

The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Drummer's Coat

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: The Drummer's Coat

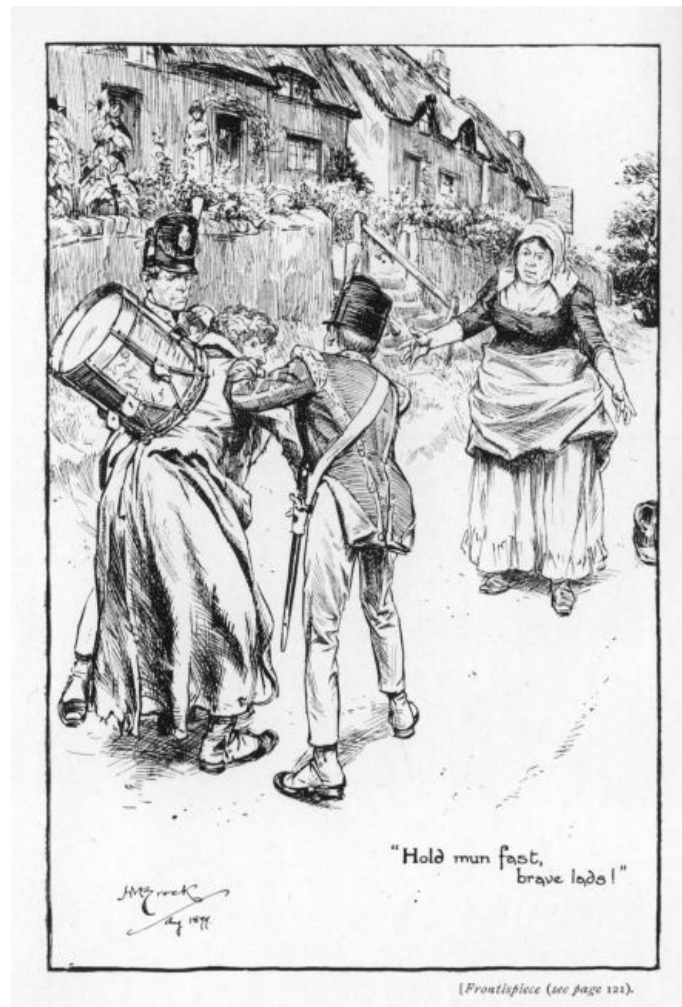
Author: Sir J. W. Fortescue

Release date: November 13, 2006 [eBook #19801]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Al Haines

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE DRUMMER'S COAT ***



[Frontispiece: "Hold mun fast, brave lads!"]

The Drummer's Coat

by the

Hon. J. W. Fortescue

Author of "The Story of a Red Deer"

With illustrations by
H. M. Brock

London
MacMillan and Co., Limited
New York: The MacMillan Company
1899

All rights reserved

RICHARD CLAY AND SONS, LIMITED
LONDON AND BUNGAY.

First Edition, November 1899.
Reprinted, December 1899.

TO
D. W.

PREFATORY NOTE

Lest a principal incident in this little tale should seem incredible, it may be mentioned that an instance of a child being deprived of speech for several days, at the bidding of a reputed witch, came under the author's immediate notice less than three years ago, in a village but three miles distant from his own home.

It may be added that the military details in Chapter XIII. are all drawn from authentic sources, mainly from the *Recollections of Rifleman Harris* and the *History of the Fifty-Second Regiment*.

CASTLE HILL,
28th August, 1899.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I](#)

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)
[CHAPTER III](#)
[CHAPTER IV](#)
[CHAPTER V](#)
[CHAPTER VI](#)
[CHAPTER VII](#)

[CHAPTER IX](#)
[CHAPTER X](#)
[CHAPTER XI](#)
[CHAPTER XII](#)
[CHAPTER XIII](#)
[CHAPTER XIV](#)

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

["HOLD MUN FAST, BRAVE LADS!" . . . *Frontispiece*](#)

[BENT DOWN TO KISS ELSIE'S AS HE HAD KISSED HER MOTHER'S](#)

["THE BIRD BEGAN TO PIPE A LITTLE TUNE"](#)

["STILL THE WOMAN LED THEM ON"](#)

THE DRUMMER'S COAT

CHAPTER I

In a deep wooded valley in the north of Devon stands the village of Ashacombe. It is but a little village, of some twenty or thirty cottages with white cob walls and low thatched roofs, running along the sunny side of the valley for a little way, and then curving downward across it to a little bridge of two tiny pointed arches, on the other side of which stands a mill with a water-wheel. For a little stream runs down this valley as down all Devonshire valleys; and as you look up the water from the bridge you can see it winding and sparkling through its margin of meadow, while the great oak woods hang still and solemn above it, till some bold green headland slopes down and shuts it from your sight; and you raise your eyes, and count fresh headlands crossing each other right and left beyond it, fainter and fainter, till at last they end in a little patch of purple heather, which seems to be the end of all things.

But when you look down the water, you find that the woods no longer cover the sunny side of the valley so thickly, but that there is open ground like a park. There is a gate by the bridge opening on to a narrow road, which presently ends in two great spreading yews; and through these you can see a lych-gate, and beyond it a little grey church with a low grey tower. Close to this gate is a lodge of grey stone, with a winding drive which guides your eye through the trees to the gables of a house of the same grey stone, which peer up over the trees on the ground above the church. Then beyond it the headlands of green wood begin to cross each other again, lower and lower, till you can follow them no more.

So Ashacombe, as may easily be guessed, is a sleepy little village, which sees little of the great world outside. But whatever it sees it can see well, for the hill on which it stands is so much broken by little clefts and hollows that some of the cottages stand level with the road and some high above it; wherefore if you are not satisfied with looking at anything on the road from the same level, you can go to some neighbour's garden and gaze down upon it from above, or again you can slip down from the road into the meadow (for the road is raised on a wall) and scrutinise it carefully from below. Still sleepy though the village may be, it is always beautifully neat and clean. The walls are always of spotless white, and the thatch trim and in good repair. The scrap of garden behind each cottage is well tended and full of vegetables, and the scrap of garden in front gay with flowers; for Ashacombe has never known the time when there was not a master or mistress in the Hall who made the village their first care. Such it is now, and such, if old pictures are to be trusted, it was with little difference eighty years ago, at which time we are about to examine its history.

But if visitors come to Ashacombe it is to see not the village but the Hall, for Bracefort Hall

has some fame of its own. It is a beautiful little house, built in the time of King Henry the Sixth, and therefore in the shape of an H, with two gables marking the end of the downstrokes, and a short length of grey roof standing for the cross-bar. It faces to the south, so that the little court between the gables is a veritable sun-trap, wherein grow magnolia and jessamine; while roses, Dutch honeysuckle, clematis and wistaria cover the whole front of the house and almost hide the mullioned windows. But the Hall is even more attractive within than without, for from the moment when you enter the door you find yourself among oak panels, oak carving and old tapestry on every side and in every room. The house has but two storeys, so that the rooms are not very large not very high, with the exception of the hall, which fills both storeys of the cross-bar of the H, from the floor to the roof. The ceiling is of open work, beautifully carved; the walls are panelled high, and at the head of each panel is painted a coat of arms showing the marriages of many generations of Braceforts. Above the panels at one end of the hall are huge coats of arms carved in stone and gorgeously coloured; and at the other end is a gallery of carved oak with the gilded pipes of an organ shining above it. A great part of the outer wall is taken up by a very large mullioned window with quaint round panes, many of them filled with old stained glass; and on the wall opposite to it is a great fireplace of carved stone, the centre of it showing the crest of a mailed arm and the motto, *Dieu et bras fort*.

Above this fireplace hang some curious things—stags' horns, and weapons of bygone times, and among them a buff coat, an iron helmet, a cuirass, and two long straight swords, which evidently belonged to one of the gentlemen with flowing love-locks and broad collars turned down over their mail, whose portraits are hung on each side. But below these is a more modern helmet, such a helmet as was worn by Light Dragoons about a century ago, of lacquered leather with a huge comb of fur, a scarlet turban wound about it, and a short plume of red and white. Also there is a curved sword with a crimson sash draped round it; and below these again, neatly spread in a glass case, is a quaint little child's coat of yellow, with red collar, cuffs and lapels, two tiny red wings at the shoulders and two tiny red tails behind; which garment an inscription, now much faded, declares to be a drummer's coat of the time of the Peninsular War.

Now it is easy to guess to whom the Light Dragoon's helmet and sword and sash belonged, for immediately on one side of it is a portrait of a very handsome man with dark hair and eyes, dressed in a blue coat with silver braid, with the crimson sash round his waist, the curved sword at his side, and the identical helmet under his arm; and you may read underneath the picture that it represents Captain Richard Bracefort, who was killed at the battle of Salamanca. Close by, too, is a picture of his charger, Billy Pitt, which he rode in the battle, and which lived, as is written on the picture, for many years afterwards. Again, as a pendant to the Captain's picture hangs a portrait of a lady, showing a beautiful oval face with three chestnut curls on each side of it and a mass of chestnut hair above, and two blue eyes as clear and as pure as a child's; and underneath this portrait is written the name of Lady Eleanor Bracefort, wife and widow of Captain Richard the Light Dragoon.

But how the drummer's coat ever found its way into Bracefort Hall there is nothing to show. Nevertheless by that little coat there hangs a tale; and though that tale is now nearly eighty years old, both the Hall and the village are so little changed that it is perhaps worth the telling.

CHAPTER II

It was the 22nd of July 1820, and the shadows were beginning to lengthen over Ashacombe village on a burning summer's afternoon. The men were still at work, and most of the women also; for, early though it was, a farmer was cutting a field of wheat over the hill on the far side of the valley, a field which was always the first in the whole parish to ripen. So the men were cutting and the women were binding, for women did more work in the fields in those days than in these; and now and again, when the booming of the mill-wheel ceased for a moment, the sound of the hones on the sickles could be heard clinking musically in the still heavy air. Two or three old women alone stood in their porches, with their sun-bonnets over their neat white caps, gossiping as they knitted, and speaking an occasional word to an old, old man who sat in a high-backed chair basking in the sun. The children were all down in the meadow below, the little maids mostly sitting in the shade and making nosegays of forget-me-nots; while every boy that could walk, and some of the maids also, were paddling in the little stream or dancing about the bank in chase of such unhappy fish as had been too lazy to leave the shallows when the stream was turned into the mill-leat. Sometimes they were silent, and the next moment they broke into chorus like a pack of hounds, while occasionally there came a shrill rate from one of the old women who watched them from the cottages, calling back some too venturesome boy from the deep water of the mill-leat.

So the old women gossiped and the children played, for the daily coaches up and down had passed some hours before, and there was little excitement to be looked for in the road after they were gone. Presently the old women stopped and listened, for they heard the gate at the lodge clang as it opened and shut, and two children's voices crying merrily, "Oh, corporal, corporal, put

on your watering-cap!" Then one of the old women hastened, though with infirm steps, across her little garden towards the road, and stood by the edge of it among tall stalks of red valerian and a great plant of periwinkle which hung down over the wall. And there came along the road a tall man with grizzled hair, dressed in drab breeches and gaiters just like any other man, but wearing on his head a flat blue cap, widening out from brim to crown, with a yellow band round the forehead—the watering cap of a Light Dragoon. He walked very erect, though he limped slightly with one leg; and over one shoulder he carried a clean white stable-rubber, neatly folded, with a stable-halter tied across it. Hanging on to his hand on one side was a little boy of about nine years old with great brown eyes and glossy black hair, dressed in a very short little brown jacket with brown breeches buttoning on to it, and a broad white collar. On the Corporal's other side and clinging tight to his other hand skipped a little girl with wide blue eyes and fair hair, dressed all in white, and with her face almost hidden under a little white sun-bonnet. Both children carried a little wreath of laurel in their hands and seemed to have some very important business before them, until they caught sight of the old woman looking down upon them, when they cried out "Sally! Sally!" and letting go the Corporal's hand ran up the steep little steps to her, while the Corporal limped more slowly after them.

"Ah, my dear hearts," said old Sally, "I minded that it was Sallymanky day, and I said to myself that Master Dick and Miss Elsie would surely be coming in for the ribbins. Shall us go in to house and fetch mun? Then please to come in. Please to come right in, Mr. Brimacott," she added, addressing the Corporal. So they passed through the little low door into the cottage, and in two seconds the children were standing on chairs and examining all the treasures on the walls. For Sally had been a servant at Bracefort Hall, and was never so glad as when little Dick and Elsie Bracefort came to pay her a visit; first because she thought there was no family to equal the Braceforts in the whole wide world, and secondly, because these children had lost their father at Salamanca just eight years before to a day. And there were wonderful things on the walls, too. First and foremost there were two coloured pictures, one of France and Britannia joining hands, with a very woolly lamb and a very singular lion lying down together at their feet; and the other of Commerce and Plenty, represented as two very slender ladies with very short waists, loading Britannia with corn and fruit and flowers of the brightest colours. The children had heard Sally tell the story of them fifty times but were quite content to hear it again—how Sally had bought them of a hawker in the year 1802, for joy that peace was come at last, and how that wicked Boney had plunged all the world into war again. Then Dick jumped up and brought down a china figure of a man in a blue coat on a prancing horse with his hand pointing upwards, who was no other than Boney, the terrible Bonaparte himself, as he appeared when crossing the Alps.

"Ah, the roog," said Sally, as Dick flourished the figure. "Many's the time that I've wanted to throw he behind the fire. He tooked from me my boy, my Jan; ah, you knows the story of my Jan, don't 'ee, my dear?" she added turning to Elsie.

"Yes," said Elsie, who had heard the story so often as a mite of a child that she told it herself with something of a Devonshire accent, "poor Jan that 'listed for a soldier and went to Portingale to the wars, and never come back, not he, nor wild Lucy that ran away for the love of him, nor the boy that was born to them."

"Aye," said the old woman to the Corporal, but smiling sadly on the child. "Killed he was, so they said, but they couldn't tell how nor where; and missing they was, but I never could find out nought about mun, though I hope still to hear somewhat; but it must come soon for it's ten years agone now, and I reckon that my time's a getting short."

The Corporal nodded; but Dick had brought down another figure in china, the figure of a man in a red coat with a hooked nose and two curves of black whisker on his cheeks, underneath which was written WELLINGTON.

"Aye," said old Sally, triumphantly, "that was the boy to give Boney what vor. And now here's the wreaths, my dears, tied with the family colours, blue and white. I've a had they ribbins forty years, ever since the great election, when Bracefort was head of the poll, your grandfather that was. And now you'm going to catch the old Billy Pitt, I reckon; dear, dear, to think that the horse should still be here and the captain gone."

"But the Lieutenant's come back," said the Corporal. "Colonel Fitzdenys, I should say, whom I mind as the captain's lieutenant; come back only yesterday safe and sound from the Injies."

"That's well," said Sally, "for a fine brave gentleman he is, as never passes me without a kind word. But don't 'ee go yet for a minute, my dears," and she hobbled away to a large glass bottle, took out two sticks of toffee, such as she sold to the village boys for a halfpenny a piece, and gave them to Dick and Elsie.

The children took them gratefully, for it was little sweet stuff that children got in those days; and old Sally watched them as they went up the road, each of them breaking off a large piece for the Corporal.

They had not long been gone when a new and strange figure suddenly bounded into the road from the bank at the side. It was that of a young man who seemed to be about five and twenty, short in stature and slight in figure, and dressed in a long skirted coat, breeches and gaiters, which were all alike full of rents and patches. He wore no hat, but his head was so thickly

covered by a shock of brown hair that he did not seem to want one. His face was brown and sunburnt and partly covered by a fair downy beard, which, though not thick, added to his wild and untidy appearance; and his eyes were very large, grey and vacant. He sprang down from the bank as though he had lived there all his life, like a rabbit, and then moved on towards the village at a strange shambling pace, straying from side to side of the road and waving his arms meaninglessly. Suddenly he stopped, and pulling a squirrel out of his pocket began to play with it, cooing and whistling to it as it ran over his arms, and chirping when it stopped and threw its tail over its back. The two seemed to be the very best of friends, and after playing for some time the man moved on with the squirrel on his shoulder, drawing closer to the village; when of a sudden the boys at play in the stream broke into such a storm of yells that he jumped up on the bank again to look at them, and stood there for a time gaping and grinning from ear to ear at what he saw.

For the boys had succeeded in driving a little eel into a corner and in throwing it ashore; and there they were, dancing about like mad creatures, unable to hold it, more than half afraid to touch it, but always contriving to twitch the wretched wriggling thing further from the water. One brave little maid managed for a moment to catch it in her pinafore but dropped it instantly, as all the boys screamed: "Put it down! he'll bite 'ee." And so they went on babbling their loudest, when the ragged man in the road suddenly put the squirrel into his pocket and ran down into the meadow, laughing louder than the loudest, to take part in the fun. In spite of his long-skirted coat he was as active as any of them, now clutching desperately at the eel with his hand, now running at full speed for a few yards and then plunging down on his knees, and all the while laughing and whinnying with a noise more like that of a horse than of a man. The boys, though at first a little startled at the appearance of such a figure in their midst, soon screamed louder than ever with laughter at his strange antics; until at last the ragged man got the eel fairly clamped between his fingers and ran away with it, the whole of the children following him in full cry. He had almost reached the road when his foot slipped and down he fell violently on his face. The squirrel, scared to death, ran out of his coat-pocket, and the eel slipped through his fingers into the long grass by the ditch and was seen no more.

The man got up looking dazed and foolish, with his hair full of forget-me-nots, into which he had plunged in his fall. The children gathered round him hooting and screaming; and he stared at them grinning vacantly without a word. From shouts the boys soon went on to taunts of "Shockhead! Shockhead!" but still the ragged man stood and grinned, until at last two of them caught sight of the squirrel and began to hunt it about the field. Then the man's whole demeanour changed in an instant; and charging down upon the boys he gave them a push which laid both of them flat on the ground, while the squirrel ran hastily up his leg and nestled in terror against his cheek. Then he began to look, with the air of a hunted beast, for some means of escape. The two boys got up whimpering, more frightened than hurt, and at the sight of their tears the merriment of the rest turned instantly to anger. The boys remembered suddenly that their eel was gone, and crowded round the man, yelling continuously, "Where's our ale? Where's our ale? You've stole our ale." And the ragged man with drooping shoulders and white scared face slunk along the fence under the road, looking for a weak place by which he might scramble out of the field. At last he found one and made a bound to climb up it; but the bank was too steep and he fell back. The boys seeing that he was afraid of them began to raise the cry of thief, or, as they called it, thafe. Half a dozen of them ran round to the gate of the meadow to cut him off, while the rest yelled round him like a pack of baying hounds, with cries of "Thafe! Thafe! Thafe!" The man made a second attempt to climb up the bank, and this time reached the top, where he lay for a few moments sprawling, amid the jeers of his tormentors; and Tommy Fry, who was the scapegrace of the village, picked up a clod of earth and threw it at him. The clod, which was full of little stones, struck him full on the cheek and drew blood. The man gave a little whine of pain, and struggled quickly to his feet; but the boys were in the road before him, and, worse than that, the women hearing the cry of thief were hastening to the spot; for they thought of clean clothes that might be drying on their garden hedges, and, if there be a creature which villagers dread and detest, it is a tramp. The man looked fearfully up and down the road, and saw that it was blocked on every side by hurrying women and children; and then sinking down by the roadside he buried his face in his hands and blubbered aloud, while the squirrel, fully as frightened as he was, nestled close to his bleeding cheek.

Then there was a babel of voices, scolding, complaining and accusing, but the man sat blubbering and took no heed. Two or three children were ready to start to fetch the men from the harvest-field, and one old crone was declaiming with great eloquence on the iniquity of tramps, when a strange woman suddenly forced her way through the crowd to the sobbing man and took him by the arm. Her sun-bonnet was so tied before her face that they could see little of it but two eyes, which gleamed black and keen like the eyes of a hawk. She raised the man gently to his feet, and then turned round fiercely upon the ring of women and children about her.

"Now," she said imperiously, "cease your bawling, and let mun go. The poor soul a'nt done no harm to you, I'll warrant mun. Let mun go, and shame upon 'ee."

The man rose to his feet still blubbering, and the squirrel moved back from his face. Then she saw the blood on his cheek, and her eyes glowed like fire as she said in a voice that trembled with rage:

"Who's been a drowing stones at my boy?"

"He stole our ale," shouted Tommy Fry boldly, and the rest of the children took up the chorus—"He stole our ale!" And Tommy Fry ended the cry with the word, "Thafe."

The strange woman turned upon him instantly. "*You* drowed the stone," she said, quivering with rage. "*You* dare to call mun thafe. You don't spake again till I tell 'ee—mind that. I'll tache 'ee to call my boy names." And Tommy Fry shrank back with staring eyes, appalled at her fury, while she put her arm again tighter round that of the ragged man and began to lead him away.

"No, no, no," broke in a village woman who came up breathless at this moment: "You'm too fast by half. 'Tis the like of he that we want to catch, taking our linen off the hedges. I lost some but two months ago, and I'll be bound 'twas he that did it. What was it was taked away, Mary?" she asked, turning to one of the little girls. "Two pair of stockings and a chimase or one pair of stockings and two chimases? No, no, no; run, my dear, and fetch father home quick. No, stop! Here comes Mr. Brimacott."

And as she spoke there was a sound of hoofs and the Corporal appeared leading a brown horse with a little wreath of laurel hung round his ears and the white rubber spread over his back, on which were seated Dick and Elsie, Dick riding in front brandishing his toffee, while Elsie with her arm round his waist sat quietly behind him.

"What's all this?" said the Corporal, as the horse pricked up his ears over the hubbub before him; and without waiting for a moment he lifted the two children to the ground. Then all the women came clamouring round him with their complaints; and the Corporal frowned, for he loved a tramp as little as any of them.

"'Tain't true," said the strange woman firmly, "'tain't true. He's but a poor harmless lad. Sarch mun, if you will, maister; ye won't find nought."

The Corporal eyed the ragged man keenly. "He looks to be a half-baked body," he said as if to himself.

"Aye, the poor thing's mazed," bleated out an old man who had hobbled down to the edge of his garden to look on.

"Has any one missed anything?" the Corporal went on after hearing the rest of the story. "Who's got any clothes drying to-day?"

There was a long silence and much shaking of heads, till some one said: "'Twas Mary Mugford was saying that she missed something or 'nother; stockings, was it, or chimases, two months ago. Where's Mary Mugford?" But Mary Mugford had discreetly retired, for she saw a new figure coming up the road, the figure of a lady, tall and slender, dressed all in black and with a huge black bonnet, from which there peeped out the oval face with the chestnut curls and the great blue eyes, which we saw in the picture at Bracefort Hall, with the name of Lady Eleanor underneath it. Dick and Elsie ran to her at once, and the Corporal shortening the horse's halter in one hand, drew himself up, saluted, and made his report.

"It's a poor half-witted lad, my Lady, and they thought he had stolen some clothes. He got playing with the boys over an eel which they caught, and let it get away, but I can't find that he meant no harm nor hasn't taken nothing, but the boys got worriting him and scared him a bit, I am afraid."

The strange woman looked at the Corporal with softened eyes and a sigh of relief; and then Lady Eleanor turned to her, with her hand resting on Dick, who had come round to her side, and said very gently:

"Is it true that he is not quite right in his head?"

The strange woman nodded.

"Have you ever known him steal?"

"Never," she answered hoarsely. "'Tis seldom I let mun out of my sight among strangers, but he slipped away from me to-day."

"You have no other children?"

"No," answered the woman, almost fiercely.

"I see that the boys have hurt him," Lady Eleanor went on. "Bring him down the road by the well, and let me wash the blood away;" and leading the way she dipped her handkerchief into the water and was about to wash the blood-stained face herself, but stopped and gave the handkerchief to the woman. The villagers had withdrawn respectfully apart, and the idiot, no longer frightened by their presence, had ceased blubbering. He blinked foolishly while his face was washed; but when it was clean he looked at Lady Eleanor's beautiful face and grinned, and then at Dick and grinned wider, and lastly at Elsie and grinned wider still. He looked so much like a great simple boy that little Elsie came forward to give him what was left of her toffee, whereupon Dick, not to be outdone, did the like, though there was not much of his remaining.

Finally the Corporal produced his share of toffee also from his pockets and gave it to the children for the ragged man, who seemed so much pleased that they did not regret parting with it.

"There is no harm done, I think," said Lady Eleanor to the woman, "but it was a wicked thing to throw stones at him."

"It's nought, thank you. Good-evening," said the woman, taking the ragged man by the arm.

"Have you far to go?" asked Lady Eleanor.

"A middling ways," was the only reply; and the woman turned round to go.

"Stop!" said Lady Eleanor. "My name is Lady Eleanor Bracefort, and if ever you want anything for your poor son, I hope you will tell me."

"Thank you, my Lady, he wants for nothing," answered the woman rather gruffly, and turning the man round she led him away across the bridge. They watched her until she disappeared, a tall powerful woman, with her back somewhat bent, as if by carrying heavy burdens.

Then Lady Eleanor turned to the children.

"Now, my darlings! Give Master Dick a leg up, Corporal. Wo-ho, Billy; now, Elsie, up behind him. How young the old horse looks, Corporal! Are you ready? Walk, march." And away she walked fondling Billy Pitt as she led him, and with good reason, for, old though he was, his legs were as clean as a four-year-old's, his muzzle fine and taper, and his eye full and bright, while he walked with the swinging easy stride that surely tells of good blood. Indeed, but that his tail was docked rather short, as was once the rule in the Light Dragoons, and that he had a large scar on his neck, you could not have wished to see a handsomer horse. So on they went, through the lychgate to the church; and while the Corporal waited outside with the horse. Lady Eleanor and the children went in. There at the back of a square family pew, among strange old monuments, all showing heraldic shields coloured white and blue, was a tablet: "To the memory of Captain Richard Bracefort of the 116th Light Dragoons, who fell in the glorious action of Salamanca, on the 22nd of July, 1812, and was buried with his dead comrades on the field of battle." Just below it was a second but smaller and simpler tablet: "To the memory of Private John Dart, of the 128th Foot, and late of this parish, who fell in the retreat to Corunna under Sir John Moore, January 1809;" and in very small letters were added the words "Erected by Eleanor Bracefort." Around both were the words, "Death is swallowed up in Victory," and midway between the two, Dick placed the wreath of laurel. Then they went back to the Corporal and Billy Pitt, and returned, as they had come, to the Hall.

CHAPTER III

Though there was more than one snug little room at Bracefort which other people might have turned into a schoolroom, yet Lady Eleanor always preferred, in the summer at any rate, to take the children with her to the hall for their lessons. Her favourite seat was by the great mullioned window, which shed light on everything in the rooms, and her favourite teaching was to make every old picture or helmet or weapon on the walls tell its story to the children. So on the day after Salamanca Day she was sitting as usual in her corner by the window, on a very stiff high-backed chair; for people did not lounge in those days, and children were taught at meals to keep their thumbs on the table to make them sit upright. Little Elsie sat by her on a smaller but equally stiff chair, stitching diligently at her sampler, and Dick stood before her glancing furtively over his shoulder. The blue sky outside was so great a distraction to him that Lady Eleanor had turned his back to the window, and set before him an old steel morion of the time of Queen Elizabeth; and with this to inspire him, Dick was struggling with the ballad of the Brave Lord Willoughby.

"Come, Dick," Lady Eleanor was saying, "we can do better than that. Try again. 'For seven hours to all men's view—'"

But just at this moment the Corporal came in.

"If you please, my Lady, Betsy Fry's just come up. She's in a terrible taking about her boy, and she's brought him up to see you."

"Very well. I'll come out and see her directly," said Lady Eleanor. "Come, Dick,"—but Dick had turned half round and was smiling at the Corporal.

"Come, sir," said the Corporal returning, "heels together. Little fingers on the seams of the overalls. Eyes to the front," and he placed the boy's hands gently in position by his sides, and went out.

"Now, Dick," said Lady Eleanor. "For seven hours—" and the boy began, with much prompting,

*"For seven hours to all men's view
This fight endured sore,
Until our men so feeble grew
That they could fight no more."*

Then his memory seemed to return, and he went on with great gusto:

*"And then upon dead horses
Full savourly they eat,
And drank the puddle water—
They could no better get."*

Then there was a dead stop. "When they—" said Lady Eleanor. "Oh, Dick."

"I always remember the puddle water, mother," said Dick reproachfully.

"Elsie," said Lady Eleanor; and Elsie folded her hands over her work and began:

*"When they had fed so freely,
They kneeled upon the ground,
And praised God devoutly
For the favour they had found."*

"Then," broke in Dick triumphantly—

*"Then beating up their colours
The fight they did renew,
And turning on the Spaniards,
A thousand more they slew."*

"There, I know it now, mother, mayn't I go now and tell the Corporal to saddle Prince for me? And mayn't Elsie come too?"

So away the children ran, and there was the Corporal waiting outside the door, as anxious to be off as themselves; while Lady Eleanor made her way to see Betsy Fry, who was waiting by the old gate-house a few yards away from the front door.

"Well, Betsy, what is it?" she said kindly, coming up to a woman of rather hard features, who stood patiently in the shade with her sun-bonnet fluttering in the breeze.

"'Tis about my Tommy, my Lady," said the woman curtsying. "Here, Tommy, come 'vor, and take off your hat to her Ladyship," and she pulled forward a frightened shrinking boy in a suit of corduroy, who had hidden himself behind her. "Look to mun, my Lady, he that was the most rompageous boy in Ashacombe, so quiet as a snail. And he can't spake, my Lady, he can't spake."

"Can't speak?" said Lady Eleanor.

"I can't make mun spake, my Lady. I don't know if your Ladyship was to try—"

"Why, Tommy," said Lady Eleanor, bending down towards the boy, in her sweet winning tones, "what's the matter with you? Come along and tell me, like a good boy."

The lad came forward, for no one could resist Lady Eleanor's smile, and opened his mouth confidently to speak; but he made only a few inarticulate sounds, and then thrust his knuckles into his eyes and began to cry.

"Come, come, don't be frightened. Try again," said Lady Eleanor kindly; but the boy only continued sobbing and remained speechless. Nor could all her endeavours succeed in making him utter a word.

"He must recover his speech presently," she said, much puzzled. "He has not lost the power of uttering sound."

"No, no, my Lady," said Mrs. Fry very confidently. "He can scream and holly loud enough. I bate mun last night, poor soul, because he wouldn't spake, and he scritch'd so loud that Mrs. Mugford come in, and asked me what I was 'bout killing a pig at that time o' night; though she knows very well that it was my pig that was drowned in the mill-leat back along in the spring. So I says to her, 'Mrs. Mugford,' I says, 'if those that talks about pigs would look to their own boys, they wouldn't run off to sea and come home with the shakums,' I says; 'and if they would keep their fowls from scratting about in their neighbours' gardens,' I says, 'they wouldn't run about crying for lost chimases.' For there's hardly a day but I drive her fowls from my garden, my Lady. And you mind her son, my Lady, him that went for a marine, and what terrible shakums he had when he comed back from the Injies. And I consider that they stolen chimases is a jidgment,

my Lady, a judgment for the mischief her fowls have done in my garden—"

"Stop, stop," said Lady Eleanor, whose eye had wandered to a shady spot under the trees where the Corporal was lunging a steady old Exmoor pony round and round, while Dick, with a pair of long gaiters added to his attire, sat firmly on its back, though without saddle or stirrups. "Tell me; has anything happened to the boy to frighten him?"

"Well, my Lady," answered Mrs. Fry, "I consider myself that the boy's overlooked."

"Overlooked?" said Lady Eleanor.

"Yes, my Lady. For they do tell me that the woman that comed through the village yesterday with the mazed body told my Tommy, 'You don't spake again,' she says, 'till I tell 'ee.'"

"Oh! nonsense," said Lady Eleanor, "don't think of such stuff."

"But she *did*," persisted Mrs. Fry, "and sure enough the boy can't spake. She's overlooked mun! she's awitched mun, you may depend, my Lady. And I'm sure if you'd a known who they two was, you wouldn't never have let mun go. She's the old witch to Cossacombe, that's what she is, though she a'nt never been this way afore, and the man's as bad as she is, I'll be bound, though I never heard tell of he afore."

"Why, it was easy to see that he was but a poor half-witted creature," said Lady Eleanor, "as harmless as a child; his mother told me that she hardly let him out of her sight."

"Well, my Lady, 'tis all very well to say that the man's mazed," answered Mrs. Fry almost forgetting her manners in her excitement, "but what took mun down among the boys? Why, to take the ale from them! And what is ales but sarpints, my Lady?" said Mrs. Fry throwing out her hands, "and what makes the man so friendly with sarpints, that he must come to save mun? *We* know, do you and I, my Lady, who is the old sarpint and the father of sarpints. And then what was he doing with that strange baste on his shoulder, my Lady?"

"Why, it was only a tame squirrel," said Lady Eleanor.

"Squirrel, my lady," said Mrs. Fry mysteriously. "Aye, 'twas a squirrel; but who knows but what it mayn't be a dragin when it gets 'oom?"

"A squirrel turn into a dragon?" said Lady Eleanor. "I never heard such childish stuff in my life; and I wouldn't have believed that a sensible woman like you could have thought of such a thing."

"Well, I won't say as it *was* a dragin, my Lady," said Mrs. Fry, a little abashed, "but they do say that the witch has to do with dragins. She comes from out over the moor some place, she doth; and though she's a seen on times about Cossacombe, no man can tell where she liveth nor dare go sarch for mun. Jimmy Beer went out to look for mun two year agone in the dimmet after Cossacombe revel, but the fog came down so thick as a bag; and while he was a-wandering, a dragin (for so he saith it was, though I never seed a dragin myself) passed so close to mun as I be to you, my Lady, and when he looked to the ground he saw the mark of his cloven hoof so plain as could be. And he was pixy-led all that night, my Lady, was the old Jimmy, and when he come home all his money was gone; so I reckon that the pixies is in league with the witches."

"I suspect that Jimmy had drunk too much cider," said Lady Eleanor severely; "he should have kept sober or stuck to the road, and then he would not have brought back foolish stories about pixies and witches. I wonder that you can believe in such things."

"I know mun too well, my Lady," said Mrs. Fry mournfully. "There was my pig back in the spring, so rasonable a pig as ever ate mate, until the white witch to Gratton overlooked mun. And I never did the white witch no harm, nor the pig didn't neither; but as they was driving the pig along the road—and you know what pigs is, driving, my Lady,—the white witch comes riding on his one-eyed donkey; and the pig runned against the donkey, and the old man[1] muttered something or 'nother—"

"But the old man is dead, I was told," said Lady Eleanor.

"'Eas fai! and so he is, my Lady, and a terrible job they had to bury mun—thunder, lightning and hailstones so big as sloes. Dead he is, and I won't jidge mun—but not afore he'd a doed the mischief, for but three weeks afterward my pig falls into the mill-leat. So there's my pig a drowned, and my Tommy so dumb as a haddock—can't go to school, can't do nought but ate his mate and sit in the corner for all the world like a moulting hen. Ah, they witches! I wish they was a-burned, I do." And she hid her face in her apron and sobbed.

"Hush, hush!" said Lady Eleanor gently; but just then she was startled by a little cry from Elsie; and there was Dick, who had just leaped his pony over a low bar, tilted right forward on the pony's neck. "Sit fast, sir, sit fast," cried the Corporal, as Dick floundered to regain his seat; and with a desperate effort the boy recovered himself and sat up, flushed and smiling. Elsie clapped her hands with delight, and a strange man's voice shouted "Bravo!" at the sound of which Lady Eleanor started and coloured for a moment.

"'Tis surely his lordship from Fitzdenys Court," said Mrs. Fry, who had lowered her apron a little. "'Eas, 'tis. Now, my Lady, do 'ee please to spake to mun about my Tommy; for it's a poor job if his lordship can't do something for the boy, and he the lord-lieutenant as can call out the milishy any time."

And as she spoke two gentlemen came cantering up through the park; so Lady Eleanor bade Mrs. Fry take Tommy to the back-door and get something for him and herself to eat.

[1] It is a fallacy to suppose that a white witch, in Devon, at any rate, is necessarily a woman. The few that I have known were men.

CHAPTER IV

The two gentlemen dismounted at the gate giving their horses to their groom, and then walked towards Lady Eleanor together. Both were dressed in blue coats, buff waistcoats, and broad-brimmed white hats, and wore riding trousers strapped very tightly over their boots. They were evidently father and son, though the elder seemed almost as young and alert as the younger. The old gentleman took off his hat, bent his grey head over Lady Eleanor's out-stretched hand, and kissed it with the old-fashioned courtesy which has now vanished. Then beckoning the younger man forward, he said:

"I bring you back an old friend with a new title, Lady Eleanor. He has just returned from India with a new scar on the right shoulder to balance the old scar on the left, and with a letter from the Commander-in-Chief, which he is too modest to show to his friends and too proud to show to his enemies, if he has any—*Colonel* George Fitzdenys."

And the younger man came forward, tall, lean, wiry, and erect as the Corporal himself. He wore the moustache which showed him to be a Light Dragoon, and looked every inch a soldier; but though he could not have been more than three or four and thirty, he had the sad expression of a man who has found the years long. Still bronzed and brown though his face was, he blushed just a little as he caught his father's proud glance at him, and bent in his turn over Lady Eleanor's hand.

"Welcome back, Colonel Fitzdenys," she said very quietly; "we have not lost sight of you in the Gazettes through all these years; and you are quite recovered from your wound, I hope."

"Wound! it was nothing," he said, "an arrow in the shoulder which your boy would have laughed at."

And then Lady Eleanor beckoned to the children to come up; and old Lord Fitzdenys gave Dick two fingers and Elsie one, for he said that if her hand was like her mother's it could not hold more. But Colonel George gave Dick his whole hand, and bent down to kiss Elsie's as he had kissed her mother's, which won her little heart completely.



[Illustration: Bent down to kiss Elsie's as he had kissed her mother's.]

"Now, my dear lady," said the old gentleman, "I must ask you for the favour of a few minutes' private conversation."

"And I will stay with the children," said Colonel George, "for I want to make friends again."

Dick and Elsie were a little shy at being left alone with a stranger; but before he could say a word to them the Corporal appeared leading the pony towards the stable. He saluted Colonel Fitzdenys, and was going on, but the Colonel at once called to him by name and shook his hand warmly, while the Corporal beamed with pleasure, and said how glad he was to see his honour returned in good health.

"Oh! do you know the Corporal?" asked Dick timidly.

"Know the Corporal?" said Colonel George. "I should think I did know him, and a fine, brave fellow he is. Why, he saved my life once, he and your father. I was lieutenant in your father's troop, and at the very first skirmish in which we were engaged in the war, I was hit here, in the shoulder, so that I could not hold my reins. My horse ran away with me, right into the middle of the French, and there was not another horse in the regiment that could catch him, except your father's horse, Billy Pitt. But he came galloping after me as hard as he could ride, and caught him; and Brimacott, who was his servant, followed as fast as he could, and between them they brought me back from the middle of the enemy, or perhaps I shouldn't be here now. So I have good reason to remember Brimacott and Billy Pitt. Do you remember Billy Pitt?"

"He's here in the stable," said both the children in a breath.

"Then let us go and see Billy Pitt, for he's a very old friend of mine," said the Colonel, and away he walked to the stable with the children following him. The old horse seemed to know him, for he pricked his ears and kept nuzzling with his nose all over the Colonel's coat, until he put his hand into his pocket and pulled out an apple for him. "Look there," said the Colonel, passing his hand along the scar on the horse's neck. "The time came for Billy to get wounded and for me to look after him, as he had saved me. That was at Salamanca." He stopped for a minute and laid his hands on the children's shoulders. "Poor Billy had lost his master, you know, and came galloping up to me with his saddle empty, for he knew my horse well. And then he remained by my side, moving when I moved and stopping when I stopped, and charging with us when we charged. He came out of the fight with this cut on his neck. Poor Brimacott was badly wounded in the leg, and there was no one to look after the old horse, so I sewed up Billy's wound myself and kept him. He was well long before the Corporal—I made him corporal, you know—and, indeed, poor Brimacott was never fit for rough work again, so when he went home I sent Billy with him."

Then nothing would serve the children but that Colonel Fitzdenys must ride Billy again; so a snaffle was put into his mouth and the Colonel mounted him bare-backed, and took him for a little turn in the park and leaped him over the bar, to their great delight. Then all three went back to the garden again, and the children began plying him with questions. His own poor horse was dead, the Colonel told them; he had carried him all through the Peninsular War but had been killed at Waterloo. The Colonel himself had been in the wars in India since then, and the name of the battle was Maheidpore, but the Duke of Wellington was not there. He had seen the Duke, however, only a few days before in London, but he wasn't dressed in his red coat and cocked hat, and he believed that the Duke never slept in his red coat and cocked hat now.

"Is the Corporal like the Duke?" asked Dick anxiously. No! the Colonel could not truthfully say that he was, but the Corporal was the bigger man of the two, which was a consolation to the children.

Then the children asked him about Boney, for Polly Short, who had been their maid, had told them that he was a "riglar monster," and she had heard it from her first cousin's wife's brother-law, who was a sergeant of Marines. But the Colonel said that Polly was wrong, for he had seen Boney himself at St. Helena, and he was not in the least like a monster, but a little fat man with a pale face and auburn hair, not nearly as big as the Corporal. And Boney had made no attempt to eat him up, but had received him with the pleasantest smile that he had ever seen, and had told him that English horses were good. "And of course he was thinking of Billy," said Elsie, "when he said that."

And then the Colonel brought out pencil and paper and drew pictures of Boney and of the Duke, and of Bheels and Pindarrees and Mahrattas and other strange people against whom he had fought in India. He also assured Dick that he had drunk puddle-water, like Lord Willoughby's men, and had been very glad to get it. Finally he produced a little silver bangle hung with curious silver coins which he put on Elsie's wrist for her very own, and a knife in a sheath for Dick. The knife was not very sharp, but then the sheath was beautiful. So that by the time when Lord Fitzdenys and Lady Eleanor came out to look for them, they found the children hanging on to the Colonel's arms and calling him Colonel George as if they had known him all their lives.

Lord Fitzdenys called Colonel George to him; and he left the children to join Lady Eleanor, who told him the story of Tommy Fry, and asked him what he made of it.

"Witchcraft, of course, is nonsense," he said, "but there are people who can wield such influence as this over others, the power of a stronger will over a weaker, I suppose. One hears of it often in India. Probably the boy will recover in a day or two, when he gets over his fright."

"But if he does not?" said Lady Eleanor.

"Why, if the doctor can't deal with it, the best thing we can do will be to find the woman; and if she has bound the boy by force of her will to be silent, to make her release him again. Where does she live?"

"No one knows," said Lady Eleanor, and repeated what Mrs. Fry had told her.

"I never remember any one being pixy-led but that cider was at the bottom of it," said Colonel George. "As to the dragon, I expect that Jimmy Beer chanced upon an old stag which looked very big and terrible in the mist, and that the print of his cloven hoof was the mark of his slot in the ground. The moor is wide, but I cannot think it will be very difficult to find this woman."

"I should be greatly relieved if we could, if only to prevent her from playing such tricks in future," said Lady Eleanor.

"Then I will make it my business to find her," said Colonel George, "if my father approves; and you need trouble yourself no more about the matter, but leave it to me."

Old Lord Fitzdenys quite approved, and stumped off by himself to look at a shrub which he could never induce to grow at his own place. Then the children came running up to show their treasures, and Lady Eleanor looked into Colonel George's face with eyes full of gratitude, and said "How good of you! You never forget them, and you are rather inclined to spoil them. You did when you came back from the Peninsula, and again after Waterloo, and now after all these years you are just the same."

"Yes," he said quietly, "I am just the same. Why should I be changed?" He stopped rather abruptly; and Lady Eleanor began a new subject by saying that she wanted to hear all about India. So the two walked about the garden talking, and seemed to have plenty to say. Indeed they were still talking hard, and did not seem to want to be interrupted, when old Lord Fitzdenys came back to say that it was time for him to return. The old gentleman took his leave with the same stately courtesy; but both the children put up their cheeks to be kissed by Colonel George, who promised to come back to them soon. Then seeing Mrs. Fry waiting outside they spoke a few words to her and took a look at Tommy, whose mouth was smeared with brown sugar from Lady Eleanor's still-room. The Corporal held open the gate with his best salute, and they cantered down over the park, Colonel George turning in his saddle to look back and wave his hand before they finally disappeared from sight.

"It is pleasant to see Colonel Fitzdenys again," said Lady Eleanor to the Corporal, as he held the door for her.

"It's a treat to look upon his face, my Lady," said the Corporal, "a noble gentleman like that who never forgets the humblest of his friends. I've always said that if I were not in your Ladyship's service there is no one that I would serve so willingly as he. 'Tis no wonder that his honour the Captain and he were friends, for there wasn't two such gentlemen in the army."

So when the children rejoined the Corporal they heard nothing but the praises of Colonel Fitzdenys, of his bravery, his gentleness, and his excellence as an officer; all of which they passed on in the evening to Lady Eleanor, who seemed quite content to hear it.

CHAPTER V

Notwithstanding Colonel George's hopes, Tommy Fry remained dumb during the next day, and the next, and the next; and Lady Eleanor became seriously alarmed. She sent for the apothecary from the little neighbouring town, by Colonel George's advice, and he duly arrived in his yellow gig; but he frankly confessed that he could do nothing. So he wisely went away, as Mrs. Fry indignantly put it, without leaving so much as a drench behind him, or taking so much as a drop of blood from the boy, whereas every one knew (or at any rate the villagers did) that the evil spirit, which no doubt possessed poor Tommy, might have left him if a convenient outlet had been made with a lancet, or if the boy had swallowed a few doses of the nastiest possible medicine such as evil spirits find it impossible to live with.

The doctor having failed, a local preacher was called in, who with the assistance of certain of his flock screamed and sang and raved over Tommy for several hours, making such a noise as set Lady Eleanor's peacocks screaming till they could scream no more. The boy was at first rather terrified, but as his helpers became more vehement and their antics more grotesque, he lost his fright and was intensely amused. Finally the whole congregation rose and, headed by the preacher, rushed out of the house with wild cries that the evil spirit had left Tommy and that they would hunt it out of the village. None the less the boy remained dumb; so that the evil spirit, if ever it had thought of going, had certainly changed its mind very quickly.

Both doctor and preacher having failed, Mrs. Fry was at her wits' end; but her neighbours pointed out that witchcraft could be met only by witchcraft; and a remark made by her nearest neighbour, Mrs. Mugford, soon brought her round to their mind. "'Tisn't witchcraft," said Mrs. Mugford very loudly in Mrs. Fry's hearing, "'tis a judgment on evil tongues, and the sins of parents that's visited on the children. The mother goeth back and vor biting and slandering, and the mouth of the innocent child is stopped." Mrs. Fry wept with rage as she heard the words, for she had no answer ready. But she was more than ever convinced from that moment that it was witchcraft which had wrought the mischief in poor Tommy, and that only further witchcraft could undo it. Despite the sad end of her pig, owing to the malignant influence of the white witch of Gratton, she now lamented the death of the old man and wished that he were back, if only for one day, that she might consult him and show her contempt for Mrs. Mugford. As things were, she was fain to fall back on her neighbours to learn where some wizard or wise women of equal power could be discovered; and it was with dismay that she found that not one of any repute was to hand nearer than the borders of Dartmoor, fifty miles away. In vain she questioned hawkers, waggoners, and the guards of the coaches, any passing folks in fact that had seen the world; not one could enlighten her.

The neighbours, however, were ready enough with suggestions of their own, of which the commonest was that Tommy's tongue should be split with a silver sixpence. It is possible that some attempt might have been made to perform this operation, for abundance of sixpences were offered for the purpose; and there was a crooked one of the time of Queen Anne from which great things were expected, for it was said to have been given by the Queen herself when, touching children for the King's Evil. Unfortunately, however, not one of these designs escaped the keen ears of Mrs. Mugford, who at once communicated them to the Corporal.

"'Tis not that I hold with them as slanders their neighbours, Mr. Brimacott," she said, "nor that I bear no malice against them that can't let a poor boy go to sea to sarve the King without a-saying that his mother drave mun from home. I could tell of many in this parish as isn't no better than they should be, and yet takes her Ladyship's kindness and charity as if no one hadn't no right to it but themselves. I could tell of such, but I won't, not I. But I'm not going to stand by and see an innocent boy's tongue cut out of his mouth; though I wouldn't say, Mr. Brimacott, but what there's tongues in the parish that would be the better for cutting."

It was in this appalling form that the projected operation with the sixpence made its way through the Corporal to Lady Eleanor, who was horrified. She at once sent for both Mrs. Mugford and Mrs. Fry to get at the truth of the story, and gave them such a scolding for their folly and their quarrelsomeness that they departed weeping hand in hand, in deep sympathy with each

other as two thoroughly ill-used women. They were a little frightened too, for though they had long known Lady Eleanor as the gentlest and kindest of creatures, they now found out that her beautiful face could be stern, and her voice sharp and severe in rebuke; but for all their crying they knew in their hearts that they liked her all the better for it.

So all attempts to heal Tommy by magic were stopped; and meanwhile Colonel George scoured the moor in all directions without the least success in finding out anything about the strange woman and her idiot son. He had ridden first to Cossacombe, which was twenty miles away on the other side of the moor, and had heard that the woman had been seen there occasionally, but the idiot never; in fact no one seemed to know anything about him. He learned also that she had brought down some honey for sale on the day following her appearance at Ashacombe, and had bought a sack of oatmeal at the mill, which she had taken away on a scarecrow of an Exmoor pony. There were of course sundry stories of her, but these were dark and uncertain, and of no value for tracing her to her dwelling place. Then Colonel George took long rides over the moor, crossing it this way and that from end to end, in the hope of finding what he sought; for he had made up his mind that this strange couple were lodged somewhere in the waste of bog and heather. But he failed to find the least trace of them; and indeed the moor is wide now and was far wider and wilder and more desolate in those days, before there was a fence or a ditch to be found in the whole of it. Then stag-hunting began, and Colonel George felt confident that with so many people galloping over the moorland in all directions he must certainly learn something; but here again he was disappointed. Still he went on trying day after day, and very often came home by Ashacombe, when he did not fail to call at Bracefort Hall, where everybody was glad to see him, whatever the failure of his efforts.

Thus a whole month passed away without any change in Tommy Fry or any sign that might give hope of discovering the strange woman. Lady Eleanor then became very unhappy indeed, and blamed herself for letting her go without further inquiry.

Colonel George still insisted that all would soon right itself, for he was pained to see how much Lady Eleanor took the matter to heart, but in truth he too was at his wits' end. And indeed those two distressed themselves over Tommy Fry far more than anybody else; for Mrs. Fry gained great importance from her boy's misfortune. Folks from neighbouring villages came to see for themselves if the story that they had heard was true; and from time to time some gentleman passing to or from the hunting-field would drop in, when Tommy was produced and proved to be speechless, while Mrs. Fry told the tale with every harrowing detail. The great Lord Fitzdenys himself came once, and the doctor regained favour in Mrs. Fry's eyes by bringing another doctor to see what he called "this interesting case;" and as none of the gentlemen ever went away without giving a few pence to the boy and a few shillings to his mother, the family of Fry gained both dignity and profit. Nor were the Frys at first the only gainers, for, Tommy being of a generous nature, there was an uncommon demand for Sally Dart's toffee, until Mrs. Fry, perceiving how quickly his money disappeared, thought it prudent to take care of it for him.

Then suddenly one day there came an event which revived all the hopes of Colonel George and Lady Eleanor. For one beautiful evening while Dick and Elsie were wandering with the Corporal round the fence of the park to pick blackberries, they heard a strange whistling in the wood beyond. At first they thought that it was a bird, but the Corporal said that he had never heard such a bird in his life, though the sound seemed to pass so swiftly from place to place that it was difficult to think what it might be. They followed the sound along the fence for a little way, and then suddenly the Corporal shaded his eyes with his hand for a moment, and telling the children to wait till he came back, ran away down the fence as fast as his lame leg would carry him, turned into the wood by a hunting-gate and disappeared. The children wondered for a time what could have happened, but discovering some very fine ripe blackberries soon turned to picking and tasting them again, when suddenly they heard the whistling close to them, and again still closer; and presently there was a little rustle through the bushes, and there stood the idiot before them, still whistling. They were at first a little frightened, but too much astonished to cry out; and the ragged creature (for he had just the same appearance as when they had first seen him) grinned at them so kindly that they could not help smiling back. He looked round him nervously for a moment and then holding up his finger as if to bid them keep silence, he scrambled down from the fence to them, and produced a rudely made cage of hazel-wands from under his coat. This he opened, and took from it a bullfinch, which perched on his finger without attempting to fly away. Then he whistled a few notes and the bird began to pipe a little tune, though the man was obliged to remind him of his note now and again. Then he whistled few more notes and the bird piped another tune or part of one, after which he lifted the bird to his face and the little creature laid its beak against his lips. He then listened nervously for a few seconds, shut he bird up in the cage again, put the cage into little Elsie's hand, nodding and smiling all the time, jumped over the fence into the wood and was gone.



[Illustration: The bird began to pipe a little tune.]

The Corporal came back a few minutes later, very hot, out of breath, and very nearly out of temper. He had caught sight of some one in the wood, he said, a poacher or some one who had no business there, and made sure to have caught him or at any rate to have found out who he was. But when he heard the children's story he opened his eyes wide and said that they had better go home at once; and that very same evening he rode over to Fitzdenys Court with a letter from Lady Eleanor to Colonel George. But the children were far too much taken up by the bullfinch to think of anything else, for the bird took courage to pipe a little to Dick's whistling, and then they discovered that one of his tunes was "The British Grenadiers."

Colonel George duly came over next morning and was not a little astonished to hear what had happened, but could not explain it in the least. "The children will solve this mystery before I shall, you will see," he said to Lady Eleanor, laughing, "and I may as well give up the attempt."

"But do you not think that this proves these two people to be harmless and innocent?" asked Lady Eleanor.

"You judged them to be so from the first," he answered, "and that is sufficient for me."

Lady Eleanor hesitated for a moment, and then said that he must come and see the bullfinch. So Elsie produced the bird with great pride, and Colonel George recognised one tune as "The British Grenadiers" and the other as part of "Lillibulero," the famous marching song which was so popular with King William's soldiers. "Strange," he said, "that both tunes should be marching tunes. What can it mean?"

But before they had done with the bullfinch, a frightened woman came hurrying up with the news that old Sally Dart was taken bad. She had got up as usual and begun to lay the fire, but the neighbours seeing no more of her had entered the cottage and found her lying on the floor, speechless, with one side of her face pulled down. Lady Eleanor at once sent for the doctor, and walked down with Colonel George to see what she could do; but as they came back they found that there was fresh excitement in another quarter. The village preacher's cow had also been taken bad; her calf was dead already, and it was doubtful if the cow could be saved. Finally, Mrs. Mugford was seen weeping over the ghastly heads of six or eight fowls which lay in a heap before her door. The said fowls, so Colonel George ascertained from her, had strayed away in the previous night, which she had never known them do before, and the keeper had found the heads scattered about the wood not far from an earth where an old vixen was known to have brought up a litter of cubs. What could have possessed the fowls Mrs. Mugford couldn't say, for her old stag (and she selected the head of a venerable cock from the heap as she spoke, to give point to her remark) was so sensible as a Christian almost.

"What a day of misfortunes!" said Lady Eleanor, as they left the disconsolate woman.

"Yes, indeed," said Colonel George, "I only hope that they may end here. Listen!" And as he spoke the voice of Mrs. Fry rose high from the garden above.

"Yes," she said, "the mazed man was up to the park yesterday. The young gentleman and the little lady seed mun; and the witch wasn't far away, you may depend. She's a-witched mun all; that's what it is; and now maybe," she added with a triumphant glance at the weeping Mrs. Mugford, "there's some as won't be so sartain as they was as to the doings of witches."

Lady Eleanor gave a little laugh, but turned suddenly grave, and asked Colonel George anxiously, "Do you think that they really believe it?"

"There is no doubt that they believe it," he said quietly. "It is best to face facts."

"But if it should lead to trouble?" said Lady Eleanor.

"Wait till the trouble comes," he said, "and then send for me. You may be sure that I shall come."

CHAPTER VI

The day of misfortunes brought about very much such results as Colonel George had foreseen. Old Sally Dart, it is true, recovered, though she was sadly shaken; and she declared, as soon as she could speak, that she was not going yet awhile, not at any rate till she had heard the full story of her Jan's death. But on the other hand the preacher's cow did die, and as the preacher himself was but a small farmer of eight or ten acres of land, the loss to him was very serious. Mrs. Mugford, too, was thoroughly converted to belief in witchcraft by the loss of her fowls; though since Tommy Fry's noise no longer disturbed her, and her fowls were no longer numerous enough to make havoc of Mrs. Fry's garden, she and Mrs. Fry lived for the present in comparative peace. Hoping therefore to do something to destroy the belief in witches and to soften the harsh feeling against them, Lady Eleanor wrote to the parson to speak on the subject in next Sunday's sermon.

Her hopes, however, were not very great. There was no parson living in the village, the parish being so small that it was joined to another and served by an old, old man, who wore his hair in powder and droned through one service only on Sundays in the little dark church at Ashacombe. The congregation was always small, and perhaps the three most enthusiastic members were Dick, Elsie, and the Corporal. For the Corporal had inherited a violoncello, or as it was always called in the village, a bass viol, from his father, and played it in the little gallery along with the two violins, flageolet and bassoon that formed the rest of the band. The notes that he could play were few, though sufficient for the humble needs of the church, but the children had no doubt that he was the finest performer in the world, and watched anxiously for the minute when he should begin sawing away at the strings, and the choir should break (very much through their noses) into the anthem, "I will arise, I will arise and goo tu my va-ther," with which the service always began.

The old parson, though he did attempt to fulfil Lady Eleanor's wishes in his sermon, only succeeded in being duller and longer than usual, and neither Dick nor Elsie could understand what he was talking about. Moreover they had been much distracted by a printed handbill which they had seen on the church door, headed in large letters by the word "Deserted," with the description of a deserter named Henry Bale from the Royal Marines, set forth in the usual terms—"Height five feet four inches, fair hair, grey eyes; when last seen was dressed in his regimentals," and so on. This had set Dick thinking very seriously, for the Corporal had always told him that no man was so bad as he that deserted his colours and ran away from the King's service; and he had hardly believed that such people could exist. And the bill had set other people thinking too, for a reward of two guineas was offered for this deserter, which made sundry poor mouths water; so that altogether the parson's long sermon was not much listened to, many heads being occupied with an attempt to remember some strange man five feet four inches in height, with fair hair and grey eyes, and dressed in regimentals.

When service was over, the Corporal solemnly packed up his bass viol in a bag of green baize, and was about to carry it off, when he was stopped by the village preacher, who begged the loan of it for the evening. But the Corporal, who as a soldier and Lady Eleanor's servant was a staunch supporter of Church and King, did not like the preacher, who was always railing against all authority and driving silly maids into hysterics with his ravings; so he answered him very civilly (for he never quarrelled with any one) that he was afraid he could not. The preacher, however, would not take no for an answer, and tried to wheedle the Corporal, who at last told him very decidedly that his father had played that viol in the church at Fitzdenys for forty years, and he himself at Ashacombe for near seven years more, and that he would be hanged if it should ever

enter a chapel so long as he was alive. With which words he drew himself up to his full height and stalked away.

The preacher was not a little annoyed, for he wanted the viol for his own service at the chapel, where he was going to preach directly contrary to the old parson. Moreover at the close of his service there was to be a collection to make good to him the loss of his cow, so that it was important to him that all should go off as well as possible. However, notwithstanding the absence of the viol, his discourse was enough to gain for him a good collection, to strengthen the general belief in witches, and to influence the minds of the villagers against them; for he singled out those who dealt leniently with witches for punishment, either in the near or distant future, which was just what his congregation was glad to hear. Not that the preacher was a bad man, certainly not worse than his neighbours, but he was as ignorant and superstitious as any of them.

Great cackling there was among the women when the discourse was ended. It was Lady Eleanor who had delivered the witch and the idiot out of their hands; but the villagers could not suspect her of harm who was always so thoughtful and kind, and who had given more than any one towards replacing the preacher's cow. "But her ladyship's that tender-hearted, you see," they said, "and the best of folks is sometimes mistook;" and they shook their heads solemnly, each thinking in her heart that she knew of at least one excellent person who was never mistaken. But who was it that had excused the mazed man to her ladyship? The Corporal. Who had contrived to be out of the way, though in charge of the children, when the mazed man came to them? The Corporal again.

So the whisper went round that the Corporal was in league with the witch; and the preacher, who had not forgotten about the bass viol, though he said only a few mysterious words, seemed rather to agree. Then Mrs. Fry revealed the fact that she had suspected the Corporal from the first; for to begin with he was a soldier.

"And what drove he to 'list?" she asked indignantly. "No good, I'll warrant mun. 'Tisn't good that drives men to 'list. There was Jan Dart that 'listed twenty year ago, and 'ticed away Lucy Clatworthy to follow mun, her that was only child of Jeremiah Clatworthy up to Loudacott; and the old Jeremiah got drinking and died after she left mun. And there's Jan's old mother, poor soul, that loved mun as the apple of her eye, waiting here alone, and I reckon her time's short. No! I knows what it is when men go for sojers."

It was perhaps fortunate that Mrs. Mugford was not at chapel that evening or there might have been angry words; but the rest of the women, having no interest in soldiers, with perfect honesty agreed with Mrs. Fry, and lamented that her ladyship should be so misguided as to employ a man like the Corporal, for it would surely end in no good,—sojers never did. Look at Mrs. Mugford's boy that went for a marine, and came back with the shakums so bad that you could hear his teeth chattering a mile away when the fit was on him. The conversation would have lingered long on the symptoms of "shakums," or in other words of *ague*, had not some one called to mind the bill on the church-door about the deserter. Then the tongues were set wagging afresh. Two guineas were a lot of money, they said, but soldiers was often badly served, and 'twas no wonder they runned away. But it wasn't well to have strange men about the place, least of all sojers, for they never learned no good.

The mention of strange men about the place of course brought back the subject of the idiot, and then the thought occurred to one of the women that he might be the deserter in question. The idea was at once taken up by her companions, and the more they talked, the more likely it seemed to them. The man had been driven from his regiment probably because of his evil doings, and was come to Ashacombe to plague them; and all agreed that it would be very pleasant to earn two guineas by the catching of him. Mrs. Fry went home brimful of this new notion and poured it out to Mrs. Mugford, who listened with unusual interest, and without either contradiction or interruption, which was a most unusual thing. But at last she broke out with much earnestness:

"You'm right, you may depend, Mrs. Fry; you'm right. That mazed man is the man that they'm a-sarching for; and it's my belief that he isn't mazed at all but so well in his head as you and I be,—just pretending like. And you'm right about that Brimacott too, and I do hope that every one will let mun know that he's not welcome in Ashacombe. He's a prying man and a tale-bearing man, that's what I believe he is, and all to deceive her ladyship and keep friends with the witch. But we'll catch that mazed man for all his pretending, and there there will be two guineas for you and me."

Any one else but Mrs. Fry might have thought it strange for the Corporal to be called a tale-bearer by the very woman who had told tales against her; but Mrs. Fry was not a clever woman, and after all she had suffered under Lady Eleanor's tongue through the Corporal's report. Lady Eleanor knew that if the Corporal told her anything that went on in the village, which he very rarely did, it was right that she should know it; but that was not Mrs. Fry's opinion. So the two agreed that the Corporal was an enemy to the village, though, as is usually the way, they never thought of complaining to Lady Eleanor of him.

But had Mrs. Fry stayed at home instead of going to chapel, she would have understood better the meaning of Mrs. Mugford's words. For having packed off her husband, who was a feeble creature, to take the children out for a walk, Mrs. Mugford stationed herself at a window

from which she could see any one that came down from the woods at the back of the house; and after a time she saw a shortish man, fair-haired and blue-eyed, walk stealthily down to her. He was a miserable-looking fellow, with a pinched white face, matted hair and new-grown beard, and dressed only in a shirt and a pair of light-blue soldier's trousers. She smuggled him quickly into the house and locked the door; and when after a quarter of an hour the door opened again, and after due looking round the man was let out, he was dressed like an ordinary labourer. He carried bread and bacon tied up in a handkerchief in his hand, and disappeared into the wood as quickly as he could; and as soon as he was gone Mrs. Mugford very solemnly put the trousers and shirt, that he had worn when he came in, upon the fire and burned them.

CHAPTER VII

So another fortnight passed away, and nothing happened to disturb the usual peace of Ashacombe. Nothing was seen or heard of the idiot or his mother nor of any one who corresponded to the description of the deserter. The Corporal indeed realised that the tone of the village towards him was not so friendly as before, but he set that down to the preacher's influence and took little notice of it; for indeed he cared little so long as he was with Lady Eleanor and the children, and could count Colonel Fitzdenys among his friends.

But up at the Hall there were heavy hearts; for Lady Eleanor had spoken, not for the first time, to Colonel George about sending Dick to school, and he had answered that it was high time for him to go, as it was a bad thing for boys to stay too long at home with their mothers; and he said that he himself had been sent to school at six, whereas Dick was already nine. He added that by chance he had heard of a good school while passing through London, and would arrange matters for her if she wished it. It was rather strange, by the way, that Colonel George always happened by chance to know everything that could save Lady Eleanor trouble. So with a sigh Lady Eleanor had assented that Dick should go; and it had been settled that he should leave in a few weeks. Dick was rather triumphant, Elsie rather jealous, the Corporal in secret rather sad, and Lady Eleanor very melancholy.

So one day early in September Lady Eleanor promised the children that for an unusual treat they should have a ride with the Corporal rather further than usual on to the moor. She would not ride herself, for her favourite horse was lame, but settled that she would drive them some way up the valley in the afternoon, and there meet the Corporal, who would go on before them leading the ponies, and ride with them on to the moor. Accordingly on the appointed day the Corporal rode through the village on old Billy, leading a pony on each side. Not a soul wished him good-day, and the Corporal felt that all were making unpleasant remarks—indeed he caught the words, "Dear! to think that they sweet children should be trusted to such as he."

But he trotted on without taking any notice, up the valley to the appointed meeting-place.

Lady Eleanor drove up rather late, for the horse-flies had been very troublesome; and the children seeing the grey pony which drew them covered all over with little flecks of blood, had constantly entreated her to stop while they jumped down and knocked the flies off him. At last, however, she came. The children mounted their ponies, Dick very proud of a new saddle and stirrups to which he had been promoted after leaping the bar bare-backed, and they rode away up a grass path to the covert, kissing their hands as they went.

And then Lady Eleanor turned round and drove down the valley, feeling very lonely and unhappy over the prospect of losing Dick. Her thoughts wandered back to her first meeting with Richard Bracefort, the handsome captain of Light Dragoons, her engagement, her wedding in a London drawing-room, and her first visit to Bracefort Hall. Then had come some two years of happy life in country-quarters. Those were pleasant days to look back on, when her husband would come in from parade and say that he believed he had in his troop as good officers and men as were to be found in the service; while George Fitzdenys, the lieutenant, would tell her that there were few such officers as her husband to be found in the Army, and the little cornet, who was little more than a boy, would be lavish in praise of both. Her maid again was always repeating to her what Brimacott, then her husband's soldier-servant, said of the devotion of the men to the captain. Finally there came the crowning happiness of the birth of the children; and she still remembered seeing a little knot of troopers gathered round the diminutive creatures called Dick and Elsie.

But, very soon after, came the miserable day when the regiment was ordered on active service, and she rode with her husband at the head of his troop to the rendezvous. She could see him still as he appeared mounted on Billy Pitt that day. Then followed the embarkation of men and horses, and a desperate struggle with Billy, who objected to be slung on board; and finally the last glimpse of sails disappearing over the horizon and the long drive westward to Bracefort Hall. There old Mr. Bracefort's delight over her arrival and over the children had almost brought happiness back to her again; and cheerful letters from Spain kept hope alive. But when the regiment reached the front, the tragedy of war soon made itself felt. George Fitzdenys was badly

wounded in the first skirmish, two of the best troopers were killed and others wounded; and, after that, twelve months of service seemed to cut off member after member of what Fitzdenys had called the happiest troop in the Army. The little cornet was shot dead, the troop-sergeant-major drowned while crossing a treacherous ford, this trooper maimed for life, that trooper—but she could not bear to think of it. And then came the morning in August when old Mr. Bracefort had come in white and trembling to break to her the news of Salamanca. It was well that in those dreary days she had been obliged to look after him and give him the comfort which he tried, but in vain, to give to her. She remembered how, for all his courage, the old gentleman had drooped and died after the death of his son, and how all ties with the old life seemed to be severed, but for George Fitzdenys' letters of sympathy. Then she recalled the arrival of Brimacott and Billy Pitt, which seemed to mark the end of one stage of her life and the beginning of a new, and yet to carry the last relics of the past continuously into the present. All had been peaceful since then; the war had done its worst for her, and her only link with Spain now lay in the messages, always punctually delivered by old Lord Fitzdenys in person, that Captain Fitzdenys sent his respectful service to her and hoped that she and the children were well. She remembered how she had dreaded her first meeting with Captain Fitzdenys after the peace, and how he seemed to have realised that her whole life now lay in the children, and had made friends with them at once. He had helped her through some difficulties of business and had then rushed off to the campaign of Waterloo; and he had come back safe and sound only to run away again after a few months to India. And now he was back once more, in time to be of help to her; but Dick must go to school and the happy home must be broken up again. She sighed sadly, wondering where it all would end.

In this frame of mind she returned and sat in the hall waiting for the children to come back. Six o'clock came, and there was no sign of them. The long twilight faded slowly without a sound of hoofs on the drive; seven o'clock struck; and she rang the bell and asked if nothing had been seen of the Corporal and the children. The answer was "Nothing;" and she waited in growing anxiety, listening for the trample of the ponies or the sound of the children's voices, but hearing only the ticking of the clock; until unable to endure the suspense, she went out and walked first into the yard and then into the road by which they should come. The night was fine, but overcast by light clouds of grey mist, through which the moon pierced but very faintly. More than once her hopes were raised by the sound of hoofs, and dashed to the ground by the drone of wheels or by the appearance of a fat farmer jogging home. She asked more than one if they had seen a man on a brown horse and two children on ponies, but they only answered "no," and wished her civilly good night. In this way the rumour passed through the village that the Corporal and the children were missing; and many wondered, but made no doubt that they would be back presently. As Lady Eleanor came back to the house, the clock struck eight, and she returned to the Hall with a deadly sinking at her heart. A quarter of an hour later, she heard the Corporal's step, limping heavier than usual, and jumped to her feet; and the Corporal came in, looking white and haggard and weary, but braced himself to his usual erect attitude when he saw her, and stood at attention.

Then he told his story quietly and clearly. They had ridden right up to the highest point of a ridge, as they had designed, to look over the moor to the coast of Wales; and while they were standing there a deer had come by, and they had ridden down a little further to see what should come next. And then the hounds had come up in full cry and only half-a-dozen horsemen, among whom was Colonel Fitzdenys, anywhere near them. Old Billy was so much excited that the Corporal could hardly hold him, and at last the old horse fairly bolted away with him and the two ponies after him. The Corporal had managed to pull up Billy, but the two ponies had shot past him, both the children crying out with delight, and while galloping on to catch them Billy had come down in a boggy place, and the corporal supposed that he himself must have been a bit stunned, for when he got up he found that he had let go of his rein and that Billy and everybody else had disappeared. He had followed the tracks of the horse as well as he could and had found him in the next combe by the water, but had had a deal of trouble to catch him; and though he had shouted and holloaed for the children he had neither seen nor heard anything of them. Then as soon as he had ridden to the top of the hill again, the mist came down thick and heavy, and there was no seeing anything. So with some trouble he found his way back to the road, being obliged to travel slowly, as the old horse had lamed himself. He had left word at every house that he passed, and parties had gone up the road in the valley with lanterns. "I hope and trust, my Lady," said the Corporal in conclusion, "that Master Dick and Miss Elsie have followed the hunt to the end, for his honour the colonel will see to them. A man that I met on the road promised to carry a message to Fitzdenys Court, but the deer was travelling fast, so I doubt if the colonel will come home to-night unless so be as he must. But, if you please, my Lady, I'll just take another horse and ride over to the Court myself."

"Can nothing more be done?" said Lady Eleanor, calmed in spite of herself by the Corporal's calmness and forethought.

"Nothing, I fear, my Lady," he answered sadly; "it's terrible thick out over."

"But you are hurt," said Lady Eleanor, noticing the paleness of his face, and the effort which it cost him to walk.

"It's nothing, my Lady," he said. "I'd sooner have lost both legs than that this should have come." And he bowed and limped out; but within an hour and a half he came galloping back with Colonel George, who had met him on the road, and was hurrying over to say that though he had

ridden to the death of the hunted stag he had seen nothing of the children then nor at any other time.

"Is the fog as thick on the moor as they say?" asked Lady Eleanor, speaking bravely, though she was white to the lips.

"So thick that without a compass I could not have found my way across it," said Colonel George. "It is right that you should know the truth. But the farmers on the edge of the moor know what has happened and are riding as far as they dare with whistles and horns—Brimacott saw to that—and I propose to join them myself at once."

"I shall go with you," said Lady Eleanor, quietly.

Colonel George hesitated for a moment and then answered as quietly: "Be it so; then you must ride my horse, which is cleverer on the moor than any of yours. I will take my groom's, and you must let him have a horse to take back some directions from me to Fitzdenys. Brimacott, with your permission, shall watch the road by which you drove out this morning, in case the ponies should find their way there."

Lady Eleanor soon came down in her habit, impatient to start, but found Colonel George writing, with a tray of food and drink set down by him. "You cannot start until you have eaten something," was all that he said. "We may have a long ride and a long watch before us;" and Lady Eleanor gulped down a few morsels, for she felt, while hardly knowing why, that Colonel George had taken command and that she must obey orders. In a few minutes he finished writing and sent the letter back to Fitzdenys Court. Then he slung a field-glass over his shoulders; and Lady Eleanor's heart sank low as she walked with him to the door, for she perceived that he expected the search to be prolonged beyond the night. "Courage," he said, as if reading her thoughts; and they went out and rode away together into the dark.

CHAPTER VIII

And what had become of Dick and Elsie? The account given by the Corporal had, of course, been perfectly true. It was Dick who had been the first to see the hunted stag about a quarter of a mile away, travelling along at that steady lurching gallop which seems so slow and is so astonishingly swift; and it had needed all the Corporal's firmness to keep the boy from galloping after him on the spot. And then after a time the hounds had come on upon the line of the deer, their great white bodies conspicuous as they strode on in long drawn file across the waste of pale green grass, and the sound of their deep voices booming faintly over the vast solitude. Surely and steadily they pressed on, seeming like the deer to move but slowly, but in reality running their hardest with a swinging relentless stride. There was something almost dreamlike in this strange procession as it moved on between green earth and blue heaven, with none to see it, as it appeared, but the white-winged curlew which whistled mournfully overhead. But presently a little group of horsemen appeared on the far side of the hounds, just six of them in all. The old huntsman was leading them, in his long skirted coat and double-peaked cap, as Dick had often seen him, with his little legs thrust forward, his old body bent over his saddle-bow, and his eyes glued to his hounds. Just a few yards from him rode Colonel George, erect and easy, but also evidently with no eyes for anything but the hounds; and close after him came three more, while the sixth was a full hundred yards behind.

And all the time the Corporal and the children kept moving down, as if drawn by some fascination, insensibly closer to them. Old Billy was worrying at his bit and dancing about, and the ponies squeaking and dancing round him; until for the sake of peace the Corporal allowed the old horse to move in the direction which he desired, when an impatient trot soon turned after a few huge strides to an impatient canter, and Billy put his head down and was off. And off the ponies went also, for they had taken the bit in their teeth and meant to catch the hindmost of the horsemen if they could; and neither Dick nor Elsie turned their heads, or they would have seen Billy plunge deep into a patch of bog, and come down heavily, throwing the Corporal far over his head. So on they went, flying down the long slope before them, dashed across a little stream at its foot in hot pursuit of the last of the horsemen, and on again along a little track on the other side. The ascent was a little steep beyond the stream, but the ponies struggled gamely up, and then another long slope stretched downward before them, beyond which rose a great bank of heather. The hounds had already reached the heather and were breasting the ascent, but their voices could be heard now and then, and the last of the horsemen was not many hundred yards ahead. So away the ponies went again, the children nothing loth, for they doubted not but that the Corporal was near them. By the time that they reached the foot of the slope the ponies were beginning to roll a little, but they splashed through the next little stream as lively as ever, and began to gallop up through the heather on the other side. The horseman whom the children were following was still just in sight, hugging his horse up the ascent; but first his horse's tail disappeared over the hill, then only his shoulders were visible, then only his hat, and presently he vanished from sight altogether. And Dick hustled his pony up the hill to catch him, and Elsie

hustled hers after him; but the feeble gallop soon became a slow trot, and the trot became feebler and feebler in spite of all the hustling. Before long both ponies were sobbing heavily, and it was only with great difficulty that the children kept them going fast enough to regain sight of their leader. Presently the ponies came to a dead stop, and Dick looked about him for the Corporal; but the Corporal was nowhere to be seen.

As a matter of fact the Corporal at that moment was just rising to his feet, and wondering whether he was on his head or his heels. For old Billy on finding himself in the bog had plunged madly about, girth-deep, until he had pumped all the wind out of himself, when he had waited quietly to recover his breath and floundered out on to the sound ground, shaking such a shower of brown drops over the Corporal as brought him to himself and made him stagger to his feet, rub his eyes, and remember where he was. He soon made out in which direction Billy was gone and presently caught sight of him, making his way to the water to drink; but the horse was not going to let himself be caught at once, and led the Corporal a long dance down by the water-side, where, of course, he could see nothing of the children, though he kept hallooing from time to time in the hope that they would hear him.

And meanwhile the children looked round and round, wondering where they had come from and where they should go to. They had not the least idea where they were, and they could see no one and hear no one; but they laid their heads together and decided that they had better go on to the top of the hill before them, from which, as Dick said, they would be able to see further. So as soon as the ponies had recovered their wind they went on upward, and presently to their delight they saw far ahead of them the horseman whom they had followed, no longer moving but stopped still. They hustled the ponies into a gallop once more, when to their dismay the man began to move slowly on away from them. They called out at the top of their voices but could not make him hear, in fact he seemed rather to quicken his pace. So they drove the ponies on again, not noticing that tufts of grass were beginning to show themselves in the heather over which they rode. Then the man suddenly turned to his left and went galloping on, and the children turned also to catch him by cutting off the corner; but the ponies seemed unable to travel very fast, and presently Dick's pony after some desperate floundering came right down on his nose, shooting the boy gently over his ears, where he landed with his head and shoulders in a shallow pool of brown peaty water.

Dick jumped to his feet at once, for he was not a bit frightened, and caught the pony easily; but he felt a little humiliated, for he could just see that his white collar was stained with brown mud, and he did not like the trickling of the water down his back. It took him a few minutes to repair damages, and when he put his foot into the stirrup to jump up again, the saddle began to turn round on the pony's back, and he had to jump down again hastily and try to set the saddle right while Elsie held the pony's rein. But while he was heaving with all his little strength, the pony's back suddenly sank before him, and Elsie cried out that Stonecrop (for that was the pony's name) was going to lie down. Like a wise little woman she gave the rein a jerk, which brought Stonecrop's head up and kept him on his legs; but Stonecrop was so much annoyed that he whisked round and tugged so hard at the rein that he drew it over his head; and Dick had only just time to catch hold of it before Elsie was obliged to let go, for fear of being pulled out of her saddle. Then Stonecrop, who was now still more annoyed and had quite recovered his wind, refused for a long time to allow the rein to be put over his head again, but kept dodging and backing until he drove Elsie almost to despair. At last he backed into some soft ground where he could not move very quickly, and Dick threw the rein over his head; after which Stonecrop decided to behave himself, and actually stood still for a moment to let Dick mount him. The saddle very nearly turned round as he did so, but Elsie held on stoutly to the stirrup on the other side, and, once mounted, Dick soon set the saddle straight again by his weight; but both of the children were wearied and disheartened by all these misfortunes, for Stonecrop had kept them waiting by his antics for more than half an hour.

Then they looked about them again for some one to guide them, and particularly for the Corporal; but the Corporal, as luck would have it, though he was trying his best to find them, never came within eyesight or earshot of them. Besides, Billy was so lame that he could not ride him very fast, and the Corporal himself was not so sure of his way but that he had to keep looking out sharply to remember where he was. So seeing no help Dick and Elsie made up their minds that they must try to find their own way home, though they had little idea in which direction to start, for they had never been so far on the moor before. The rolling hills and grass and heather seemed to be very much the same on every side, and there was no road nor track to guide them. Dick did indeed think of following the hoof-marks of their own ponies backward, for he had heard the Corporal tell stories how lost and tired soldiers had rejoined an army on the march by sticking to its tracks; but unfortunately this was not very easy. Very soon they made up their minds that the first thing to be done was to get clear of the treacherous ground on which they stood, for the ponies floundered terribly, and in one desperate scramble over a very soft place Dick let his whip fall and could not find it again. Still on they went, and at last came to a little trickle of water in a hollow, running between what seemed to be sound green grass; but the ponies refused to cross it; and it was well that they did so, for it was deeper and more dangerous than any ground that they had yet traversed. So there was nothing for it but to follow the water in the hope that the ground would improve; and accordingly they did follow it, upward. The stream grew smaller and smaller, and Dick hugged himself with the idea that when it disappeared altogether they would be able to travel faster. But, on the contrary, the ground grew worse instead of better, for water underground makes worse foothold than water flowing

honestly above, and very soon they lost all sense of their direction in the difficulty of keeping the ponies on their legs at all. At last after several very unpleasant struggles they luckily found their way out of the worst of the bog; but there seemed to be no end to the tract of mixed grass and heather, which is always treacherous to ride over; and the ponies were constantly in difficulties. Then to Dick's joy at last they came upon tracks of a horse or pony, and there was something to guide them, though it was very often difficult to find and follow it. They wandered on, however, until Dick's eye caught the gleam of silver, and there lay his lost whip; so that, after all their riding, they had but wandered round and round and come back to the place from which they had started.

Poor Elsie, who was getting very tired, was very much disheartened, but Dick choked down his vexation and disappointment, for it was at any rate something for him to recover his whip, which he valued greatly. Stonecrop was too much blown now to give much trouble, so he jumped off and picked it up safely, and then he and Elsie held a long consultation, and at last agreed to make straight for a high hill towards which the sun was sinking. So they turned their ponies' heads towards it, and started again, keeping their eyes steadily on a mound or barrow on the hill-top. In a short time they found themselves clear of the boggy ground; and the ponies stepped out so bravely that they felt sure that they were going right. So they trotted on, greatly encouraged, and came to a stream babbling over its bed of yellow stones, though the ground beyond it was so steep that they were obliged to follow it for some distance before they could find a way across. Thus they were compelled to move slowly, and Elsie suddenly gave a little shiver, and both she and Dick realised that the air was grown chill and that the light was beginning to fail. Still they pressed the ponies on, and at last they caught sight again of the barrow on the hill, though, to their disappointment, it seemed little nearer than before. Then even while they watched it, a great bank of gray mist suddenly came rolling out of the west and blotted out the barrow and the ridge on which it stood. Still they rode on towards the same point, until, almost before they knew it, the mist was upon them and they could not see fifty yards away. Their hearts sank within them as the darkness gathered round them, but though they drew closer together they said nothing, for the ponies still travelled on with confidence, and they hoped that all the while they were drawing nearer to the barrow. But the mist struck damp and cold through them, weary and fasting as they were, and they had much ado to keep up each other's spirits. So they wandered on, until the ponies, as if they felt that their little riders had lost resolution, came to a dead stop. A keen breeze came out of the west, chilling the two children to the bone; and Stonecrop turning his head to the wind broke out into a long wailing whinny, which brought home to the children such a sense of their loneliness and desolation that Elsie looked blankly at Dick and Dick as blankly at Elsie, and neither found heart to say a word.

So they sat in their saddles for a minute or two silent and hopeless, when suddenly both ponies pricked their ears and snuffed at the wind, and Stonecrop again raised a loud but more cheerful whinny. And out of the mist faint and far distant came the sound of a whinny in answer. Then Elsie stopped, checked the tears that were rising to her eyes, and looked at Dick, who was listening intently. He had some thought of jumping off and saying his prayers, except that he was not sure how Stonecrop would behave; but, even while he reflected, Stonecrop's knees began to bend as if to lie down again, and then he caught hold of the pony by the head and gave him a cut with his whip that drove him on in a hurry. "Come along, Elsie," he said resolutely, "if we can reach that horse we may find some one to help us. Perhaps it may be Billy." And off he went dead up wind at a good round pace, which warmed them both and put them into better heart; and Dick broke into a cantering song which the Corporal had taught him, and sang it in time to Stonecrop's pace.

*"Oh, a soldier's son, and a soldier's son,
He must never go back, but always go on.
Though it may be hard, he must always try,
Though he may be hurt, he must never cry.
He must never lose heart nor seem distressed,
But pluck up his courage and do his best.
And so struggle on, and on, and on,
For that's the way for a soldier's son."*

Now nothing is more certain than that, if you wish to find your way through a fog, you must travel in the direction that you have chosen as fast as you can. Very soon the children found themselves going down rather a steep descent, when Stonecrop again stopped and whinnied, and an answering whinny once more came faintly out of the mist. So they kept on their way down and came to a stream, where Dick guided his pony across and up the ascent on the other side. But Stonecrop after scrambling up for a little way deliberately came back to the water and followed it downwards, sometimes in the bed of the stream, sometimes on the bank by the side; and Dick let him go, feeling confident that the pony knew better than he. So they went splashing down for a long way, wondering what would come next, until Stonecrop again stopped and whinnied; and a little further on they came upon another little stream, running into that which they were following, where the pony turned and followed the new water upward. A little further on he gave a kind of whispered grunt of satisfaction, and presently there came the sound not only of neighing but of pattering hoofs, and a pony suddenly came trotting out of the mist towards them. He stopped and whinnied gently, turned round, trotted back for some way, then stood and whinnied again, while the children's ponies hastened their own pace towards him. Then the sound of a shrill whistle came down the water, and the strange pony at once turned and cantered away towards it; but Stonecrop only moved the faster in the same direction, giving a loud scream

to call him back. And now a faint light came dancing down by the water, drawing closer and closer to the children till they could see that it was a man carrying a lantern. Nearer and nearer it came, and Dick cleared his throat and began, "Oh, please—," whereupon the man stopped so short that Dick stopped too, and Elsie came up close to him and clung to his arm. Then the light disappeared and the man gave a peculiar whistle. It was answered by the same whistle at a distance, and the children waited with beating hearts till the light appeared again; and at last a woman's voice said very roughly out of the mist,

"Who's there?"

"Oh, please, we have lost our way," said Dick; "please, please tell us the way home."

A suspicious grunt was the only answer; and Dick hastened to go on, "Oh, please, we mean no harm, but we've lost our way. It's only Elsie and me."

"Ah!" said the woman's voice, as if in surprise.

"Yes, it's only Dick and me," said Elsie in her most reassuring voice, but, like Dick, forgetting her grammar.

And then a curious, cackling laugh sounded out of the mist; the lantern came bounding forward, and before she could realise what had happened, Elsie found her skirt seized and a great rough head scrubbing against it. She gave a cry of terror, but directly afterwards the lantern showed her the face of the idiot, which grinned at her with delight for a moment and then bent again to kiss her skirt. Then another figure came out of the darkness, seized the lantern and held it first to her face and then to Dick's. They saw that it was the idiot's mother, and Dick again repeated, though with much secret fear, that they had lost their way.

"Is there no one with 'ee?" asked the woman astonished.

"No," said Dick sadly. "We're lost."

"Why, my dear tender hearts," said the woman in a voice of great pity, "to think of that. But don't 'ee cry, my dear," for she could hear Elsie sobbing gently, "don't 'ee cry, for 'tis all well now. See now, my house is close by, and you'm safe, both of 'ee. Come long with me, and don't be afear'd; I'll take care of 'ee and take 'ee home safe enough. To think of that now—" and so she went on, leading the way for them with the lantern for another quarter of a mile up the water, till she stopped, and saying, "Now, my dears, we'm home," lifted Elsie from her saddle and carried her under a low doorway, and then coming back, called Dick in also, leaving the ponies in charge of the idiot.

CHAPTER IX

It was but a very little house in which the children found themselves; and it took some time for them to make it out, for there was no light but that of a feeble rushlight in a horn lantern, and the faint glow of a peat fire. But after a while they perceived that it was built of sods of turf and lined with heather, neatly fixed into the turf by wooden pegs such as gardeners use; while the ceiling was also of heather, laid crosswise against ashen poles. The fire-place seemed to be built of round stones, evidently taken from a stream, which were plastered together with clay; and the chimney was carried outside the wall. Across the chimney was fixed an iron bar, from which hung a rude chain that appeared to have been made of old horse-shoes, and at the end of the chain was an iron pot. The only furniture was a low table of turf, which was built in the middle of the floor, and a couple of three-legged stools; and besides the iron pot on the fire, a frying-pan, a jug or two, a couple of wooden bowls and as many platters, there was hardly a vessel or a plate to be seen. The house, though of but one room, had one portion of it shut off by a low screen made of ash-poles and heather; and a similar screen lying against the wall appeared to take the place of a front door, when a front door was needed.

Little Elsie was so tired that she sank down at once on the low table of turf, and Dick staggered in, very stiff from long riding, and sat down by her side. But the old woman bustled into the room behind the screen and returned with a great armful of heather which she threw on the floor, and lifting the girl gently on to it, laid her down with her back resting against the table, as comfortable as could be. Then she fetched a jug full of milk, and although the milk tasted rather strong and the children were not accustomed to drink out of a jug, they were both too hungry to be particular. She then fetched another armful of heather for Dick, and bade him make himself comfortable too, when, laying her hand upon his shoulder she said, "Why, bless your life! the boy's so wet as a fisher; and where ever be I to find 'ee dry clothes? Dear, dear, this is a bad job." And she ran to the door where the idiot was standing with the ponies, and said something which the children could not understand. Dick jumped to his feet, for the Corporal had impressed upon him that a good dragoon always looks after his horse before he looks after himself; but the

old woman stopped him at the door.

"Don't you be put about for the ponies, my dear. My Jan will look to mun and hobble mun, and bring in saddles and bridles, and when they've a rolled they'll pick up a bit of mate and do well enough, I'll warrant mun."

Then she again went behind the screen, brought out a box, and began turning over what seemed to be clothes inside it, shaking her head and talking to herself, until at last she said, "Eas! this it must be." And she brought forward a little coat such as Dick had never seen before. It was of yellow, with a scarlet collar, facings and cuffs, there were two little red wings at the shoulders, and two little red tails at the back; and the buttons were of brass with a number in Roman letters upon it. Dick was not sure of the number, for he had not yet quite mastered Roman letters, and could never find the Psalms in church except by remembering the day of the month. Then she bade him take off his wet jacket, hung it near the chimney to dry, and helped him into the little coat, which was really not much too big for him. Dick turned himself round and strutted with delight in a way that set Elsie laughing in spite of her weariness; but the old woman smiled rather sadly, turned back the red cuffs, as the sleeves were rather too long for Dick, and pinned a shawl over the coat so that it could not be seen. She became cheerful again, however, and said: "But you'm hungry, my little lady. Now what shall I get you to ate?"

"Please may I have some bread and butter?" asked Elsie; but the old woman shook her head. "I have got neither bread nor butter," she said; "but think now—a bit of porridge and a drop of milk, and a bit of honey—how will that do? Jan!" she called out.

The idiot came in grinning at the children, but she shook her finger at him and made a sign, at which he nodded and went out again. Then she blew up the fire and added a few sticks to it, and taking oatmeal out of a sack which lay in one corner, and water from a wooden pitcher, began to make the porridge. Presently Jan came in again with half a dozen little trout, ready for cooking, and bending down at another corner of the fire was soon very busy over them. The porridge was quickly ready, and though the children had never eaten it before, and were not accustomed to pewter spoons and wooden bowls, yet the heather-honey, which was given to them with it, was so delicious that they found it good enough.

By the time that the porridge was all gone, the fish were cooked and served up on the two wooden platters with some salt; but now came a difficulty, for there were nothing but the same two spoons to eat them with, and it is not easy to eat a trout with a spoon, especially if one has been brought up not to use one's fingers. But the old woman soon settled matters by splitting up the fish with a knife and taking out the bones; after which both spoons were soon hard at work and the fish disappeared as rapidly as the porridge; for little trout, freshly caught from a moorland stream, are sweet enough, as all that have eaten them are aware. Finally the old woman laid before the children a huge pan full of stewed whorts; and as there were no plates left, nor as much as a saucer to be produced, they just helped themselves with their spoons out of the pan and ate as much as they wanted, which, after the porridge and trout, was not a very great deal.

Then they looked at the idiot, who had taken the squirrel out of his pocket and was fondling it and purring to it in his own strange way. He gave it to them also to make friends with, and seeing that they were fond of animals he went to the door and whistled; and presently there came trotting up a little hind of a year old, which walked in at the door as if she had been accustomed to live in a house all her life, and reared up like a begging dog on her hind legs to eat a bunch of mountain-ash berries which he held over her head. Then he gave the berries to the children, and the hind poked her little cool nose into their hands to get at the food, so tame was she; while the old woman told them how the idiot had found the poor little thing as a calf, bleating beside the dead body of her dam, and had brought her home and reared her.

But the children's eyes soon began to blink, and before long they were more than half asleep; so the old woman brought in more heather and made them up two little beds, and laid them down in their clothes. They had a faint idea, both of them, that some one took off their shoes and loosened their clothes about their necks, but they were too comfortable (for heather makes the best of rude beds) to think very much about it; and when Elsie felt vaguely that something warm was thrown over her and that a voice said "Good-night," she had only just wakefulness enough to whisper back good-night and to put up her cheek to be kissed. Dick also curled up as though heather was his usual bed; and very soon both were asleep, though at first rather fitfully and restlessly, for they were over-tired. But whenever they woke for a moment they were lulled to sleep by the voice of the woman, who sat on a stool watching them and crooning a song to herself. The children were too sleepy to catch the words, but they were as follows:

*"Oh! whither away that ye fly so fast,
Ye black crows croaking loud?
And what have ye sped that ye wheel so wide
Above yon grey dust cloud?"*

*"We spy two hosts of fighting men,
The blue coats and the red.
For mile on mile in rank and file
They come with even tread."*

*"And brave and bright on brass and steel
The slanting sunbeams fall.
Like giant snakes, with glittering flakes,
Their columns wind and crawl.*

*"The red march north and the blue march south,
And we wheel betwixt the twain;
And we hear their song, as they tramp along,
Rise joyous from the plain.*

*"The red march north and the blue march south,
And the daylight wanes apace,
'Till their fires gleam bright through the falling night,
And the twain rest face to face.*

*"And the morning's thunder shall be of guns,
And the morning's mist of smoke,
And higher and higher o'er din and fire,
We crows shall rise and croak.*

*"While the ranks of red and the ranks of blue
In mingled swathes are shorn;
As the poppies nigh to the cornflowers lie,
At the reaping of the corn.*

*"Oh! merry to stoop over chasing hounds,
As they speed through field and wood,
When their bristles rise, and with flaming eyes
They yell for blood, for blood.*

*"And merry to croak at the hunted fox,
When his brush trails draggling down,
And his strength is spent, and his back is bent,
And his tongue lolls parched and brown.*

*"But merriest far to wheel o'er the fight
Of the blue coats and the red,
'Till the fire has ceased, and we swoop to the feast
Which the strife of men has spread."*

Dick's last vision before he fell asleep was of her strange figure bent forward and watching, but he was a little startled when he woke in the morning and remembered where he was; for he was not accustomed to sleep in his clothes, still less in such a coat as the yellow one with the red facings, which he found upon his back. Elsie also was much astonished; and the sight of Dick in so strange a garment half frightened her for a moment. But the old woman was so kind and gentle that they were reassured, particularly when she told them that in a very few hours she hoped they would be at home. There was indeed some difficulty about washing, for there was no such thing as jug or basin in the house; and, as to tubs, you would not have found them in those days in any country-house in England. The woman told Dick that all her own washing was done in the stream, so Dick went out to wash his face in it; but the mist still hung thick over the moor, the air was sharp and cold and the water colder still; so that both he and Elsie were satisfied with very little washing. When they went back, they found that the old woman had set the two stools close to the fire for them and was making the porridge; so they breakfasted off porridge and trout, as they had supped on them the day before; and then the old woman gave Dick his own jacket and asked him to take off the yellow one. Dick was a little reluctant to part with it, and asked what it was and where it came from; but she only answered that it was a long story. He followed it with his eyes to see the last of it as she folded it up and put it away, and she smiled rather sadly as she saw him. "I can't let you have it yet, my dear," she said, guessing his thoughts, "and maybe when I can spare it for 'ee you won't care for to take it. But if ever it goes from me it shall go to you, that I promise 'ee, if so be as I can get it to 'ee."

Then they ran out to see the idiot saddle the ponies, with which he was already as friendly as if he had known them all his life. All animals seemed to take to him, for he had pets without end. The two nanny-goats and the little hind followed him like dogs; the squirrel was always in his pocket or on his shoulder; and a jackdaw and a magpie, both of them pinioned, fluttered after him wherever he went, chattering and scolding as though the place belonged to them. Then the children mounted their ponies and off they started, the idiot leading the way on his own ragged pony, which he rode barebacked and with a halter only for bridle; Dick came next, and then Elsie with the old woman walking by her side. The mist was as thick as ever, but this seemed to make no difference to the idiot, as he guided them up the stream for a little distance and on over the rough yellow grass. The ground was very deep and much cut by tiny clefts that carried the water away from the bog, but the idiot went on straight and unconcerned as though he were on a high road, though often his pony floundered hock-deep. So on they went for a full hour with the mist whirling about them, the children being kept warm in spite of the bitter cold air, by their excitement, and by the constant scrambling of the ponies. At last they reached firmer soil, but after travelling over it for a little way the idiot stopped and held up his hand; and the children listening with all their ears thought they made out the faint sound of a horn. At a sign from his mother the idiot turned, and presently the children found themselves going down hill and realised that the mist was not so thick about them. A little further on they reached the edge of a

wood, where the idiot led his pony into a hollow and hobbled it, and guided them into the trees on foot.

It was not pleasant riding now, for the ground was very steep, and the trees very thick and low; and when after long scrambling down they came to a stream at the bottom of the hill, the children found no better path than a very rough track by the water, full of great boulders, over which the ponies stumbled continually. Presently they crossed the water, and then for the first time the children perceived that the woman was no longer with them, though where she had left them they could not tell. Still the idiot guided them on through the woods, uphill and down and across more than one stream, till at last he led them into a grass path, where after walking for some time he suddenly stopped and listened. Then pointing down it, he grinned and touched up Stonecrop to make him trot, and after running for some time alongside them, dropped behind. Dick began to think that the path was familiar to him, and the ponies began to pull, as though they knew it also. In another five minutes they came down into the road by which they had driven up on the previous morning, and there stood the Corporal and another servant, both of them mounted, not a hundred yards away.

Dick shouted joyfully, and the Corporal galloping hastily up, dismounted and ran to them. He was white, haggard and unshorn, and for a time only patted their ponies apparently unable to speak. Then he looked up the valley at the hills, and seeing that they were clear of mist told the other servant to get up to the top of the hill and make the signal, and to look sharp about it; upon which the servant turned his horse up the path and galloped away like one possessed. Then the Corporal turned to the children and asked them who had brought them back; and when they told him they noticed for the first time that the idiot was not with them. They called and shouted for him several times, but he never came; and then they rode back with the Corporal, telling their adventures as they went.

But far behind them on one of the highest points of the moor stood Colonel George and their mother. She was now deadly white, with great black rings round her eyes, for she was worn out with watching and anxiety; but she would not give in. She had dismounted and was sitting on the heather, while Colonel George with his field-glass laid across his horse's saddle conned the moor anxiously in every direction. The mist was only just gone, and he seemed to have much to look at, for a long line of horsemen was sweeping before him over the moor, searching for the children. At last he set down the glass and rubbed his eyes, for he had been in the saddle for nearly twenty-four hours, and taking a flask from his pocket poured out a little for Lady Eleanor. She shook her head as he brought it, but he only said "You must;" and then she drank a mouthful or two. He was just about to drink himself when he hastily slipped the flask into his pocket, and taking out the field-glass looked long and earnestly through it. Then he tied a large white handkerchief to his whip, waved it three times over his head and looked again through the glass, after which he kept on waving for some time. Then after a last look he put away the glass, and walked slowly, leading both horses, to the place where he had left Lady Eleanor. She was lying back with her face covered with her hands.

"Come," he said gently. "The Corporal has found them and they are safe and well. I made them repeat the signal twice, so that I am quite sure, and I have signalled to the search-parties to go home. Let me put you on your horse."

See looked up like one dazed; but there was Colonel George holding out his hand to her, so she took it and rose to her feet; and then she seized the hand between both of hers and wrung it hard without a word. He lifted her into the saddle, and no sooner was he mounted than she started to gallop down the hill at a pace which made it hard for Colonel George to keep up with her. Away she flew, and he felt thankful that she was a fine horsewoman and mounted on his horse instead of her own, which was not nearly so clever over rough ground; though he could not help reflecting that he could never have found it in his conscience to hustle a horse of hers as she hustled his. There were two or three valleys to cross, which gave the animals a little respite, but not much, for Lady Eleanor went equally fast, uphill, downhill and on the level. So that when they arrived at the Hall Colonel George, after seeing Lady Eleanor run in to the children, only looked at his horse's heaving flanks, shook his head, and led him off to the stable to look after him himself. There he heard the whole story from the Corporal, and leaving a message for Lady Eleanor that he would call next day, rode back very quietly to Fitzdenys Court.

CHAPTER X

It need hardly be said that when her first joy over the recovery of the children was over, Lady Eleanor's instant thought was for the strange woman and her idiot son, who had befriended them and saved them for her. She longed to thank and to reward them, but she could not think how to find them; and moreover it was plain that, for some reason which she could not divine, the woman wished to keep out of her way. It was difficult for her to believe that there could be any harm in the woman, after the care that she had taken of the children; but on the other hand there was Tommy Fry, still speechless. She was thankful when Colonel George came over next day, that

she might discuss matters with him.

But he was as much at a loss as she was. He had examined all the people who had gone out to search for the children, but not one of them had seen a sign of any dwelling where the strange woman could live. He was, however, struck by Dick's account of the little coat that he had worn; for it seemed, he said, to be a drummer's coat, and he could not imagine how such people should possess such a garment. As he spoke, the bullfinch broke into the first bars of "The British Grenadiers;" and then the same thought occurred to Colonel George as had seized upon the minds of the villagers—Was it possible that the idiot was a deserter, or that he and his mother were harbouring a deserter? But he kept his thoughts to himself, for he knew the terrible punishment to which a deserter would be liable, and did not wish Lady Eleanor to think of such a thing.

But however the gentry might doubt at the Hall, the folks in the village found no difficulty in accounting for everything. It was the witch who had enticed the children on to the moor and made them lose themselves; and, though she had sent them back safe and sound, it was impossible to say what trouble she might have in store for them. One soft-hearted woman did indeed suggest that no witch could have power to hurt such dear innocent angels; but Mrs. Fry promptly rose up in arms against her, for was not her Tommy also a dear innocent angel, though to be sure he was but a poor boy, whereas her Ladyship's children were rich? Then Mrs. Mugford came forward with her explanation, which was, that the Corporal, as had already been suspected, was undoubtedly in league with the witch, and had led the children into her clutches. It might be that the witch could not hurt them; but certain it was that, when all the country was out searching for them, she had led them straight back to the Corporal. As to the Corporal being thrown from his horse, Mrs. Mugford had heard such stories before; and it was strange that he had found his way home safe enough though he had left the children to be eaten alive, for aught he knew. It was strange, too, that he was waiting in the right place for the children next day when the witch brought them down, and that the witch had vanished, as Mrs. Mugford averred, in a cloud of brimstone smoke.

So the feeling against the Corporal in the village increased, and not the less because he looked ill for some days after the children's adventure, owing partly to the shaking which he had received in his fall, and partly to the miserable hours of anxiety and watching that had succeeded to it. The villagers of course attributed his appearance to the torment of a guilty conscience, and no one was more careful to dwell on this explanation than Mrs. Mugford, with a vehemence which surprised even Mrs. Fry, who knew the sharpness of her tongue better than her neighbours.

The Corporal took no more heed of the villagers' coldness than before; for a new matter had come forward to occupy his thoughts. While he was walking one day with the children through the wood above the village, Dick suddenly stopped and said that he had certainly seen a man slinking off the path into the covert; and the Corporal at once hurried to the spot in the hope that it might be the idiot. Making his way through the thicket he presently came upon a man lying down in some bracken and evidently anxious to conceal himself. The fellow was ragged, unkempt and bearded, but he was not the idiot, and he seemed terrified at being discovered, stammering out something about meaning no harm, and begging to be allowed to go. The Corporal sent the children a little apart, felt the man's pockets to be sure that he was not a poacher, and bade him begone and think himself lucky to escape so easily.

"I've seen you before," he said, looking hard at him, "and I shall know you again. You know you have no business here, and if I catch you again, it will be the worse for you." But though he let the man go, he puzzled himself all day to think where he had seen him before.

And now the annual fair at Kingstoke, the little town that lay nearest to Ashacombe, was at hand, and all kinds of strange people were to be seen on the road. There were hawkers and cheapjacks with persuasive tongues, which the villagers found difficult to resist; swarthy gipsies with gaudy red and yellow handkerchiefs, whom they kept at a safe distance; and great lumbering vans containing fat ladies, and learned pigs and two-headed calves, which roused their curiosity greatly. Finally one day a loud noise of drumming brought Dick and Elsie flying down the road, and there was a recruiting serjeant as large as life, with red coat, white trousers and plumed shako hung with ribbons, and with him a drummer and a fifer. The two last had stopped playing by the time that the children reached them, and were apparently not best pleased, for Mrs. Mugford had flown out at them directly they appeared with, "No, no. 'Tis no use for the like of you to come here. We won't have naught to do with the like of you, taking our boys away to be treated no better than dogs." And all the other women had shaken their heads knowingly and looked askance at the red coats; so that, as all the men were out at work and as there seemed to be little chance of obtaining refreshment, the serjeant simply scowled and moved on. He and his companions looked dusty and thirsty, for the day was hot, and the drummer and fifer, who were both very young, looked tired and hungry as well. In fact they had only played in the hope of being offered a drink, which hope Mrs. Mugford's tongue had effectually extinguished for them.

So on they went along the road, followed by Dick and Elsie, who were deeply disappointed; but close by the lodge the children saw the Corporal, and running forward to him prayed him to ask the serjeant to give them a tune. The serjeant evidently recognised the Corporal as an old soldier, for he wished him good-day; and the Corporal then asked him if he would play something for little master and mistress.

"Will little master give us something to wet our whistle with?" asked the serjeant. "We have had a longish march to-day, eight miles already and six more to go, and there's little to be got on the road. It's a wild country hereabout."

At a word from the Corporal Dick flew up to the house with Elsie at his heels, to ask his mother's leave, and meanwhile the serjeant asked the Corporal if he knew anything of the deserter from the Marines whose description was on all the churchdoors, as he was said to be somewhere in those parts. Presently Dick returned breathless with a message to the recruiting party to come up to the Hall, where the fife and drum struck up, and Lady Eleanor came out to say that soldiers were always welcome, and this with a gracious condescension which in itself was nearly as good as a glass of beer to a thirsty man. Then the serjeant followed the Corporal towards the back door; and the drummer, who was a good-natured lad, seeing how Dick stared at his drum, took it off, and shortening the slings put them over his head. Lady Eleanor at once called to Dick that he was keeping the drummer from his dinner; but the drummer replied that he was sure little master would take care of the drum and that he was very welcome; and Dick begged so hard to be allowed to keep it for a little while that Lady Eleanor after some hesitation gave in, only bidding Dick not to make too much noise close to the house.

So off Dick strutted, followed by Elsie, tapping from time to time, till on reaching a quiet place under the trees in the park, he was very glad to take the drum off and turn it round very carefully, looking at the Royal Arms and the names of battles that were painted round them. Then he began tapping again, when all of a sudden there was a rustle behind them, and there stood the familiar figure of the idiot Jan, with his face grinning wider than usual. The children were startled and were on the point of running to the house, but he held up his finger as usual and beckoned to Dick to go on beating; though after hearing a tap or two he shook his head and, taking up the drum, let out the slings and put them over his own head. Then he squared his shoulders and threw out his chest, and bringing up his elbows in a line with his chin he beat two taps loudly with each stick, slowly at first and gradually faster and faster till the taps blended together in a long, loud roll. Then he stopped and grinned at the children, who were staring with amazement and delight; and then beating two short rolls he began to march up and down whistling the tune "Lillibulero," which the bullfinch piped, and beating in perfect time with all his might.

So intent was he on his music that neither he nor the children noticed the serjeant, who with halberd in hand came walking up with the drummer and fifer close behind him.

"What have we here?" said the serjeant, eyeing the strange figure before him. "Where did you learn to beat like that, my man?" he went on, laying a heavy hand on the idiot's shoulder. The idiot glanced round with a start, and uttering a whine of terror slipped away from the serjeant's hand, swung the drum on to his back, and made off as fast as his legs would carry him.

"What's the meaning of this?" said the serjeant staring for a moment. "The deserter for a guinea! After him boys, quick! There's a reward out for him." And away went the drummer and fifer in pursuit, while the serjeant followed as fast as he could; and the children, after gazing for a time in bewildered alarm, ran back to the house. The idiot ran like the wind, but in his first terror he had taken the wrong direction and was flying down towards the village. Reaching the drive before his pursuers he gained on them somewhat, but he fumbled at the gate by the lodge and let them get close to him. He broke away, however, and was running gallantly through the village with the lads hard after him, when down the road came the ample figure of Mrs. Mugford, who put down the pitcher that she was carrying and stood right in his way with her arms spread out wide. She did not dare actually to stop him, but she so confused him that in another few yards the drummer and fifer had caught him each by an arm. The idiot cowered abject and trembling between them, and the three stood panting and breathless, while Mrs. Mugford exhorted at the top of her voice,

"Hold mun fast, brave lads!" she cried, in a very different tone from that which she had lately used to the soldiers. "Hold mun fast! That's the man you was a looking vor. Hold mun fast! Ah, you roog; so we've a got 'ee at last, and now 'twill be the jail and the gallows for 'ee sure enough. Ah! you may whine and guggle, but you won't get away, not this time." Her cries brought every woman in the village to the spot, and solemn were the shakings of heads, and loud the recalling of prophecies that vengeance would soon overtake the wicked. Then the serjeant came elbowing his way through the crowd, and was hailed instantly, like the drummer and fifer, by Mrs. Mugford. "That's the man you'm a looking for, maister; and a bad one he is. Hold mun fast, maister; and don't let mun go, whatever."

"Ah! you know him, do you?" said the serjeant. "Well, you can trust him to me. Take the drum off his back, my lads, and bring him along."

But the idiot seemed hardly able to move; and they had not taken him far, with the women and children still crowding round them, when they were stopped by his mother, who came hastening up the road and planted herself full in the way.

"Now, then," she said sharply, "what be doing to that boy? Let mun go. He's a done no harm to you, I reckon. Let mun go, I tell 'ee. Where be taking mun?"

"Come, mistress, no hard words," answered the serjeant. "I don't know who you are; but this young man's my prisoner, and to Kingstoke he must go tonight, and before the nearest justice to-

morrow for a deserter."

"Ay, and for a witch too and you with mun," yelled Mrs. Fry; and she and the women with her raised a howl that was not pleasant to hear. "She's awitched my boy," screamed Mrs. Fry high above the rest. "She's a witch and she ought to be drowned in the river."

The serjeant looked puzzled, and was relieved to see the Corporal come limping up the road; but Mrs. Mugford no sooner saw him than she screamed at the top of her voice, "Ah, don't 'ee listen to he, maister. 'Twas he that let mun go weeks ago, and there's been nothing but bad work for us all since then. He's so bad as any o' mun; 'twas he that let mun take her Ladyship's childer; and we'm not going to be plagued with witches no more. Lave the witches to us. We knows what to do with mun."

"What have you got against the man?" asked the Corporal of the serjeant.

"He's a deserter," said the serjeant shortly, "and it seems that these women know him well enough, if you don't."

"He ain't no deserter," said the idiot's mother savagely, "he wasn't never 'listed."

"Then how comes he to drum as he did?" retorted the serjeant. "Our own drummers couldn't beat better."

The woman clenched her fists in despair, and the Corporal looked very grave; but he no sooner tried to speak to the serjeant than the women again raised a yell that he was not to be trusted, and renewed their cry that they would be troubled with witches no longer, but would drown them in the river and have done with them. At last they worked themselves up into such a state of fury that the Corporal saw that they meant mischief, and said sharply to the serjeant that if he didn't look out they would take his prisoner from him. Even while he spoke they made a rush, but the serjeant had his wits about him and brought down his halberd to the charge, just in time to stop them.

"Now, enough of this," he said sternly. "I know nothing about your witches and nonsense, but this young man's my prisoner, and if you don't leave him to me it will be the worse for you. Take him along, lads."

So the drummer and fifer led the idiot down the road, while the serjeant, with his halberd still at the charge, kept the women at bay; and thus slowly they passed clear of the village while the women and children, after following for a time with yells and execrations, at last dropped behind.

"Now, mistress," said the serjeant to the idiot's mother, "you'd best look out for yourself, I expect, and go away."

The woman turned upon him with a scornful laugh. "Do you suppose I be afraid of they?" she said. "Not I; and if 'ee think that I'm a going to leave my boy—here, let mun go," she said resolutely, shoving away the drummer's arm—"you've naught against mun. I tell 'ee he wasn't never 'listed."

The serjeant removed her hand instantly. "None of that," he said. "You can come along with him as far as you will, but the justice will see to the rest to-morrow morning."

The woman glanced at the Corporal in despair, but the Corporal could only shake his head. "Best go quietly along with him, mistress," he said; "I'll go to her Ladyship and do what I can." Then he turned to the serjeant and said: "I believe you've got hold of the wrong man; for this is only a poor half-witted lad, not the man that you want. Don't be hard on him."

"Not I, if he gives no trouble," said the serjeant. So he went on with his charge along the road to Kingstoke, the idiot staggering along on his mother's arm between the fifer and the drummer, and he himself walking behind. And the Corporal limped up over the park as quickly as he could to the Hall.

CHAPTER XI

Great was Lady Eleanor's distress when she heard from the Corporal what had happened. "Ah, if only Colonel Fitzdenys had been here!" she repeated more than once; but she could think of nothing that could be done except to send a letter at once to the colonel to tell him the whole story and to ask him to be present at Kingstoke, which lay close to Fitzdenys, when the prisoner should be brought up next morning. This was the Corporal's suggestion; but Lady Eleanor noticed that he was unusually silent and subdued, and she was rather surprised when he asked leave rather mysteriously to be absent from the house for the rest of the day. But she trusted him so implicitly that she granted his request without hesitation, and the Corporal, having sent off the

letter, went out for the evening by himself.

The truth was that he was bitterly hurt and indignant at the hard words that Mrs. Mugford had used towards him, of having betrayed the children to the witch on the moor. The bare idea that he should have been false to his mistress and to the children, whom he worshipped, made him furious; and he went out with the determination of giving Mrs. Mugford a bit of his mind before night, but, like a wise man, not until he had thought the matter well over during a solitary walk. So he made his way through the woods and in due time came to the place where Dick had pointed out to him the ragged man, whom he had found skulking in the fern a short time before. Then it flashed across him suddenly that this man might be the deserter, and he blamed himself for his stupidity in not thinking of it at first. Once again he racked his brains to remember where he had seen the man before, for certainly he had seen him or some one very like him; and with his mind full of Mrs. Mugford he suddenly recalled her son Henry, who had enlisted for a marine, and had once come back on sick-leave. The more he thought of it, the more certain he was that the man whom he had found was Henry Mugford, for though he had not seen him for some years he had never heard that he had been discharged. That would account for Mrs. Mugford's anxiety to keep the Corporal out of the village, and to get the idiot arrested, for it would probably be some days before a serjeant of Marines could arrive from Plymouth, or the idiot himself could be sent there, to decide if he were the deserter Henry Bale or not. And, as to the name, the Corporal knew well enough by experience that men constantly enlisted under assumed names, while Bale was a likely name for this particular man to choose, as it had been Mrs. Mugford's own before she married.

Thus reflecting, the Corporal turned along the path that led through the woods lying above the village, stopped when he saw the roofs of the cottages below him, and went down through the covert towards the hedge that parted the cottage-gardens from it. It was dusk, so that he had little difficulty in remaining unseen, and as he drew nearer to the two cottages where Mrs. Fry and Mrs. Mugford lived, he heard the voices of the pair in violent altercation in the garden below.

"You said so plain as could be that you'd a-share the two guineas with me," Mrs. Fry was saying indignantly. "That's what you said."

"And don't I say that I'll give 'ee five shillings?" retorted Mrs. Mugford, "and that's more than nine out of ten would give. 'Twas I caught mun and not you. If I hadn't stopped mun in the road they'd never have caught mun at all, and 'twas a chance then that he might have killed me, mazed as he is. And you've a-taken pounds and pounds from the gentry for the harm that was done your Tommy, and never given me so much as a penny, though I've a-showed mun many times when you wasn't in house."

"Well," said Mrs. Fry defiantly, "then we'll see what people say when I tells what I've a-seen of a man coming round to your house night-times these weeks and weeks, and you going out to mun with bread and mate. I've a-seen mun, for all that you was so false."

Then they dropped their voices, and Mrs. Mugford appeared to be making new offers. But the Corporal had heard enough. Keeping himself carefully concealed he walked along the hedge until he found a rack over it, which seemed to be well worn, leading down to the cottages below, and by this rack he curled himself up in the bushes, and waited. In a short time the village was dark and silent, for in those days oil-lamps were never seen in a cottage; and the Corporal found waiting rather cold work, but he had bivouacked on colder nights in the wars, and lay patiently in his place. A little after ten the moon rose, but it was full eleven o'clock before the Corporal heard the bushes rustle, and at last made out a man creeping cautiously alongside the hedge. Nearer and nearer he came, straight to the rack in the hedge, where after pausing for a moment to listen, he was beginning to scramble up; when the Corporal suddenly laid hold of his ankles, brought him sprawling down, rolled him into the hedge-trough, and was instantly on top of him, with his knee on his chest and his hand on his throat. The unfortunate creature was too much paralysed by fright to resist; and the Corporal soon dragged his face round into the moonlight and saw that he had caught the man that he wanted.

"So you've come here again, Henry Bale," said the Corporal; "I told you that it would be the worse for you, if you did."

"My name's Mugford," gasped the man, now struggling a little.

"And when did you get your discharge?" asked the Corporal; "and why are you hanging about the woods instead of living with your mother like an honest man? But when you're back at Plymouth they'll know you as Henry Bale fast enough, I'll warrant."

The man trembled, and begged abjectly for mercy; but the Corporal only pulled out a knife, without relaxing his hold on his throat, turned him over on his face, and cut his waistband. "Now," he said, "the best thing that you can do is to surrender and come quietly along with me. Give me your hands." And pulling a piece of twine from his pocket he tied the man's thumbs together behind his back. Then raising him to his feet he shoved him over the rack in the hedge, and led him past Mrs. Mugford's windows, where a rushlight was burning, into the road and so to the stables at Bracefort. There he locked his prisoner into a separate loose-box with a barred window, having first tied his wrists before him, instead of his thumbs behind him; and then he sought out pen and paper and wrote; a letter to Colonel Fitzdenys, which, though it was not very

long, took him much time to write, and ran as follows:—

"Honoured Col.—these are to inform you that I have the deserter Henry Bale saf under lock and kay which is all at present from your honour's most ob't humble serv't.—J. BRIMACOTT."

He put the letter into his pocket, and drawing a mattress before the door of the loose-box, went fast asleep on it till dawn, when he called a sleepy stable-boy from the rooms above and bade him ride over with the letter to Fitzdenys Court.

By eight o'clock Colonel Fitzdenys arrived at a gallop from Fitzdenys Court. Having seen and questioned the Corporal's prisoner, who made a full confession, he left a message that he would return as soon as possible, and that he would want to see Mrs. Fry and Tommy; after which he rode back again, as fast as he had come, to Kingstoke. There his business was soon finished, for when the idiot was brought up before him (which he had already arranged to be done) he was able to discharge him directly, since he himself had ascertained that the true deserter had been captured. But none the less he gave the serjeant a guinea to console him for his disappointment in having caught the wrong man.

Then he went to speak to the idiot's mother and to tell her how sorry he was for the mistake that had been made; for the two had been locked up all night in Kingstoke. She did not receive him kindly, however, for all that she said was: "It's very well to be sorry now, and I don't say, sir, that it's no fault of yours, but they've agone nigh to kill my boy with their doings;" and indeed the idiot was so weak and white that he could hardly stand. Still more distressed was she when Colonel Fitzdenys told her that she could not go yet, but that she must first visit Bracefort Hall. She tried hard to obtain his leave to go to her own place at once, but he insisted, though with all possible kindness, that she must come with him to the Hall, and that then she should be free to go where she would. So very reluctantly she got into a market-cart with her son, who sat like a lifeless thing beside her, and was driven off, while Colonel Fitzdenys cantered on before them.

When the market-cart reached the door of the Hall, Lady Eleanor was there waiting to welcome her and to thank her for all that she had done for her own children; but the woman only said coldly that she was very welcome, and seemed to have no thought but for her idiot son, who remained sunk in the same abject condition. They brought him wine, which revived him enough to set him crying a little, but he would take no notice of anything. For a moment the woman softened, when Dick and Elsie came in and thanked her prettily for the kindness that she had shown to them, and she tried to rouse her son to take notice of them. But he only went on crying; and she was evidently much distressed.

Then the Corporal came to say that Mrs. Fry was come and had brought Tommy with her; on which Colonel Fitzdenys told the woman outright that she had been accused of bewitching the boy and depriving him of his speech. The woman's hard manner at once returned, and she laughed loud and scornfully.

"That's only their lies," she said. "How should I take away a boy's speech? they'm all agin me and my boy; that's all it is."

"Well, they say that he can't speak," said Colonel Fitzdenys. "You shall tell him to speak yourself, and then we shall be able to judge."

So Mrs. Fry was called in and told to hold her tongue, and Tommy, who had hidden himself in her skirts, was brought forward. The woman no sooner saw him than her eyes gleamed, and she said: "That's the one who throwed stones at my boy and called mun thafe. He not spake? He can spake well enough if he has a mind, I'll warrant mun."

"But his mother says that he cannot," said Colonel Fitzdenys. "See for yourself," and he led the trembling boy forward. "Tell him to speak to you."

"Spake, boy," said the woman not very amiably. "You can spake well enough, can't 'ee?"

"Yas," said Tommy nervously, to his mother's intense surprise.

"There! what did I tell 'ee?" said the woman contemptuously. "'Twas only their lies. He can spake so well as you and I."

Mrs. Fry, much taken aback, seized hold of the boy in amazement; but he begged so hard to be let go as to leave no doubt that his speech was restored; and Lady Eleanor lost no time in sending him off with his mother.

Then Lady Eleanor again thanked the idiot's mother for all that she had done for her own children, and asked what she could do for her; but the woman would accept no money nor reward, nothing but a few cakes which the children brought to her to take home for her son. Lady Eleanor offered her everything that she could think of, even to a remote cottage in the woods where she would certainly live undisturbed; but the woman only begged that she might not be

asked to say where she lived nor to give any account of herself. She was quite alone with her son, she said, and lived an honest harmless life. As to Tommy Fry, she could not understand how any words of hers could have taken his speech from him; it was nonsense, and the women were fools. Finally, she said that if Lady Eleanor really wished to be kind she would let them go and not try to find them again; but she faithfully promised that if anything went wrong, she would come to her first for help.

So Lady Eleanor seeing that she was in earnest promised to do as she had said; and the woman thanked her with real gratitude. Then Dick and Elsie came in again to say good-bye, and the woman, taking her son by the arm, led him away. He moved so feebly that Lady Eleanor offered her a pony for him to ride, but his mother refused, though with many thanks; so the two passed away slowly across the park, and disappeared.

"Well, there is Tommy Fry cured at any rate," said Colonel Fitzdenys. "And I believe that the woman spoke the truth, when she said that she did not know what she had done to him. And now I must see to this man who is locked up in the stable."

But even while he spoke the Corporal came to say that Mrs. Mugford was come, and begged to be allowed to see her Ladyship. So in the poor thing came, crying her eyes out, to confess that her son in the stable was the true deserter, and to beg her Ladyship to have mercy and not to yield him up, giving such an account of the punishment that awaited him as nearly turned Lady Eleanor sick; for those were rough days in the army.

Colonel George meanwhile stood by without uttering a word; and when Mrs. Mugford had crawled from the room, utterly broken down, and Lady Eleanor turned to him with tears in her eyes, too much moved to speak, he only shook his head.

"The fellow must be given up and sent back to his corps," he said. "He has already got an innocent man into trouble, and even if he had not I am bound in duty to send him back."

"Could you not do something to intercede for him and save him from this horrible punishment?" asked Lady Eleanor. "I should be so thankful if you would."

Colonel George hesitated. "I have no wish to harm the poor wretch," he said, "but there are other men in the same case, very likely less guilty, who have no one to intercede for them. It is a question of discipline."

"Oh, don't be so hard," pleaded Lady Eleanor, "you who are always so gentle. You, who have done so much for me, grant me this one little thing more."

Colonel George looked at the beautiful face before him, and Lady Eleanor knew that she had gained her point. "Well, well," he said at last; "I will write on his behalf, and better still I will get my father to write also, which will have more effect. But it is all wrong," he added; "it is not discipline."

"I am quite sure that it will be all right," said Lady Eleanor with great decision.

Colonel George shook his head smiling; but he and old Lord Fitzdenys wrote, as he had promised; and it may as well be said that they obtained pardon for Henry Mugford the deserter.

CHAPTER XII

The village was not a little awed by the strange turn that affairs had taken, for the two noisiest tongues in it had been silenced, Mrs. Fry's by the restoration of her Tommy's power of speech, Mrs. Mugford's by the arrest of her son. The Corporal had been vindicated and his slanderers confounded; but Lady Eleanor as usual did all that she could to make unpleasant things as little unpleasant as possible. The deserter was sent away to Plymouth so quietly that hardly any one found it out, and his disconsolate mother was somewhat comforted by Lady Eleanor's assurance that everything would be done to obtain mercy for him. Moreover the Corporal declared that he would not touch the two guineas reward that he had earned, but would hand them over to Lady Eleanor to spend for the good of the parish as she should think best; which fact leaking out through the servants at the Hall did much to regain for him the goodwill that he had so unjustly lost.

Another thing also helped to restore harmony; for Dick could not leave home for school without going round to say good-bye to all his friends, and these were so numerous that there was hardly a cottage at which he did not step in, being always sure of welcome and good wishes. The farewells ended with a visit to old Sally Dart, who, feeble and crippled though she was, had prepared a great feast of hot potato-cake (which was made under her own eye by a neighbour, since she was too weak to make it herself) honey and clouted cream; while the little silver cream-jug and the six silver spoons, which the old squire and his lady had given her at her marriage,

were all brought out for so great an occasion. A great meal they ate, the Corporal attacking his potato-cake and cream as heartily as Dick himself; and when all the old stories had been related for the fiftieth time, old Sally produced the greatest treasure that she owned, a little snuff-box mounted in silver, which had been made from the horn of an ox that had been roasted whole at the great election, when old Squire Bracefort had stood at the head of the poll. This she gave to Dick for his own, and then setting the boy in front of her she put his hair off his forehead and begged him that if ever any child or children of her son Jan should appear, he would be kind to them for her sake, and that he would think of this when he looked at the box. Dick promised this readily, though he was a little puzzled at her earnestness; and then she bade him good-bye and God bless him, and prayed that he might grow up to be such another man as his father had been. So the children and the Corporal returned to the Hall thoughtful and subdued, though the children hardly knew why.

Two days later, early in the morning, Dick and the Corporal drove off to meet the coach. Little Elsie stood on the steps crying silently, but Dick was so much excited at the prospect of the journey, that he held up bravely, and fluttered his handkerchief out of the window as long as the house was in sight. So Lady Eleanor and Elsie waited until the handkerchief could be seen no more, and then went in sadly together. Lessons were a heavy task that morning; and when they were over and Elsie was gone out, Lady Eleanor felt lonely and depressed and out of heart with everything. She was roused by the sound of a horse on the gravel; and presently Colonel Fitzdenys came in to say that he had seen Dick off by the coach, and that the boy was in good spirits. Lady Eleanor never felt more thankful for his presence than on that morning; but they had not talked for very long, when a maid-servant came in with a scared face to say that the strange woman from the moor was come, and begged, if she might, to see her Ladyship directly.

So Lady Eleanor went out and Colonel George with her; and there the woman was, with her face ghastly white, her eyes wild and weary, and every line in her countenance ploughed thrice as deep as when they had last seen her. She was sitting in a chair which the frightened maid had brought to her, but rose wearily as Lady Eleanor came to her.

"Are you in trouble, my poor soul?" said Lady Eleanor, shocked at her appearance. "Tell me what has happened!" and she motioned to her to sit down again.

The woman waited for a moment and then said in a hard voice, "'Tis my boy Jan; I can't rightly tell what's wrong wi' mun"—and then she stopped, but seeing the sympathy in Lady Eleanor's eyes broke out hurriedly, "Oh, my Lady, I believe that they've a-killed mun. Since I took mun home three days agone he won't eat and won't take no notice of naught, but lieth still; and 'twas only when I left mun for a minute that he made a kind of crying and clung to me like. I had to carry mun home herefrom the day I left you."

"You carried him home?" broke in Colonel George astonished.

"Yes," said the woman simply; "most all the way, for he soon gived out walking; and ever since he's growed weaker and weaker, till this morning at daylight he didn't take notice of me no longer, so then I was obliged to leave mun"—she stopped a minute and went on in a harder voice—"I couldn't help it; I come to ask you if you could spare mun a drop of wine or what you think might do mun good, for"—she stopped again and buried her face in her hands.

Lady Eleanor did not speak; she only laid her hand gently on the woman's shoulder, which sank down and down until she was bent double. Colonel George at once slipped out of the room and presently returned with wine, which he gave to Lady Eleanor. The woman revived when she had drunk a little, and then Colonel George said to her: "Now, my good woman, you must let me go back with you to your son and take with me some things for him. Don't be afraid"—(for the woman was shaking her head)—"I am your friend and you may trust me to keep your secret if you have any to keep. Think, now, if I know the way, you can stay with your son and I can bring him up whatever he wants on any day that you please; and I'll bind myself not to show the way to any one, nor to come back except on the day that you choose."

The woman hesitated and looked from Colonel George to Lady Eleanor, who said: "Colonel Fitzdenys is right. You can trust him, and you will show him the way; and I must come too in case I can be of use. Remember that you saved my children for me."

The woman still shook her head, but she was evidently wavering. Colonel George's tone of quiet authority at last prevailed with her, and she consented to show them the way, saying gruffly that she would always prefer a soldier, who knew what he was about, to a doctor. But she refused to ride a pony which Lady Eleanor offered to her, and insisted on starting off by herself, appointing a place in a valley by the edge of the moor where she promised to meet them without fail. And with that she strode away across the park, while Lady Eleanor ordered her horse and ran to put on her habit.

The horses were soon ready, and Colonel George and Lady Eleanor started off; but it was only by a long circuit that they could ride to the appointed spot on horseback, and when they reached it the woman was already there before them. She then led them by a very rough path, which was unknown to Colonel George, to the very head of a deep combe, where the oak coppice grew thinner and thinner until at last it died out in the open moor. Among these thin trees was a rough Exmoor pony, hobbled, which the woman caught and mounted, and then led the way

straight on over the hill.

"I don't understand this," said Colonel George to Lady Eleanor, "I have always been told that the ground before us was impassable. It is the bog in which most of the rivers in the moor rise. I have crossed it a mile east and west of this after deer, and the ground is bad enough there; but I had no idea that it could be crossed here."

"No," said the woman, who had evidently overheard him, "the deer don't never cross here, but I know my way across well enough."

These were the only words that she spoke during the ride, except now and again to bid her companions keep to right or left, for presently they were on the treacherous ground across which she had guided the children, and the horses sank deeper in it than the ponies. With all his knowledge and experience of the moor the colonel found it difficult to pick his way, and Lady Eleanor's horse floundered so deep that she was once or twice obliged to dismount before he could get out. Still the woman led them on until at last the worst of the ground was past, though the horses still sank at least fetlock-deep at every step. The watershed was left behind and the ground began to fall rapidly, though it was so heavily seamed by a network of deep drains dug by the water through the turf, that without a guide any one would have found it almost impossible to find a way out. Colonel George watched carefully for landmarks as he went on, and looked out keenly for the hut, but could see nothing. Once or twice the woman smiled grimly as she saw his eyes roving in every direction, and the colonel smiled back and said: "It's a good job that the deer do not cross here, mistress, for no horse could live with them;" but she only shook her head and said nothing.

At length the rank red and yellow grass of the boggy ground showed a patch or two of heather. They were riding upon a ridge between two streams, and Colonel George was wondering which of the two they were about to follow, when the woman turned sharply downward on one side and followed the stream up for a little way; and then suddenly there opened out a little cross combe, so deep and narrow that the colonel might have been excused for not seeing it. At one point a mass of rock rose out abruptly from the earth, which had evidently turned the water from above, so that for a short distance the stream ran almost the reverse way to its true course. Against the rock the washing of centuries had thrown up a bank of pebbles, now thickly overgrown with grass; and there lay the hut, almost invisible from any point, against the rock, sheltered from the westerly gales and gathering more of the eastern and southern sun than could have been thought possible. The goats ran bleating towards the three as they rode up, for they had not been milked that morning; and the woman's face was set hard as she went to the door of the hut and presently returned to beckon Lady Eleanor in.



[Illustration: Still the woman led them on.]

It was little that could be seen of the sick man, except a white shrunken face and closed eyes, as he lay on his bed of heather, with every description of garment piled upon him. He lay quite still and quiet, breathing rather heavily; and when his mother poured some wine down his throat from the basket that Colonel George carried with him, he only stirred slightly and composed himself again as it were to sleep. Then Lady Eleanor came out to hold the horses and Colonel George went in. She heard him ask a few questions, and when he came out he could only shrug his shoulders in answer to her inquiring glance. "I can make nothing of it and get nothing out of her," he said, "but I have seen that look on a man's face before, and it is not a look that I like to see. She seems unwilling to tell anything of the reason for his illness, but there must be some story at the bottom of it all, if we could only get at it. Go in and try."

So Lady Eleanor went in, while Colonel George stood at the door holding the horses, and sat for a time looking at the sick man in silence, till at last she asked the woman if she thought the bandsmen had hurt him when they seized him.

"No, 'twasn't the bandsmen," said the woman absently, and without looking up; "'twas the sarjint as did it."

"What did the serjeant do to him?" asked Colonel George from the door. "It is a shameful thing if he hurt him, for Brimacott told me that he had begged him not to be hard on him."

But the woman gave no answer, seeming rather ashamed to have said so much; and after another silence Lady Eleanor asked another question or two which was answered very shortly, and said something about calling in a doctor.

"Doctor, no!" answered the woman fiercely. "They never do nought but bleed a man to death."

"Are you sure?" said Colonel George. "I know there were army-doctors who used to bleed men disgracefully. You remember," he added, turning for a moment to Lady Eleanor, "what Charlie Napier of the Fiftieth wrote from Hythe, that the doctors thought bleeding to death the best way of recovering sick soldiers. But I don't suppose, my good woman, that you have ever had to do with such."

"What! not I?" said the woman scornfully, but instantly restrained herself and stopped.

"I should give him a drop more wine from time to time, mistress," said Colonel George, as if taking no notice of what she had said; and hitching the reins of the horses round the poles of the hut he took a spoon, and poured a little between the sick man's lips himself. "The poor fellow's dreadfully weak," he went on. "Was he ever sick or hurt as a boy, mistress? Did you ever see him taken like this before? If you could tell us, we might know better how to treat him." And as he asked the question he looked straight into the woman's face, very keenly but very kindly, and she dropped her eyes with a half sigh. "You see," he went on, "my Lady's little son came home and told us of a coat that you had put on him, which sounded to me like a drummer's coat; though of course as I haven't seen it I may be quite wrong; but I was wondering if he had ever been a soldier, as I am myself, and been wounded at some time."

"No, he wasn't never a soldier," said the woman hastily.

"Ah," said Colonel George; "it was his knowing how to drum that made me think so. And so you had to carry the poor fellow all this way the other day? Well, it's more than many a strong man could have done. Many's the man I've seen break down from the weight of his pack, and many's the wife I've seen take the load off her husband's back and carry it for him like a brave soul." He looked up at the woman and saw her eyes glisten. "Ay," he said, "you've seen it too, maybe? Now, my good mistress, just tell me what the serjeant did to your son here, or what has happened to him to bring him to this state."

The woman hesitated long. "'Tis a long story," she said at last, "but maybe it's time that it was told; for I'm thinking that before long there may be none to tell it. You've been kind to my boy, the both of 'ee, and you've a promised to keep my secret. So if you have a mind to hear, I'll tell 'ee."

So Colonel George stood in the doorway holding the horses, while Lady Eleanor sat on the turfen table by the sick man; and the woman began her story.

CHAPTER XIII

"Years agone, long afore you ever come this way, my Lady, my father lived not above seven or eight mile herefrom, up to Loudacott; you must surely have heard the name of the place. Well, there he lived with his own bit of land, for he was a yeoman, he was, and the Clatworthys had lived up to Loudacott hundreds of years, as he used to tell me. There wasn't but the three of us,

my father—Jeremiah Clatworthy was his name—my mother and myself; for I was the only child they had a-living. It's a lonely place, is Loudacott, and it wasn't many folks that we saw there when I was a child; but when I growed up into a comely maid, and men seed me now and again to market or fairing time, they began to come a-courting; for 'twasn't me only that they would get, but forty acre of land with me, if father liked mun well. There was more came than you'd a think for, plenty enough to turn the head of a silly maid; and there was one that father favoured particular, for he had land close nigh by Loudacott, but I didn't like he—never could. There wasn't but one that pleased me, and that was Jan Dart. You know his old mother that lives to Ashacombe, or used to live, for they tell me that she's a-dying. She couldn't never abide the name of me, Jan's mother couldn't; and father, he couldn't abide Jan. For his father hadn't been more than a servant with the old squire, nor his mother neither, and Jan, he'd a been bound 'prentice to a shoemaker, and wasn't long out of his time; while we was the Clatworthys to Loudacott.

"Well, the men come, and I was well enough pleased to keep mun dancing round me, and poor Jan with the rest of mun, for you may depend that I wasn't going to let he go. I'd a-been a bit spoiled, for my mother had had a boy and another maid besides me, and fine children too, as I've been told; but she'd a-lost the both of them o' smallpox, so that there wasn't but me left. So I couldn't tell what to do, for I know'd but one thing for sartain, that the man that father wanted for me wasn't the man that I wanted for myself. But there was a wise woman—Betsy Lavacombe her name was, I mind well, but what use to tell you that?—that I used to see; and terrible afear'd of her the folks was. It was she that built this house, and no one knew where she lived except myself, nor knoweth till this day. But I wasn't afear'd of her, for I had a-helped her more than once, and used to put out a bit of mate for her now and again when I could; and she would always carry any message from me to Jan or from Jan to me. And I asked her many times which of mun I should marry, but she wouldn't never tell me more than that I should cross the sea and come back with gold. 'That's enough for 'ee,' she would say, 'don't ask no more. You shall cross the sea and there will be lords and gentlemen with 'ee, and your bed shall be so good as theirs, and you shall come back with gold.'

"So time went on and Jan kept courting o' me and I kept a playing with Jan, as foolish maids will, till at last one day, I forget what it was I said to mun, but he flinged away like a mazed man. 'I'll never come nigh 'ee again,' he said, 'you'll have to find me if you want to see me more; and till you find me you won't never find a man as loves you so well as I do.' And I laughed so as he could hear as he walked away, for I made no doubt but he'd come again so soon as I called mun. And I mind well then that the old Betsy comed out of a hedge soon afterward—she'd a been listening, I reckon—and saith she, 'Shall I call mun back to 'ee now? Best lose no time,' she saith. But I let mun go, for I depended that he'd come back, though I don't deny that I wasn't easy.

"And it wasn't above a week afterward that the old Betsy cometh back and saith, 'You'd best have let me call mun back when I told 'ee'; and then she told me that a serjeant was come to Ashacombe and that Jan was listed for a sojer and was agone. It was evening then and I heard mother calling, so I went into house like a dumb thing, for I couldn't think what I should do without Jan; and I minded the words that he had said, that I must come and find mun if I wanted to see him more; and I lay awake all night a-crying to think that I couldn't tell where to seek for mun, for find mun I must. But next day when I went out I glimpsed the old Betsy on the road not far away and whistled to her (for she never showed herself about Loudacott if she could help, but watched for me and whistled), and when she saw my face, 'Where's your rosy cheeks gone, my dear?' she saith. 'A red coat's red enough without they to dye mun, I reckon.' But she wouldn't tell me where he was agone, till I said that if she did not I would go out to find mun for myself. 'Do you mane that?' she saith—I mind it as if 'twas yesterday—"Then I'll take 'ee to mun. 'Ere, look 'ee! I'll give 'ee time to think about it, and if you mane to go sarch for mun, do you meet me here with your clothes o' this day fortnight when the moon rises.'

"And with that she went away and showed herself down Ashacombe ways 'most every day, to make folks think she was busy thereabouts—that false and artful she was. But when the days was gone, and mortal long days they was to me, she was waiting for me as she said, for I wasn't agoing to change my mind; and then it was that she brought me to this house and told me to mark the way well. We stayed here till night, and then we started off walking across the moor, the both of us, until morning, for she wasn't going to let a maid like me walk by myself, she said. We took a bit of mate with us and flint and steel, and many was the things that she taught to me on the road for a body to make herself nighly as comfortable in the open air as in ever a house.

"We walked night-times only till we was fifty miles away from home, and then we could keep the road middling well, though I kept my bonnet tied across my face. And so we drew nigh to Gloucester town, and then the old Betsy told me that Jan was there with his ridgment, and that I must find he by myself. And she wished me good-bye, and then the poor soul fell a-crying, for she said that there was no one left now to be kind to her. 'And there's hard times before 'ee, my tender,' she saith—I mind the words well—"but not yet. Good luck will be with 'ee first along. There's a man loves 'ee, and a man he is; make the most of mun. You shall cross the sea and come back with gold, but don't 'ee forget my little house, and if I bean't there, dig under the table, and think kindly of the old Betsy.'

"So she went back and I walked into the town alone, feeling terrible fluttered; but I hadn't a-gone very far before I meets with a man in a red coat and his hair a-powdered, a-walking along by hisself, for it was evening. I looked at mun and hardly knowed mun at first; but Jan it was, and beautiful he looked in his ridgmentals sure enough. The old Betsy had a-promised me good luck

first along, and yet I was most afraid to speak to mun, though nobody was by. And when he saw me he turned so white as death, and saith quite hoarse like, 'Lucy, what do you here?' And I couldn't say no more than 'I've a come to find you, Jan.' And the blood come back into his face, and we didn't want to say no more, not then. Dear Lord! That was a day!

"We was married so soon as could be, though a sojer's pay is little enough, as *you* know, your honour; for the half of what is given is took away again, so far as I can see. But Jan could always make something with his shoe-making, while I could wash, and get many a little job besides from the officers' ladies. So we did middling well, and Jan got one of the men that was a bit of a scollard to write to his mother, and got a hawker to take the letter along for the mending of his shoes. And in six months the hawker came back to say that mother was dead and that father had sold Loudacott and was gone to live in the town, where he was drinking and doing no good. I reckon 'twas the old Betsy had told mun; and I suppose that really 'twas all o' my account, but 'twas too late to think of that. And it was less than six months after this news come that my boy was a-born—"

She stopped a minute to pass her hand over the sick man's head, and went on:

"A beautiful boy he was, sure enough, and glad I was, when he was about a twelvemonth old, that the peace came and there was no chance for Jan to be sent to the war. Scores of men was discharged, but Jan said we should do better to stay, for there wasn't nowhere for us to go to if we went, and he'd a got fond of the sojer's life, as I had, so long as I was with he; and they was glad to keep so fine a man. But then the war come again, and a terrible way I was in, for they said the ridgment was sure to be sent soon to the Injies or some place. But it chanced that another ridgment was raising a new battalion in Gloucester, and there was a young chap that was got into trouble and wanted to cross the sea as soon as might be, so wished, if he could, to change with Jan. And by good luck 'twas done, and we was sent to the new battalion. So there we stayed to Gloucester nighly four year. Those was the days when they said that Boney was a-coming over, but he never come, as you know very well, for he didn't dare.

"And at Gloucester it was that I had a little maid born to me, so sweet a little maid as ever was seen, with blue eyes and golden hair like your own little lady's. But there was a terrible lot of sickness among the men. Whether it was that our other battalion brought it back from Egypt, I can't tell, but so it was. The men died fast, for all that the doctors would do was to bleed mun like pigs; and whether it was that, or what it was, I couldn't say, but the little maid sickened and died, when she was fifteen months old. Jan was terrible distressed, I mind, and so was I; but since then I've a-thought often that it was better so.

"But Jan and the boy kept well and strong, and as the boy growed bigger, he got mazed with soldiering. Nothing would sarve mun but he must be a drummer; and one of the drummers took up with mun and taught mun almost so soon as he was big enough to hold the sticks, and it was wonderful to see how quick he learned. It was pretty, too, to see his little hands a-twinkling, for very soon he could beat so well as any of mun. So he became a bit of a favourite, for he was a sweet pretty boy, and the officers took notice of mun, and the tailor he made mun a little coat and breeches and dressed mun out for all the world like a riglar drummer. For the tailor's wife hadn't no children you see, my Lady, and was wonderful took up with my boy; and Jan he made her a beautiful pair of shoes in return, I mind. And it was a saying that our ridgment had the smallest drummer in the army, and the best. Look 'ee, I've a kept the very coat."

And she pulled the outer clothes off the sick man's chest, and showed the little coat which Dick had worn, tied by the sleeves about his neck. He moved slightly and his mother poured a few drops of wine between his lips; but he made no further sign of revival, and she went on with her story.

"Well, it was in the year seven, I mind well, that the other battalion of the ridgment was sent to the war in Denmark and then on to Portingale. I didn't like that, for it seemed that the war was coming nigh home to us, and our good luck had lasted long; and I couldn't never get the old Betsy's words out of my head, that I must cross the sea. And at last in the autumn of the next year, the year eight that was, the day come. Our battalion was ordered to find men to fill up the place of those that was dead in the other battalion, and Jan was a-chosen for one. There was only six women to every company allowed to go with them, and they was drawn by lot. Ah, well I mind the drawing of they lots. It was pity to see the poor wives a-screeching and crying, as one after another was told that she must hide home. Many a one was on her knees to the officer begging mun to take her, and the officer hisself oftentimes was near crying as he was forced to say No. My turn came at last, and I was drawn to go; and then I couldn't help a-crying so loud as any of mun for joy.

"So we was put a board ship with Jan, the boy and I was, and away we went to sea; and the poor things that was left behind stood crying, and the men aboard cheered and cheered again. Many's the time I've a-thought of that day. I reckon you've a knowed what it is yourself, my Lady, to see the ships sail away; but I was happy enough, for I was with Jan.

"Well, we got to Lisbon, where Sir John Moore was a-waiting for us; and the army marched away from Portingale into Spain. The women was all told that they might sail back to England if they would; but 'twasn't likely that any would leave their husbands, let alone me who was only just come. So we marched with the army, and long marches it was, they winter days, nighly five

hundred mile in six weeks as I've been told. But Jan kept up brave, for he was a strong man, and I was always hearty, while the boy tramped along wonderful too; and when he was a-tired there was always Jan or others of the men would carry mun, or I would carry mun for a time myself. And what I had learned from the old Betsy 'bout walking and camping sarved me well, for I was nigh so handy as any of mun.

"Well, after six weeks we come to a place—I forget the name—something like sago I think it was."

"Sahagun," said Colonel George.

"Ay, that was it; and there we was told we women must bide while the men went vor against the French. And then I began to think that the bad luck of which the old Betsy had a-spoke was come at last. It was two days before Christmas, I mind well, and we wondered what ever Christmas Day would bring. But the very next day the news come that the French was stronger than we, and that we must go back; and many ridgments turned back that very day. But we waited, for Jan's ridgment was gone farther on, expecting mun all through the night, and in the morning sure enough they came; and out we ran through the snow, for the snow was on the ground, and there was Jan alive and well, but a bit tired. But there wasn't no time for rest; and we had to go on to once. The rain came down, the snow began to thaw, and the roads was so slushy and heavy that it was miserable travelling. The men was angry too at turning away from the French, and they kept asking if the time wasn't never coming to halt: but on they had to go.

"My boy soon began to tire, for the way was terrible soggy, and Jan carried mun for a bit: but he hadn't had but little to ate and had marched a long ways already. So before very long Jan was obliged to give mun to me, and I carried mun along as best I could. But I couldn't help dropping behind a bit, for Jan said that I could catch mun up first halt, and that the boy would be able to get along better after being carried a bit. I couldn't get no help, for all the men that I saw was so tired as I was, and worse. Now and again one would fall down not able to go no furdur, and it's my belief that every one of mun would have done the like if it hadn't been for the General (Craufurd was the name of mun) who rode up and down, driving mun on as if they'd a-been sheep. But he wouldn't let mun go like sheep, not he. 'Kape your ranks and move on. No stragglin,' he kept saying. And you'd see the men a-looking up and scowling at mun: but he was a-scowling worse than they, and if they didn't mind he'd break out at them like a mad thing; and then look out! I never see a man fly into such passions as he, swearing and cursing in his strange Scotch tongue. You'd have thought he was going to kill the men, and sometimes I believe he would, for he talked of hanging mun often enough.

"It was late at night before we got to the town where we was to rest; and the boy was so bate that it was all I could do to bring mun in. 'Twas raining so heavy that we couldn't light a fire out of doors, so there was little to eat; but I got a bit for the boy, and Jan tried to mend my shoes, which was in a sad way; but there was many crying out to have their shoes mended, and he was that tired that he couldn't do naught, but falled asleep over his awl and bristles. The next morning it was march again, tired as we was. The boy was fresher after a bit of sleep and could walk for a bit, and Jan and me managed to get mun along so well as we could; but we growed weaker and he growed weaker every day. How many days and nights it was I can't tell, for there was no rest, and the French was said to be close by; so days and nights we tramped on, through the wind and the rain and the sleet; and every day there was more men dropped down. There was hardly a pair of shoes among the lot, officers nor men, and our feet was cut and bleeding; but still that General Craufurd kept driving of us on. He was always the first ready to start, and there he would stand waiting, his beard all white with frost on the bitter mornings, looking to the men with their clothes all in rags, so cold and stiff and faint that they was hardly able to move; and this I will say, that he favoured hissself no more than he favoured the men. It was terrible to see mun looking them over, for you could see that he feeled for them; but then he would open his mouth and give the word to march in a voice that made you jump to hear. And when once they was a-moving, if ever a man dropped behind, a sarjint went at mun for all the world like a sheep-dog, and a dog that knowed how to use his teeth too. My boy got terrible 'feared of they sarjints, for he heard mun use rough words, ay, and more than words, to our men, and more than once he thought the sarjint was speaking to he, and clinged to me tight, poor little soul; and night-times he would wake and cry that the sarjint was come for mun.

"It must have been nighly a week after we started that General Craufurd tooked a different road from we; and we went on without mun. And then we found what it was to have such a man, hard though he was in driving us 'vor and keeping the men in order. For we came to a town where there was stores and stores of wine; and there the sojers, that had marched on before us, was lying in the gutter by scores, or staggering about the streets more like to pigs than Christian men. I seed General Moore that night. Ah! that was a man. The handsomest man in the army they said he was, for all that one of his cheeks was scarred where a bullet had gone through it years before; and sure enough I never see a finer man 'cepting my Jan. But he was terrible stern too, and I never saw man look so dark and angry as he did then. I seed mun many times afterward, for he was always a-looking to the rear where our ridgment was, a-helping and encouraging so well as he could. Well, I got a drop of wine for the boy—it was the morning of New Year's day I mind—which did mun good, and next morning we started again.

"But worse was avore us than we had left behind, for till now the cavalry had been behind us and had kept away the French; but now the cavalry was sent forward, and there was nothing

betwixt us and the enemy. Two days afterward the French came upon us sure enough, and the muskets was going all night. I couldn't sleep, for I knowed that Jan was there, but sat with the boy, who was lying by me, tossing and tumbling, for he was ill with the wet, and the cold, and the long ways. Some women that was with me told me to go to sleep and not be a fule, for 'twas naught but a scrimmage; but I couldn't do that. Ah, the night was long; but a bit before dawn the boy grew quiet, and as the light come in I heard our men was a-coming back, and runned out to see Jan. And there was Jan's company a-standing in line and the sarjint calling the roll. I heard mun call Jan Dart, but couldn't hear Jan's voice answer; but there was a chance that he might be carrying a wounded man or something or another, so I called 'Jan Dart, can anyone say where Jan Dart is?' but no one answered; and then the captain asked the same, and a man stepped out and said that he had seen mun fall. And I cried out, 'Oh take me to mun,' and the captain (a kind gentleman he always was) told the man to show me where he seed mun last; but he saith, 'You mustn't stay long, my poor woman, for the French will be here again directly;' and I knowed what that meant. So the man showed me the way and there was Jan, sure enough, a-lying on his face. I turned mun over, and, as I did, his hand fell across my knees, and his face was so quiet that I thought for a minute that he was only a-dropped asleep from weariness; but it wasn't of no use, for he was dead—shot through the heart.

"And there I reckon I should have stayed, spite of all that the officer said; but the man took me by the arm and told me to come on. 'The saints rock his soul to rest in glory,' he saith, crossing hisself, for he was an Irishman, 'and have mercy on us that is still living;' and then I remembered the boy, and I left Jan and come away. The boy was terrible weak and ailing, but we set off to walk, though very soon I had to carry mun; and so I dropped behind. The road lay through the mountains now, and was terrible rough and steep, while the snow come down and made the ways so slippy that it was hard to move without falling. But on I went, I can't tell how, though there was many that dropped behind me and never come up again. That march was terrible long, and the boy kept crying to be put down; but when I laid mun down for a minute or two he couldn't rest for long, but would cry out again that the sarjint was after mun, so I had to pick mun up and go on again.

"I reckon that it must have been the next day—but I can't tell, for days turns to years at such times—that as I was a tramping on I seed a crowd of women a-stooping down to the ground to gather up something or another, and scrambling, and fighting, and squabbling like a lot of fowls when they'm fed. It was money they was a-fighting for. The oxen a-drawing the carts with the money was foundered, and the General had gived orders to throw the money away. I picked up some few pieces myself, thinking it might buy something for the boy, but there was one woman that loaded herself like a bee with dollars, and said she would be a lady when she got home.

"After that, she and I was a good bit together, she carrying her dollars and I carrying the boy; but the way grew worse and worse, and but for the boy I think that I should have gived out myself as so many did. Once I remember I saw a sojer and his wife a-lying down by the wayside; they couldn't go no farther and had lain down to die together; and I wished that it had been Jan and me; but I had the boy on my back and I went on. Well, I won't tell you what terrible sights we saw on the road; but I'll tell 'ee this, that I have seen grown men a-sobbing like children for pain and cold and hunger. It was enough to turn the head of a grown man, let alone a child. And so it was that after a time the boy stopped crying and complaining and went quite quiet. I couldn't think what was come to mun, that he was always a-staring and never speaking nor taking no notice; but I reckoned that if I could carry mun on to the end, he would recover hisself. And I did carry mun on to the end to—what was the name of the place again?—something like currants it was."

"Corunna?" said Colonel George.

"Ay, that was it, Corinner—but when we got there, there wasn't no ships, and General Moore had to fight the French and bate mun before he could sail home. And he was a-killed, poor gentleman, he was, as you know, and many other brave men besides. But we and the sick and the wounded was put aboard before the battle was fought, and a strange thing there was that happened. The woman that had taken the dollars come aboard with me, but her hands were so full that she gave me a part of the money to hold, while she climbed from the boat to the ship's side. And as she stepped on the ladder, her foot slipped, and she fell into the sea and sank like a stone; for she had dollars sewn up in her clothes so heavy, that down she went and never come up again. So there was I left with what she give me, and as her husband was killed in the battle and there wasn't no one else belonging to her to take the money, I reckoned I might keep it. And then one day I thought of what the old Betsy had said, that I should cross the sea and bring back gold, though it wasn't gold, but silver.

"Well, on board ship the boy didn't change, though he got a bit stronger in his body. We had a terrible storm on the way home, and for all I could do I couldn't keep mun from being knocked about; the ship rolling and plunging so that the men could hardly save themselves. And when we got home and was set ashore on the beach, I could see that my boy wasn't the only one that was gone wrong. I tell 'ee, my Lady, that some men was even blind with the toil of that march, and hunger and cold and misery.

"So there I was alone with my boy, for hardly a man of Jan's company was left and not many of the whole ridgment, while what there was of them was mostly sick. 'Twas lucky that I had money, or I can't think what I should have done. But the worst was that my boy remained just the

same as he was. I showed mun to the doctors, and they took blood from mun once and wanted to take more, but I wouldn't have that, for I'd a-seen what they was with their lancets if they was let alone; and at last they telled me that his mind was gone and wouldn't never come back. But he grew stronger in his body after a bit, and I was able to take mun abroad; and though he liked the sound of the drums he was a bit frightened at the sight of a red coat, for fear that it should be a sarjint, and if it was a sarjint he would run like a rabbit. So I was obliged to move away as soon as I could; but go where I would there was no peace, for he'd a-lost his speech except some few sounds, and I couldn't let mun run with other children, for they always make sport of such poor things as he. So for a long time we wandered from place to place, getting little but hard words, though the boy was happy enough, I believe; for living in the air as we did he took up with every bird and every beast that he could find, and they seem to know mun for a friend. Many was the young one that he took and made so tame as could be.

"Then at last the money began to run short, for all that I was careful, and that now and again we could earn a little bit; so I minded what old Betsy Lavacombe had said, and thought I would go back and find she. It was a long way to go, but we walked on day after day till we got nigh to the moor, when I chose my road very careful and walked night-times only till we come to this house. The old Betsy was agone, and the house was nigh failed to pieces, and I've a-heard since that she was found drowned in a lime-pit some years back. But I digged under the table as the old Betsy had said, and there deep down was a box wrapped up in a sheepskin, full of silver money, and a little gold too. How she got it, I can't tell, unless she took it from her husband, who had been a sailor, as she told me once, though sailors isn't given to saving. So we built up the house again and here I made up my mind to live, where no one couldn't hurt my boy, for he was shy of grown-up folks, and children won't leave mun alone.

"So here we've a-been now these many years, and the boy's been so happy as could be. Jackdaws, hedgehogs, squirrels, deer, naught comes amiss to mun: and he knows the moor and the woods so well as the deer themselves. He growed stronger too, though I wouldn't never take him with me when I went down to the villages to buy meal: but he would always keep out of sight and wait for me. And I suppose that just lately he may have been getting a bit better in his head, for he runned down to join the children that day when I come to Ashacombe, as you remember; and for all that he was a bit frightened then, he was so took up with your little lady that I hadn't the heart to keep mun from going to look at her, though I was always hid not very far from mun. It was me that your servant saw in the woods the day Jan brought the bullfinch; but Lord, Lord, I never thought that it would have come to this."

She stopped, and pulling the clothes aside looked sadly at the sick man's face. "See there," she said in a hard, changed voice, "that's how he looked often when we was marching back to Corinner. I thought that I should never get mun back alive then, but I did hope never to see mun look so again. And though he can't spake I know what he's a-thinking. He thinks that the sarjint's come for mun, and it's a killed the heart within mun."

CHAPTER XIV

There was a long silence when Lucy Dart came to the end of her story. There were parts of it that struck home to Lady Eleanor, for was not she also the widow of a soldier who had been killed in action? But what moved her and Colonel George above all was the change in the woman's face. While she was talking of her young days her features were softer; but as she neared the end of her story they grew harder and harder until they assumed an expression of worn, dogged despair, as though she still felt the stress of those terrible days in the retreat to Corunna. She was ghastly pale also, and seemed quite exhausted when she came to the last word; and both of her visitors recalled her words, that she had carried her son, a grown man, most of the many miles from Bracefort to the hut where he now lay.

Colonel George broke the silence by telling Lucy that she must take care to keep up her own strength as well as her son's, and that he would come back the next day with a fresh store of provisions for them both. He begged at the same time to be allowed to bring the doctor with him, but Lucy positively refused. A doctor could do no good, she said; and she begged that the colonel would not come again until the day after to-morrow, as she wished to be left alone.

So with a heavy heart Lady Eleanor bade her good-bye, and they left her bent over the body of her son; Colonel George saying that he could find his way back over the bog without help. And so indeed he did, with a skill which to Lady Eleanor seemed marvellous; but she said not a word to him until they reached the high ridge, on a point of which she had once rested while the searching parties were scouring the moor for her lost children, as weary with watching and misery as the woman from whom she had just parted. And then for the first time there occurred to her the readiness, quickness and foresight with which Colonel George had arranged everything, not only for the finding of the children, but for letting her know by signal what had happened, for better or worse, as early as possible. Involuntarily she quickened her horse's pace a little as she thought of her race home to the children, after they were found; and then came the

chilling remembrance that, when she reached home, Dick would not be there. She pulled up, and looked round for Colonel George, who had dropped somewhat behind her, and was gazing at the glorious prospect of moor and valley and woodland that was spread out before him. Instantly he was at her side.

"I am afraid that we have not the same excuse for scampering home to-day," he said, divining her thoughts; "poor old Dick is well on his way by now. Well, the Corporal will be back in a few days to tell us all about him; and I hope to see him myself before long, as he will be close to London."

"Then you are going?" said Lady Eleanor, "for how long?"

"For a long time," he said, "I am going abroad again. Three months is not very long leave after a six months' voyage perhaps, but I am a soldier and must go where I am told. But I don't start for another month," he added, "so I hope to clear up this little trouble for you before I go."

Lady Eleanor stifled a little cry. "Going away again so soon?" she said. "Surely you are not wanted already?" But she checked herself and went on calmly. "Then you think there is nothing very serious the matter with that poor idiot after all?"

Colonel George shook his head. "I am not a doctor," he answered, "but I confess that I think very badly of him, and I believe that the woman is right, and that a doctor would be useless."

They rode on silently for a time, when Colonel George said, "That poor woman looked nearly as ill as her son. She went through terrible things before Corunna, but the last few days must have been almost worse. The strain of carrying him all that distance from Bracefort must have been more than she could really stand. She has no one except him in the world, and if he be taken from her, I cannot think how she will struggle on alone."

"Yes," said Lady Eleanor, as if talking to herself, "it is terrible to be left alone."

Colonel George glanced at her quickly, but she was looking sadly straight in front of her, and he rode on for some way further in silence before he broke out almost fiercely, "When I lost my best friend at Salamanca, my first thought was for her who by his death was left alone. When I came back after the peace I should have asked her, if I had dared, to live alone no longer, but to come and live with me. But I dared not, and went away again, dreading every day lest I might no longer find her alone when I came back. And now I am about accepting an appointment at the Cape and leaving her alone again, when God knows, all I care for in this world is to throw up my commission and stay with her—always, if she will let me. Eleanor, it is true—you are more than all the world to me. Tell me, shall I go or stay?"

Lady Eleanor flushed deeply but rode on in silence; and Colonel George added very gently:

"One word more; whatever your answer, remember that you can count upon me always for your faithful friend."

So they rode on without a word for some way further till they came to two rough tracks, of which one led to Fitzdenys Court and the other to Bracefort, where Colonel George pulled up and looked at her straight in the face.

"Is it go or stay?" he asked.

"Go now," she said with some difficulty; "come back,—not to-morrow, but when you return from visiting the hut on the day after."

"If I come back to you, I shall stay," he answered.

"Come back," she repeated, "but leave me for to-morrow; and now good-bye."

So she gave him her hand, and they went their different ways; but both stopped and looked back after they had gone a hundred yards, to the great surprise and disgust of their horses, who were impatient to get home.

But next morning Colonel George received a hurried note from Lady Eleanor saying she had been disturbed in the night by the sound of footsteps on the gravel by the house; and that, though she could see nothing at the time, the maids on opening the door had found the drummer's coat lying on the step. She therefore feared that something was gone wrong and begged Colonel Fitzdenys, despite his promise, to ride up to the hut on the moor without delay.

Of course the colonel started off at once, and when he caught sight of the hut he noticed that the goats were un milked and bleating pitifully round the door. As he drew nearer, the jackdaw and magpie came hopping out, cawing with mouths wide open; and then he jumped off his horse, tied him up, and knocked with his whip against the pole which formed the door-post. There was no answer, and he went in. The idiot was lying as he had seen him on the previous day, but the troubled look was gone from his face; and across him with her head close to his lay his mother, while the squirrel with his little bright eyes was sitting up by the heads of both. The woman's skirts were dripping wet, as though she had walked through dewy grass, and she lay quite still.

The colonel laid his hand on the man's forehead; and it was quite cold. Then he took the woman's hand and that also was cold. He had seen such sights too often in the wars to be dismayed at finding himself alone with the dead. "He must have died at sunset," he said to himself, "and she walked over to Bracefort in the night in distraction and came back to die before sunrise. No wonder, after such a strain as carrying him all those miles." He left the two where they lay, and was about to put the door in its place and go; but the goats clamoured so loud that he stopped to milk them, which he had learned to do in India, and finding the meat that he had brought on the previous day untouched in the basket, he gave some scraps to the magpie and the jackdaw, and ferreted about till he had discovered some nuts in the hut for the squirrel. Then he set the door in its place and rode straight for Bracefort.

When he reached the hill-top he saw some one riding upward; and galloping down soon found himself face to face with Lady Eleanor. In spite of what she had said on the day before she seemed very happy to see him twenty-four hours earlier than she had appointed, and it was not for some minutes that they came to the matter which had brought them together again. Then Colonel George told her what he had seen at the hut, though he found it hard to tell her anything so sad at such a time. She listened with many tears, but when she had recovered herself somewhat, she told Colonel George that there was one person more who must hear the story of Lucy Dart at once.

So when they came to Bracefort they went to see old Sally Dart, who had become weaker again in the last few days, and had taken to her bed. She brightened up as they came in, and before either of them could say a word, bade them, as if she knew for what they were come, to tell them about her Jan. So they told her how he had fallen in fair fight with the French, among the rear-guard, which had covered itself with glory in the retreat; and she said that it was well. And they told her how Lucy his wife had stuck to him faithfully through all the hardship of war, that she had carried his boy to the end, when men were dying all round of fatigue and despair, and had brought him out alive, by her patience and courage, though injured for life; and that she had devoted herself wholly to him in the years that followed and died from grief when he died. They kept back from her any more than this lest they should grieve her, but old Sally was satisfied without asking questions, for which indeed she had little strength, but said that it was well, and that she would now go in peace. Then she wished them both good-bye and hoped they might live long and happily together, though they had told her nothing of what had passed between themselves; and those were the last words that she spoke, for she was stricken for the second time that evening and after lingering for a day and a night departed in peace, as she had said.

So there were three graves dug in the little churchyard; and grandmother, mother and son were buried together, so that the mourners for old Sally did honour also to the two whom they had treated as outcasts. The goats, the old pony, the magpie, the jackdaw and the squirrel were all brought down at the same time and made over to Elsie; and the little drummer's coat still lies in the glass case at Bracefort Hall.

But it was all many, many years ago; and there are few now living in Ashacombe village who remember to have heard from their parents the story of the witch of Cossacombe. There are many more monuments now in the churches both at Ashacombe and Fitzdenys than there were then; but those who read from them of George, Lord Fitzdenys, who fought in the Peninsula, at Waterloo, and at Maheidpore, and of Eleanor his beloved wife, think little or know nothing of the manner in which they were brought together. Still less do they know of the part played in the matter by John Brimacott, sometime of the Light Dragoons, who died in their household after forty years of good and faithful service. Those again who read an inscription to the memory of General Sir Richard Bracefort, Colonel of the 116th Lancers, who fought in the Punjaub, cannot tell that this was once little Dick, who was lost on the moor, nor that Elizabeth his widowed sister, whose memory also is preserved in Ashacombe church, was once little Elsie who was lost with him. But folks still pause to look at the tablet which records the death of Private John Dart in the retreat to Corunna, and of Lucy his wife, who after his fall carried her son of nine years old to the British ships, and having devoted the rest of her life to the care of him, who by God's visitation could take no care for himself, was found dead upon his body when he died.

THE END

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed,

viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™’s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation’s EIN or federal tax identification

number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.