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The Wayfarers] [*Frontispiece*

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THE WAYFARERS

BY

J. C. SNAITH

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CHAPTER I

THE DEVIL TO PAY

When I opened my eyes it was one o'clock in the day. The cards lay on the table in a heap, and on the carpet in a greater one, the dead bottles in their midst. The candles were burnt out; their holders were foul with smoke and grease. As I sat up on the couch on which I had thrown myself at nine o clock in the morning in the desperation of fatigue, and stretched the sleep out of my limbs and rubbed it out of my brain the afternoon strove through the drawn blinds palely. The half-light gave such a sombre and appropriate touch to the profligate scene that it would have moved a moralist to a disquisition of five pages. But whatever my errors, that accusation was never urged against me, even by my friends. You may continue in your reading, therefore, in no immediate peril. The ashes were long since grey in the grate; there was an intolerable reek of wine-dregs and stale tobacco in the air; and the condition of the furniture, stained and broken and tumbled in all directions contributed the final disorder to the room. Indeed the only article in it, allowing no exception to myself, that had emerged from the orgy of the night without an impediment to its dignity was the picture of my grandfather, that pious, learned nobleman, hanging above the mantelpiece. A chip off a corner of his frame might be urged even against him; but what was that in comparison with the philosophical severity with which he gazed upon the scene? In the grave eyes, the grim mouth, the great nose of his family, he retained the contemplative grandeur which had enabled him to give to the world in ten ponderous tomes a Commentary on the *Analects of Confucius*. The space they had occupied on my book-shelf, between the *Newgate Calendar* and the *History of Jonathan Wild the Great*, was now unfilled, since these memorials of the great mind of my ancestor had lain three weeks with the Jews.

By the time my wits had returned I was able to recall the fact that the previous night, whose evidences I now regarded, was the last I should enjoy. It was the extravagant ending to a raffish comedy. Finis was already written in my history. As I sat yawning on my couch I was a thing of the past; I had ceased to be; to-morrow at this hour I should be forgotten by the world. I had had my chin off the bridle for ten years, and had used that period to whirl my heels without regard to the consequences. I had played high, drunk deep, paid my court to Venus, gained the notoriety of the intrigue and the duel—in fact, I had taken every degree in rakishness with the highest honours. I had spent or lost every penny of my patrimony, and fourteen thousand pounds besides; I could no longer hold my creditors at bay; various processes were out against me; the Jews had my body, as surely as the devil had my soul. But it was more particularly a stroke of ill-fortune that had hastened on the evil day. The single hair whereon the sword over my head had been suspended must have been severed sooner or later, even had it not suddenly snapped at four of the clock of the previous afternoon. At that hour I had killed a cornet of the Blues within a hundred yards of the Cocoa Tree, in the presence of my greatest enemy. Lord knows it was in fair fight, marred it is true by a little heat on the side of both; but the only witness of the deed, and he an accidental one, was Humphrey Waring, my rival and my enemy. He of all men was best able to turn such a misadventure on my part to account. The moment poor Burdock sank sobbing to death in Waring's arms, and he cried with his grim laugh, "You will need to run pretty swift, my lord, to prove your *alibi*," I knew that fate had reserved for the last the cruellest trick of all she had it in her power to play.

Possessed by the knowledge that I must inevitably perish in a rope, or less fortunately in a debtor's jail, for the instant the hand of the law was laid on my coat, the state of my affairs would never permit it to be removed. I went home and hastily summoned a few choice spirits to my lodgings in Jermyn Street that evening; and I spent the last night of my freedom in that society, expecting at every cast of the cards and every clink of the bottle to hear the boots of the "traps" from Bow Street upon the stairs. Yet all night long they never came, and here it was one o'clock in the afternoon, and I still in the enjoyment of my liberty. And now, as I sat in the sanity of daylight, refreshed by an excellent sleep, I felt myself still to be my own man. Therefore I called to François my valet to draw up the window-blinds, and to have the goodness to bring me a bottle of wine.

This blackguard of an Irishman bore in baptism the name of Terence, but I called him François, because one holds that to be as indubitably the

name of a valet as Dick of an ostler, and Thomas of a clergyman. Besides, I have such an hereditary instinct for polite letters, that I would as lief have called him after his own honoured patronymic as by that of our excellent Flaccus himself. François waded through the kings and queens and aces on the carpet, let the daylight in, and then withdrew to fetch a clean glass and a bottle of Tokay.

"The last bottle, me lord," says he.

"We drain the last bottle on the last day," says I. "Can aught be more fitting? *Finis coronal opus*!"

As this was the last time I should take the cup of pleasure to my lips, I made the utmost of it; sipped it carefully, turned it over on my tongue, held the glass up to the light, meditated on my past a little, on my present case, and what lay before me. I suppose it was a particular generous quality of the wine that kindled a new warmth in my spirit. Why, I asked myself, should I sit here, tamely waiting on my fate? Why should I be content to have my person contaminated with the dirty hands that would hale it to an ignominious death, or a thing less bearable? Why should I not cheat the Jews and my evil fortune in this last hour? Nothing could be easier than to leave the law in the lurch.

This course was so consonant to the desperation of my temper and affairs, that I had no sooner entered on the second glass of this last bottle, than I was fully convinced of its propriety. It was surely more fitting that a gentleman should select the hour and the manner of his exit from the world, than submit like a common ruffian to the dictation of the law in these important matters. To die by the hand of oneself is not the highest sort of death, it is true; but I am one who would advance, although the ancient and best writers are against me in this matter, that there are occasions when a man may best serve his dignity by renouncing that which has ceased to be a cherished object to him. In this, at least, I have Cato the younger with me.

Indeed I had already taken this resolve rather than submit my pride to those inconveniences that so depress the spirit, when a third glass of wine put me in mind of a thing the most importunate of any. There was a certain lady. Nothing can be more ludicrous than to consider of a ruined gamester broken by Fortune on her wheel, pausing in his last extremity for such a reason. But there it was. I could have wished to see the tears of defiance once again on her cheeks. In spite of the world, in spite of her family, of my evil history, of my cunning, plausible enemy, she had given me her proud little heart. She was the one person I might have turned to in this black hour, who would not have requited me with a sneer or a cold glance. Her stern old father had no sooner discovered how her affections stood committed towards me, and had learned the colour of my reputation, than he had whisked her away from town to his seat in the remote west country, and had vowed upon his soul to have me ducked in a ditch if I so much as showed my nose in those parts.

These thoughts of dear, insolent little Cynthia had induced reflections that I could well have done without. It was plain that this last cast of the cards had left the game in the hands of Mr. Humphrey Waring. He had long had the ear of the old duke, Cynthia's father, and no man knew better how to push the advantages my misfortunes had given him over me. He would marry the greatest heiress in the west country, hate him as she might, whilst Jack Tiverton, the worthless rogue on whom she doted, or, if it please you better, the Right Honourable Anthony Gervas John Plowden-Pleydell, fifth Earl of Tiverton, that ill-fated nobleman, rotted in durance, or writhed in a rope at Tyburn, or spilt his brains on the carpet of his lodgings. But for all that I had a mind to attempt a little more mischief before I perished. Why not go to poor little town-bred Cynthia, immured in the country like a bird in a cage, and throw her obstinate old father and her cunning suitor into such a fright as they would not be likely to forget? Indeed, why not?

However, when I came to reflect on this scheme more carefully, I found that I had hardly zest enough for it. My ruin was too complete. Besides, it might cost Cynthia dear. I should have been well pleased to look on my pretty young miss once again and watch the tears course down her cheeks in the stress of our farewell, for I would have you know that I am a man of sentiment when in the humour. But it would be a hollow business and little of a kindness to the child to have her weep for such a broken profligate. I should purchase the discomfort of my enemies at too high a price.

Yet I must come to a decision speedily. Every instant I expected to hear the law upon the stairs. Should I spare it any further trouble there and then, or make an attempt to break out of town and lead it a dance across the country? The drawback in the first course was its somewhat

arbitrary nature. It was so final and so certain that chance would have no opportunity. The drawback to the second was that I had not a guinea in the world. That morning I had staked my last and lost it. However, as I weighed the pros and cons with a whimsical deliberation I was taken with a fortunate expedient. Chance had been the ruling passion of my life. It had brought me to this pass. Why should I not employ it to solve this problem? I summoned M. François.

"Take two pistols," I said, "into the next chamber, but load one only. Cock them both, however, but use particular care that nothing shall suggest which is charged and which is not. Then bring them here and lay them side by side upon this table, still remembering not to betray the fatal one."

M. François bowed, and solemnly carried away the weapons from the sideboard. I awaited his return with an emotion akin to pleasure. I had tasted most of the delights that chance could afford me; but even I, who had staked houses, lands, servants, furniture, and every guinea of my fortune, had not yet gambled with my life. Thus, when I came to play the greatest stake that is in the power of any man to play, it was but fitting that I should enjoy some little exhilaration in that act.

M. François returned in rather more than two minutes with the pistols, and set them on the table on the top of the cards. They were both cocked, and it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. M. Francis coughed in his well-bred manner, and then sighed deeply.

"I beg your pardon, my lord," he said, at the verge of tears, "and I am sure your lordship will overlook the liberty on an occasion—on an occasion that is not likely to occur again. But may I say, my lord, with what deep regret I take farewell of your lordship? I am sure there could not have been a better, kinder master."

"François, I subscribe heartily to that," says I, "and I am sure there could not have been a bigger blackguard of a servant. And may I say, François, that I never took a deeper pleasure in anything than in parting with you; and I may even add that if a minute hence I am called elsewhere, I go with the less irresolution, because I am firm in the opinion that wherever it may be, I cannot be worse served than I have been at your hands."

"Your lordship is more than kind," says François humbly.

"No thanks, I beg," says I. "But, François, if chance, who hath served me nearly as ill as you have and for a rather longer period, sees fit to arrange that I shall perish by my own hand, I do not doubt that you will desire some small memento, some small souvenir of so fortunate an occasion."

"Your lordship is more than kind," says François, more humbly than before.

"You overwhelm me, François," says I. "If there is any little knick-knack your fancy turns to, you have only to mention it. The Jews will but claim it otherwise, and I would almost as lief it fell into your hands as into theirs."

"As your lordship so emboldens me," says M. François, "I should most greatly cherish the picture of your grandfather, that wise good nobleman, that hangs above the mantelpiece, for I am sure I could devise no more fitting memorial of his grandson."

"François," says I, "would I did not know you for a rogue, for the chastity of your taste does you so much honour it honours me. But would you bereave me of the last badge of my respectability? Friends, fortune, estate, the consideration of the world, all are gone, and you would now deny me the solace of my heritage. Yet I commend your wisdom even here, since if you rob others as you have robbed myself, you will presently be able to purchase half the kingdom of Ireland, and set up among the landed gentry. You will then, I doubt not, find an ancestor or two come not amiss. And if of my grandfather's pattern so much the better, for their virtue will purchase you more credit than any of your own. But I would recommend myself that you took a few ancestors over with the property. They would cost less in a lump. Besides, they tell me they are cheaper in Ireland than anywhere else, except France, where they are even more common than matrimony."

M. François was gathering himself to make a proper reply to this harangue, when suddenly we both heard the long-expected footfalls on the stairs.

"Secure that door," said I. "I will not be taken until chance hath arbitrated on my destination."

Saying this, without the hesitation of an instant I picked up one of the pistols lying side by side among the cards. François slipped to the door

and turned the key. Then he went to the mantelpiece, took down the picture, and placed it under his arm.

"Farewell, my lord," he said, "I leave you with inexpressible regret."

He ran to the window, cast it open, and with the most astonishing skill and agility, squeezed himself through the opening, my grandfather and all; and the roof being well within his reach, he first laid the picture on the tiles, then drew himself up after it, and showed the cleanest pair of heels to the law as ever I saw. And I was so taken with the ready wit and contrivance of the rogue, that although I had the cocked pistol pressed to my temple, I could not pull the trigger for the life of me. For I stood all a-shake with very laughter, so that the cold muzzle of the weapon tapped now against my forehead, now against my nose, now against my cheekbone, till I vow it was a miracle the hammer did not descend. But in the middle of all this the door was tried and shaken, followed by a fierce tap on the panel, and then came the clear tones of a woman.

"Open—open the door. Jack, it is I!"

At the sound of that voice the pistol fell from my hands altogether. Striking the carpet with a thud, it exploded under my feet and knocked a great hole in the wainscot. For an instant the room was full of smoke, gunpowder, and a mighty noise; but the moment I recovered my courage I unfastened the door and confronted the cause of it—Cynthia Carew! She too was the victim of a not unnatural bewilderment, and as pale as linen.

"Ods sputterkins!" she cried. "What a taking you have put me in! I am all of a twitter. Whose brains have you spilt? Not your own, I'll warrant me, for you never had any. Give me a kiss now, and get me some ratafia to compose me, and we'll let it pass."

"Cynthia," I gasped, but giving her the first of these requisites, "how came you here, in heaven's name?

"Ratafia!" she cried, "ratafia, or I perish."

"There's never a drop in the place," says I. "No, nor cherry-brandy, nor aromatic vinegar neither."

"Another kiss then," says Cynthia, pressing her white cheek against me, and casting her arms about my neck.

I led her within and set her down on the couch. She bore all the evidences of having made a long journey. So far from being dressed in the modishness that was wont to charm St. James's Park, she was covered by a long, dun-coloured cloak, wore a country hat, if I'm a judge of 'em, in which the feathers were crumpled; her shoes were muddy, and she carried a strange look of fear and uneasiness that I had never seen about her before. I procured a clean glass and filled it with wine from the last bottle and made her drain it, for she looked so pale and overborne.

"Now," says I, "how came you here? and what brings you?"

"Oh, Jack," says she, "I am run away." She suddenly broke forth into a flood of tears.

"The devil you are!" says I.

"Yes," says she, sobbing as though her heart would break, "and I'm not sorry neither."

"You wouldn't confess it an you were," says I.

"No, I wouldn't," she sobbed.

I must admit that the sight of the sweet chit was the one thing in all the world that had the power to please me at that hour, yet there was not a thing that could have happened to leave me in so sore a case. Here had my prettiness come and thrown herself on my protection—on the protection of a man utterly ruined, whom the law was already dogging for his liberty, if not his life. In sooth I must send her back again. It was no sort of a reception, especially when one fell to consider the heroical fashion of her coming to me. But what else was one to do? I was at my last gasp, without so much as a guinea, or a roof for my head, since to stay in that house was to court arrest, nor had I a friend in the world to whom I would dare to recommend her.

"Cynthia," says I, "I dote upon the sight of you; I am filled with joy to see you sitting there, but—but——"

How could I tell the child!

"But—but?" She sobbed no more. Mopping her tears, she crumpled the sopping handkerchief in her little fist, sat perfectly upright in her seat, and stared so straight at me that I felt the blood hum in my ears.

"But—but!" says I again—devil take me if I could tell her.

"But—but?" says she on her part; and it was wonderful to see her blue eyes come open and her proud lips spring together like the snap of a

watch-case.

"Well, Cynthia, dear, it is simply this," says I, going headlong into it. "You find me a ruined gamester, without a friend or a guinea in the world, who even at this moment is being hunted for his debts, and, if I dared say it to you, something worse. Now there is but one way out of it. You cannot stay here; there is not a friend to whom I may confide you; child, you must go back to your father."

Instead of growing red, the colour that shone I am sure in my face, she grew as pale as snow, and her eyes sparkled with a grim beauty that discomposed me more than it charmed me. She rose from the couch, lifted her chin out of her white throat, and kicked the kings and queens and knaves on the carpet in all directions.

"Never," she cried. "I will not go back to my father. I said I would not marry this Mr. Waring; whereon my lord said he would lock me in my room until I was of another mind. And he did lock me in it; and I broke out of it; and I will not go back, no, not if I must subsist on crusts picked from the kennel, and the clothes rot off my body, and I sleep o' nights in a dry ditch or the porch of a church."

"Faith!" says I, "that's well spoke, monstrous well spoke."

"I hate this Mr. Waring," says the little fury. "May I be crost in love, if I do not."

"And if I do not too," says I, "may my heart smoke in purgatory. But come tell me, is it for himself you hate him, or is it for love of me?"

"A plague take all catechisms," says she. "But I will tell you for another kiss."

I think two persons in love could never have been in a worse plight than Cynthia and I. There seemed no course open to us, other than to flee together, we knew not whither. Before even this could be considered, however, we had to find the means.

"What money have you left in your poke?" I asked her.

"Twelvepence exactly and a halfpenny over."

I whistled long and shrill. "Which is twelve-pence exactly and a halfpenny more than there is in mine. At nine o'clock this morning I staked my all, including three periwigs, nine pairs of silk breeches, stockings, five cambric brocaded waistcoats, silver-buckled shoes, sword, duelling pistols, house and furniture, the Odes of Horace, and my man-cook—staked 'em on the queen of hearts and lost 'em. Think on it, my pretty—lost 'em on the queen of hearts."

"I care not for that," says Cynthia. "I will not go back, and so you must make the best of me."

"But, child, what can I do when I'm taken?"

"You must not be taken."

"In that case," says I, "the only chance we have is to get away from here at once, furnished with the clothes we stand in, and the sum of twelve-pence halfpenny."

CHAPTER II

LADY CYNTHIA CAREW

Having come to this odd resolve, it behoved us to lose no time. But whither we should go, neither of us knew. North, south, east, or west, one latitude was as good as another. We should be equally served in each. As for the means at our disposal, we had the sum of twelve-pence halfpenny sterling. I am sure that much the same thoughts were uppermost in the minds of us both, for the moment I looked at little Cynthia sitting on the couch with a tight mouth and ratter quizzical eyes, I broke forth into a shout of laughter, which she returned so promptly that it became a question as to whom the honour of the first peal belonged.

In the midst of this pleasantry I walked to the door of the room and locked it again. I had no mind to be taken unawares by the enemy; and provided I was not, François' example had shown that a way of escape was always open.

"Now, my dear," says I, "we have no time to lose; let us be putting our few affairs in order. Look round this despoiled chamber, and tell me if you observe any article in it that could be turned into money at a pawnshop, or is likely otherwise to serve us on our journey. I am sorry to say that every object of *vertu* that I ever possessed upon which we might at a pinch have raised a seven-shilling piece has already been called upon to perform that office. There is one exception even to these, it is true, but that cannot help us now, and I rejoice to think so. For five minutes before your arrival I gave away to a connoisseur, a dilettante, a lover of the beautiful, Sir Godfrey Kneller's picture of my famous grandfather. I think I could never have held up my head again had I given up that eminent nobleman to the ignoble usages I have suggested. I foresaw this calamity; let me take the credit therefore of its aversion."

"You gave it away without receiving a farthing for it!" cries Cynthia aghast. "Oh, what a folly, Jack! Had we it now we could make thirty shillings of it at any dealer's."

"I know, I know!" says I triumphantly, "I grant that; therefore do you not more clearly see how finely I have acted by my grandfather?"

"Burn me if I do," says Cynthia. "Jack, what a fool thou art! For I see never a thing of value left in the place; or stay, we might put that pair of old iron pistols in a case and raise a loaf of bread on them. I suppose that on the floor is the one with which you tried to take your life, and as the one other's cocked, I suppose that's loaded too."

"Tried to take my life," says I. "Cynthia, what words are these?"

"A truce to dissimulation, if you please," says Cynthia tartly, "for feather-headed fellow that you are, yet do no better at it than any of the other arts and sciences at which you have tried and failed."

I turned to the table and began sorting a handful of cards to cover my confusion. A clever woman is the devil! Cynthia, to add a sting to her speech, picked up the discharged pistol from the carpet, ostentatiously searched for its case, and put it in. She then took up the other.

"Is this loaded, or is it not?" she asked.

"No, it's not loaded," says I. "Pull down the trigger and put it in too."

"Then, if it's not loaded, why was it cocked?" The question was decidedly disconcerting. I was by no means willing to go into the details of that matter, and therefore hesitated to find a reason.

"You don't know whether it's loaded or not," says Cynthia, sternly.

"Most certainly I do. Have I not said that it is not loaded?"

"And have I not said," says the impudent Cynthia, "that you don't know whether it's loaded or not?"

"But, my dear child," says I, "have I not positively said that the thing's not loaded?"

"Oh yes, I admit that," says the provoking creature. "But you must admit too, sir, that I have more faith in my own judgment than I have in yours. I say again that you don't know whether that pistol is loaded or whether it is not."

"I'll lay you two to one in hundreds that I do," says I hotly.

"Would not a case of iron pistols against the sum of twelvepence halfpenny be more appropriate in the circumstances?" says Cynthia.

"I believe you are right there," says I.

Cynthia then presented the pistol at the wall and a strange thing happened. The room was filled with a reverberating crash, and when the

smoke that arose had lifted a little it was discovered that a large mirror had been shivered into a thousand pieces.

"There," says Cynthia triumphantly.

As for me, I stood aghast for a moment, perfectly at a loss to explain the pistol's strange behaviour. Then I suddenly broke out into a fit of uncontrollable laughter; the admirable François had loaded them both.

It was then the turn of Cynthia to stand aghast.

"I hope your misfortunes have not deprived you of your reason," says she, more tartly than ever; and added, "I knew all along that you didn't know whether it was loaded or not."

"Come, come!" says I, keenly anxious, you may be sure, to change the topic. "We have already tarried here over-long. I will tell you the whole story in a more convenient place and season. If we don't go at once, I am afraid we shall not go at all."

"True," says Cynthia, seating herself again on the couch with the most deliberate and provoking coolness.

"What new whimsey is this?" says I, utterly nonplussed.

"I think, my Lord Tiverton," says Cynthia, with remarkable gravity, "that you have overlooked an important particular."

"Which? What?" says I.

"Nay, my lord," says she, "I am the last person in the world to remind you."

That might be true enough so far as it went, but the pretty roguish chit composed her features and her person into such an affectation of solemnity, and there was such a saucy twinkle in her eyes too, that all the words in the English tongue could not have spoken more plainly than she did without uttering any. It is, I suppose, one of the highest gifts of her sex, though to be sure, would it were exercised more!

"Dammy," says I, "you mean—er—er; you mean that I must ask you to marry me."

Instead of replying at once, she bent down and picked up half-a-dozen cards from the floor, arranged them in the shape of a fan, and held them in front of her eyes.

"La," says she, "your lordship is too kind. Pray ascribe my blushes to my country breeding."

"Pah!" says I, "we have not the time for play-acting now. The moment is very ill-chosen."

"Oh, I grant you that," says she, "but as you will allow that it was none of my choosing, why should I forego the peculiar privileges that my sex have ever derived from this position? No, as I'm a woman, I will have this thing carried through in the most proper and approved manner. Ods lud, sir! what notions have you got! I will be coy if I choose, or haughty, or easy, or gracious, or mocking, or disdainful, just as my mood is and as I've a mind to be. Now then, my lord, down on to your noble knees, and pour forth your foolish speeches that are meant to be so grand, which you must forget in the middle, whereon you will descend out of a rather turgid poetry into a bald and somewhat blasphemous prose. For I will have your lordship to know that I will be wooed as a woman, else I will not be wooed at all. Down, down on to your knees, my lord, and up, up with your apostrophes."

"What a consummate folly is this," says I, "when at any moment we may be ta'en."

But the pretty little fool sat as demure as a mouse, not relaxing a lip or twitching an eyebrow, i' faith as adorable a picture of a person as any I've seen off a painted canvas. There was that tantalizing air about her which at once invited, yet forbade; that aroused that which it denied. I vow nothing could have been more taking than the sight of little Cynthia sitting there as straight as any arrow that ever Cupid shot, her knees and heels together, and her hands spread out with the palms turned down, and her dainty toes peeping from underneath her petticoat. Indeed, so was I worked on by her graces and airs that I was like to forget the grim pass in which we were involved. Nay, I gradually began to solicit her in a formal manner; a piece of behaviour that contributed as much to her whimsical pleasure as it did to my embarrassment. And when in accents of undying regard, I came to ask for her hand in exchange for my heart and fortune, she was so charmed with the natural fervour with which I did it, that she stopped me imperiously, in the middle of much passion, and says: "I would have your lordship go over again that splendid passage that you have just uttered, that hath the fine swearing and the great humility in it. I never heard anything choicer; Mr. Betterton never surpassed it."

And when I had humoured her as much as she wished and that was not until I was thirsty and hot, and she was somewhat weary of keeping the strict attitude that she thought best suited to receive my addresses in, says she: "I declare, sir, you have pleased me vastly. You are as good a suitor as any of them all. Mr. Waring never wooed me half so well. As for Mr. Stokes, and Colonel Regan, and Sir John Dufty, and my lord Viscount Brighouse, you compare very well with them too. You have not the fine brawny pease-and-bacon appearance of Sir John, it is true, nor is your voice so rich and noble as the Colonel's, begorra, nor is your nose so well curved as Mr. Stoke's, nor have you a pretty little lisp like my lord Viscount, but in the sum-total of your attributes you do very fairly well. And therefore as your lordship's fortune is so considerable, and you have already gained the approbation of my father, I think the only course open to me—Oh, Jack, listen! What in the name of heaven is that?"

"You may well ask," says I. "One, two, three, four, five probably or more, according to their boots on the stairs, gentlemen from Bow Street come to wait upon us."

"Oh, what shall we do!" says poor Cynthia, clapping her hands.

"Keep very calm, child, and carefully heed what I say. They will not molest you; I am their game. But I doubt gravely whether I shall fall to them at present. My way lies through that window and along the tiles, and whilst they follow, you will simply go downstairs and walk out at the front door. Go as swiftly as you can down to Piccadilly to the gates of Hyde Park. And if I am not already come there before you, wait till I arrive. It is to be considered, of course, that I may have more difficulty than I apprehend in slipping these fellows."

Here the door was roughly taken and the next instant so heavy a blow was delivered against it as partly drove in one of the panels. I had just time to run into the adjoining chamber for a hat and a riding-cloak, to plant a kiss between brave little Cynthia's brows, and abjure her not to be afraid, when the door was driven in, and three or four ugly wretches came tumbling one upon another pell-mell into the room.

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCES A MERITORIOUS HEBREW

I had hardly time to open the window ere they were recovered of their entry and on their feet. Seeing what I was about to attempt they made a rush, but I did not bear youth and vigour in my limbs for nothing. With a quickness that I'll warrant would have done no discredit to a cat, I had poised myself on the precarious sill, and had twisted myself into a favourable position for reaching the roof. It was easily in reach, as this chamber very happily was at the top of the house. I had barely taken a firm hold on the iron gutter that ran along the edge of the tiles, before I had drawn up one knee, and was in the act of dragging up the other as fast as I could, when it was seized by a hand from the room below. Luckily for me, I had a firm enough hold of the roof to get some little purchase for my imprisoned leg, whereby I was enabled to deal my adversary a pretty smart kick in the teeth, which sent him cursing back into the room. Thereupon I scrambled willy-nilly, hands and knees, on to the tiles. Not one moment too soon, however. My pursuers evidently numbered fleet and active fellows among them. Their blood was up too. For scarcely had I gone ten yards along the edge of the tiles, moving on all-fours for safety, ere another fellow was also in possession of the roof. This was not at all to my liking, and a good deal outside my calculations, since I had not expected that these clumsy Bow Street runners would attempt to follow me in this fashion.

My pursuer gave a view-halloa and followed me so fast that I realized at once that at this game Jack was like to be as good as his master. Perchance the fellow was better schooled in this mode of procedure than I, for he was clattering behind me, preparing to grab my heels before I could take my bearings. I did not know where I was, and had not the least idea as to how I should get away. But one thing was plain. I had embarked on so bold a course that the moment there was a limit to my daring all would be lost. Therefore, hearing the Bow Street gentleman wheezing and grunting a yard or two behind me, I stopped and rose to my feet, and turned round so suddenly as considerably to endanger my own safety and to take him entirely unawares. And I sent my fist such a crack in his eye, that only a miracle saved him from toppling over the parapet into the middle of Jermyn Street, twenty feet beneath.

While Mr. Catchpole sprawled and wallowed with his arms and legs outstretched striving to save himself from falling over the brink, and howling to his mates, whose heads were just showing above the gutter, to come to his assistance, I took the occasion to alter my tactics. Instead of crawling along the edge, I began climbing up in a vertical direction. And my pursuer being but a runner from Bow Street after all, had been considerably cooled in his zeal, and accordingly allowed me rather more of elbow room, whilst his companions, of whom two more had now come upon the top, observing the nature of his accident, were in no such hurry as he had been to come by one themselves.

I mounted painfully enough as high as the chimney pots, not without some damage to the skin of my hands and knees, and a good deal of slipping and sliding. A game of hide-and-seek followed. Reaching the opposite slope of the roofs, which concealed me and put me farthest away from the enemy, I crept as swiftly as I could from chimney-stack to chimney-stack with ever a keen eye for a means of getting down again into the street. Some yards ahead I saw that the straight line of the tiles was broken by a dormer window. I made to this for here was the very chance that I desired. Alas! when I reached it I found it secured from within. I had no time in which to break a pane of glass in the hope that I might put my hand through and discover the fastenings. A couple of the traps had already found out in which direction I had gone, and were even now standing on the apex, and beckoning to the others. I moved away to another dormer window a few yards further on. It too was fast, but looking ahead I saw, greatly to my relief, that a third was standing open. My satisfaction had a short life, however. For scarcely had I made two yards towards it ere I observed a thing that in my haste I had overlooked. The line of the houses ended abruptly; the open window belonged to another row. Between ran an alley or a narrow street, wide enough to make me pause in my career. Hard pressed as I was, I must confess that I had no fancy to attempt a leap so precarious. I turned to go back, but the enemy had followed so smartly on my heels that I saw in a glance that there was no chance of retreating by the way I had come. My only hope lay in a forward direction; I could not possibly retire. Nor must I hesitate an instant either. The closer I came to this gulf in the houses the more desperate it looked, but my resolve was already taken.

A drowning man clutches at a straw.

Impeded as I was with a cumbersome riding-coat, I could not hope to make the leap successfully. Hastily pulling it off, therefore, I folded it up in some rude fashion, for I could not afford to lose it, and pitched it over a space between the houses. It landed in safety well over the immediate brink. The traps, apprehending the nature of the feat I was about to attempt, were coming along the roof with wonderful expedition. Indeed, they are almost within an arm's-length of me when I started on the run to make the leap. With teeth set, and it must be confessed some little sickness of anticipation in my spirit, I ran as hard as I could, and hurled myself into the air with a despairing energy. That I covered the gulf and landed with my knees on the coat I had cast across, I have always ascribed to that benevolent Providence that hath such a jealous regard for the worthless. And in sooth when I had actually arrived there it was one of the greatest wonders in the world that I did not fall back again in the recoil, or did not begin to roll sideways and so tumble over the lower edge. But somehow I recovered my balance before either of these calamities happened. Then I felt that I might breathe again.

There was precious little to fear that the men from Bow Street would be bold enough to follow me. For when I came to contemplate, now as you may believe with no little satisfaction, the magnitude of the hazard intervening between us, it cost me a shudder in despite of my complacency. And as in their case it was not a life and death matter on which line of the roofs they happened to stand, and they had no thoughts of adorable little Cynthia to spur them on to these great risks, I think they may be pardoned for giving back before that which I with so many sweats and misgivings had accomplished. Nor do I lay any unction to myself, since I am sure that had I stood in their shoes, or had I played for a lesser stake, I would have had none of such risks either. Nay, I am not altogether clear in my mind that had I not been heated by the fine excitements of the hue and cry I should have been wrought up to do it as it was. There can be little doubt, I think, that the chase makes a much nobler and more adventurous creature of the fox than ever consists with his vulgar and common character.

Seeing my pursuers had halted on the opposite brink, and were presenting such a helpless and bewildered appearance as plainly showed they had no stomach for a similar deed, I was able to resume my riding coat at my ease, and even to engage in a few words of conversation as I did so. Says I:

"Certainly, gentlemen, I think you are well advised in not seeking to come over. 'Pon my soul I would not have come over myself had you not pressed me so hard! Here is a guinea to drink my health, and now I will wish you good afternoon!"

Such is the power of habit that I fumbled in several pockets in search of a gold piece to toss them, ere I recollected the bankrupt condition in which I stood. Perforce I had to be content with a bow and a lifting of the hat, whereupon I went my way along the roof while they were left at the end of their wits to discover a means by which they might circumvent me.

I had not an instant of time to lose, however, if I was to make good my escape. There were doubtless persons in the street below who had had a keen eye for these proceedings. No sooner would they see in which direction the cat was to jump than they would act accordingly. Therefore it behoved me to be as bold and as quick as ever. The open dormer window offered the readiest mode of egress. I made to it at once, and peering within saw that the chamber, a bedroom, was very happily empty. I had no difficulty in squeezing my body through the narrow opening and so came into the room. Having done this, I securely fastened the window to present a further obstacle to my enemies. The great thing that lay before me now was to make my way downstairs as cautiously as I could, and to slip out of the house without attracting the attention of its occupants, or of those of my foes who might be lurking about in the street. But much address was required to perform all this successfully, as you will readily understand.

First I opened the door of the bed-chamber with noiseless care, and then groped my way through the gloom and strangeness of the place to the stairs. And mighty rickety and full of noises they were when I found them. They began so sheer and abruptly, and so close to the bed-room door, that in spite of my caution, I was on them long ere I thought I was, and as a consequence nearly pitched headlong down their whole length. Mercifully I recovered my balance in the nick of time, but not before, as it seemed to my nervous ears, I had set up an intolerable clatter that appeared to echo and re-echo through every room of the house. Step by

step, I crept down the stairs, and paused to listen on every one. It was so dark that I had to be very tenacious of the walls. But fortune was still on my side. There seemed not a soul in all the house, nor could I hear a sound. Yet every step I descended the place grew darker and darker; there was not so much as a glimmer of light from a door or a window to be discerned; while the walls were so close about me that when I stretched out my hands I could feel them on either side. Presently I ceased to descend, whereon much shuffling of my feet ensued, and I concluded that this was some kind of a landing. More shuffling and gingerly manoeuvring followed, and then the stairs began again, and the place grew darker than ever. The darkness became so great that I could not see my hand before my face; and as I had not the means about me to procure a light, nor would have dared to employ them had they been in my possession, I began to marvel where in the world I was coming to.

At last the stairs ended altogether, and on pushing carefully forward, my nose suddenly came against an unexpected obstacle. Running my hands over it, I judged it to be a door. I put my ear to the wood, but listen as I might I could hear no sound. Whither it led or what lay behind it I had not the vaguest notion, nor was there a speck of light by which I might make a guess. But when the handle of the door came into my fist, I decided not to flinch the situation whatever it might present. A bold course had been my salvation hitherto; come what might I would continue in it. Therefore, I cautiously turned the handle, and opened the door an inch at a time, I daresay I had got it about five inches apart when it was rudely grasped from the other side, and flung wide open in my face. A Jew stood before me, as true a child of Israel as ever I set eyes on. He cast up his hands and gurgled in his anger and surprise.

"Why, what the deffil!" says he at last.

"How do you do, sir," says I, cordially holding out my hand. "Proud to meet you, sir, infernally proud to meet you."

Although I had hoped that my air and tone were the very pattern of affability, I doubt if this Hebrew thought them so; or even if he did, he hardly seemed to think they became me in the circumstances as handsomely as I had hoped they would. For he gurgled and cackled, his tawny countenance grew redder and redder, his hands trembled, and he contorted his body into a truly fantastic shape. Meantime I gazed past him to see whence he had emerged, in the hope that I might get some clue as to what would be the best line of conduct to adopt. To my infinite pleasure I saw that I had come upon the threshold of a pawnbroker's shop, since a truly miscellaneous collection of articles lay scattered about it, whilst the character and nation of my inquisitor alone warranted the theory. Yet in an instant was my satisfaction turned to anger, for there, staring into my very eyes with all the meditative grandeur he had of yore, was that learned nobleman, my grandfather. It was well for M. François that he was not at that moment within my reach.

"What do you do here?" says the Jew, having discovered his tongue at last. "Do you think I do not know? You haf come to rob my house. Benjamin, bring your blunderbush. In broad daylight, too. O heaven, what effrontery!"

"My dear Mr. Moses," says I winningly, "what words are these? Effrontery—rob your house; to conceive that I, the best friend your tribe ever had or for that matter ever will have, should be thus accosted by you! I am here as a client, sir; and to conceive that you of all men should deny a client when he takes these monstrous pains to come to you in privacy!"

Mr. Moses was a good deal reassured by my address. But after all his race are a good deal too tenacious to be put off so lightly. He demanded to know in what manner I had come there and he did it so boisterously too, and in a fashion so calculated to attract the attention of persons in the street that I judged it wisest to make a clean breast of how matters stood with me.

"Well, Mr. Moses," says I, "if you must know I am that great benefactor of your tribe, Lord Tiverton. My lodgings are about six doors up the street, and they have been visited this afternoon by the dirtiest set of minions from Bow Street as ever I saw. And so hard was I put to it to clear them that I took to the housetops, whereupon, seeing your dormer window open, I gave them the slip by climbing into it, and here I am. And mark you, my dear Mr. Moses, I would not so honour the dormer windows of all and sundry, no, rabbit me an I would. For I am mighty particular as to whose hands I would accept an obligation from. But if a friend cannot take a benefaction from a friend, then who in all the world is one to take it from? As Flaccus himself has said."

Mr. Moses, you may be sure, was mollified indeed.

"I am sure I beg your lordship's pardon," says he. "A thousand times most humbly I am sure I do. Benjamin, put by your blunderbush; and withdraw the curtains across the window, sirrah, for I have seen the traps walking up and down the street, and peering here and there and everywhere this last ten minutes; yes, that I have. Is there any particular in which I can serve your lordship?"

"Yes, by thunder, that you can!" says I. "I must get away from here unknown as quickly as you might count ten. The traps are still about in the street you say?"

"See, my lord, there is one going past the window now."

As he spoke I took the precaution of drawing farther back into the shadow of the stairs, for it was even as he said. The next instant Mr. Moses pushed the door to in my face, and as he did so, wheeled round to confront (as I guessed) two or three of the traps who were coming into the shop.

"A sheeny, by the Lord!" I heard one say, in a voice so coarse that it set my teeth on edge.

"What is your pleasure, good gentlemans?" says Mr. Moses in a tone of incredible politeness. "If I, a poor old clo'es-dealer as I am, can be of service to you, I cannot tell you how happy you will make me."

"Well, ole Father Abraham," says the foremost man, "we're on the 'eels of a hearl, d'ye see. We've been a-chasing of him on the 'ouse-tops, we have so, and he's just a-been a-squeedgin' of himself through your dormer window, and he's left us in the lurch, d'ye see. He's in your bed-room, you can wager, and we're a-going up to rout him out."

"Is he so?" says Mr. Moses. "God-a-mercy! is it possible? Benjamin, get your blunderbush, and go and bring him down."

I was so charmed with the comedy that was being played, that at some little risk I had opened just a small crevice in the door, in order that I might peer through upon the actors. Benjamin, a youth about as tall as the counter, but wonderfully keen and sharp of feature, put himself in possession of an antiquated fire-arm, probably the most obsolete weapon ever handed down from early times.

"Be damned to Benjamin," says the man from Bow Street, "and be damned to his blunderbush; we're a-going up to look ourselves."

"And wherefore, gentlemans," says Moses in a tone like silk, it was so soft, "should Benjamin and his blunderbush be damned? Benjamin is a good boy, and his blunderbush is a good weapon. If this earl is in my chamber, depend upon it one or the other shall bring him down."

"No; we'll go up ourselves, ole Shylock," says the other, "for this hearl is so full of hell, that as likely as not he'd beat Benjamin to death with his own blunderbush, crikey-likey! he would so."

"Nay, that he would not," says Mr. Moses, "for Benjamin would blow the heart out of him, if he but advanced one step upon him."

Mr. Moses was evidently a master of fence, and determined as my enemies might show themselves, they could make nothing of his subtle, cringing ways. They might have excellent reasons for overhauling the house, and going upstairs, as indeed they had, yet they had not the wit to enforce them. For every additional argument he had a new excuse to advance, which at least if it contributed nothing whatever to the case in point, yet served to obscure the issue and to distract and confound those concerned in it. It was truly remarkable how he managed to lure and cheat them with the most specious words that could mean nothing whatever; and yet at the same time, and therein lay his art, they listened to him and never once seemed to doubt his sincerity. And it seemed too that this cunning Hebrew had something of a trump card to play, and this he had reserved for the last.

"An earl did ye say, sirs?" says he, with a vast air of reflection. "It could not have been by any chance the Earl of Tiverton?"

"Yes, by thunder," they cried together, "the man himself."

"Well now, I call that whimsical," says he, "seeing as how I see his lordship running at the top of his legs past this window not five minutes before you came here."

"You did that," says one of my enemies, "then why in thunder couldn't you say so before, instead o' keepin' us argle-hargling here, you piece o' pork, you hedge-pig!"

With a stream of oaths and vituperation they tumbled out into the street, whilst Mr. Moses, with his hands outspread and a cringing, shrugging, smiling yet deprecating aspect, looked the picture of a highly ingenuous bewilderment. No sooner had they passed away in the hot

pursuit of some phantom of myself, than Mr. Moses opened the door he had pushed so lately upon me, and informed me that the immediate danger was overpast. He waved away the thanks I offered him, with a great deal of politeness, assuring me that he was more than repaid by the happiness he took for having been of some slight service to so fine a specimen of the nobility as myself.

"But if there is any leetle thing in the way of pizness," says he, "I am the man, your lordship."

"Yes, Mr. Moses, I have been thinking of it," says I, and indeed I had. "Now you see I am very tolerably attired." I unbuttoned my riding-coat and threw it open to display as elegant a costume as ever I had from Tracy. "Unhappily I have not a guinea in the world"—let me do Mr. Moses the justice of recording that in the face of this announcement he retained his countenance wonderfully well.—"But I will barter breeches, coat, waistcoat, ruffles, stockings, buckled shoes, for a plain drab shoddy suit, some common hose, and a pair of hob-nailed boots. By this exchange I think we shall both be gratified; you on your side by receiving things of about twelve times the value of what you give away; and I on mine by obtaining a tolerable disguise to my condition when I start on my itinerary, for I hardly think I should recognize myself in such a uniform, whilst as for my mamma, dear sainted buckram lady! if at the end of all the journeying that is before me I come before the gates of Heaven in it, she will hold a bottle of vinegar before her fine-cut nose, and say *c'est un faux pas!* and get me denied the *entrée*. She will ecod! for I would have you to know, my dear Mr. Moses, I am of a devilish stiff-backed family. Look at my grandfather. What a majestical old gentleman it is, even as in his declining years he takes his ease in his pop-shop, with christening mugs and dirty candlesticks about him on the one hand, and saving your presence, Mr. Moses, a Jew dealer on the other. But there, my good fellow, we will not talk about it."

Mr. Moses, seeing his advantage in this proposal—indeed he was so excellent a fellow that had he not done so, I do not doubt he would still have tried to accommodate me—fully entered into this idea, and did his best to fish this chaste wardrobe out of the varied contents of his shop. Indeed such hidden stores did it contain, that after the contents of divers boxes, and cupboards, and back parlours, and mysterious receptacles had been examined, the necessary articles were forthcoming, and I was shown into one of the chambers leading from the shop, in order to effect this change in my attire.

It would have made you laugh to see the figure I cut—my snuff-coloured coat and pantaloons, fitting in most places where they touched, gave me such a rustical appearance that an ostler or a tapster became a gentleman by the comparison. The hose was rather better, however, but the boots were not only the thickest and clumsiest as ever I saw, but were much too big into the bargain. A hat was also found for me that matched very well indeed with this startling change in my condition; and a thick, coarse brown cover-all in lieu of the smart riding-coat I had set out with. Mr. Moses certainly had as good a bargain as he could have wished, but certainly not a better one than his merits deserved; whilst I had come by the most effectual disguise to my station, and one well calculated to mislead Sheriff's officers and Bow Street runners, for in all my extended experience of the tribe they have ever been clumsy fellows, blind of eye and thick of understanding, incapable of seeing beyond the noses on their faces. With mutual respect and pleasure, therefore, and many pious hopes for the welfare of my grandfather, whom I was moved to say could not have been left in more worthy hands, I took my leave of Mr. Moses. And seeing he was a Jew, I must say that he was the best conditioned Jew as ever I met.

I took my way very cautiously on leaving the shop of my friend the Hebrew. At first I kept well in the shadow of the houses and peered carefully about. My enemies, however, appeared to be still away on the false scent. The twilight of the autumn afternoon was gathering in as I pursued my way towards little Cynthia. She was to have met me at the gates of Hyde Park nearly an hour ago. As I turned into Piccadilly without meeting with a sign of my enemies, for no reason whatever I was suddenly stabbed with the pain of a most bitter speculation. Suppose my little Cynthia was not there to meet me after all! Suppose I had tarried so long that, fearing I was taken, she had gone from the rendezvous! Suppose something unforeseen and mysterious had befallen her, as such accidents occasionally do! In a flash I realized how dear, how inexpressibly dear she was to me. If aught bereft me of her now, she, the one friend I had, the one creature who believed in me, worthless ruined fellow as I was, the one person who would dare to stand at my side and face the sneers and the scorn of the world, life would indeed have no

savour left in it. I should neither have the heart nor the desire to continue in that which would become a burden and a mockery. And in sooth so did this terrible thought take hold of me, that a kind of fatality came upon me. I began to have a sense of foreboding, as they say one may have in a dream; I felt the blood grow slow and thin in my limbs; I was taken with a cold shivering; and my spirit flagged so low that I would have wagered a kingdom at that moment that some dire circumstance had happened to my love, and even more particularly to me.

In the very height of this fever of insane fears, I came to the end of Piccadilly, and there in the increasing gloom of the evening were the gates of Hyde Park. And there too, like a sentinel on guard, so proud and strict she was of outline, was my little Cynthia. She stood there all unconscious of the fact that the simple sight of her was enough in itself to reconcile a ruined man to his empty life.

CHAPTER IV

WE START UPON OUR PILGRIMAGE

All the way I had come I had heightened my disguise by mouching along with my hat low down over my eyes, the collar of my coat turned up to my ears, and my hands stuck deep in my pockets. And so effectual was this mode, that though Cynthia was awaiting me in fear and impatience, I had walked right up to her and taken her by the arm ere she knew I was so near.

"Oh, Jack," she sobbed, "I—I am so glad. S—something s—seemed to tell me that you would never return. I was certain you were ta'en, and that I should never see you again, except between the iron bars of a prison."

I kissed her.

"Foolish child," says I, with dignified forgetfulness, "to entertain such silly fears. Alas, you women, that you should give way to weaknesses of this sort! What would you say of us men now, if we were so easily afflicted?"

It was fine the way in which I wielded my advantage, and clearly showed to the shrinking little creature how ill the poor weak female character compared with the hardy, resolute male. But as this instance goes to show, I do not really think that the masculine character is so much sterner than the feminine; for is not its pre-eminence largely a matter of assumption? A man scorns and conceals the weaknesses a woman flaunts and cherishes.

The twilight was deepening rapidly and giving way to an evening of heavy clouds and rainy wind, when arm-in-arm we started to walk we knew not where. We started to walk into the night and the country places, away from our enemies, and from those who would sever or deter us. We had not the faintest idea as to the place we were bound for. One spot was as good as another. Involuntarily we turned into the park, although we knew not why we should. But I suppose we felt that every step we took into this mysterious nowhere of our destination, we were leaving the law behind, and that together, friendless and resourceless, but ever hand-in-hand, we were beginning our lives anew.

We moved away at a brisk round pace, possessed with the thought of putting a long distance between us and our foes. And in the pleasure of having come together again we walked lightly and easily for long enough, not heeding the way, nor the wind, nor the threat of the rainclouds and the dark evening. We rejoiced in the exquisite sense of our comradeship, and in the thought that every step we took together was a contribution to our freedom. We came out of the park again, and went on and on, past the houses of Kensington, and then past straggling and remoter places, the names of which I did not know.

In a surprisingly little while, as it seemed to us, sunk in the obsession of our companionship, we were groping in the unlit darkness of the country lanes, with the lights of the town we had left fading away behind us. But we must have been walking considerably more than two hours, and at a smart pace, to judge by the distance we had made. It was then that I pressed Cynthia's hand and says:

"Are you not tired, little one?"

"Nay," says she, "my feet are slipping by so light, I do not know that I am walking. I could journey on all night in this way."

I was vastly gratified by this brave speech. But for myself, although I too had no weariness, and to be sure I could not have confessed to it if I had, I was yet being bitten very severely by the pangs of hunger. All day I had taken nothing beyond a glass or two of wine. Therefore I now felt a pressing need.

"At least," says I, "I hope you are hungry?"

"Well, since you mention it," says she, "I think I am."

"That is well," says I, "for I am most abominably so. I believe I never was so hungry in my life before; and I am sure I never had scantier means of appeasing it. Only conceive of twelvepence halfpenny to the two of us for our board and lodging."

It now became our business to find an inn of the meaner sort, in which we might invest this munificent sum. But as we had long since left the bricks and mortar of the town behind, a house for our entertainment was not so easily come by.

We walked on and on, but still no welcome inn appeared; and presently the lamps of the great city itself had vanished, till we were left in the

utter darkness of the country lanes. There was no evidence of a human habitation anywhere about, and we knew not where we were.

By this time both of us were tired as well as most bitterly hungry. Poor little Cynthia hung so heavily on my arm, that I knew fatigue had mastered her. Yet so brave she was, that despite all the pains and difficulties she endured, she would not admit that she was weary. Indeed, when I asked her to confess it, says she: "Nay, not I," as stoutly as she would have done three hours before. Yet when we came to a bank of earth beside the way, and I bade her rest upon it for a little while she could raise no very great objection.

I suppose two persons could never have taken their repose with more singular feelings than did we upon that bank of earth. Whither we were going that night, and what was to become of us we did not know. There was the sum of twelvepence halfpenny between us and destitution, but even this could not avail us in such a solitary darkness, in the absence of a house and human aid. Happily the night was wonderfully mild, and we in our coats and stout boots were warmly clad. Otherwise we might have perished where we sat. The pains of fatigue, allied to the pangs of hunger, had bereft us of both the energy and the inclination to proceed. We must have tarried on that bank considerably beyond an hour, mutually consoling one another. For my part little Cynthia's courage almost reconciled me to these present circumstances, but you may be sure I was bitterly distressed for her. I had admitted her into my care, foolishly no doubt, and because there was scarcely an alternative; and this was the sort of provision I had to offer. Come what may, something must be done. The child could never be left to suffer thus. I must find food and a sanctuary of some sort for her.

However, even as I pondered on our case, hunger and weariness did their worst.

For some time I had known by Cynthia's failing answers and the heaviness with which she leant against me, that she was becoming more and more completely overborne. And I'll swear so monstrous brave she was that never a word of complaint passed her lips, nor yet a tear escaped her. And then her little head nestled up to my coat-sleeve, and the next moment she sighed and was dead asleep upon it. In spite of her resolution, the excitements, the distresses and the pains of that long day had overpowered her. Yet I dare not have her pass the night in this exposure on a moist bank of earth, with the night-wind playing on her face, and the clouds that had banked themselves over the moon for ever increasing and threatening to descend upon us in a drenching rain. Therefore, dire as my own case was, I roused myself to a desperate attempt to discover a meal and a lodging for the night.

I had not the heart to try to arouse the poor child, as you may suppose; wherefore, disturbing her as little as I could, I gathered her in my arms, for after all her fine spirit she was but a feather of a thing, and carried her before me along the lane. It was an effort of despair, for the never-ending darkness revealed no glimpse of what I sought. Every now and then the wind brought a spatter of the expected rain; but this, when it came upon my lips, carried a kind of refreshment in it. I doggedly set my teeth and marched along with my warm burden, and I think the weight of responsibility that was in my arms, added to the one upon my heart, fostered a grim determination in me to succeed in my search at any cost. The lanes seemed interminable, and every one the same. All my limbs were one strange, numb ache; I had become so faint with hunger that I moved in a kind of delirium; and in the end every step I took became so mechanical a thing as to be an effort of the will without the co-operation of the senses.

Heaven knows what the hour was when one of these lanes I had been eternally taking all night long ended in a partly-unhinged gate. My first instinct was to snatch an instant's rest upon it; but this I dared not do. I could never have set my paralysed limbs in motion again had I done so. Indeed it was but the presence of poor little Cynthia in my arms that prevented my sinking to the earth as I stood. But looking beyond the gate I could indistinctly define various dull masses that I believed to be the outline of haystacks or farm buildings. Brushing through the rickety gate with an accession of new strength that the idea had lent me, I had not proceeded many yards in the stubble-field beyond ere I knew that at last I had come to a farmstead. There was not a glimmer of light to be seen anywhere, nor could I make out in the total darkness which was the house itself. Approaching nearer it grew plain that these were farm buildings. Considering, however, my exhausted condition, the lateness of the hour, and the probability that the house was some distance off, I decided to make the best of what lay before me. No sooner had I taken

this resolve, than the moon, as if in recognition of it, showed itself suddenly for the first time that night from out of its wrack of rain clouds. By its aid and the smell issuing from within I was made aware that I stood before the entrance to a cow-hovel.

There was no door to it, therefore I was able to carry Cynthia straight in. The cows in their various stalls paid us hardly any attention as I groped my way past them. The place was of a somewhat considerable extent, and coming to the end of it, I discovered a space in the far corner where the clean straw was stored. Dispersing a bundle of it with my feet, I deposited my poor little one very gently into the warm bed thereby made. Careful as I had been not to disturb her, the change in her position had its effect. She gave the same sigh with which she had gone to sleep, and says:

"Jack, Jack, where are you? I do believe I've been to sleep."

"Then go to sleep again, my prettiness," says I.

"But what is this?" says she. "This is surely not the bank of moist earth in the lane I went to sleep on. Where are we then? What place is this so warm and snug?" A rustle. "Straw!" A sniff. "A cow-shed! Oh dear, I am ——! Oh, could we——! and, oh, Jack, dear, how did we get here?"

The sound of Cynthia's voice and the knowledge that there was a roof for her head and a couch for her body at last, however mean they might be, did much to lift me out of my own sorry predicament. Faint and numb as I still was, my brain seemed to have its capacity restored. And at least I could gauge by my own sufferings those which Cynthia strove so valiantly to conceal.

"Are you not hungry, little one?" says I.

"Are you?" says she.

"Most damnably so," says I.

"Then I am too."

Now I would have you mark that hunger is a great wit. Cynthia sniffed a second time. "Cows," says she. "Oh, what good fortune!"

"But my dearest prettiness," says I, "hungry as we are I do not exactly see how these cows can help us. Although to be sure I will undertake to knock one down and skin it, and make the fire and such like menial offices, if you will cut it up and cook it."

"Goose that you are," says Cynthia. "You almost deserve to perish of your emptiness. What about the milk?"

"Odslife!" cries I, "to think that I should not have thought of that. Ye gods and little fishes, I must go find a pot, or a pail, or a pan to hold it in!"

The happy prospect of such sustenance endowed us both with new vigour. Without more ado I began groping about in this moonlit hovel to discover these utensils. But it was no such easy matter. Look where I might, inside the place and outside of it, amongst the straw and fodder, or among the cows themselves, there was devil a pail that I could see. Yet so insistent was our case that we could not be put off by any small detail of this sort. We were both of us thoroughly awake by now and fully bent on assuaging our distresses. And Cynthia in particular showed her good resources.

"Jack," says she, "give me your hat. It is bigger than mine."

"To be sure," says I. "I had not thought of that. But I will go and do the milking. I do not choose that you undertake these menial offices, my pretty, like a common dairymaid."

"I am afraid you can have no choice in the matter," says Cynthia, now thoroughly awakened and full of importance at the prospect. "You speak as though it were indeed the simplest thing in the world to milk a cow. 'Pon my word, sir, I would vastly like to see you at that exercise. It requires a mighty long apprenticeship, I would have you to know; and luckily I have had it during the time I have lived in Devonshire. Were it to be left to you, I am thinking we should come by precious little else than your good intentions."

I bent my head in silence under this merited reproof. Our resolve was a brave one, for in the darkness and strangeness of the place it was not easy to carry it out. However, Cynthia, armed with my hat, if you please, was not the person to stick at trifles. She groped her way among the cows in a most valiant manner, and presently, having the good fortune to find one with a calf by its side, her task was made lighter than it might have been otherwise. I encumbered her with my assistance. The assistance in question consisted in holding the hat, while she performed the more delicate operation. And I could not help remarking that for a town miss, who in Saint James's Park or Bloomsbury had quite enough of

airs, affectation and incapacity to pass as a person of the finest *ton*, she showed a degree of aptitude quite foreign to her quality.

"It is rarely done," says I, as the hat grew weightier and weightier. "And I protest that you astonish me. It is as unmodish a performance as ever I saw. I wish some of your friends could see you now."

"Oh, Lord," says Cynthia, in great terror from beneath the udder, "I would not have them see me for the world. I vow if they did I should die of it."

"I believe you would," says I; "and I believe they would also."

Cynthia had the first drink from the hat, which, being of a good, stiff felt quality, and being pretty commodious too, for its business as you know was to enclose a great brain, it made an admirable receptacle. But to drink from it without spilling the milk was not by any means a simple performance. Great address was required, but the expert Mrs. Cynthia contrived it somehow. And when she fitted her lips to the brim, there was never a drop that left this quaint vessel but it went to its right destination.

"How warm and delicious it is!" says she, after bibbing a most immoderate quantity. "How refreshed I feel!"

Shaking with laughter, I followed her example. Yet the vigour with which I did it, combined with my clumsier masculine methods, had unfortunate consequences. I choked and sputtered and turned a good deal down my coat ere I was able to get any satisfaction out of my labours. However, when I had learned to control my impatience, and had found the true knack of drinking hot milk out of my own hat, it was almost worth enduring the pangs of so shrewd a hunger to have such an exquisite recompense. One hatful did not suffice us either. We returned to the cow again and again; and with such excellent consequences, that for the nonce, we were both strongly agreed that no meal of rare dishes served on silver with powdered servants behind our chairs had ever given us any pleasure to approach our present one. Indeed, so delicately satisfied did we feel within, and such a sense of sweet lassitude was stealing over us, as made the thoughts of our couch of straw a thousand times more delectable than any pillows and lavender sheets we had ever slept in—nay, we really marvelled that if this was a state of mind incident to a vagabond roving life, how any one could ever do aught else but adopt it? Truly it must be the ignorance of the world. People could not know of these Arcadian delights. Who would trouble else to be a peer, for ever sweating and fuming in the toils of one's position, spending one's days in contriving fresh devices for the defeat of weariness and in the excitement of new appetites? Who would game and drink every night in order to forget the *ennui* of the world, only to find day by day that instead of forgetting it, the intolerable oppression of it did increase?

After shaking down several bundles of sweet-smelling hay and making of it a rare soft bed, I was about to lie in it, when the propriety of the feminine character was most excellently manifested. With a good deal of confusion in her voice, and I'll swear in her face too, though unhappily the darkness of this far corner was so great I could not observe it, my companion intimated her modest doubts. It seemed we had not yet been through the hands of the clergyman. Be sure that this marvellously bashful proper miss did not use words of this rude character. In faith, I hardly think that she used words at all; and if she did, certainly not more than three at a time, and even they were of such a nature that taken by themselves they could have no meaning whatever. But so evident were the poor child's modest distresses, and so keen her desire not to act in anywise contrary to the conventions of that propriety in which her sex has ever been foremost, that I nearly cracked a rib with my vulgar mirth.

"So be it, Mrs. Puritan," says I. "But upon my soul more *bourgeois* reasons I never heard. 'Fore Gad, though, a most meritorious respectability."

Little Cynthia, however, was not to be smoked out of her demeanour. She persevered in it in the most straight-laced manner, and in the end I was fain to erect a barrier of hay between us, and build up a second couch for myself. Thus we might at a pinch be said to occupy separate chambers, though to be sure the partition between us was not stout enough to prevent us conversing as we lay in our separate beds. But it was little talk that passed between us. We were so delightfully weary that it began and ended in "Good-night!" The next minute an unmistakable indication came from Mrs. Cynthia's apartment, and a minute afterwards I was sunk in the honestest and therefore the most delicious sleep I had enjoyed for many a year. I neither dreamt nor wandered, but just dropt into a profound insensibility which was continued well into the daylight of the morning. This rare refreshment

was destined to end in a somewhat peremptory fashion.

I think it must have been a kick or a blow that waked me. For I came to my senses with an unnatural suddenness and a curse on my tongue. It was broad day, and the misty morning sun was struggling in through numerous chinks in the roof and walls of the hovel. A farmer with a pitchfork in his hand was standing before me. He was almost inarticulate with rage. As I opened my eyes he burst out into a violent Doric that I hope these pages are much too chaste to adequately reproduce.

"Well I nivver in all my born days," says he, stamping his feet, and then rounding his period with a most ferocious kick on my shin.

"Get up, ye impident scoundrel, and I'll beat ye to purpose so I will. In my own barn, in broad daylight too. O the impidence, the domned impidence of it!"

The kick had greatly helped me to realize the state of the case. We had been discovered by the owner of the cow-house, and he, with true British respect for the rights of property, was not unnaturally incensed that two persons were so calmly infringing them. For by this he had discovered poor little Cynthia, whom I was able to observe through the frail portion of hay between us, sitting up in her bed with a very woeful, frightened countenance.

"Whoy theer's a woman too," says the farmer. "Well if this doan't beat all I ivver heard. O you impident hussy."

"My good fellow," says I, fearing lest he should deal Cynthia a kick also, "I am afraid you are under some misapprehension in this matter. Allow me to explain."

I thought it to be an occasion when the very nicest suavity of tone and manner was required, for the consequences were like to be uncommonly ruffling else. Therefore I could not have been more careful of my courtesy had I been addressing my remarks to the King. But all I got for my pains was the sight of a great bewilderment that suddenly ran in the farmer's purple face.

"Whoy, a dom'd foreigner," says he. "That makes it wuss, an hundred times wuss, that it do. I'll give you foreigner, I will too. A foreigner in my plaace, among my cows, lying in my hay. Come out o' it and I'll break your yedd in two plazen; once for yersen, and once for t' little witch with the blue eyes. How d'ye like that, Mister Foreigner?"

Crack came the blunt end of the pitchfork at me so smartly, that it was only the fact that I was expecting some small manifestation of the kind that enabled me to get up my arm quick enough to save my head.

As my attempt at a polite argument had had such an unfortunate effect upon him, I judged that I should best serve my skin by advancing a less formal sort of rejoinder, but one that might more directly appeal to his rustic character.

"Enough of this, sir," says I, "But just lay down your pitchfork, take off your jacket and step outside, and you shall be the judge as to whether I am a foreigner, or as good an Englishman as you are yourself."

The effect upon him was excellent. His anger melted at once at this proposal, so clearly was it after his own mind.

"'Tis fair speaking anyway," says he. "I could not have spoken it better myself. Come on this way, my lad, we'll soon set this matter to rights."

Cynthia was terribly frightened. She clung to my arms, and refused to let me follow the farmer into the yard.

"Much as I admire your solicitude, my prettiness," says I, "it is most highly inconvenient. For do you not see that this is as much an affair of honour as an appointment at Lincoln's Inn Fields? Mr. Chawbacon has suffered an injury at our hands, and you who milked his cow last night should be the last to deny it. Wherefore should he not have the satisfaction that he desires? You would not, I am sure, have me put off my gentility now that I cease to wear its livery. It is the only reparation that I can make to Mr. Chawbacon, and if I denied it to the honest fellow I should cease to respect myself."

Poor little Cynthia having no substantial argument to advance against this—indeed how could she have?—had recourse to a flood of tears, at once the most natural, formidable and convincing one her sex can set up. But greatly as her behaviour embarrassed me, I was committed with the farmer, and I have such an instinct in these matters, that notwithstanding Cynthia's very real distress, I could not possibly have backed out of my position with any shred of credit. Therefore taking off my great-coat I bade the poor frightened child wrap herself in it up to her ears and to stay where she was, that she might neither hear nor observe that which was going forward. She obeyed me in this, and lay

sobbing softly to herself while I went forth to do battle with my friend the farmer.

On stepping out of the hovel into the yard I found my antagonist was surrounded by three or four of the farm yokels, and moreover was stripped to the waist. To judge by his expression he was plainly animated by the highest intentions towards me, and was prepared to give quite as much or even more than he was likely to receive.

"Now then, my lad," he says briskly, "I'm a-going to do as well by you as Tench did last week by the Fightin' Tinman. Now then, Joe Barker, and you, Bill Blagg, come on with them there pails and moppses."

To my infinite delight I saw that the two children of the soil in question were bearing two buckets of water towards us with a sponge floating on the top of each.

"We can't have this done in due and proper form according to the reggerlations," says this sportsman of a farmer in an apologetic voice, "because you see we've got no judge, and none o' these men o' mine could be trusted with the dooties. I wish Squire was here, I do so. We *could* have it all done proper then accordin' to the reggerlations. Squire was Tench's backer down Putney way last week, and knows all the reggerlations off by heart, does Squire. He only lives just across the road, and if you'll wait a minute I'll have him fetched."

"No, my good man," says I hastily, "we'll have no squires if you please. We can trust one another, I suppose. Let me suggest that a knock-down ends the round, and that we set-to again when we feel able."

"That seems fair," says the farmer. "But I should a-liked Squire to ha' been here all the same, and I'm thinking he'd a-liked to ha' been here too. He's the best sporting man in Surrey, is the Squire, and fair death on the reggerlations."

Having fixed up all the preliminaries of an encounter in this expeditious fashion, I proceeded to prepare for the fray. I imitated the farmer's excellent example, divested myself of coat, waistcoat and shirt, and bound up my breeches with a leathern belt I was able to borrow from a flattered and delighted yokel. It was in this negligent attire that I regarded my antagonist, and devoutly hoped the while that my little Cynthia was still sobbing among the hay in the hovel.

CHAPTER V

I VINDICATE THE NATIONAL CHARACTER

The farmer held out his hand with a grin, but quite in the approved manner, and I seized the occasion of shaking it briefly to run over his points. He was extremely broad: a hard-looking, powerful fellow, apparently capable of taking a deal of punishment. But his years were against him. He was considerably on the wrong side of fifty to judge by his looks, and in height I had the advantage of a full four inches. To judge by the attitude in which he set himself, I doubted whether, whatever his experience of these encounters, he had much science to recommend him. For myself I must confess I was hugely delighted with the whole thing, and entered into it with the spirit of a boy. A match or a contest or a wager of any kind has ever been peculiarly acceptable to me. Indeed was it not this fondness, amounting almost to a passion, that had so largely contributed to my present position? I had always, I think, been pretty ready with my hands; had had some little practice in night affrays with footpads and persons of that kidney; had witnessed more than one set-to in the ring; whilst as for the matter of science, I had in my younger days taken so keen an interest in this invaluable art, as to put myself under the tutelage of acknowledged masters of it. Therefore I was not without a certain confidence in myself, although there was a grim determination about the mien and air of the farmer that was not to be despised. He was unmistakably game and full of the true fighting instinct, but his years were no friends of his intrepidity.

Disregarding all subtleties and finesse, as well became his blunt, rustical, honest character, we had no sooner greeted one another and got our hands up, than the farmer came at me both hands pell-mell, with his head down, like a bull at a gate. His onset was so fierce and sudden, that I was by no means prepared to receive it, and he had me at a decided disadvantage. He had rained in a full dozen of short-armed blows, right and left, left and right at my face, at my ribs, at my chest, ere I could even so much as find my fighting legs, or bring into action any little skill that I might possess. My long-unpractised ward could not prevail at all against such an onslaught. I received half-parried blows on the mouth, which cut my lip and broke a tooth, on the right eye which partially closed it up, and a full one in the ribs. This last was the worst of all, as for a time it deprived me somewhat of my wind and made me sob to catch my breath. And while I was meeting with these misfortunes, the bystanding yokels, whose sympathies were all on one side and that not mine, as you may suppose, were dancing with delight, and shrieking their hoarse encouragement.

"Go it, varmer. Give un pepper, give un snuff!"

However, by this I had pulled myself together somewhat, and had found a means of coping with this hand-over-hand style of fighting. There was plenty of room to dodge in. This I began to make use of. Indeed it was the only chance I had of protecting myself, for I was quite incapable of standing up to the farmer's terrible blows. But as soon as I could find myself sufficiently to begin dancing out of his reach, the game turned at once in my favour. There was devil a bit of guile or finesse in the heart of my honest adversary. The moment I gave ground, he pursued me, hitting the air. Happily for me he was much too slow and heavy in this kind of warfare ever to get his knuckles near the place he desired.

In a little while his great jowl grew inflamed, the sweat poured off his forehead into his eyes, his breath came short and thick, and his hitting grew gradually weaker and less sustained. It was not yet that I went in, however. I continued to prance round and round him, there being plenty of room in which to do so; and at every futile blow he grew more unsteady. But all this while I had a keen eye for my opportunity. It was coming slowly but surely, for I was well enough versed in the matter to know better than to go so much as an inch to meet it. I waited then with a wary patience, sometimes letting him get nearer than I need have done to encourage him in his course. Not that this was necessary, for the old fellow was as game as any pet of the "fancy" that ever buffed in the ring. But not again did I allow him to get his "ten commandments" home on me; I had had enough of that. And at last having allowed him to spend himself entirely, I quickly selected the moment of my advantage, even deliberated on it to make quite sure, and then stiffened every muscle into trim. I made a pretence of closing up with him. This had the effect of luring him into another futile rush. As he came hitting blindly, I feinted, and as he went past, my right went out at the most correct fraction of an instant, and down went the gallant farmer into the muck of his own barton. The Fighting Tinker himself could not have done it more neatly,

I'll vow. But the old fellow was of a rare British mettle. He was no sooner down than he was up again. Apparently he was ashamed to be seen in such a humiliating posture.

I, for my part, had barely time to wipe away the blood that was oozing from my broken lip, ere the farmer was up and at me again. But I was not to be caught napping a second time. By this I was perfectly calm and sure of myself, for I felt that I enjoyed a command of the methods that were likely to bring me success. Instead of dodging from my opponent on this occasion I allowed him to come right up and literally hurl himself on his own undoing. For again at the exact instant I got a beautiful lead on to his point, and stunned as much by the unexpected check to his own impetus as by the blow itself, he fell flat on his back. This time he lay half stunned. He made several attempts to rise immediately, but was quite unable to do so.

Seeing him to be somewhat the worse, his yokels ran to him, whilst I went too, and rendered him all the assistance that lay in my power. He lay puffing and panting in the mire of the yard, half-dazed by his disaster, otherwise apparently not a penny the worse. He was still full of fighting courage; but unfortunately he lay as weak as a child from the shock of the blow and the fall. Strive as he might he was quite unable to rise. His yokels of course were at a loss to know what to do in the circumstances, but I did what I could by propping his head on my knee, and dispatching one of the men to the house for some brandy. And at this moment who should arrive but little Cynthia with a very white face indeed, and in such a quiver of distress as plainly said that she had witnessed the whole affair from the seclusion of the cowhouse.

"Oh," says she, taking charge of the farmer at once, and sponging his face and his breast with the cold water, "you are neither of you killed, I hope. Oh, you pair of ruffian wretches! Have you much pain, poor farmer? Lean your head on Jack, and take things gently a little. And do you, What's-your-name? bring his coat and put over the poor man's shoulders."

While these delicate attentions were going forward, my sturdy adversary was recovering remarkably.

"I'm all right, my wench," says he. "But I'm dom'd if I can stand up again, much as I should like. Your mate's done me fair for once, and I can tell you he's the only man hereabouts that ivver gave Joe Headish his bellyful. Dom'd if I don't go at 'im again. Here, let be; let me get up."

By a sudden effort he tried to rise, but immediately fell back again in a still more dilapidated state. But the arrival of the brandy did a good deal to restore him, and a little afterwards he was on his legs. Feeling himself in no condition to continue, reluctant as he was to admit the fact, he held out his hand, and we both subscribed to the articles of peace.

By the time I had donned my clothes in the seclusion of the hovel, and had emerged forth again in all the respectability of my great-coat, coat, waistcoat, and shirt, the farmer was thoroughly recovered and talking to Cynthia in the most friendly spirit. At my appearance, says he:

"I don't know who you are, young man; I don't know you from Adam, that I don't, but I respect you. You're of the right stuff, my lad, and pretty handy with your mauleys. I ax pardon for calling you a foreigner. Whatever part you come from, and whatever your occipation may be, dom'd if you're not as true-blood an Englishman as I am mysen. And I don't care who hears me say it."

"I thank you, sir," says I gravely. "But I am sure the apology should come from me. I on my side ask your pardon for using your cowhouse and using your milk in the small hours of the morning."

"Don't name it," says the farmer. "You're quite welcome to the best I've got. And dom me if it comes to that you shall have it too. You come along with me, and bring the little wench as well. Purty a little wench as ivver I see, she is so!"

I suppose it was the rudest and coarsest invitation either of us had ever had in our lives, but it was certainly the heartiest; and this I'll vow, there never was an invitation in this world more promptly and thankfully accepted. Indeed at the first hint of it our hearts almost leapt with joy, and then a tear sparkled in Cynthia's eyes as she curtsied to the farmer. It was really fine to observe the behaviour of the honest fellow. There was not a spark of animosity in him. He had arbitrated on the merits of the case in his own fashion, and he now acquiesced in the result with the same game spirit with which he had arrived at it. And I am perfectly certain for my part that there was more wisdom in the man's instincts of justice than may at the first sight appear. If all the world would recognize his as the accepted manner of adjudicating on its private and

individual grievances, it would be found the best method, the one least likely to breed bad blood, and the one most calculated to engender a mutual respect in the parties concerned. And now having delivered this superior sentiment as a sort of grace before meat, let us follow our good farmer to his dwelling with the cheerful expedition that we did on the occasion itself.

The excellent man, although evidently puzzled as to who we might be—our mode of life was certainly such as to justify his gravest suspicions—was at great pains to conceal any doubts of our character and occupation that he might entertain. But the moment we entered the ample food-smelling kitchen of the farm, the ceiling hung if you please with hams, a rare dish of bacon frizzling before the fire, and a breakfast table that to our charmed eyes was almost overborne with good homely and appetizing things, we had to run the gauntlet of the farmer's wife. She was a little, keen-featured, hard-faced woman, with, as we were soon to discover, the devil of a sharp tongue. She ruffled her feathers as soon as she saw us.

"Lork-a-mercy!" says she, "I didn't know, Joseph, as 'ow you was a-bringing of company to breakfast."

"I didn't know mysen," says Joseph complacently. Then followed a moment of embarrassment. It was plainly the good man's duty to present us to his wife. She very properly expected it of him. But as in his own phrase he did not know us from Adam himself, he was at a loss to know in what terms to represent us. Nor did the pause that ensued help matters at all. The farmer's wife had from the first, as her manner showed, been by no means disposed to view us favourably. There was evidently something in our appearance that had caused her to take a strong prejudice against us. One cannot be surprised that this was the case, however, seeing that we were both unwashed, and as unkempt as we possibly could be, whilst to add a final touch to the picture we presented, I was embellished with a puffy and discoloured eye, and a bloodied lip. These misfortunes, when her good man had made appearances ten times more unfortunate by his hesitation, his wife was only too ready to take as a confirmation of her suspicions. We were a pair of worthless persons, and Joseph was unable to account for the sudden impulse that had led him to bring us into that respectable abode. For if we were persons of some credit, why did not Joseph say so at once? His wife sniffed, and after gazing at us in a most disconcerting manner, was moved to say:

"Joseph, I'm surprised at you. I'll have no wicked vagabond play-actors here. I've always done my best to keep this house respectable, and, please God, it shall always be so. How dare you bring such people here? I'll be bound you found them sleeping in your barn, and then, soft-hearted fool that you are, you bring them in to breakfast. Oh, I know; you can't deceive me. It is not enough then that they should trespass on your premises, lie on your hay, and rob your hen-roosts, but you must encourage 'em in it into the bargain, and bring them into this clean, wholesome kitchen that you know I've always took such a pride in."

The farmer turned as red as a cabbage. In his heart he was bound to admit that every word his wife uttered was true in substance. But he was a very honest fellow; and though he might feel that he was greatly to blame for taking a couple of vagrants so much under his wing, he was not the man to go back on his hospitality. He stood by us nobly.

"Wife," says he, "what words be these? If I choose to ask a lady and gentleman to come and sit at table with me, shall my own wife insult them lo their faces?"

"Lady and gentleman!" says the redoubtable wife. "A pretty sort of lady and gentleman, ain't they? A brazen madam with a hat on. Oh, and curls too! Lord, look at her! If she's not a play-actress I've never seen one. And what a bully of a rogue she has got with her, too. Hath he not the very visnomy of a footpad? He's lately escaped from Newgate Gaol, I'll take my oath on't."

There could be no doubt that this good lady was blest with a tongue of the sharpest kind. Her husband was terribly put out by it. Poor little Cynthia was, too. For all her high breeding and her modish London insolence, which in circumstances favourable to it was wont to sit so charmingly upon her, she could hardly restrain her tears. I suppose it is that a woman can never bear to be ridiculed, or abused, or put in a false position. The poor child trembled and clung to my arm, while her face grew pink and white by turns.

"Oh, Jack," she whispered, "do say something that will put us right. Tell them who we are. I cannot bear to be spoken to like this."

"You surely would not have me spoil the comedy just now?" says I. "I am enjoying it vastly."

In sooth I was. I dare say it is that I am always keenly alive to these odd passages in life, and that I am more prone to seize the whimsicality of a matter than is a person of a better gravity. I vow it was finer than a play to me to witness a highly rustical farmer and his spouse violently quarrelling because Mr. Chawbacon had degraded his rural abode by bringing a duke's daughter into it. And here was the storm growing shriller, the farmer redder and angrier, and poor little Cynthia ready to faint with the humiliation of it all.

The state of the case was not improved when the farmer turned his back on his wife in the middle of her invective. And doubtless to define his opinion of her behaviour and to show that he was determined to stand by us, come what might, he very civilly asked us whether we would care to have some hot water from the kettle and go upstairs and perform our ablutions. You may guess with what alacrity we accepted this invitation; indeed nothing could have better accorded with our needs and our wishes. But no sooner had the farmer spoken to this tenor than Mistress Headish broke out shriller than before:

"What can you be thinking of, Joseph Headish?" says she. "Do you think I would trust two such rapscallion persons out of my sight in our clean upper chambers, and so many things to tempt their honesty in them, too? No; if they want to wash themselves, they must do it at the pump in the yard, as their betters have had to do often enough. And why people like that, leading the vagrant, masterless life they do, should require to wash themselves at all, I don't know. And as you have promised them a bite to eat, they shall have it, after they have washed themselves. But not in my nice clean kitchen. I'll send 'em out half a loaf of bread and a piece of cold bacon, and a mug of my good October ale, and they can take it sitting on the pump, and think themselves lucky to get it too."

"Peace, woman," says the farmer, in a voice of such dudgeon as did him the highest credit. "Are you the master in this house, or am I?"

To emphasize the inquiry he brought his hand down with such a force upon the breakfast-table as set the dishes rattling; whilst he indicated the answer by peremptorily bidding us follow him upstairs. This we were in something of a hurry to do, and we soon found ourselves in a spacious bed-chamber, which smelt of cleanliness to such an extent that, knowing how very ill our own persons must consort with it, we began to feel that the farmer's wife was justified of her grievances. That worthy shrew, having thoroughly aroused her honest husband, did not think fit to interpose any active resistance to his commands, but contented herself by staying below, and in delivering a shrill monologue from the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER VI

CONTAINS A FEW TRITE UTTERANCES ON THE GENTLE PASSION

We had to wait a minute for the hot water and fresh towels which our host had had the forethought to order for us. These were presently brought by a strapping servant lass, whose ill-repressed grins proved that she had been a spectator of these incidents. While we waited, the good man's apologies for his wife were truly comic. He chivalrously made it clear to us that her defects sprang from the very excess of excellencies in her character.

"A notable good woman," says he, while her voice continued to shrill up the stairs. "A fine, honest, energetic woman—a woman in a thousand. Always strivin', savin', and cleanin' she is, the very model of what a housewife should be. If she's got a fault, it is her over-anxiousness. She will look on the dark side of things; and she's that dreadful suspicious, all in the interest of her household, that if a stranger is seen with his head over the fence, she can't sleep for a week after it, being so certain in her mind that the hayricks are going to be fired, the stock taken, the farmstead broken into, and our throats cut as we lie in bed. But I know you'll overlook it; she don't mean nothing by it, as you can see with half an eye. She's a rare good woman as ivver I see; it's only her worritin' frettishness for the welfare o' the farm; you do understand that, don't you?"

"Perfectly," we said together, an assurance that relieved the good man mightily.

"You know, what upsets her most," says he, "is that I can't put a name to ye. For myself, although I came by you promiscuous like at the onset, I likes you and I believes in you. I think you're the right sort, only a bit down in the world. But of course she don't know that. She's not seen you use your ten commandments, young man; and she don't know what pretty little ways your nice little wife 'ave." Cynthia blushed such a brilliant colour at this complimentary reference that the farmer paused to chuckle. "Begs your pardon, I'm sure, my dear," says he, "if I've put my big foot in it. Not his wife. Well, well, I thinks none the worse o' 'im for that, I don't; but if I was you I would not let the mistress know it. Her virtue makes her that disagreeable sometimes as you wouldn't believe. Now if you can give me a name by which I can introjuice you by, fair and square, as though you was friends o' mine, it'll make things easier, do you see, when we sits down to breakfast."

"Well," says I, "since you ask it of us, this lady is the Lady Cynthia Carew, daughter to the Duke of Salop, and you can call me the Earl of Tiverton."

Instead of betraying any surprise at finding us in the possession of dignities which, to say the least, he could not have expected us to enjoy, the farmer betrayed not a whit of it, but broke into a fit of laughter and clapped me upon the shoulder.

"Oh, if it comes to that," says he, "you can call me the Cham of Tartary and my old missis the Queen of Sheba."

Nor would he, in spite of the solemn assurances that I rather delighted to give him, be convinced of our true condition.

"No, my lad," says he, still laughing at the humour of it, "you may be pretty handy with your mauleys, and I would be the last to be denying that, but you're no more the pattern of a nobleman than I am. You should try this game on with a greener chap than me. You must not think because I'm a plain farmer that I can't recognize the real slap-up nobility when I meets them. Now if you allowed yourself to be some sturdy vagabond that's too idle to work for his livelihood, or a strolling actor that is a peddling along the country with his puppet-show, or an incorrigible rogue that's lately out of the stocks for robbing hen-roosts, and was lying last night in my cowhouse to take more than his lodging, I wouldn't disbelieve you. But an earl!—no, you've overshot the mark a bit, my lad. Say a bart now—be satisfied with just a blessed bart—and we'll let it pass at that."

"No, rat me if I will," says I, pretending to be angry. "I'll have my earldom, or I'll have nothing at all."

"But surely a bart's good enough for anybody," says the farmer, fully entering, as he supposed, into the humour of the thing. "Why, I wouldn't mind being a bart mysen. Come, let it go at a bart, my lad. Yes, I'll pass you at a bart out of respect for your fisticuffs, but between you and me I don't think my old mis'ess will."

"No," says I, "'od's blood! I will not be a bart as you call it. I will be the Right Honourable Anthony Gervas John Plowden-Pleydell, Fifth Earl of Tiverton, Knight of the Most Noble Order of the Garter, or I will be nothing at all."

"Very well, then," says the farmer perfunctorily, "since that is your humour, we'll have it at that. But wait till I announce your title to my old mis'ess, and hear what she's got to say about it. And this little wench—pretty little wench, I'll allow—she's daughter to my lord the Duke of who?"

"To my lord the Duke of Salop," says I, importantly, dwelling on each syllable of her title for the jest's sake, "and you can call her my Lady Cynthia Mary Jane Carew."

"Dom'd if I don't then," says he. "And here come the clean clouts and the warm water. Here, Jenny, put them down there for his lordship and her ladyship. And we'll leave his lordship and her ladyship to do their dressing, and then they'll please condescend to honour our humble meal. Now, then, my girl, off with you below; and how dare you have the impertinence to stand grinning there like a Cheshire cat, before my lord and my lady, too!"

With a great guffaw for the honour of his own wit, the farmer left us to our much-needed toilets. The reflections with which we made them would have served a philosopher of the kidney of my grandfather, for instance, for a monstrous fine homily on the true value of rank and title. What were they worth when enclosed in a suit of homespun? They required all the appurtenances with which they are hedged about in the public mind to be of any value whatever. It seemed that a lord derived the consideration of the world from his silk stockings and the congees of his servants—not from any intrinsic merits within himself; and it was with this trite reflection that I looked in the hand-glass, and smiled in something of a cynical manner at the unredeemed villainy of the countenance that I found there. A lively scrubbing did a little for it, it is true, but that could not obliterate the traces of my recent bout with the farmer, nor the growth of beard upon my chin, nor enhance the rude, ill-fitting clothes in which my friend the Jew had, as it seemed, so effectually disguised me. Cynthia, however, who had the true feminine ingenuity in these matters, having washed her face and trimmed up her curls a little—Lord knows how!—contrived to make a very much better appearance in the role of the duke's daughter than ever I was like to do in that of the noble wearer of the Order of the Garter. When we were sufficiently furbished to think of going down to that delicious meal, in which the greater part of our thoughts were centred, says I as we descended:

"Remember now, we are under no alias whatever. I am my lord, and you are my lady."

"But surely," says Cynthia, who in so many ways had the true feminine imperviousness to the whimsicality of things, "is this not the very height of imprudency? If we leave evidences behind us at every place at which we tarry we shall be certainly taken in three days."

"Rest content," says I, "they will never inquire in out-of-the-way places of this sort. In dangerous places we can still be incognito. But do you not see the cream of this affair is that our real names are the best disguises we can wish to have? We are far less likely to be recognized by them than any we might adopt."

It was with this conviction that we came in to breakfast, and confronted the farmer and his wife. Determined to play up to my part, I bowed to the farmer's wife with a most sweeping air, as though she were a woman of the first fashion, and I made her as gracious a speech as I could possibly make. There were a thousand apologies in it, and a great many compliments to her, her husband, her kitchen, and more sincerely, the hot meal we were dying to partake of. I did it with all the breeding I could summon, and to see such ceremony issuing from so common not to say low a person, dumbfounded the good wife so completely, that even her powers of speech forsook her. She blinked, and nodded her head, and fidgeted this way and that; and when little Cynthia, taking her cue from me, curtsied to her with the best grace of a lady-in-waiting to her most gracious Majesty, as indeed the naughty miss was destined to be, the poor goodwife was so taken by confusion that she trod on the cat, and the cat I doubt not would have knocked over the dish of bacon on the hearth in its fright, had not I, in anticipation of some such disaster, very gallantly interposed between them.

The farmer himself, although equally at a loss to reconcile our manners with our appearance and presence in that place, was evidently too much of a lover of his joke to let the occasion pass.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, wife," says he, "that these are a lady and gentleman of the first nobility. You would run on so when they first came in that you gave me no chance of saying who they were. Just tell the mis'ess, my lord, who your lordship and her ladyship may be, for I domm'd if I don't forget."

This I did with a good deal of unction, for seeing what a comic effect our manners had had on the good woman, our names in all probability would have one still more singular. This proved to be the case, for no sooner had I, with much apologetic modesty for the circumstances which had impelled me to it, played the herald to my fair companion and myself, than our hostess became the victim of an even more remarkable nervousness, and grew as apologetic on her part as she had been cross-grained before.

"La," says she, "I can never forgive my husband for not having told me. To think you should honour us by sitting down in our humble farm-kitchen to our humble fare, and you should be treated so unseemly! But it is so like my husband not to have told me. La, will your lordship have ale, or does your lordship prefer to take a little claret-wine of a morning? We have it, although it is not on the table. Jenny, go this minute and fetch the claret-wine for his lordship."

It seemed that our hostess having got over the first shock of our identity, proposed to match our breeding with some of her own. She began to use a high clipping tone that she evidently kept for company, and became so assiduous in the attentions she paid us, and so heedful of our wants, that we profited vastly by her credulity, if that is the right name to apply to it. Her husband, however, was not so lightly to be imposed upon, as he was at pains to show. At every polite effort put forward by his wife, he counteracted it by a wink or a cough, or a chuckle, or a snigger. And he put the handles to our names in such a voice of banter as greatly distressed his wife, who continued to overpower us with her civilities. At last, says she:

"Your lordship and your ladyship must really excuse my husband. He is a very good honest man to be sure," here she sank her voice to a mysterious whisper, "but he is a little vulgar and low-bred in these things, although," with a still lower voice and more mystery, "I would not have him hear me say it for the world. You see he is not come of so good a family as I am. His folk were a little vulgar and low-bred too, and people said at the time that for all his farm and his prize heifers it was the last thing to be expected that a person like me would ever marry him. Ah, well, I suppose it is always a mistake to marry out of one's station, although to be sure no one could have a kinder, better husband. But your lordship and your ladyship follow me, do you not? He almost makes me blush for his manners, that he do."

"My dear madam," says I, "I am sure we both feel for you from the bottom of our hearts, and understand the occasion perfectly."

And could there have been a prettier comedy? First we had had the husband apologizing for the wife, and now we had the wife apologizing for the husband. Lord knows whether she allowed us to be what we were or not, but she certainly entertained us to a royal breakfast. Two famished people never sat down to a finer meal in this world than the one we partook of. And when we left our honest but wonderfully ill-assorted host and hostess, about nine of the clock in the morning to continue on our way, we were most handsomely fortified in mind and body.

As we passed from the farmyard and struck into the fields the sun was showing handsomely, and the thrushes were singing their lusty notes. It was as fine a spring morning as the heart could desire. The virginal airs played on our faces; the birds called to one another from hedge to tree; the little lambs frisked among the white daisies in the meads, as hand-in-hand we took our way again. We still had no clear idea as to whither we were going. But we were mightily content wherever our way might lead. The sense we had of our liberty was a something we had never tasted before. Had we not cast off the trammels of the world? We could begin life again; and be whom we chose. We were a pair of unknown persons, moving among unknown people in unknown places. Every hour we passed in these solitudes of nature had something of the glamour of romance invested in it. For we did not know how our next meal would be come by, or what would be the next shelter for our weary heads when nightfall overtook us. But we cared not. We were in the crisp, free, open air, snuffing the sunshine, and trampling across a carpet of flowers over hill and dale, while the spring birds sang.

I think we were too desperately happy to talk much. Cynthia was radiant, and as light of foot and heart as the birds that called to us from

the green hedges. The words of an appropriate ballad were on her lips:

When Strephon wooed his Chloe dear,
All in the springtime of the year.

And I took the infection of her spirits also, I was sensible, ere we had walked a mile, of a frank, jovial, devil-may-care lightheartedness, not so fresh and buoyant as my little one's perhaps, since I had lived a little longer, had therefore had the brightness of my youth more overlaid with the rust of the world, and had a greater weight of responsibility, more particularly for her, upon my shoulders. It was little I felt it, however. For suddenly as we walked in these sweet fields, an idea was born in my mind that banished everything except the thrill of joy it brought.

"My prettiness," says I, "we could not wish for a perfecter wedding morning."

"That we could not," says she, so promptly that it struck me she had been expecting some such suggestion from me. Her blushes were adorable, it is true, but I believe they were more a matter of instinct than the offspring of any particular commotion in her bosom.

"Wilt marry me, pretty one," says I, "at the first church we come to, that hath a snug parsonage sitting in honeysuckle beside it?"

"Ay, that I will," says she, cocking up her thin with an archness of invitation that was not to be denied.

I suppose it was that the adventures we had already had together had given us the most perfect understanding of one another. There was a feeling of proprietorship between us; and had not each given up everything in life for the other's sake?

"My dear," says I, feeling that a little sentiment would not come amiss this rare spring morning, "I hope you have realized what I have to offer you. I have but my blasted reputation, my destitute condition, my debts, my crimes, my prostituted name. This is all the estate that a very humble, constant heart is endowed with."

"They will serve," says Cynthia simply. "If you were the wickedest man in England, and by your own account you are not far removed from that state, it would be the same. It is not for what you be that I like you; it is for what I think you to be."

"If it comes to that," says I, "I don't suppose it is me at all you care for. It is not myself you are in love with, nor my virtues, nor my vices, nor my hair, my eyes, my clothes, my understanding, nor anything that is mine. You are at that romantical instant of your womanhood when you have fallen in love with the name of love. If instead of a man I were a tame white mouse, or a bob-tailed rabbit, or a bull-calf you would invest me with all the pretty fancies that are running in your head, so that the reflection in your mind would yet be the one that you most wished to see. But a truce to philosophy, let us to church."

Cynthia was so evidently of my mind in this last particular that she laughed, and resumed the singing of her ballad, as we strode out the brisker for our intercourse.

CHAPTER VII

AN INSTRUCTIVE CHAPTER; IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT IF A LITTLE LEARNING IS DANGEROUS, MUCH MAY BE CALAMITOUS.

As we took our way through the grass of a most charming flower-coated country, there was a kind of rivalry between us as to who should be the first to spy a church. The honour of doing so had not fallen to either of us, when Cynthia suddenly darted from the path to pick some white violets out of a hedge.

"Why," says she, in the delight of finding them, "we will make ourselves a posy apiece to carry with us to church, as it is our wedding morning. Oh, look at the marsh-marigolds at the side of the brook there!"

She gave me the violets to hold, with some injunction as to the correct manner of holding them, for my handling of them was much too crude to please her, and ran away again to fetch the pretty yellow flowers. All sorts of things she gathered for our nosegays, lady-smocks all silver white from the meadow, and daisies pied and violets blue, cowslips and even a blue-bell. Nothing would content her but that we should make them up into posies there and then; which we did, and bound them round with grasses. But hardly had we finished this pastoral employment and continued on our way, when we became the victims of a singular diversion. We passed out of one meadow over a stile into another of a similar kind. But in the second a few cows were browsing. To these we paid no heed, but walked jauntily enough through the pasture, apprehending no danger; but by the time we had come perhaps to the middle of the field we were startled by a commotion behind us. Turning round to discover whence it arose, we were horrified to find what the source of it was. A young bull with its head grounded and its tail in the air was charging down upon us. A single exclamation and a frightened instant of hesitation in which to take our bearings, and evolve a mode of escape, was all we had time for. The bull was coming so furiously that it was almost upon us, yet we were stranded full in the middle of the field, with no chance whatever of taking refuge in flight. But happily my eye lit on a tree, a sturdy young sapling a yard or two off. Thither I pushed the terrified Cynthia, and literally lifted her into one of the lower branches, whilst she, with an admirable conception of the case and how to act in it, scrambled with a mighty rending of her garments into the boughs above. I clambered after her madly, not a second too soon. The vigorous snorting young bull crashed his horns against the tree with great force. He was so near to my leg that I instinctively felt it to be gashed wide open; whilst such a mighty shake did its impact give to our place of refuge that it was indeed a mercy we were not both of us thrown on to the ground to be gored and trampled on. But despite our fright we were able to cling to the branches; and when at last I was able to get a glimpse of my leg, I found to my relief that I had been the victim of my imagination.

The bellowing beast made divers onslaughts against the bark of the tree, whilst we very fearfully hurried up higher and higher, dreading at each stroke of our enemy to feel ourselves flying through the air. Providentially, however, by clinging with rare tenacity to our vantage place we were able to maintain ourselves in the security of the highest branches of all. And presently our adversary having wreaked a good deal of his fury on the offending tree, desisted from an occupation that brought him so little profit, and having walked off a yard or two, proceeded to regard us morosely. He seemed prepared to stay in that employment too for an indefinite period. But feeling our position, snug as it was and safe for the time being, to be yet highly precarious, since the very boughs on which we sat swayed and cracked and creaked in a truly alarming fashion, I determined to play a coup, ere any melancholy thing should happen which would put it out of my power to play one.

Divesting myself with much difficulty of my cloak, although Cynthia rather audaciously, considering her own position at the time, lent me a hand, I committed that garment to her charge, and proceeded to select the most favourable moment for a speedy flight to the nearest hedge. Keeping perfectly motionless in our unhappy posture, we presently contrived to lull the unsuspecting bull into a state of quiescence which I am sure he would have been the first to admit, had he but known, the circumstances hardly warranted. For suddenly taking an advantage of his sleeping vigilance, I made a leap off the tree as far as possible from the spot on which he stood watching. It was then a case of run devil, run baker. I'm sure no poor devil ever ran more fleetly than I did then; whilst

I am equally sure that there never was a baker in this world that ran more swiftly than that roaring, rampageous bullock. Luckily for my precious bones I had a fair good start of the fellow, and the distance to the hedge was less than a hundred yards. Had it been otherwise this history had never been written else, for not for a moment do I think Cynthia would ever have troubled to write it; nor between ourselves, do I think she would ever have been capable of doing so, even had her ambition jumped in that direction. Running pell-mell, my heart beating holes in my ribs, and the clear tones of Mrs. Cynthia issuing from the topmost branches of the tree in words of lusty encouragement such as: "Bravo, lad, bravo! Mightily done!" I panted to the hedge with the bull ever at my heels, and had just the strength to take a second leap at the green brambles, and half jump, half scramble through their tenacious barriers, and so into the neighbouring field, while the bull, foiled for the second time, raged and vented his disappointment from the other side.

Meanwhile little Cynthia, with a delightful intrepidity, also took advantage of our enemy. While Mr. Bull continued to thrust his head at the hedge in his mighty rage, and roared forth his threats, high-couraged little Cynthia, if you please, very simply and dexterously dropped down my cloak out of the tree, neatly dropped down after it, and then with the most gallant coolness gathered herself up again, the cloak too, and even stayed to recover our late discarded posies, which the bull had evidently thought too mean to be worthy of his regard. With these articles tucked away in one hand, she gathered her skirts in the other, and away scudded her dainty ankles through the grass to the opposite fence. All this time the bull, foiled and nonplussed as he was, continued to fume and rush at the fence that kept him from me, but never for an instant did he guess that Cynthia was in the act of cheating him too.

Convinced by this that my little one had made good her escape, I could not restrain my joy. I began to jump and clap my hands, and bellow out hearty encouragements and applause to her across the field. This behaviour so surprised the bull, that he whisked angrily round to discover the cause of it. He beheld Cynthia in the very height of her rapid victorious transit. Away he dashed, head down, in pursuit of her, but she was much too well advanced in her flight to have any fear of him whatever. By the time he had come level with the tree, Cynthia was calmly climbing into security over the stile; and when the outwitted animal rushed up and thrust his nose over it, she tauntingly, if a trifle vain-gloriously, shook the cloak and the posies at him. Never, I think, did I see an act more neatly or more bravely performed.

When we came presently together again in the middle of an adjoining field, a sort of half-way house from where the bull had respectively left us, we were both in high feather and mightily pleased with ourselves and one another.

"I declare," says I, "that hunting the fox becomes a tame and foolish sport by comparison. In all my amusements, from cards to cudgel-playing, I was never furnished, I'll swear, with so entertaining an episode. Besides, I am vastly proud of your conduct this morning, my prettiness. Come, let us waste not a moment; I am dying to get married at once."

The deep crimson in Cynthia's cheeks, that her late eminent exertions had induced, lent her even more of an adorable appearance than even I had ever observed in her. And when she tossed me my cloak, and gravely gave one of the posies into my hands, I think I never saw the eyes of a woman beam with such mirth and high spirits. Flushed and breathless as we were, no two human persons could possibly have been happier. Already our haphazard, vagrant life had proved the antidote of that weariness of the world, that fatigue of mind and body, the chains of polite life had induced. Already we had come to take a fraternal pride, as it were, in one another. We no longer had to apprehend how we should get through the day without perishing of weariness, but rather how to pass it without perishing of hunger and violence. And we were revealing such unexpected qualities to ourselves and each other in overcoming these calamities that we were falling in love anew with our own heroic attributes, and were already prepared to vow to one another that we were a monstrous well-assorted pair. Indeed, the foolish bull had given us such a fine conceit of ourselves, that on the score of the hour of high-wrought happiness he brought us, he must, I am sure, be allowed after all to be our friend.

A good deal of walking through the blossoming fields brought us at last on to a good broad highway, and a little later having climbed up a hill, we saw from the top of it the thing we were seeking. A village nestled below, and very properly the tallest roof among the collection that

clustered there together, and by far the most imposing object of them all, was a sweet little country church, grey with age, surrounded by a low stone wall whose crannies were filled with moss. Approaching it we were overjoyed to find that a pretty little parsonage stood beside it, which in every particular matched the quaint and venerable appearance of the church itself. But no sooner had we come to the latticed gate of the parson's house than our pleasure fled suddenly away. We had been bold enough in the contemplation of the deed, and had even been disposed to treat it airily. Yet when our fingers fell on the parson's latch, we were suddenly confronted with its magnitude. We were going to be married!

Now although I had started from town not twelve hours before as cynical and desperate a character as any to be found, the humane influences that had been brought to bear upon me, even in that short period, had not been without their effect. I began to see things in their true relation once again, and even to be sensible of feelings I had so long outlived that I almost forgot that I had ever known them. For instance, the emotion of timidity that overtook me at the parson's gate, I could have sworn I had never met with before in my life. The uncomfortable sense of the bashful business to follow caused me to falter with my hand still at the latch, and to parley with Cynthia.

"I think you had better go first, my prettiness," says I seductively, "I don't doubt that you will make a better hand of it than I, and you will have a better knowledge of how to talk to the parson. I am so devilish unused to talking to parsons, d'ye see."

"Oh, yes, I quite see that," says Cynthia significantly, "and I also see that you are afraid."

"I dare say you might have shot wider of the truth," says I. "It is the first time I have been called on to smell this kind of powder, and burn me! if ever I want to be called on again."

"I hope you won't be," says Cynthia.

She herself, I must confess, was as cool as a cucumber. Her colour was a little high perhaps, and the animation in her eyes was, I think, more than usually fine. But take her altogether, she seemed to have all the calmness and assurance of an old campaigner, whilst I was wincing and starting like a raw recruit. They say that all women are alike in this. They go to church as complacently as they go to Ranelagh, and take as keen an enjoyment from the reading of the marriage service as they do in the performance of the Italian dancers at the theatre in Covent Garden. And it is said again that never a man of us all, whatever his years, disposition and ideas, comes to this ceremony but what he is beset with those same qualms that fastened upon me so unexpectedly at the parson's gate.

When we walked up the pretty garden and came to the door of the parson's house, it was Cynthia who unhesitatingly knocked upon it. But the operation had to be repeated ere it was replied to. And when at last the door was drawn back from within we were confronted by a stout, red-faced woman in a gown of printed calico. Her sleeves were rolled up above the elbow, her cap and apron were awry, and there was a look of industrious ill-temper about her that contributed nothing to our encouragement. She stuck her hands on her hips, filled the whole of the doorway with her defiant presence, very like the dragon in the fable that barred the way to the princess in the enchanted palace, and surveyed us in a grimly critical fashion from top to toe.

"Is the parson at home?" says the audacious Cynthia.

"He be!" says the woman in a loud, harsh voice.

"We wish to see him then, if you please," says Cynthia.

"What might your business be?" says the woman, looking us all over with a really disconcerting keenness.

"I think we must explain that to the parson himself," says Cynthia.

"Then I think you will not then," says the woman, mighty uncivilly. "I've formed my own opinion of you. You shall not see the master, not if I know it. He's got such a character for softness of heart all about the countryside that you vagrant beggars come for miles to get what you can out of him. It's mortal lucky he's got me to look after him, or he would have given away the shirt off his back this many a year ago."

It was impossible to deny that the good woman's estimate of our station and business was shrewd enough. We were certainly a pair of vagrants, if ever there was a pair in the world, and were certainly come to get something of the parson that we had no means of requiting him for. And I am sure neither of us, singly or together, would have stood a chance of melting that adamantine bosom, since everything we said seemed more clearly to reveal our humble not to say destitute condition; indeed we had come to the point where this clergyman's

uncompromising guardian was about to bang the door in our faces, when the parson himself made a very welcome intervention.

He came shuffling along the path from some remote part of the vicarage garden, in a pair of old down-trodden carpet slippers, wearing over an old-fashioned wig a beaver grotesquely battered and green with age. His cassock hung in tatters at his heels, and he made about as unkempt and disreputable a figure of a clergyman as it was possible to conceive. Besides, he was a very small and insignificant rat of a fellow, and had a strange odd way of peering through his horn spectacles. But the moment he began to speak such a pleasant twinkle of courtesy came into his ugly countenance—by itself it was plain to the point of ugliness, although to this day Cynthia will never allow it to be so—and his voice was so wondrous musical, that straightway we forgot that he had such a singular appearance, and fell in love with him.

"A very good morning to you," says he. "I hope you are drinking in this golden morning that God hath sent us. Hey, what a thing it is to be a human being!"

As he came up and observed Cynthia more closely, he, bowed with a wonderful grave dignity, and took off his hat with a flourish that became him most inimitably well. Such courtesy from an appearance so discourteous never was seen.

"La, master, what be you at?" says the woman, highly scandalized by so polite a demeanour. "Do you not see these are an arrant pair of vagrant beggars? I must get you more artful spectacles if you will stay so close at your book-reading."

"Peace, my good Blodgett," says the parson. "Do you think I do not know breeding when I see it? It is a rare possession that nothing can disguise. There is sensibility here, in this fair countenance, and pride and candour, and the features are almost highly classical in their outline. A little too full in the lips perhaps, yes, I think a little too full, or this would have been the countenance of Minerva with the animation of Diana in it. I must remind you again, my good Blodgett, that appearances are apt to deceive; *non semper ea sunt quæ videntur*, as the excellent Phædrus has so wisely said. You will do me the honour, I hope, my dear young lady, of entering my house and partaking of a glass of my gooseberry-wine and of eating a piece of Banbury cake. And you, sir, also, I hope and trust; although in your case the credentials you bear in your countenance are nothing like so noteworthy. But as Plautus very pertinently asks, *non soles respicere te*, to look at oneself ere one abuses another, the less said the sooner we shall mend it, *tulum silentii præmium*. Come this way, I beg you."

During this peroration poor Blodgett wrung her hands and shook her head, and kept repeating some such mystical phrase as:

"He is off at the top again! He is off at the top again!"

However, this strange old parson, all unconscious of the distress of mind he was occasioning his handmaid or housekeeper, or whatever she might call herself, flowed on and on in his extraordinary monologue, and led us indoors into a spacious room full of a remarkable disorder of books, which doubtless composed his library. Books open and shut, piled up and overlaid, were on the table, and under the table, on the chairs, and on the floor. Any square inch of space wherein a book might insinuate itself, there was a book to be found. Dusty, black-letter, grimy Aldine, foxed Elzevir, any folio, quarto, or octavo, providing it was old enough and dirty enough, was assembled there. Those that lay open seemed to be annotated and scored under, and embellished with marginal notes in a delicate minute handwriting, on every page. And among all these tomes there was never a one that was in a new dress, or done in a reasonable easy print, nor one written by a reasonably modern author. To observe the *Paradise Lost*, with the imprint of Jacob Tonson upon it, was to be startled with that sense of gratified surprise that one would experience at unexpectedly meeting with a personal friend in a foreign country.

The parson was an odd match to his books. His conversation was as musty, learned and interminable as themselves. He talked of all topics but those that could have been of the least interest to anybody. He never thought to ask who we were, or what business had brought us thither, but having lured us into his library, he very vigorously began to engage us with matters at least a thousand years old. We were very polite at first, and nodded our heads in deep interest at the mention of the first Punic war, and kept saying, "Ah, to be sure!" and inserting "yes" and "oh yes" whenever we found half a chance to get in so much in the middle of some animadversions he thought fit to make on the behaviour of the Carthaginians generally. But when proceeding to move with an air of

great mystery and consequence to topics of the most inconsequent character, and presently to prove to us that in his opinion the battle of Cannæ, or it may have been Marathon, or the siege of Troy for aught we knew or cared, was not so important and decisive an affair as the historians of these times had represented, our observance of a polite interest showed signs of giving out.

We might shuffle, however, and shift our stations, and cough, and take our weight off our right leg and lean it on our left, but it never made one bit of difference to this terrible monologue. The old parson, with his eyes half closed and his hands spread forth, poured out the finest prose in his mellifluous voice, with every period rounded to such a perfection that had he been a historian and his speech a printed page the world could never have sufficiently admired his attainments. And every emphasis and quantity seemed so indubitably exact in the classical tongues he so freely quoted, as must have made him the envy of pedagogues and the paragon among them all. And all this time we were striving to maintain our well-bred interest as best we might, and inwardly cursed Rome and Greece and the whole race of poets, historians and soldiers that ever sprang from them.

His mind was filled with a vast deal of knowledge of a recondite sort. It could have been of no possible service to anybody, least of all to himself. Yet he moved lightly and easily from one antediluvian topic to others more antediluvian still. He was armed with a great array of theories of no moment at all, and a matchless sheaf of facts that proved and disproved and proved them over again. How weary we became! How we fidgeted and looked at one another in our despair, for he grew more minute as he proceeded, and called up, extempore, authority upon authority to show that Lais was a woman of virtue, and that Virgil did not write his own works. He split straws with Aristotle, and picked holes in his Ethics. He said that Cicero was a windbag, and that Plato was a dunce. He said that Herodotus was loose in his facts, and no more worthy of credence than Plutarch, and that Plutarch was not a whit better than Herodotus neither. He said that Homer was the biggest impostor in history. He had nothing to do with the *Iliad*, whilst as for the *Odyssey*, he had long come at the truth that it was by a female hand, most probably one of the Hesperides, though to be sure he had not quite satisfied himself as to which, just as the plays of the poet Shakespeare would one day be allowed to be the handiwork of Lord Bacon, the eminent lawyer and philosopher; and again, as the world, purblind as it was, would one day discover that Mr. Fielding's so-called novel of *Joseph Andrews* had sprung from the fertile brain of Mr. Colley Gibber. Indeed I was so fearful lest he should take steps to disprove my grandfather's claims to have produced his celebrated Commentary on the *Analects of Confucius*, that I became quite desperate, and determined to put a stop to the unceasing current of his talk, even at the risk of making a hole in my good manners. Having reached a point in his discourse wherein he showed that Cæsar did not cross the Rubicon, I slapped my hand on the table with a vigour that knocked down half-a-score of tomes and startled everything and everybody but the speaker himself; and, says I, at the top of my heartiest voice:

"I quite agree with you there, sir; I do indeed."

"I presume, sir," says the parson, "you know the authorities there are against us, and what adversaries of weight, Cæsar himself, Suetonius, and Plutarch, to name only three, that we have to face."

"I care not if there are three thousand," says I valiantly, "in this matter I am entirely of your mind."

The parson, whose simplicity was as great as his learning, grasped my hand with the utmost fervour.

"My dear sir," says he, "I can never sufficiently extol your spirit. It is excellently said, sir, excellently said. Would that there were more persons like you in the world. I can but offer you some gooseberry-wine and a piece of Banbury cake, but I am sure you are very welcome. I do declare that Blodgett has forgotten them; I will go and see about them myself."

At last in the very height of our sufferings we obtained in this truly unexpected, not to say whimsical fashion, a brief instant of relief. It was plain that this learned wight was possessed of a mind of the most singular simplicity and inconsequence. Everything that was told him he took for gospel. He had the faith of a child. Everything that had the least interest for himself he felt that all men were languishing to hear of. With him evidently to think was to act; he was the slave of his own whims; no sooner did he mention a thing than he went straightway and performed it.

The prospects of being united in the bonds of wedlock by so extraordinary a gentleman were indeed remote; but armed with the knowledge of his character we had already gained, we concluded that if we beat about the bush at all, he would be quite content for his own part to detain us a "month of Sundays" in his library, while he unfolded his facts and propounded his theories. On his own initiative he would not be in the least likely to surrender a single moment to our affairs. We must be bold and decisive, and grapple firmly with him.

Therefore when the good parson returned, preceding the umbrageous Blodgett, who bore the Banbury cakes and the gooseberry-wine on a tray, before he had the chance to open his mouth to take up his discourse, says I, in a truly dramatic manner:

"If it pleases you, sir, we are here, this lady and I, to ask you to marry us."

"Marry you," says he, without a moment's reflection. "I shall be delighted. Blodgett, have the goodness to set down the tray on the top of the *De Imitatione* there and go and find the clerk, and tell him to open the church. And tut, tut! my good woman, how often must I beseech you not to dust my books with your sacrilegious apron."

While Mrs. Blodgett flounced out to find the clerk, and the good parson in the height of his courtesy poured out the gooseberry-wine and served us with it, Cynthia and I fell to talking at the top of our voices about nothing at all, since we were certain that as soon as the parson got an opportunity he would furnish us with a criticism of Strabo's geographies, which, however damaging to that worthy ancient, would be even more so to us; or prove that it was a vulgar error to speak of Castor as the twin of Pollux; and proceed to demonstrate that Achilles was vulnerable in other places than his heel.

CHAPTER VIII

WE GET US TO CHURCH

By the time the parson had served us solemnly with our refection, I deemed it proper to give him some relation of our circumstances. I was emboldened to do so because his simple, honest character made him easy to talk to; it was also essential that he should be let some little way into the state of our affairs, since we had but the sum of twelvepence halfpenny with which to requite him for his services and to vail the clerk. And again I talked to him the more readily because while he was engaged with these matters, he was not so likely to revert to those that concerned us less.

He received the confessions of our bankrupt condition with a breadth of generosity that was truly noble in its magnitude.

"I am grieved that you should have thought fit to name that matter," says he. "What a world it is for pounds, shillings, and pence, to be sure! One cannot come into it, nor go out of it, nor even enter into a highly natural and commendable contract for its advantage, but what somebody has to be feed. And I blush to say that that somebody is generally some old rogue of a parson; but I hope, sir, you agree with Tully when he says ——"

"Yes, sir," says I hastily, "I quite agree with Tully, I have ever been of Tully's opinion. And, sir, let me say that we are overcome with your generosity. But there is yet another matter that irks us; we have no ring by which we can be wed into matrimony."

"An even more trivial thing," says the parson, "the good Blodgett, honest widow that she is, shall lend you hers."

It was bravely resolved of the parson, but I dare swear we both shuddered at the same instant, when we conceived of the courage required to put it into practice. To think of us "vagrant beggars" summoning that redoubtable dragon to deliver up her marriage ring! It would be perilously like commanding an ogre to cut off his own head. I'll vow that Cynthia trembled a little; whilst she goes even farther and says I grew as pale as death.

"Do you think, sir," said Cynthia fearfully, "that good Mrs. Blodgett will be so kind?"

"She will be delighted, my dear madam," says the parson. "She will be delighted!"

We were still wrestling with our honest doubts on the score of Mrs. Blodgett's delight, when lo and behold! that formidable fair burst into the room, redder in the face than ever, for she was out of breath. She had seen the clerk, and he had gone that minute to open the door of the church. And she conveyed this piece of news in such a brisk and important tone as seemed a good deal out of keeping with her severity of character. She had an air of interest which we had certainly not expected her to betray in our humble affairs. And when the parson without a word of preface had the audacity to prefer his proposal in regard to the ring she bore on her finger, an audacity that caused us both to hold our breaths, since we were fully persuaded that Blodgett would at least break into a most violent diatribe against the impudence of some people, drawing an affecting parallel with the late departed saint whose relict she was, and how wild horses should not tear her and this venerable sanctified token of their marital harmony apart, to our surprise her reply was mercifully brief.

"Humph!" says she. Having glanced at us for a very embarrassing period, during which time a good deal of perplexity distorted her harsh features, says she: "Well, I never did! Is it a runaway?"

"You can take it at that," says I.

A very singular change was being wrought in this stern matron. Where is the female bosom that can resist a wedding, or a touch of the romantical? Not even that of the Spartan Blodgett. The more she pondered the matter in hand the less terrible she became. She began to ask a dozen questions of us in a greatly mollified voice. Nay, the tone she used to Cynthia might even be called indulgent.

"Well," says she, "seeing as how it is an emergency, you shall have my ring this once, but it goes against my conscience, I am sure. You are doing a very wicked thing, young woman. To think of a little chit like you running away to get married! I am sure I ought not to countenance it. Oh, what will your mother say?"

"I have not a mother," says Cynthia, putting her hands to her eyes, and smiling at me through her fingers.

This admission seemed considerably to ease the mind of Mrs. Blodgett, and forthwith she began wrestling with the wedding-ring on her fat finger. In the meantime her master was very fortunately engrossed in another matter, and we were therefore spared his comments.

It seemed that Blodgett had brought him that day's *London Gazette*, which had been left by the coach at the village alehouse. It was the newspaper that claimed the parson's attention while his housekeeper struggled with her wedding-ring. I vow it was as whimsical a sight as ever was seen to witness the good lady growing redder and redder in her face, and puffing, grunting, and twisting her countenance into the most fantastical shapes, while she freely "dratted the thing," and called down a murrain upon it. But strive as she might, the precious ring still clung faithfully to her finger. Presently Cynthia was fain to take a hand at hauling it off, but she fared not a whit better than Mrs. Blodgett. Whereon I was called on, and after several very natural and becoming protestations on my part as to my inability and so forth, even I was pressed into the service. I tugged and hauled away with what gravity I might, but never an inch would that wretched ring budge. In the height of this deadlock, I was seized with a brilliant expedient.

"One of the rings round the curtain-pole," says I. "Surely one of them will do most admirably well, and at least there will be no difficulty about getting it off, nor on neither."

Now when I proffered this suggestion Mrs. Cynthia blushed such a colour and looked so ill at ease, that I half began to doubt whether this idea was so fine after all. And indeed, Blodgett took me up warmly.

"Wedded in a curtain-ring indeed!" says she. "I'facks, that she never shall be. Who ever heard of such a thing! Has the man no decency! Rather than that, my dear, I will run to neighbour Hodge's and borrow hers. As she's a thin body it should slip off easy."

There and then the scandalized Blodgett was as good as her word. Favouring me with a glance of such scorn and contempt that a person more impressionable would have been rooted to the spot, she flounced out of the room all in a moment, and directly afterwards passed by the library window, running quite excitedly down the garden path. Surely a whole chapter of dissertation might be written on the metamorphosis of Mrs. Blodgett. From openly deriding Cynthia she had passed to an almost motherly tenderness towards her. She had become as concerned for her as though she had been her own daughter. She was no longer "wench," or "vagrant beggar," nay nor even "young woman," but just "my dear." And why was this? Do you think it was because she had suddenly lighted on some latent virtues in my little madam, some strain of moral loveliness, some unexpected beauty in her mind and heart? I am sure I crave the pardon of her ladyship, but it was devil a one of these things that had such a magic effect on Mrs. Blodgett. It was simply that she had run away to get married, and that this was her wedding morning. Oh, woman, woman! where is the daughter among you that can resist the blandishments of Hymen?

While this was going forward, and we were congratulating ourselves in secret on the most fortunate course this portentous affair was like to take, an incident happened that shook me dreadfully, and recalled to my mind much more sharply than I cared, the kind of fortune I was about to endow my bride with. For the time being I had forgotten the colour of my reputation, the character of my past, and my black prospects for the future, in the cheerful topsy-turvy madness of the last twelve hours. But now all of a sudden, in the least expected fashion, I was reminded as to who I was, and what I was. The parson, who all the time had been deeply involved in his news-sheet, suddenly cast it down, uttered a loud exclamation, and with tears in his honest eyes began striding down in his agitation, and knocked down many an unoffending book.

"*O tempera! O mores!*" says he, "In what degenerate days do we live! To think that this should be the grandson of such a grandsire! No; I cannot believe it of him; nay, I will not believe it of him."

You may guess that as there was a grandfather in the case I pricked up my ears at once, and on looking at the newspaper saw that which confirmed my premonition. There was a paragraph in the column of "Newest Intelligence" that ran in this wise:

"On Tuesday evening in the near neighbourhood of divers well-known coffee-and-chocolate-houses in Saint James's Street, Piccadilly, was found the body of Mr. Richard Burdock, of His Majesty's 4th Regiment of Horse Guards. The unfortunate gentleman had been done to death by a sword-wound in the upper part of the chest. Precisely in what manner the deceased came by his end is not at present known, but we are informed that on the following day an information was laid against the

Earl of Tiverton, a nobleman whose name has been most unhappily notorious of late. A warrant was at once procured for the arrest of Lord Tiverton, and on an attempt being made to put it in force at his lordship's residence later in the day, a most desperate struggle ensued, and his lordship with the assistance of his household succeeded in effecting, for the time being, his escape. We learn, however, that the celebrated Mr. John Jeremy of Bow Street has the matter in hand; that Mr. Jeremy with his world-famed acumen is in possession of a clue as to Lord Tiverton's whereabouts; that Mr. Jeremy is already actively following up the same, and that presently an event may transpire that shall set all the town by the ears."

I directed Cynthia's attention to this account, and she was so startled by it that she changed colour, and offered so many visible evidences of her distress, that I feared she would have excited the suspicions of the parson, yet after all that must have been an impossible feat, for I am sure the honest parson was a man so utterly without guile, that he was incapable of harbouring any sort of suspicion against a fellow-creature. Besides he was still fully occupied in lamenting the low repute into which our name had fallen, with a grief so genuine that I did not know whether to be touched or amused by it.

However, I could not pay much heed to the parson at that minute, being deeply concerned for little Cynthia. I began to fear that I had done an ill-considered thing in allowing her to see the news-sheet. I had never tried to find out how far she was acquainted with my history of the past few years—my gaming, duels, intrigues and debts. That she must have known of it to some extent was certain. She had heard of them from my own lips in a haphazard sort of way; and again, they were too well known to be suppressed, as witness the conduct of her father in the matter of my suit. At his hands, and those of my friends, and of my rival too, they would certainly lose nothing of their magnitude. Whatever she had heard of me, she had been able to condone. But now confronted with a more circumstantial charge against me, clothed in all the authority of black and white, a charge of the most terrible character that can be preferred against any person, it came on her with a cruel force that almost crushed her down. She stood faltering, with the newspaper still clutched in her hands; her lips trembled, and the tears gathered slowly in her eyes.

"I don't believe it," said she, in a low, shaking voice.

She held out her hand, and I, despite the presence of the parson, took it to my lips with the same passion with which she had extended it to me. If a man in the midst of all the contumely and detraction of the world, can yet get one woman to believe in him, it is enough!

Meantime the parson, whatever he may have thought of our behaviour, not that it is altogether certain that he happened to witness it, was so strangely ingenuous that he took my little one's distress to spring from the same source as his own. He laid it all to that precious Commentary on the *Analects of Confucius*!

"Your grief does you honour, my dear madam, allow me to say," says he, wiping the memorials of his own from his red eyes. "It honours you vastly. It is something in this benighted age to know that the reverence for polite letters has not yet died out amongst us. And I, on my part, will never be persuaded that the descendant of so noble and learned a gentleman, whatever the errors of his youth, could fall into an act of such a hideous kind. I blame the publick press too for disseminating such a story. If it is false, as I believe it to be, oh, the pity of it! But if it should be true, the pity is the greater. With your permission, I will destroy this newspaper, lest this scandalous thing it contains should come under the eye of Blodgett, and she should spread it amongst the village folk."

I protest with all my settled views on life, and my arbitrary way of looking at things, I did not know whether to burst out into a shout of laughter, or fall a-weeping too, for, ecod! there was an affecting side to the affair when our simple old parson tore up the offending newspaper in a hundred pieces, all to preserve the fair name of that philosopher who had perished of the gout a full thirty years ago.

Cynthia was so greatly shaken, that to defend her from his observation I was even moved to indulge in the parson's fondness for the dead languages and abstruse theories. However, I had just induced him to quarrel with Cicero on the strength of something that Cicero ought to have said and yet had not said at all, when Blodgett returned, bearing the ring.

That redoubtable lady observed Cynthia's distress at once, but did not put the same construction on it that her master had.

"Very natural to be sure," says she. "Weddings are strange, exciting

things, and apt to upset the strongest of us. I remember the first time I went through the ceremony. I was mortal worried by it."

Mrs. Blodgett having by this time fully entered into the affair, took Cynthia in hand. She insisted that Cynthia should go with her upstairs, "to tidy herself like," and be accomplished generally in a manner more befitting the occasion. Indeed so enthusiastic had the housekeeper become about it that she even proposed to search for some of her own discarded nuptial garments, which she ventured to say with a bit of fettling and contriving, a pleat here and a tuck there, Cynthia after all might not lack for a wedding-gown. The conceit of a young lady who a week ago had been of the first fashion, appearing as a bride in a gown that had once done duty for the admirable Blodgett, convulsed me with laughter. And this behaviour was heightened rather than depressed when I recollected that such an attire would consort very aptly with the hobnailed appearance of the bridegroom.

During the absence of the ladies upstairs, the parson had the forethought to give me a two-shilling-bit, for the purpose of feeing the clerk. I was so struck by this further instance of his generous courtesy, that I asked the name of my benefactor, for I swore that I would not rest content until I had repaid him. It seemed that this obscure country clergyman bore the name of Scriven. It is a name as far as I can make out, that has not yet come to any eminence in letters or the humane arts; nor has it attained to any signal preferment in that Church of which it is so true an ornament. His great learning, his simple ingenuous character, his notable generosity, his tenderness of heart, his implicit courtesy have never advanced him one step, so far as I can gather, in the world's opinion. For aught I know he is still the country parson on his forty pounds or so a year, whilst many a sleek old worldling with half of his learning and a tithe of his humanity is my lord Bishop riding by in his gilt coach with footmen behind it, the recipient of a hundred times more kudos and emolument.

When Cynthia came down again she looked wonderfully spic and span. Her hair had been done into a becoming rustic mode, most admirably neat, and showed off its qualities of abundance, gloss and curliness to true advantage. She had not thought fit to call in the aid of Mrs. Blodgett's gown it is true, but her own became her as well as another, and happily at the same time afforded no index to her degree. It was a plain and simple country dress, sober in hue and severe in its style. Yet it fell so exactly into the exquisite lines of her shape, that she and the dress became one as it were; and if there was a woman's tailor who could have exhibited a lovely figure more artfully than that, she must have been good Mrs. Nature herself. Cynthia, for all her country clothes, looked so sweet, arch and dainty too, so much the gentlewoman without the affectations that go with *ton* and "fine," that by their absence the breeding that lurked in every inch of her, the carriage of her person, slender and small as it was, the set of her head, and the cast of her features became more apparent.

These evidences had even an effect on Mrs. Blodgett. She was mightily pleased with her *protégée*.

"I don't know who *you* are, young man," says she, "and I won't say all that's in my mind about you, but I hope you know that you are taking a real born lady to wife. Such white hands I never did see, and such pretty ways, saving her presence, as she 'ave too. You are not a quarter good enough, young man, for the likes of her, and just keep that in your mind and live up to it. But I gravely misdoubt me as to whether you will, for take you all round you are about as disreppitable and low a fellow as ever I saw. To think that such as you should have lured the pretty lamb from her father's house. But as I've told her, it is not yet too late for her to go back again."

Although neither Cynthia nor I was greatly inconvenienced by this crude statement of the case, except in the matter of the smiles we strove in vain to control, the parson, good, honest man, was not a little disconcerted by it.

"Tut, tut!" says he, "my good Blodgett, your tongue runs too fast. However excellent the motives may be that inspire you, I could wish you had a somewhat less direct manner of expressing them. I really cannot have you intervene between plighted lovers, at the very steps of the altar. And whatever the personality of our young lady, if truth compels us to admit that our young gentleman is scarcely so fortunate in his physical semblance, I am sure he hath a very nice mind."

With these panegyrics we ultimately got us to church. Now it is not to be expected, I hope, that a man should describe his own nuptials. If there are three acts in his life on which he is the least qualified to speak,

are not those his birth, his marriage, and his burial? For in not one of them can he testify with any certainty as to whether he went through them on his heels or his head. Besides, I am one who holds that there should be a becoming reticence in these things.

I can recall perhaps an empty, musty-smelling church, and the clerk, a solemn, unctuous man, with a graveyard cough. Some little wind of the affair had evidently got abroad in the village, owing to the exertions of Mrs. Blodgett in quest of the wedding-ring. Thus the ceremony was not so entirely private as we could have wished. A few women in aprons, and some with babes in their arms kept the porch and the immediate interior of the church. It seemed that they did not venture to go further owing to their awe of the clerk. Various ragamuffin children of tender years played hide-and-seek round the gravestones and their mothers' gowns. When however the wedding party came along in a kind of little procession, they desisted for a minute, and having safely seen the parson precede us into the sacred edifice, they put out their tongues at Cynthia and myself, and made several references of a nature uncomplimentary to us couched in the form of rustic wit.

Mrs. Blodgett had undertaken the office of chief bridesmaid. She would have undertaken that of groomsman too, had I given her the least encouragement. She made an impressive figure at the altar rails, clad in a severe black hood; whilst she was quite conscious of her conspicuous position, and stood calm and erect in the dignity of her infinite experience. What whispered but animated counsel she proffered to Cynthia during the brief period in which we waited for the parson to emerge from the vestry, I know not, but I would have given a good deal to have been a party to it, for I am sure that if the look on Mrs. Cynthia's countenance was any index to its character, it would well have been worth setting down in this place.

At the last moment when the tension of our minds was very great, the clerk became obstreperous. He asked parson Scriven in a significant undertone for the special licence that was to marry us, as the banns had not been put up and cried in church. Of course we were not furnished with anything of the kind.

Parson Scriven, as became his amiable casual character, was not at all disconcerted by such an informality.

"Pooh and faugh!" says he. "Banns and licence, John, stuff and nonsense! Why should an honest couple be hedged about in this way? If they have no licence, upon my soul I will marry them without."

The clerk was scandalized. The parson, however, would hear no argument. He was not the person to allow his head to interfere with the dictates of his heart.

"Parson's main obstinate," said the clerk, scratching his head. "And I do believe he cares no more for law an' regulation than the gypsies on the common. It won't be legal, this won't, but bless you what'll parson care!"

So long as we could get this awkward business over we cared as little for law and regulation as this singular old clergyman. Therefore, when he disdained the opinions of the clerk, and reiterated his intention to marry us, we breathed again.

At last all was ready, and the parson came out of the vestry with his book and his gown, and smiled upon us with benevolent self-possession. We strung ourselves for the great ordeal. Yet as a preliminary we were confronted with one that we found vastly the more awkward of the two, and one that we had not anticipated either. How we both came to overlook it, I know not, unless the palpitation that our minds were in was the secret of it. It had never occurred to us that the parson could not marry us unless he was informed of our names. But when he made that very obvious and natural stipulation it came upon us as a thunderbolt. What a pair of arrant fools we were, not to have thought of that contingency, and to have provided for it!

When the parson bluntly demanded this of us, we stood staring open-mouthed at one another, a pair of zanies. I pursued a bold course, however. To give our own was out of the question in that public place, and more particularly as the newspaper had just acquainted the reverend gentleman of my black history. Therefore, says I, with an impudent assurance:

"John Smith and Jane Jones."

"How truly national!" says the officiating clergyman in a rapture of sentiment. "How exquisitely English are these names, to be sure!"

I durst not look at my poor little Cynthia. But somehow I felt that she was trembling and deadly pale, and ready to sink to the ground under

this humiliation to her native delicacy. I fear that I was of a much coarser grain. I had suffered too much from the world already to be easily bowed with a sense of shame. "Needs must when the devil drives," was a good enough motto for me. We were in a pretty tight corner, and if we ever came out of it at all, we must expect to lose a little of our tender skins in doing so.

My little one was most monstrous brave. Having recovered the possession of herself, she set her teeth and went through the thing gallantly. I'faith she was of a good mettle. In spite of Mrs. Blodgett's opinion of my worth, my little miss answered the all-important query in such a clear affirmative voice as never was heard, and entered into vows of a sort that argued some degree of rashness on her part. Even at the time I was inclined to raise a doubt of her ability to be the equal of them. Nor hath aught subsequently transpired to cause me to forego this estimate of the matter. When we had been duly put through these trials, we were led into the vestry to write our names in the marriage register.

"Oh, Jack," whispers Cynthia, as we went, "whatever shall we do? I am sure it cannot be legal."

"I am sure I don't know," says I. "What a folly of mine not to have thought of it sooner!"

"It was my place to think of it," says Cynthia. "The folly is mine."

"No, not at all," says I. "What have you to do with it, a chit as you are? The folly is mine, I tell you."

"Then I tell you it's not," says Cynthia flatly, and stamping her petulant shoe on the very steps of the altar.

CHAPTER IX

WE GO UPON OUR WEDDING TOUR

I am sure it is expected of me to improve this occasion with a few sage remarks, for could anything have been more ominous to the prosperity of our married life? But I hope I have too much chivalry in me to say to what extent this evil presage has been borne out since, and I dare Mrs. Cynthia to do so. *Revenons à nos moutons*, a phrase I think that always looks better in French. We got through all these important matters at last, even to the forging of the honoured names of Jane Jones and John Smith, or Jane Smith and John Jones, I forget precisely which, in the parish register. Then having vailed the clerk with the parson's two-shilling-bit, and having thanked and bid farewell to our kind benefactors, we moved out of the church amid the acclamation of the whole female and juvenile population of the village, and got us with some speed upon our wedding-tour.

Now we had made about half-a-mile along the highway at a round pace, when Cynthia to her great concern discovered that she had carried away upon her finger the ring that Mrs. Blodgett had borrowed from a neighbour.

"Oh, this will never do," says she. "We can never rob such kind honest people."

"I suppose we cannot," says I, "but the value of that ring will come in wonderfully apt this evening when we desire a lodging for our weariness."

"Oh, Jack, how can you!" says she. "We must take it back at once."

And willy-nilly with never another word my pretty one, with a fine indignant colour in her face, turned about and set her nose straight back to the parson's door. And taking a material view of the matter, honesty was just as good a policy in this case as any other, for when we had come to the parson and Cynthia had got her mission off her lips and the ring off her finger, all in due time, the kind man was so pleased by our worthy behaviour, that says he to Mrs. Blodgett: "There, there, what did I say? I knew you judged them too harshly," and straightway invited us to an excellent repast of potherbs and boiled mutton, that even then was smoking on the table.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when we set out again on our travels. We took the highway, and followed it mile upon mile, through pretty hamlets, past inviting inns, lush green meadows, and here and there a shady little copse. Up hill and down dale we went, and always in something of a joyful spirit, for no two people could be more happy in their freedom, or more careless of what might befall. The moment was enough for us. We were sound in limb and spirit, stout of heart, too, I ween, and my little wife had the sum of twelvepence half penny in her pocket. An avenging law was doubtless pursuing me, and a stern parent was most probably pursuing her, but we were so taken up with one another that we could think only of our present happiness. Avaunt dull care, it was our wedding journey.

Who could help being happy in the soft airs of the spring afternoon? They were so generous, and the sun was so mild and pleasant, that we discarded our cloaks, and I bore them both over my arm. But we were not allowed to remain in this paradise very long without being rudely reminded of its insecurity. After awhile, growing hot with our exertions and a little weary also, we began to desire a cool shady place in which to rest. A hill more than usually steep lay before us, and having toiled to the top, at considerably less of a pace than the one at which we had started, found there the spot we were in need of. Seating ourselves under a tree covered with snowy blossom we proceeded to take our earned repose. And we had been in this occupation perhaps five minutes or so, when our attention was directed to the sound of wheels at the foot of the hill we had just overcome. A pair-horse chaise was coming up at a round pace. It was occupied by two persons, and was so striking in colour and design that it was in the distance likely to be recognized sooner than the people in it. This proved to be the case. No sooner had it come into view than Cynthia clutched at my arm in a quick, frightened manner.

"Look, look!" says she. "Oh, what shall we do? 'Tis papa's curricle coming up the hill, and on my life, it is papa within it."

I needed no second exhortation. There was an instant of time in which we both looked wildly about us, backwards and forwards, only to discover that it was impossible to get away from our present place without being caught in the act of doing so. A hedge was at our back, another was on the opposite side of the way, and in front stretched the

long level surface of the road. Yet there was just one chance of our passing unnoticed, though heaven knows a precarious and remote one! There was a slight declivity running under the hedge at our backs. It was a kind of dry ditch, but the bed of it was so shallow that it could hardly be dignified by the name of ditch at all. I commanded Cynthia to lie perfectly flat in this, face downwards, and to squeeze herself as far into the earth as she could get, whilst I did the same, though in regard to the last particular I fear my precept was higher than my resolution. Meantime the chaise came grinding and grunting up the hill, at the same smart pace, while we lay in our ridiculously inadequate hiding-place, perfectly convinced in our own minds that we must be discovered. What an agony of suspense we lay in, stretched full length, Cynthia's head pressed firmly against my heel, and our noses nestling in the dry earth! We durst hardly breathe as the carriage came nearer and nearer.

How it was its occupants failed to see us I cannot understand, for we could have been scarcely shielded at all from their observation. But sure enough the curricle went past us, and as it did so we could even detect the familiar voices issuing out of it, above the noise of the horses and the vehicle. One belonged to my lord the Duke, Mrs. Cynthia's papa, a terribly irascible loud-toned voice to be sure; whilst the other, smooth, polished and elegant, was that of Mr. Humphrey Waring.

When at last they had fairly passed us by at a deuce of a rattle, we were able to sit up from our tight positions and show our noses again. We gazed at one another solemnly, and then broke into a peal of laughter apiece.

"Phew!" says I, "it was as bad a two minutes as ever I've had. I thought papa sounded very angry too."

"Poor papa!" says Cynthia, with a very odd mingling of sorrow and mirth in her face. "I wouldn't have given much for you, sir, had he spied us; and for that matter I would have given even less for myself."

"I suppose he is in full pursuit of us?" says I.

"There cannot be a doubt of it," says his daughter. "And if I know anything of his Grace, he'll hardly sleep in his bed again until he hath tracked us down. He's a terrible implacable man when he's aroused. He'll be hunting us night and day, and he'll spend his last penny sooner than he'll be baulked by us, now that he hath seen fit to start on this business."

"Humph!" says I, "a nice energetic old gentleman to have for a father-in-law, to be sure. And that smooth villain Waring too. Did you not catch his voice also?"

"Yes," says Cynthia, flaming, "the wicked, wretched, contriving villain. What can he hope to get by it all?"

"A wife," says I.

"He's like to go empty-handed there at least," says Cynthia. "What a mercy it was we were married this morning!"

"I doubt whether we were," says I. "I do not know that the ceremony will hold in the sight of the law."

"Then," says Cynthia, "we will be married over again in our real names and with a proper licence at the first church we can."

"Nor will that avail you," says I, "when he hath got me hanged."

Mrs. Cynthia grew thoughtful, but says she after a moment's reflection:

"When he does that I will put an ounce of lead into his heart, then I can be hanged beside you."

At this perforce I had to capitulate before her ingenuity.

We resumed our way somewhat chastened in spirit. We looked keenly ahead of us along the road as we went, for any sign of the vehicle that had lately overtaken us. Any inn or alehouse that happened to lie at the roadside we passed with particular caution, lest our papa and his companion should have broken their journey there. As time went by, and we had begun to forget the excellent repast of boiled mutton and potherbs with which we had been regaled by parson Scriven, we cast our eyes on these wayside places of entertainment with another end in view. We were growing honestly tired and hungry. Coming to one that wore an air of unobtrusive respectability and general cleanliness, we determined to part with half of our fortune in exchange for some bread and cheese and ale.

Having first been at the precaution to convince ourselves that his Grace's curricle lingered nowhere about the house, we went in and called for our modest refreshment. And we were engaged in doing justice to it with a good deal of zest, when to our great fear we heard the

sound of wheels on the road, and by the time we could turn round and look out of the inn-window a chaise had come to a stand in front of the door. It needed but a glance to tell us that we might have been spared our alarm, since it was not the one belonging to Mrs. Cynthia's papa. This was a much less imposing carriage, of a prim colour and cast that was designed not to attract any attention. It contained two persons. The first who alighted from it was a middling drab-coated kind of a fellow, smug of countenance, and not to be looked at twice. He was doubtless the unliveried servant of a well-to-do tradesman; an estimate that was borne out by the deferential, not to say obsequious air with which he stood at the side of the vehicle, and assisted the second occupant to get out. This was a vastly more imposing person. He was a great fat, heavy-featured man, with an almost overpowering consequentialness about him. He moved with a slow but dignified strut, spoke in a very loud voice, and yet there was a tone of affable condescension about him too that was very baffling. He might be the mayor or an alderman of some provincial town, some local big-wig, or even a pursy magnate of commerce.

By the time he had moved in his heavy dignity into the room in which Cynthia and I were seated at our bread and cheese, the landlord had taken note of his visitor, and had come forward to greet him with all the respectful familiarity of one who was happy to meet again an old and cherished and highly-valued client.

"No other than Mr. John Jeremy, by all that's wonderful," says the landlord, bowing and smiling. "*The* Mr. John Jeremy, as I'm a licensed victualler."

No sooner had the landlord uttered the name than I looked hastily at Cynthia, and she looked hastily at me. Where had we heard that name so recently, and in what connexion? Suddenly the same flash of recollection illuminated the minds of us both. It was the name of the celebrated Bow Street runner, as given in the *London Gazette*. I think we both went hot and then cold. But when the first emotion of surprise was overpast, a dogged resolution succeeded to it and with it a determination to put, if need be, as bold a face upon the matter as we could. After all there was nothing about us by which we could be identified. Appearances were certainly in our favour; and the black eye I had that morning received from the farmer was not the least likely thing of all to stand me in good stead.

"Sit tight," I whispered to her, "and we'll keep asipping out of the same pot as unconcerned as possible."

Mr. Jeremy having seated himself with majestic negligence at a table immediately opposite us, turned to his companion and says:

"Wattle you 'ave, Willum?"

"Make it porter," says Willum, in a voice of extreme melancholy.

"Wattle you 'ave, Mr. Johnson?" says Mr. Jeremy, addressing the host, a reel-faced worthy of simple ways, who seemed pleased with himself and all the world.

"Make it porter, Mr. Jeremy, as you're so haffable," says he; "and what might be your own?"

"If you 'ave any of that there sloe-gin, mine's sloe-gin," says Mr. Jeremy.

These preliminaries being arranged to the satisfaction of all concerned, and the host having retired to fetch the refreshment, Mr. Jeremy remarked to his companion with a wonderful air of reflection: "Honest, unassooming feller."

"Very," says the other, more gloomily than ever.

Mr. Jeremy then observed us for the first time. We returned his gaze with one of the most simple unconcern.

"Nice day," says he.

"Very," says I heartily.

Here the host returned with the refreshment, and having pledged each other, they drank solemnly and copiously.

"Well, Mr. Jeremy," says the host, "what are you after this time? It's a murder, I know, for you to be taking it on. You never do nothing under a murder, you don't, as I've heard you say."

"You don't mean to say as you 'aven't 'eard?" says Mr. Jeremy. "The whole case was printed in this morning's *Gazette*. It's no small thing, this isn't, I can tell you. The quality's in it, to start with."

"Ha!" says the landlord, with breathless interest. "Is it a hanging matter?"

"Of course," says Mr. Jeremy. "And a hearl, and a thorough bad lot too.

A thorough wicked feller with a record as black as your hat. I always say when one of that sort goes wrong he's much worse than ord'nary."

"If it's you that says it, Mr. Jeremy, there can be no manner of doubt about it," says the landlord.

He appeared to hang on every word that the man from Bow Street uttered. That worthy gentleman who was by no means unaware of the impression he created, was at pains in a dozen little ways to heighten it. Now and then he would halt in a mysterious manner, wink and nod, and then continue in a truly oracular way. It was plain that he felt himself to be a man of a great reputation, and it would certainly be no fault of his if he failed to sustain it. Nor was he content to work on the mind of the landlord, but continually looked across at us to see what effect he was having on our susceptibilities. Observing this, I began at once to betray an interest in all he thought fit to say and do; an interest more exaggerated than the landlord's even, and certainly less sincere.

"Are you the great Mr. John Jeremy from Bow Street, sir?" says I at the first opportunity. I asked it in a voice of as much timidity as I could summon, as one astonished at his boldness.

Instead of replying, the gentleman from Bow Street closed his eyes in exquisite self-satisfaction, threw his head back against the wall and folded his arms across his chest.

"How can you ask?" says the landlord, replying for him. "Who else can he be? I should ha' thought your eyes would ha' told you that with one look at him."

"I am very proud to meet you, sir," says I, and added, turning to Cynthia: "Who would have thought it, Betsy, that you and I of all people would ever have met the great Mr. Jeremy from Bow Street in London."

"Don't mention it," says Mr. Jeremy, opening his eyes with vast condescension.

"Oh, Mr. Jeremy," says my little Cynthia, playing up to her part in the comedy with admirable instinct, "would you—could you let me have a peep at the—at the handcuffs?"

Mr. Jeremy needed no second invitation to exhibit the badges of his office. He took them from his pocket and laid them on the table with an air. And nothing would content Cynthia but she must rise from her seat, go over to the gentleman from Bow Street, and have the manacles clapped upon her wrists to see how they felt. Her curiosity was very prettily and justly simulated. It was done to the life, and no one could have been more pleased by it than Mr. Jeremy.

Not content with thrilling Cynthia with the handcuffs, the gentleman from Bow Street was anxious to impress everybody else. He presently produced the warrant for the wicked earl's arrest; also a handbill offering one hundred pounds reward for any information that should lead to the apprehension of the person whose full description was contained therein.

"But that's only a matter of form, you know," says Mr. Jeremy. "I've already got all the information that I want in this 'ere," Mr. Jeremy solemnly tapped his forehead. "It's only a work of time. We knows everything about him: his age, his height, his complexion, his general appearance, how he was drest, and his religious views. All there is to know of him we knows. I wouldn't give a snap of the fingers for that man, no that I wouldn't, not if you paid me to do it."

"Wonderful!" says the landlord, his eyes dilated with admiration. "Wonderful smart! What a mind you must have, sir."

"*I* didn't say so," says Mr. Jeremy, "Though I wouldn't contradict you there. A feller's got to have a mind for our perfession. A numscull can't make head or tail of it, can't a numscull. It's observation that does it, d'ye see? You've got to put two and two together, and to know how many beans make five. Now in the case of this 'ere hearl, I've made such a liberal use o' my faculties that the noose is as good as round his neck. Pore feller, I'm sorry for him."

Mr. Jeremy's sorrow was reproduced in the face of each one of his hearers. In that of his man and the innkeeper it was sincere enough, and at least in mine and Cynthia's it was very well simulated. One and all professed the greatest admiration for the gentleman's genius. To be sure, in what way it had been manifested was not very clear; but as his speech, his behaviour, and the airs he gave himself furnished incontestable proofs of its possession, how could we help doing homage to it? He sat like a potentate, and received the court we paid to him as by no means more than his due. But he was generous as well as great, for having ordered his own glass to be replenished, he asked us all to name our tipple, wherein we had the privilege of drinking his health.

As soon as we felt that we could slip off without attracting any particular attention to our going, we took the road again. Yet in the precautions we were at to get away as little observed as might be, we were more ill-served than by an ostentatious departure. For our one object being to retire quickly and privily, we discovered when we had gone a few yards on the road that we had not paid our reckoning. Thus when the landlord awoke to this fact, we should be much more freely discussed and commented on than by paying our score and effecting our retirement at our leisure. Cynthia, who had a wonderful itch of honesty, was mightily put out, and was all for going back and for requiting the landlord at any cost. But I demurred to this strongly. The sooner we put a few country miles between ourselves and Mr. Jeremy the better, said I. Yet Cynthia argued more subtly, and more justly, as I was fain to allow. Mr. Jeremy and the innkeeper had taken no suspicion of us to the time of our leaving the inn, said she, and if we were at the trouble to go back again, frankly admit our lapse of memory, and even go out of our way to behave honestly, we should be far more likely to continue in their good graces, than if we left them in the lurch as I proposed. In that event we should infallibly get ourselves and our concerns talked about.

Admitting the justness of this reasoning, I consented after a brief argument to our going back. Mrs. Cynthia was pleased indeed, partly because this course was such a tribute to her wisdom, and again because she would not have to carry on her nice conscience an act that fretted it. When we re-entered the inn it seemed that the landlord had already discovered his loss, and was in the very act of calling us harsh names. Indeed he was so occupied with this and was expressing himself so fervently, whilst Mr. Jeremy laughed at him in a humorous key, that he was not conscious of the fact that we stood behind him, until I said:

"I quite agree with you, host, in all you have said, if such was our intention. But as it happens, nothing could be farther from it. The moment we discovered our omission, we returned to rectify it."

The landlord was in a great taking when he heard my voice at his back. Having listened to his apologies that were no less fervent than his previous abuse, and having taken them in very good part, I demanded to know the amount of the score, and smiled at Mr. Jeremy while I did so, in an intimate way, for I judged a display of some little familiarity towards him was the most calculated to propitiate that gentleman.

Eightpence was the score, a sum fortunately well within our truly modest means. But judge of our desperate chagrin an instant later when Cynthia, the custodian of our poor fortune, having felt in all her pockets, declared that the purse which contained it was not to be found. Search as she might, there was never a trace of it. We stared at one another blankly, and then at the landlord, and then at Mr. Jeremy. It was this last good gentleman who saved the situation for us, since he burst out a-laughing. Thereon I broke into a roar; and presently Cynthia, Willum, and the landlord were roaring too. And could anything have been more ludicrous than two persons leaving an inn without paying the reckoning, and wending all the way back again for the purpose of rectifying the error with devil a penny between them with which to do so!

Under cover of the commotion that this discovery provoked, I racked my wits to find an excuse for our behaviour.

"You may laugh, gentlemen," says I, with a sudden gravity, "but it is no laughing matter for us, let me tell you. My wife's pocket hath been picked, and how we are to get back home with not so much as a penny between us, strike me dead if I can say!"

"Why, 'tis a case for Mr. Jeremy's genius," says Cynthia, smiling at that flattered person in a most bewitching manner. "He must devise us a means out of his infinite wit."

"Peace, woman," says I, angrily. "Is it not enough then that you should lose all our travelling money and bring us into disgrace with our honest host, whom we are unable to requite for his hospitality, but you must lose the control of that unlucky tongue too, and let it grow so familiar with the name and attainments of one of the foremost persons of his age that it brings us into disrepute with him also?"

I spoke with my tongue in my cheek to be sure, and Cynthia more than once had to bite her lips to restrain her merriment. But Mr. Jeremy nodded his head delightedly all the time, and purred with satisfaction.

"No offence, no offence," says that gentleman. "Don't mind me, my pretty one. But since you ask my opinion as to 'ow you shall get back home again, I think after carefully considering all the circumstances, the only means I can discover is 'Shanks's mare.'"

"Ha ha! he he!" we all laughed at this desperate piece of wit.

The upshot was that we were allowed to depart indebted to the innkeeper in the sum of eightpence. The loss of our money was a blow. Why it should have been I cannot tell, for after all it was very little the right side of destitution. Cynthia was quite unable to say in what manner she had lost it, and when I came to put a few shrewd questions to her on the subject, she was so vague in her ideas and so uncertain in her answers, that it became a moot point at last whether her fortune of twelvepence halfpenny had not existed from the first in her imagination only.

CHAPTER X

WE ARE BESET BY A HEAVY MISFORTUNE

It was about sundown now. We had not so much as a penny to purchase a loaf of bread. Night was coming on; there were no friends to whom we might recommend ourselves; and at least two parties of persons were engaged in hunting us down in that vicinity. To set against these inconveniences we had only our liberty and our comradeship; and although our bellies were like to go empty, and our heads unpillowed that night, and for full many a weary one to come, we did not rail against our lot. We were as free as the air and could defy the polite conventions. Lest we should fall in again with Mr. Waring and our papa, or less dangerously with Mr. Jeremy, we decided to forsake the high road and its publicity, and take to the fields. All ways were alike to us; north, south, east, and west, it did not matter.

We had not gone far across the country when the twilight overtook us. We did not view it with the least apprehension, however. The night promised to be so mild, and we were so warmly found against it with our cloaks and thick clothes, that another evening couch in a barn or a cowhouse would not greatly daunt us. Indeed we had already made up our minds to this, unless Providence should throw a more luxurious one in our path. In the event this proved to be the case, for after awhile our wanderings brought us to a kind of common, across which smoke was seen to be rising. It came from a fire of sticks as we presently found, and on coming to it, we discovered ourselves in the midst of a gypsy encampment.

Four or five persons of a dirty, ragged and uncouth sort, were busying themselves about the fire in various ways. One was tending it with fuel, another was adjusting a great cooking-pot that sat in the midst of the embers, a third was cleaning a clasp-knife with a piece of rag and a tuft of grass, a fourth had two parts of a flute in his hand and was striving to fix them together; an old woman sat staring into the blaze with her hands on her knees, smoking a pipe; and a young woman, by no means destitute of a swarthy beauty, sat beside her with a child at her breast.

The reception we met with at the hands of these simple strange people was at first reserved and suspicious to a degree. One of the men addressed us in a barbarous tongue, the like of which I have neither heard before nor since. I could not make a word out of it. Showing plainly that we were at a loss in this language, the man translated it into good if a trifle rustic English:

"What do you want?" says he roughly.

"Leave to sit down by your cheerful fire a little," I replied. They were in no hurry to extend this permission to us, but by the time that Cynthia with excellent tact had greatly admired the babe in its mother's arms, and I, who amongst my accomplishments pride myself as being somewhat of an amateur of the flute, had pieced that instrument together, for its owner did not appear to understand much about it, and had been at pains to make ourselves agreeable to our company in several ways, their gruff reserve grew sensibly less. And shortly, so much did our addresses have their effect, that we found ourselves seated around the fire, with a pleasant odour of cookery tickling our noses. For after all bread and cheese and ale, although excellent in themselves to be sure, do not form a very enduring diet.

By the time the meal was ready the moon had risen. Sitting in the midst of these strange gypsy people, beside a bright fire that threw up its flames to the open fields, and clothed trees and hedges and the sky itself with a vagueness and mystery that we had never noticed in them before, we became possessed with a sense of the weirdness of the shapes about us. They made the folk we had come amongst seem more singular than they might otherwise have appeared. However, the meal we presently partook of in their company did much to alleviate this feeling of strangeness. When the lid was taken off the hissing cauldron, and platters, spoons and knives were produced, the circle about the fire was increased by the arrival of other gypsies of various ages and both sexes.

As their guests, they had the courtesy to serve us first. From the pot was produced a hot and grateful mess, that to persons with appetites sharpened to the degree that ours were, was deliriously palatable. It appeared to consist of fowls, mutton, hares, onions, and potatoes, and probably other meats and vegetables not so easy to detect. We were also given some excellent ale in a great horn tumbler, and a hunch of barley bread apiece. We feasted indeed on the liberal fare, and were fain to pay

a second visit to the cauldron.

It was to be remarked that our entertainers were much better disposed toward us after supper than before. Their suspicion and reserve melted more and more, and instead of using the Romany language, ordered their conversation in ours, that we might take some profit of their intercourse. They all showed this amenable disposition with the exception of the old crone, who had supped only on tobacco, preferring her pipe to the lustier fare of the cauldron. She would have none of us. We could clearly see the expression of her lowering, tawny face, since she sat opposite to us, full in the glare of the fire. This indifference to us was more than passive. We discerned with some uneasiness that it amounted to positive dislike. She would stare at us whole minutes together, while a concentrated malignity came into her already sufficiently ugly face. She would then mutter incoherently under her breath. Once she spat venomously into the fire. At last, after staring at us longer and more resentfully than usual, she clutched a fellow who sat beside her fiercely by the arm. She talked to him with great energy, and ended with something that sounded of the nature of an imprecation. As she did so she shook her finger at our faces. Whatever her communication was, the man was much discomposed by it. He nodded, infused a certain malignity too in the look with which he regarded us, and then addressed several of his companions very much in the manner that the old woman had addressed him.

Cynthia, who had observed these signs as keenly as I had, grew alarmed. Nor was this unreasonable in her, for such were the weight of the old crone's objections to us, whatever their nature, that before long they had spread to the whole community. Thus we soon found ourselves in the unpleasant position of being the cynosure of all their eyes, the objects at which their fingers were wagged, and against whom their passionate talk was directed. But we suffered from the additional misfortune of being unable to understand a single word, and were thus quite at a loss to know wherein we had offended. It was the man with the flute who presently enlightened us. Probably his devotion to music, one of the liberal arts, gave him a more humane cast than his brethren. Indeed at this moment he alone seemed friendly towards us.

"Old Goody does not like the set o' ye," says he. "You will bring ill-luck upon us wandering folk, she thinks."

"What does she object to in us?"

"Nay," says he, "that is more than I can say. She is as full of prediction, whimsies, and foreboding as a dog-fox is of cunning. She has lived a long while, d'ye see, and can read the signs. She has forseen many a corpse, by looking at the moon. Many's the man-child she's brought into the world. And only last year when she heard the wind soughing through the branches, she told not only the day but the very hour that Jerry Boswell came to be hanged."

This sinister reference did nothing to ease us. Looking around, the cunning and superstition that was everywhere about us took a direr significance. As their resentment in no wise abated, it struck us that we should do well to resume our way. But the man with the flute assured us that we were under no necessity, for since we had sat at meat with them, the mischief, if any, was already done. He said besides that his people were the civillest in the world, and whatever their fear of us, they would be the last to visit their dislike upon us. As the fire was so bright and genial, and our present position, despite any little inconveniences that might arise therefrom, was so much more to be desired than any other we were likely to lie in that night, we were seduced to remain. It may have been against our better judgment that we took this course, or like the gypsies themselves, we may have had an instinct of something impending, for in the end we were to rue it bitterly.

Our friend with the flute, doubtless to compose the minds of his more nervous brethren, began a strange sort of melody. It was played not very well to be sure, but they gave an alert attention to it that furnished an instance of the power of music on untutored minds. Presently one of the women broke into a song to match the air. It was in the gypsy language, and though sung in a low crooning voice and a primitive fashion, it was by no means unpleasing, whilst its weird character was highly appropriate to the place in which it was performed. The rude audience was vastly soothed by it too; their fierce looks grew softer; and soon they fell to regarding the music entirely instead of Cynthia and myself.

When the flute-player had given his melody, he politely handed the instrument to me, with the request that if I had any skill in the art I should give one also. Being as I have said an amateur of the flute, and being like all other amateurs as I have observed, never in any situation

averse to display my poor aptitude, I struck up a ranting air from the *Beggar's Opera*. I was surprised to find how excellent the instrument was, and was therefore able to enter into the performance as much for my own gratification as for theirs. When I had finished I was agreeably surprised to find how warmly my efforts were received. The former player wrung my hand, and, strange as it may appear, many eyes shone about me with pleasure and admiration. Nothing would content them but I must play again. Mightily pleased with my success, as every person who seeks the approbation of the public invariably is, I needed no second invitation, but ventured on a more ambitious piece. With many a spring and trill and roulade I ranted it into their ears. They followed me with rapt attention, and again and again would have me play. How long I continued to do so I do not know. For seeing the singular pleasure they took from it, I should have been a churl indeed not to gratify such hospitable and simple people. Therefore I poured out all the tunes I knew for their behoof.

Little did we reck however of the calamity that was about to befall us. The old woman, it is true, had had a premonition of something impending. Had it been concerned with the effect as well as the cause much might have been spared us. As it was, no catastrophe could have come more swiftly, unexpectedly, or completely. I was still in the height of my music, and the group around the fire were absorbed in it wholly, when this unhappy interruption came. Without a sound of warning a dozen forms or more suddenly sprang into being out of a ditch hard by, and rushed into our midst. By the light of the moon we could observe enough of them as they came to see that they were armed with formidable staves, and clearly meant mischief.

We had only just time to spring to our feet before they were upon us. What their business was we did not stay to inquire; indeed, it was soon evident that my friends, the gypsies, were only too intimately acquainted with it. Without passing a word they resisted this onslaught with all the vigour they could summon. One or two ran into the tents close at hand to procure weapons of defence; others produced their knives; whilst the old crone, who along among the gypsy women was not barefooted snatched off one of her boots and brandished it fiercely. As for Cynthia and I, we were so taken aback by this strange situation that we did not know what course to pursue. We had neither art nor part in this quarrel whatever its nature. Besides, we were weaponless and utterly at a loss to understand whether submission or resistance might serve us the better.

The aggressors, whatever their impetuosity, stopped short at first of actual violence. Seeing the uncompromising attitude of the gypsies, the foremost man, a fine strapping fellow as ever I saw, halted a few yards off, put up his hand to speak, and said with a great air of authority:

"Now, you Egyptians, let me give you a word of advice before we come to blows. You have no chance at all. You are outnumbered by three to one, and whatever blood is shed, will be to your hurt. Whatever polls are broken will not save any man Jack of you a hanging. I summon you to put down your weapons, and the women shall go free. But I arrest every man of you in the name of the High Sheriff for stealing sheep."

The reply of the sheep-stealers was brief enough in all conscience.

"Take that!" cried the old woman, flinging her boot at the speaker's head.

It was the signal for the battle to begin. My friend the flute-player followed up the boot by hitting the spokesman of the law full in the face with his fist. Thereon blows fell thick and fast and furious on every side. The Sheriff's men closed up, nor did the gypsies budge an inch. Without a weapon of any sort, as I was, I had to bear my part perforce, since there was no opportunity to explain that I was neither a gypsy nor a stealer of sheep. But even had it offered, I could never have embraced it. Just as a man may be known by the company he keeps, he is at the same time laid under the obligation to defend his friends.

My first care, of course, was for Cynthia. As the Sheriff's men were not likely to molest her should she run away out of reach of harm, I insisted on her doing so. I had to be firm with her too, since she was by no means disposed to separate from me in this pass. She would either have me come with her or she would stay where she was. The first alternative was impracticable even had I wished to embrace it. The enemy were all about us by now, and I should not have been permitted to go; and the second put her personal safety into such a jeopardy that I had to be very stern. Thereon she unwillingly complied.

No sooner had she gone than I slipped the flute in my pocket and prepared to take a hand in the defence. As I had no other weapons I had to employ my hands. Had the conditions been equal I could have wished

no better. But they were little likely to prevail against superior numbers, armed with staves. Indeed, from the first, submission would have been the wiser course for us all, as the gypsies were at such a disadvantage that they had no chance. Yet blows were dealt with mighty goodwill on both sides; sometimes the upholders of the law went down, but more often the breakers of it. Presently two fellows with cudgels in their hands made to seize me by the collar, whereon I dealt the most assiduous of the twain so shrewd a crack on the point of the jawbone as laid him low. The other fellow came at me furiously with his stave, and I had barely time to whisk my head aside and so get it clear of the blow that was aimed at it. I was hastening to follow up this delicate attention with a few of my own, when a third adversary unseen came behind me, and gave me such a tap at the side of the head as brought me to the ground bleeding and half insensible.

Before I could make any attempt to gather myself again, a pair of knees were in the middle of my chest, and a strong hand half choked the life out of my throat. I was in no condition to kick or struggle much; but whatever the philosophy of my temper in the piping times of peace, devil a bit did I exercise of it now. Bleeding and breathless as I was, I resisted with what was in the circumstances an absurd tenacity; and it was some little time, after a great display of energy on both sides that two or three of my enemies ultimately secured me, bound my hands and raised me to my feet. And I hope the reader will observe that I again insist that it took two or three persons to conclude this unfortunate business, as it did to inaugurate it. I know not what vain glory it is in a man that makes him so punctilious in matters of this sort.

By the time I had been overcome and raised on to my feet in fetters, the affair was almost decided. There could be but one ending; and very soon the unfortunate gypsies were all of them captive too, with cords round their wrists, and most of them bloody of bearing. No time was lost in marching us away to the nearest magistrate. There seemed about a score of armed men to take the custody of us. In the haste with which everything was carried out, in the uncertain moonlight, and in the dull vague condition of mind that the shock of events, to name only one cause, had induced, I had not the smallest opportunity of taking farewell of Cynthia. Nor had she any means of approaching me, seeing how sedulously we were guarded, and how promptly we were marched away.

The whole thing was begun and ended so swiftly that this very grandiloquent and self-important quill-pen hath made, I find, an incomparably greater business of it than ever it was in itself. It can never bring its dignity down to the subordinate office of the relation of a plain piece of history, but is all for the frills and the trimmings. Do not be deceived into thinking, therefore, that this country brawl was as great as the battle of Marathon. But at least, at the time the consequences were to me very poignant. As we were dragged along over the stubble and through the moonlight, we knew not whither, I was more stunned by my evil fortune than by the blow I had come by in the argument, notwithstanding that as I walked the blood trickled in a thin warm stream on to my coat. For a person in my circumstances to fall into the hands of the law in a hedge scuffle in an alien quarrel, was about as scurvy an accident as could possibly happen. I was truly between the devil and the deep sea. To clear myself of the charge of being a gypsy and a sheep-stealer, I should be compelled to expose my identity, and in doing so should but fall out of the frying-pan into the fire.

There was another side to the matter, equally black. Whatever would happen to Cynthia? Was she not left utterly destitute, without a friend, in a foreign country? Even in the extreme unlikelihood of my regaining my freedom, neither of us would know where to seek the other, and thus at a time when it was so imperative that we should be together, we should be wrenched apart. Look at the case as I might, I could derive no crumb of comfort from it.

It was in a great depression of spirit then that I was haled, weak, bleeding, and encumbered along the country lanes to meet my fate. What it was likely to be I did not exactly know, but look at the matter how I would, there seemed to be but one natural ending to it. I was parted from my poor little wife, doubtless for ever; and if I did not come to the gallows for murder or stealing sheep, I must perforce end my days in a debtor's prison.

CHAPTER XI

I COME A PRISONER TO A FAMILIAR HOUSE, AND FIND STRANGE COMPANY

We had marched along for what seemed to me in my unhappy state an intolerable period, although I suppose actually the time was less than an hour, when we passed through the gates of a great house. When the porter came out of his lodge to let us through, and held his lantern against the iron-work, I observed that the device of the family wrought therein had a strangely familiar appearance. There was something about the porter too that awoke all sorts of remote recollections in my mind. As we went along the paths, even the situation of the trees that skirted them added to this impression. And when we came at last on to the lawn, and the house itself was clearly exposed in the moonlight, a cry of surprise almost escaped my lips, for the place had once been my own.

It was a house in which a great part of my boyhood had been spent, and one that I had inherited at my father's death. It was but a little while that it remained in my hands, however, for one night, having lost much more than I cared about over a game of piquet, I think it was, in a desperate attempt to retrieve my fortunes, I staked this precious house upon the cards and lost it also, to a fellow as reckless as myself. It is impossible to say, therefore, what my emotions were at this my strange return to the home of my childhood, and the seat for many a generation of those whose name I bore. But I think that the first moment of recognition over, my tendency was towards laughter, for could anything have been more comical than that I should be brought in such a company, and on such a charge, to this of all the places in the world?

Even the fellow who replied to the summons on the great hall-door, I remembered nearly as well as my own father, for I ought to tell you that servants, furniture and plate had passed over with the property. We were kept waiting without whilst the head-constable or chief officer among our captors went in to confer with the magistrate. In the end it was decided that we should be brought before the justice in person. He was said to have been a prime mover in the matter from the first, and was highly incensed against the unfortunate gypsies.

"We could not have come to a worse place," said my friend the flute-player, who stood beside me. "This is the house of Sir Thomas Wheatley, a hard man, and the biggest enemy to us poor folk of any one about. If his name and interest count for anything, we shall all of us infallibly be hanged."

There were eight of us prisoners, and we were presently led into Sir Thomas's presence. When we were brought into the fine dining-room that I knew so well, every inch of which was so familiar to me, in which every object of vertu and article of furniture was a thing so well recollected that even in this predicament I could not refrain from regarding them with pride and affection, how can I indicate the flood of emotions that surged in my head? After all, a man in the depths of his abandonment is something more than a piece of wood.

The justice was a common type of person enough; a man in middle life, who doubtless lived well and drank much, to judge by his purple cheeks and the somewhat puffed appearance of his body. He was a middling sort of man in every way; middling in his stature, in his mind and in his character, and more especially so, as we were to discover, in his thoughts and ideas. He affected the very nicest style of the squire in his dress, was highly formal in his deportment; and he sat playing cards with another fellow, apparently not so much for the amusement of himself or the entertainment of his friend, but rather as one who followed a dignified occupation in a dignified way. In his every word, gesture and motion he had an indescribable air of one sitting for his picture. He was in a towering rage, it is true, but it was a rage that appeared not to spring from the heat of his blood, for he was of that lethargic habit, which does not rise to heats of any sort. He was in a towering rage, because it was expected of one of his position and sentiments to be in one at such a time. Therefore, when we poor prisoners had been ranged along the wall, he put down his cards with great deliberation, slowly wheeled his chair round towards us, put together his thumbs, and looked us all over with a noble indignation.

"Soh!" says the justice, counting us carefully. "One, two, three—eight of you fairly taken; eight cut-throat rogues that most richly merit a hanging. And a hanging you shall get if there is any law left in the country. I will commit you at once, so help me I will! Fetch me pen and ink somebody, and I'll fill in the mittimus. I hope you are mightily

ashamed of yourselves, you wicked, blackamoor villains."

"Can you not see that they are, good Tommie?" says the man with whom he was playing at cards. "They are as ashamed as the devil was when he singed the hairs on his tail through overheating his parlour."

The solemn justice was somewhat shocked at this piece of levity. He frowned at his companion, and coughed to cover his annoyance. The man who had spoken to this disconcerting tenor appeared rather a singular fellow. It was difficult to say who or what he might be. Of a rather massive frame, he had a countenance that recommended him to the curious. His features were large and bold, with an aquiline nose, a devil of a chin, and a short upper lip. His face shone with wassail and intemperate excess; there was a deal of sensuality in it, and more than a suggestion of coarseness, but it was for none of these things that it was remarkable. There was something besides that was baffling and indescribable to a degree, that drew one's attention to it again and again. It was a face of marvellous humorous animation, with the mockery of a devil and the candour of a saint. It was as prodigal of wit as it was of appetite; of majesty and mischief; of impudence and nobility. It was the face of a poet and a sot. Here, apparently, was a great heart, a humane spirit overlaid with flesh and infirmities. I think I was never so arrested by a countenance before, and certainly never more puzzled by one.

"Why do you propose to hang these gentlemen, Tommie?" says this whimsical fellow, with a mockery in his eyes and a curl of the lip that made the justice more uncomfortable than ever. "Have they picked a few hazel-twigs off your honour's footpaths?"

"Oh lord, Harry, I pray you be a little serious," says the justice. "These are gypsies and sheep-stealers; villains and rascals all."

"They are beyond our prayers then," says Harry. "The law must take its course. Even if it could overlook the rape of the mutton, it could never condone the colour of their hair. *Lex citius tolerare vult privatum damnum quam publicum malum*. There you are as pat and pragmatical as Marcus Tullius Cicero. I tell you, Tommie, the world lost a great lawyer when I became a hackney writer."

While this was going forward I had collected a few of my wits and had determined on the course to pursue. Unless by hook or by crook I could seize these precious moments prior to our committal to prison in which to put myself right or regain my freedom, all chance would be gone. Jack Tiverton was as dear to the law as a sheep-stealing gypsy, and once before a judge I must prove myself to be the one before I could prove I was not the other. Therefore I boldly seized the occasion.

"I beg your worship's pardon," says I, humbly; "but surely you will not commit a man without evidence? And there is not a tittle of evidence against me. I am neither a gypsy nor a sheep-stealer."

I was several times interrupted in the course of this little address by one of our custodians, who continued to pluck at my sleeve, and enjoined me in audible whispers to hold my impertinent tongue. The justice was astounded by my audacity in daring to address him, and grew as red and pompous as a turkey-cock.

"How dare you, fellow, talk to me?" says he. "If I had the power I would commit you twice over for your insolent presumption, yes I would, so help me."

"Yes, Tommie, you would, so help you," says his friend. "The spirit of Hector; ye speak like Priam's son. How dare the fellow ask to hear the evidence when you have had the magnanimity to commit him without it? Does he forget too that when innocence ceases to suffer it will no longer be the highest wisdom to be a rogue?"

I was likely to profit nothing by these protestations of my innocence. This justice was evidently of the worst type of magistrate. He was too high and mighty to imperil his preconceived opinions by entering into the merits of the matter. He was too lofty to argue; too swollen with self-esteem to be affronted with facts. All persons who were brought before him must be guilty of some crime or other, otherwise they would not have come there; and he held that he had discharged his office with credit to himself and with profit to his country when he had impartially committed them to gaol. I soon came to the conclusion therefore that it would be impossible to prevail on a man of this mould with a simple relation of the case, or expect to meet with any suggestion of justice at his hands. I must try a more uncompromising method; and that an exceedingly bold one. I must prove to him beyond all doubt that I was far other than an ignorant gypsy, taking the risk of the revelation of my true identity, and any consequences that might ensue. For that matter if I must go to gaol, I might just as well go there in the role of the defaulting

nobleman as in that of the larcenous vagabond.

Disregarding all attempts on the part of the officers of the law to restrain me, I gazed about the spacious apartment with the air I might have worn had it still belonged to me, and says: "The old place is just as it was, I see. But, my good Sir Thomas, it grieves me to observe that you have put your fat aunt by the side of a Rubens; and that you have not scrupled to set a pompous citizen in a tie-wig, who, to judge by a certain consanguinity of expression and countenance, was the illustrous man your father and a cheesemonger at that, cheek by jowl with one of Vandyck's gentlemen."

The justice was too incensed by this audacious speech to find words with which to reply to it. He spluttered and stuttered himself to the verge of an apoplexy. His friend took it far otherwise, however.

"A hit, a palpable hit," says he, laughing heartily. "I never heard a ripe thought better expressed. And, damn it, Tommie, you deserve it too. Your fat aunt, and your illustrious father the cheesemonger in a tie-wig, ha, ha, ha! Our friend of the black eye and the bloody countenance is an amateur of the arts, a lover of the beautiful."

"Remove the prisoners out of my presence," says the justice in a fury.

"No, no, Tommie," says his companion, "you go too fast. Our friend is so monstrous good that I vow and I protest he must drink a glass of claret."

Thereupon he countermanded the justice's order with a certain easy air of authority that was natural to him, which carried more weight than all the assumption of the magistrate. This strange fellow, still chuckling, poured out a glass of wine from one of several bottles that adorned the table, and leaving his seat carried it over to me, despite the fact that he hobbled very badly with the gout. When he stood up he was wonderfully imposing, being more than six feet tall, with an appearance of perfect breeding and majesty, for all his profligate looks and his free, laughing, jovial, devil-may-care manners. As he offered me the glass of claret with a charming grace, I looked down at the cords that so tightly secured my wrists with an air of humorous deprecation.

"Here, hold this, and keep your long nose clear of the rim," says he, putting the wine into the hands of the astonished head-constable. He then drew a knife from his pocket, and without more ado cut off my fetters. As he did so an honest indignation seemed to run in him suddenly.

"What a dirty way to treat a gentleman!" he said. "But you must excuse these low fellows; they are not to blame. They have no discretion but simply to follow their calling. They only know a hog by his bristles."

"As a former *custos rotulorum* for the county of Wilts, none knows that better than I, sir. But I am vastly obliged to you, vastly obliged."

Thereupon I drank the glass he so kindly handed to me.

"My dear sir," says he, with another great laugh, "that was not the work of a tyro. There was a neatness and a deftness in the manner of it that must have cost you at least ten thousand liftings of the elbow to acquire. You are as good to drink with as to talk to. I'faith you must do me the honour of sitting at table, for you are a three-bottle man, or I have never seen one in the world."

You may be sure that I was nothing loth to accept an invitation that was as unexpected as it was desirable. The bewilderment of the justice, the constable and his men, and the poor gypsies too, was boundless as I briskly followed this extraordinary gentleman when he hobbled back to his chair, and promptly ensconced my disreputable self in one of the high-backed oaken seats of my forefathers, now so courteously placed at my disposal. While he proceeded to refill my glass and his own too, the scandalized magistrate very naturally expostulated in the most vehement manner.

"Why, Harry, God save us all!" he cried, "have you gone horn-mad? It is the most outrageous thing that ever was perpetrated. I vow and protest, Harry, that you are gone stark mad to bring a thief and a gypsy to my table to share your cups. It is unbearable, Harry, and 'fore God I will not have it. When this gets wind in the county they will deride me to death. Lord, I shall get struck off the justice-roll."

"Your petitioner will ever pray," says Harry, while simultaneously we raised the distraught justice's good claret to our lips.

Taking my cue from the familiarity of my entertainer, I threw aside restraint and adopted the attitude of a guest in lieu of the humbler one of a prisoner. Continuing to gaze about completely at my ease, says I, with that frank criticism that had been formerly so effective:

"Things are no longer what they were. This place hath deteriorated since I was in it last. The city creeps into the ancestral hall; cheesemongery obtrudes itself. Where formerly there were Old Masters and French Tales, there are now Bibles and bad prints. But I rejoice to see that some few of my ancestors are still faithful to their old-time haunt. My parents, my grand parents, my uncles, my cousins and my aunts, Vandycks, Lelys, and Knellers, and the devil knows who, are still assembled here, even to the replica of Sir Peter's picture of that nobleman, most illustrious of his race, who made a Commentary on the *Analects of Confucius*, the original of which I last saw in the shop of a Jew dealer the other day."

My singular acquaintance with the contents of his dining-room, evidently far more extensive than his own, was not without its effect on the justice.

"What is the meaning of all this, Harry?" he asked of my benefactor. "What is the fel——what is the man talking of? What does the man mean by his ancestors? Who ever heard such impudence, such effrontery?"

"Well, Tommie," says his frank friend, "I'll lay my last guinea that he hath more right to call them his ancestors than their present owner."

"A murrain take you," says the justice, more purple than before, for this was a stab in a tender place. "Will you never learn to control your infernally long tongue? And yet again must I ask you not to address me as Tommie when I am in the exercise of my high functions. Thomas if you like, or my full title would be still better on these occasions. The King would not have conferred it upon me, were it not designed for use, and that he desired I should profit by it."

His friend nearly choked himself with laughter long before the justice had come through this solemn homily. Indeed he could not recover his breath until he had poured himself out another glass of wine, and had refilled mine.

"You will kill me of laughing, Tommie, one of these days," says he. "If it were not that your claret is as good as any for thirty miles round London, I would never come near you. How a man can keep such a good table and yet such a poor understanding is a thing I have never fathomed. But I protest you will certainly kill me if you do not amend your mind a little."

"Harry," says the justice sternly. "I can never understand how it is that a grandson of the Earl of Denbigh, and a person of undeniable family and descent, should have such ungenteel manners."

"Damn the Earl of Denbigh," says Harry, banging his fist on the table, "and you too, Tommie. You can no more keep that fly out of the ointment, than a pig can his snout out of the muck."

"What, sir," says I eagerly, "are you also cursed with a grandfather?"

"Aye, to be sure I am," says he. "Though I'll thank no man that names him. If it were not for my grandfather I could go to the devil in my own way."

"Why, my dear sir," says I, "never were there two such brothers in misfortune. Your case is the very counterpart of mine."

CHAPTER XII

I DISCOVER A GREAT AUTHOR WHERE I LEAST EXPECT TO FIND ONE

While all this was going forward very eloquent glances were repeatedly exchanged between the justice and the head-constable. They were both equally at a loss to know what to do in the matter. Their plain duty was to have me removed in custody. But this they could not very well do, seeing on what terms of intimacy I had already been placed. There must be a grave mistake somewhere. What it was they were too greatly puzzled to say, but the end of it all was that my fellow-prisoners were removed into the stables against the next morning, when they could be more conveniently taken to prison, whilst I for the nonce was allowed to remain seated at the table in the society of my whimsical friend.

Sir Thomas's composure had been so rudely shaken that for a long time he could hardly venture on another word. He sat watching us with a kind of stupefied horror, whilst we made short work of several bottles of his most excellent claret.

"The true Falernian," says my companion, smacking his lips. "I would that Roman fellow were here in the room of Tommie, who sits like a dead dog in a dry ditch. I have remarked it before, and I remark it again, that I can never understand how it is that a man who can keep such a full-bodied, generous wine in his cellar should yet keep such a lean, ill-liberal heart in his body. It is an internal paradox on which I break my brains anew. You would think that one would cry out upon the other, and that they could live together no better than a keg of gunpowder and a live coal. And how in the first place they ever came to be associated passes me. Ring the bell, Tommie, and tell 'em to bring us up another bottle a-piece."

While Sir Thomas did so with the mechanical meekness of one well accustomed to obey, says I:

"I think I can give you ease on this last matter, sir. Hath it never struck you that our host may have bought his cellar at the same shop that he bought his ancestors? It sticks in my mind that I have met both his forebears and his vintages before. Indeed, to come down to the details of this odd matter, I believe at the period of which I speak they may have had my name appended to them."

"Shrewdly said, sir," says my companion; and then going on to another matter which I had sedulously been leading up to, for I had come to the conclusion that my one chance of ultimate escape lay in betraying myself entirely, continued: "You begin to interest me vastly. I confess you are a man after my own heart. I like your talk, I like your manner, the colour of your eye, the cock of your old beak, i'faith, I like you altogether. You are the very perfect gentle guest; you abuse your host and drink his wine with the same impartial spirit. You bear the same relation to a gypsy as our club-footed Thomas does to the herald Mercury. No, no, my good sir, it will not do; *ex ungue leonem*."

"Your compliments charm me," says I, raising the glass to my lips again, "but I could have wished, sir, that you had not nosed out my *incognito*. It may be the source of a greater inconvenience than I care to think about, if it and I part company."

"The blame is entirely your own, sir," says the other. "Hercules should not try to hide behind an arbutus tree. But no man ever had aught to fear from me, unless that man was myself. To him, it is true, I have been a great enemy. Yet I'll swear on my life that even that poor unlucky young man whose name is proscribed in this morning's news-letter would never be a penny the worse for revealing himself to such a rough fellow as me. As for Tommie, I will answer for Tommie too. It is true that Tommie hath weaknesses, but they are on the surface mostly. If he can never forget that Nature had a hand in the fashioning of Sir T. Wheatley, Knight, and Justice of the Peace, and is in a sense a self-made man therefore, he nevertheless hath a very good heart. I can answer for Tommie as for myself."

When he came to mention the "poor unlucky young man," I suppose I must have winced or blinked a little, or he was a marvellously subtle and keen observer, for after looking into my eyes, he slapped his hand on his thigh, and cried:

"By God, can it be? Surely it is too whimsical, too fantastical. These things do not happen outside the story books."

"Such a coincidence is a little after the manner of *Tom Jones*, to be

sure, sir," says I.

I suppose it was the word "story books" that led to my mentioning that immortal novel which at that moment held all the town in a spell of wonder and delight. But no sooner had I uttered the magic name of *Tom Jones* than I thought I saw my companion's flushed face flush deeper than ever, and at the same instant my mind was assailed with a dozen points of recognition. In a flash I jumped to the conclusion that I was being entertained by the author of that inimitable work. For a moment we sat regarding one another with the frankest amusement. Then my companion took up his glass, and lifting it slowly to his lips, says:

"Lord Tiverton."

Thereupon I followed his polite example; and when the glass was at my lips, says I:

"Mr. Henry Fielding."

Upon that we fell a-laughing wildly, and wrung one another warmly by the hand. Now that the murder was out we grew closer in good-fellowship. Had we not shown proofs of an admirable sagacity in our previous respect for one another? The magistrate, however, was aghast. No sooner was he acquainted with my name than he was beset with his manifest duty as a justice of the peace.

"As you are a refugee from the law, my lord," says he, looking anxiously at me and then at Fielding, "I fear that I have no alternative other than to hand you over to the proper authorities. You see, as one holding his Majesty's commission of the peace for this county, I am precluded from giving way to any private feelings I might entertain in the matter, but must do my plain and obvious duty, however it be opposed to the dictates of my heart."

The dignity and the rather florid effect of this speech, which I will do Sir Thomas the justice of saying was very well meant, was utterly spoiled by Mr. Fielding's reception of it.

"Come down off the high horse, Tommie, if you love me," says he. "Be damned to the dictates of your heart and your duty too. Do strive to be natural, Tommie; if you would but be content to be natural I would suffer you gladly, for at bottom you are as good a fellow as I know. But when you get on these magisterial airs of yours a common mortal cannot touch you with a six-foot pole."

"That is all very well, Harry," says Sir Thomas, "but you forget my responsibilities."

"There you go again," says Fielding. "Be damned to your responsibilities. Come and drink a glass of good claret with us and forget yourself, your office, your dignity, your wig, your knighthood, and your laced coat for a brief five minutes. Perpend, Tommie, perpend; and for the nonce consent to be a human being."

"Would you have me, then," says the magistrate, "sit down with a man in my own house, knowing him to be a great criminal? How can I possibly entertain such a person? Were I to do so I should be altogether unworthy of the high trust that hath been reposed in me."

Mr. Fielding scratched his wig.

"A very moral sentiment," says he, "but all the morality in the world is not worth a penn'orth of humanity."

"Sir," says I warmly, "I am grateful to you. You can scarcely know how an example such as yours helps a drowning man to keep his head above the flood that is like to overwhelm him. But I think I owe it to myself to lessen the weight of Sir Thomas's responsibilities, by assuring you that I am innocent of the horrid crime with which I am charged. The poor fellow came by his end in a fair fight; and therefore if you can only overlook the sums I owe my creditors, you may relieve your scruples."

"I am more than glad of these assurances," says the justice. "A great load is taken off my mind."

"On the contrary," says Mr. Fielding, "they make not a farthingworth of difference to me. I care not if you are the most long-suffering peer that ever went to the dogs, or if you are the greatest villain that ever tried to dodge the gallows. What's the odds? You are a proper enough fellow for all rational purposes. Certainly I would not choose to meet Mr. Jack Sheppard in a lonely lane on a dark night, but I would as willingly drink a bottle with a lad of his mettle just as well as with another. If a man shall bear himself gallantly at table, with a merry courage and a kindling eye, who am I that shall ask uncivil questions of him?"

Whatever Mr. Henry Fielding's philosophy, and it seemed to have a savour of that of the late eminent Sir John Falstaff, Knight, he was a fine merry companion, who asked no better of the hour and the company in

which he sat than that they should consort with his humour. After a while his wit, his gallant spirits, and his brave bearing before the bottle did not fail of their effect upon the justice too. That staid and pompous fellow resisted them for a time, but as first one and then another bottle was numbered among the slain, and our tongues grew looser as our brains grew warm, he fell at last from his high estate and was seduced into a course that ill consisted with his sentiments. When he had accepted several glasses from Mr. Fielding's own fair hands he began to grow rather thicker in his speech, weighed his words less, and showed several signs of having departed from his usual habit.

"You can see," says Mr. Fielding, winking at me, "that our gallant Tommie hath been nurtured on cinnamon-water and Dr. Akenside's sermons. I should say that four glasses are about the limit of him; five, and he goes over the verge."

Although both Mr. Fielding and I had already accommodated a far greater quantity than the magistrate, we had served such a much longer apprenticeship to this business (the shame is our own) that whereas we were scarcely conscious as yet of what we had drunk, the square-toed Sir Thomas was already hanging out his evidences. Now no sooner did I observe this disposition in him than I was taken with a scheme by which my poor fellow-prisoners incarcerated in the stables outside were to profit. Whatever my shortcomings, I would never have it said of me that I left a friend in the lurch. These poor gypsies had given us of their hospitality; that in itself therefore was enough of a reason why I should endeavour to spare them a hanging. Therefore I suggested the matter to my companion.

"Do you think, sir," says I, "that we can get our good magistrate drunk enough to be worked on to give the order for the release of my poor friends the gypsies? It is like to go very hard with them, I fear, unless we can find some such way as this to aid them."

"It is very well thought on," says this truly humane fellow, without so much as pausing to consider the matter. "Leave this jocund old justicer to me, and I'll answer for it that the king's enemies shall get a free pardon. Now then, Tommie, by your leave I'll name a toast. We will drink to Law and Order. Fill up, Tommie, and no heel-taps."

So thoroughly did Mr. Fielding enter into this plan, that very soon Sir Thomas began to babble in his talk with a most unwonted levity, and even essayed to sing a song. With such assiduity was he plied, that he presently advanced stage by stage, until my companion considered him to be sufficiently primed for this business. Thereon Fielding rang the bell and ordered the head-constable, who with his men was keeping guard over the premises, to be brought to him. When that worthy presented himself, Mr. Fielding says with an inimitable glib audacity:

"Sir Thomas, after much weighing of the merits of this case, hath come to the conclusion that the evidence is not sufficient to send these prisoners for trial. He is sensibly fearful of some miscarriage of justice, the more particularly as one of their number that you brought before him hath turned out on an examination to be anything but what he was represented. Therefore Sir Thomas bids me to inform you that he hath decided to remit these charges. And he would have you release these people at once, that they may go about their business. And when you have done this, you are to take your men to the kitchen, where they are to have a good supper of beef and ale, and they can then repair to their homes. And at least this course, this somewhat extreme course I may say, that Sir Thomas hath decided on will save you all from a long and weary vigil in the night air."

However surprised the head-constable was at this unexpected turn of events, he was by no means disposed to cavil at it, since the only way in which the fate of the gypsies could affect himself was the one that Mr. Fielding had so adroitly indicated. Not so the scandalized justice. Fuddled as he was, he had enough wit left to apprehend what was going forward. But he had not enough, however, to interpose his authority in a way that was at all likely to take effect. At all his thick and nearly inarticulate protests, his friend Mr. Fielding kept hushing and soothing him down, with highly eloquent and imploring gestures.

"Oh lord, Tommie," he would say, "I pray you have a care. Here am I trying to conceal the fact that you are abominably drunk, and yet you will flaunt it and advertise it, before the servants too. Think of your own dignity, Tommie, I beseech you."

Whereon the head-constable would rub his coat-sleeve across his face to conceal his laughter. Sir Thomas would grunt and wriggle and writhe his tipsy protests, and his friend, Mr. Fielding, with the oddest mingling of sorrow, amusement, and solemnity, apparently struggled to put the

best face he could on the justice's scandalous behaviour.

CHAPTER XIII

I FIND OUT CYNTHIA: CYNTHIA FINDS OUT ME

It was in this agreeable fashion that my unlucky friends obtained their release. The justice was in no condition to cope with Mr. Fielding's peremptory ways; and the constable, seeing and caring nothing beyond the advantage to his own personal comfort, was not at all disposed to wait until the magistrate was in a better condition to express his opinions and good pleasure. Thus he bowed to Sir Thomas whilst that inarticulate gentleman was still wrestling with his thick speech, assured him his will should be obeyed, and that he would see to it that his officers made a good supper in the kitchen, and took his departure without any reluctance whatever.

"So much for that matter," says Mr. Fielding, highly pleased with the success of his own ingenuity. "We have robbed the gallows of eight good necks and true, which is, I think, a pretty liberal evening's work. Yet as this is a night for good works, let us spend it fittingly. Ring the bell, Tommie, ring the bell. The last of these bottles died a full two minutes ago."

Unfortunately Sir Thomas was in no condition at this stage to comply with such a request, and Mr. Fielding had perforce to perform that office himself. A fresh relay of wine was brought, and our glasses were filled up again. Sitting here in the midst of these insidious allurements, well found in all bodily comfort and good companionship, it needed but a corresponding ease of mind to be as perfectly content as Mr. Fielding himself. I had been most providentially delivered from a very real and immediate peril, had contributed to the saving of eight poor people from the gallows, and had exchanged the cold night for a far happier sanctuary; but with all this, I was nearly at the verge of despair. Where was Cynthia? What had happened to that poor child, and how could we hope to come together again! Neither of us knew in which direction the other had gone; and to search for each other in that dark night was clearly impossible, seeing how complete was our ignorance of the neighbouring country.

In my distraught state I mentioned my unhappy case to Mr. Fielding. He, with the sanguine temper that seemed to be so strangely characteristic of him, pooh-poohed my fears, and swore that all would come right by the morning.

"I will wager you the last guinea I have got in the world," says he, "which by the way I borrowed from Tommie to bear me back to Fleet Street to-morrow, that you will see her pretty face in this parlour before you are prepared to leave it. Why, man, if she hath any wit at all she will remain with the gypsies until they discover whither you have been taken, and then she will come to Tommie with a mighty long tale and a mighty heart-moving countenance. I suppose it is that my wit runs wonderfully clear to-night, for I confess I can see the whole course of this matter as plain as the back of my hand."

Mr. Fielding declared his opinions with such an energy, that in spite of myself I half subscribed to them. Indeed, as he pointed out, nothing could be done by repining. But as he followed up this last sage reflection in a manner peculiarly his own, no less than by the opening of a new bottle, I am not sure that the occasion itself was not the source of his wisdom. "*Vino diffigiunt mordaces curæ*," says he, "an old, old tag, but a monstrous good one. Come, my dear fellow, do not spoil the excellent impression you have already made. I am sure to mump and moan is not in you; besides, you would be the last to have yourself numbered among the Tommies of the world, the half-bottle men. You are capable to bear me company for many an hour yet. Come, let us grapple with melancholy and put him to sleep."

I was in such a state of maudlin misery by this, thanks to the wine I had already drunk, and my dubious speculation in regard to Cynthia, that I soon fell a-prey to Mr. Fielding's importuning. That lusty full-blooded fellow was not to be denied. As I accepted glass after glass of the insidious liquor from his hands, I felt my resolution weaken as of old, and that same sense of large content and utter heedlessness of the morrow steal upon me. As my brain grew hotter and heavier and less capable of thinking and doing, Cynthia's absence grew less poignant to it, and my own situation of the moment more perfectly acceptable. It was truly Elysian to sit in this warm room and in this mellow society, after having been without a roof to one's head and in such peril for so many hours. The sense of abandoning oneself by slow degrees and against one's proper judgment to this forbidden pleasure, was fraught with a delight

that it is only in the power of the illicit to bestow. At the same time that I knew Mr. Fielding's point of view was specious and worthless, *vide* the teachings of a bitter experience, I could hardly find it in my heart to resist his wit, the compliment of his good-fellowship, his whole-hearted gaiety. He was such a lovable spirit that he would have seduced the first of the Pharisees to hang with him at Tyburn, for the sake of the companionship. It would have taken sterner stuff than was ever in me to deny or resist him.

It was not long before the justice was so overcome by the contents of his cellar that he drooped his head on the table and straightway fell fast asleep. Mr. Fielding, who was himself so seasoned that his face hardly shone as yet, laughed, and says with a kind of kingly pity:

"What a penny-halfpenny haberdasher of a man it is! *C'est un vrai épicier*. Strip him of his paunch, his purse, and his knighthood, and there remains one who hath no more parts than a Presbyterian. If I were old Sir John, I would undertake to make a better man out of a cheese paring. It is a pretty behaviour in him, when we are sitting at this table, bearing ourselves so gallantly before his claret. But after all, I would prefer that his honour should speak with his nose rather than with his mouth. Both organs are equally witty; and we are under no obligation to answer his lustiest performances in that style."

It was not long before I began to feel some inklings of a disposition to imitate Sir Thomas. Fortunately Mr. Fielding did not observe it in me; and he on his side was so brisk and jovial-hearted that he easily found enough of conversation for us both. And he was so prolific that I am sure he would have been the last to notice it. My bosom was no longer torn with the same pain when my thoughts reverted to Cynthia. My wits were so deadened that I had a sort of sweet sorrow instead; the sorrow whose expression is an amiable snuffling melancholy, and a tender reflection on the days that are past. I was fast sinking into the depths of this maudlin condition, when a diversion occurred that mercifully kept me from it, even as my mind tottered on the brink. A servant entered with the information that a woman was at the hall door demanding to see the justice on a most particular business. In an instant a great possibility possessed me completely, and startled me out of the bibulous lassitude that was creeping upon me.

"What kind of a woman?" I asked eagerly, "A very beautiful woman, a most adorably beautiful woman, with the voice of a nightingale and as dainty in her carriage as, as—— Fielding, an you love me, give me a simile—as dainty as——"

"The swift Camilla," says he instantly, "the virgin Volscian queen, as she

'Flies o'er th' unbending corn, or skims along the main,'

in the crude language of the crookbacked Twickenham bard. If you were not so drunk I would give it you in Virgil's eleganter tongue."

"I don't know what the female's like in her carriage," says the fellow, regarding us both with a very natural bewilderment, "for she's not come in no carriage, do you see. She's come afoot. But she's a shortish wench, with a pert tongue, and she's a-crying like fun."

Prosaic as this description was, and sensibly differing as it did from the one I had furnished, I was sure that the female was no other than Cynthia. That there could be other shortish wenches in the world with pert tongues, who were capable of crying like fun, never entered my head. It may have been that I had so continually brooded on her fate, or the guilt of my conscience was so keen as to lead me to this conclusion on such slender grounds. Relieved as I was, I yet had some twinges of contrition. Despite my heavy-witted state I was fully alive to it, and mightily uneasy as to the figure I must make in her eyes.

"A pretty kettle of fish," says I, "that I should be as drunk——"

"As a lord," suggested Mr. Fielding.

"As drunk as a lord on our wedding-day. I pray you have pity on my state, sir, and help me out as much as you can."

"My dear fellow," says Mr. Fielding, "this is no sort of talk. It is unworthy of you. Why, nothing could have been better contrived, sir. Can anything be more commendable than that a man should begin as he means to go on. One cannot begin too soon to bring up one's wife properly."

"Poor little toad," says I. "When she sees me like this I am sure she will weep more bitterly."

"Hath she never seen you drunk before?" says Fielding.

"Never," says I.

"It is time she did then," says he. "But after all, as it is your wedding-day there may be some little reason for your perturbation. She is still the first woman in Christendom, I suppose, and you are still the true prince. It can contribute nothing to the welfare of either for you to be seen at such little advantage. Get thee behind the screen there and leave this to me."

Having still enough wit to be fully aware of my unfortunate condition; and being at the same time assailed with many pangs for having so callously sat down to my ease before the bottle, whilst I was seemingly content to allow her to roam the night to find me, I felt truly shamefaced and hangdog. I was but too ready therefore to embrace any proposal that might alleviate my position. Certainly Mr. Fielding had a much better command of himself than I had, and was therefore much more fitted to receive her. Besides, I was so deeply imbued with my desperate case that I counted on his ready wit to shield me from an exposure.

Therefore I stumbled into concealment behind the screen, and drunk as I was, I was sufficiently sober to follow and to keenly appreciate the whimsical scene that was enacted before my eyes. Sir Thomas being hopelessly surrendered to Morpheus, Mr. Fielding profanely assumed his character. But at least the mad rogue played it with a far finer spirit and *abandon* than the justice could have done. When my poor little Cynthia was ushered in, for she it was undoubtedly, he rose, gout and all, to greet her, and bowed very low.

"Pray take a seat, madam, pray take a seat," says he, with an inimitable gesture of politeness. "And if there is any small service that you would have me render you you have only to put a name to it, and you may consider it rendered."

My poor little one, who was very pale and trembled with apprehension, peered out of the hood of her cloak with the tears still in her eyes. Despite Mr. Fielding's obvious gallantry she gazed at him with a dim distrust, and then cast a look of downright fearfulness in the direction of the heavy-slumbering Sir Thomas. It was the first time I had been in a situation to observe these feminine timidities in her, and methought they enhanced her a hundredfold.

"I would not have you regard that fuddle-witted fellow, madam," says Mr. Fielding, mad wag as he was. "He is but a common hackney writer of a man, Henry Fielding by name, who hath come out of Grub Street to take the country air. And the country air hath proved too strong for him, do you see. Do not regard that fellow, madam: believe me he is quite unworthy of your attention."

The excess of chivalry with which this was uttered did something to compose poor Cynthia; though why such flummery should have imposed upon her I cannot tell. Even a parcel of lies, if it is made up into the semblance of a delicate attention, can do a great work with that sex, apparently. Anyhow, Cynthia sufficiently overcame her trepidation to find the courage to ask:

"Are you Sir Thomas Wheatley, sir?"

"You can call me that, madam," says Mr. Fielding.

"Then do you know anything of my—my husband?" says Cynthia.

"Your husband, madam," says he. "I did not know that you had a husband. Since when have you had a husband, madam?"

At this point Cynthia blushed divinely. All her proverbial pertness was fled. The situation was too great for the foibles she had acquired. She stood forth in her strange predicament just a simple rustic maid, who longed to express her misery in tears, but was too proud to do so. Thus, with an ingenuousness that I had never observed in her before, she faltered:

"Since—since this morning, sir."

"Since this morning, madam," says Fielding, "and you have lost him already. Is it credible? He did not leave you at the church door, I hope."

"He did not leave me at all, sir," says Cynthia.

"Then if he did not leave you at all, madam, why is he not with you now?" says Mr. Fielding.

Little by little, with numberless hesitations and small attempts at concealment on her part, and many sly quips and verbal quibbles on his own, the roguish fellow drew out of her a fair account of the state of the case. Cynthia's anxiety to conceal her husband's name and how he came to be placed in such an unhappy pass, afforded Mr. Fielding a great deal of pleasure. He was continually springing awkward questions upon her with a wonderful appearance of judicial innocence; and to observe the unfortunate chit wriggle and contort herself out of many an awkward

corner was as good as a play. It was a cruel sport, perhaps, and I half thought it so at the time; but I am sure Fielding did not hold it to be such, for I do not think it was in him wittingly to give pain to anyone. This whimsical by-play was really directed against me, for when he had got her into a more than usually tight corner he would look at me, as I frowned at him from my hiding-place, with a face that dared me to intervene.

"I am afraid, madam," says Fielding, "you are not dealing with me quite fairly. I must really assure you that this repeated and noticeable concealment—I can use no less explicit term—of your husband's name is most embarrassing. With the best will in the world to serve your interests, and to aid you to the extent of my poor ability, how can I give you any information about your husband if you will not take me far enough into your confidence to vouchsafe me his name? Even though I am a justice of the peace, I do not pretend to any supernatural knowledge. I am no mystery-reader, nor a worker of miracles."

Poor Cynthia's dilemma was desperate. She did not know how to act. I shook my fist at the wicked wag, and began to wish heartily that I had not added to my other weaknesses by shirking the consequences of them. I longed to come to her aid. But I had less desire than ever to expose myself now; and after all here was a very pretty comedy.

"Come, come, madam," says Mr. Fielding. "I would not have you trifle with justice in this manner. What is your husband's name?"

"His name is Smith," says she at last, taking the name we had been married in.

The pseudo-justice expressed his disappointment. He grieved to say that to the best of his knowledge no person of that name had called upon him that evening.

"But he was among the gypsies that were brought to your house this evening," Cynthia persisted. "What is become of them?"

"Is your husband a gypsy, madam?" says he. "I should have thought it not at all likely, to judge by the appearance of his wife?"

"No, he is not," says she.

"Then why is he concerned with gypsies in such a scandalous charge?"

At every turn the mischievous fellow contrived some new means of embarrassing her story; and at the same time he embarrassed my patience also, as he very well knew. But it was quite in vain for me to publish my threats from behind the screen. Both of us were delivered into his hands.

"I am disappointed that he was among the gypsies, madam," says he, "since they were discharged and sent away several hours ago."

"Oh," says Cynthia eagerly, "how glad I am to hear that!" But then her face fell. "How may I find him?" she says, very anxiously.

"Nay, madam," says Fielding, "that is more than I can tell. But I am disappointed to hear that his name is Smith. You are sure his name is Smith, madam?"

Cynthia hesitated between hope and fear. Could it be possible that my true name had been discovered, and that concealment was no longer desirable or necessary?

"It is most strange, madam," says her relentless persecutor, "that you should not be certain of the name of your own husband. I suppose you could not by any chance have made a mistake in regard to the name of him?"

"I might have done," poor Cynthia faltered; whilst I felt such an overpowering desire to execute a prompt vengeance on the wretch that it was as much as I could do to remain in my seclusion.

"Well, if you might have done," says he, "his name could not by any chance have begun with a 'T.' Could his name be something like 'Tivy,' or 'Tantivy'?"

Poor Mrs. Cynthia had completely lost her bearings by this. She was utterly nonplussed, and looked at the wicked Fielding as helplessly as a child. She was still unable to overcome her scruples about revealing my real name. To do so to a justice of the peace of all people in the world was like to be a most imprudent act. But at the same time she could not rid her mind of the thought that he already knew more than he would tell.

"Tivy or Trivy or Tantivy," says Mr. Fielding; "you are sure his name is nothing of that sort? Now could it by any chance be Tiverton?"

At this mention of my name Cynthia was unable to go further with her imposture. With a face of much confusion and distress she made the

confession.

"Well, madam," says Mr. Fielding reproachfully, "why could you not have said so at once without so much beating about the bush? Really the name of Smith was too facile, too obvious. Now as it happens, I am in a position to know where my Lord Tiverton is."

"Oh, sir," says Cynthia, clasping her hands, "I beseech you to tell me of his whereabouts."

"Yes, my dear madam," says Mr. Fielding, "that I will, on one condition."

Mrs. Cynthia eagerly asked it.

"That you give me a kiss," says Mr. Fielding. "I vow and protest, madam, I never saw a creature more divinely handsome."

My breath was almost taken away by the audacity of the villain, as I fear he had intended that it should be. But what could I contribute to the situation beyond a few impotent threats, made in dumb show? I was never had at a greater disadvantage in my life? It was in vain that Cynthia evaded the demand, and besought him by the name of humanity to tell her where I lay. The spirit of mischief in the fellow, inflamed by the quantity of wine he had drunk, caused him to brook no denial.

"Come, my dear madam," says he, "one kiss from those dainty lips is all I seek. Then i'faith shall you know where your husband lies."

"You are no gentleman, sir," says Cynthia, with more spirit than she had yet shown.

"No, only a justice of the peace," says he.

"It is cruel of you," says Cynthia, flaming, "to drive such a bargain in these circumstances. You know it is not in my power to say you nay when so much is at stake."

"To be sure I do," says he, favouring me with a triumphing look. "And as for the cruelty of it, surely the onus of that matter lies with you. Is it not your adorable sex that provokes that which it denies? It is ever a point with me that if I can ever take any little revenge upon you, I take it with an easy conscience, knowing full well that you beauteous ladies have scored up such a heavy tally of cruelties as can never be expunged. Besides, madam, where is this cruelty you speak of? Am I not at least as well favoured as this ugly profligate Lord Tiverton of yours; and is there not the additional advantage of my not being your lawful wedded husband?"

"I would that Lord Tiverton were here to hear you say this," says Cynthia indignantly.

"Bah," says Mr. Fielding, "the water-blooded fellow, I would that he were too, then I with five pints of good claret in me would prove upon his miserable person how mean a figure he doth cut."

It was with the utmost difficulty that I could hold back at this challenge. I might be very drunk, and therefore doubly disposed to resent such wanton insults; but I was also sober enough to be aware that they were not prompted by ill-nature. It was a piece of mischief merely. We were entirely at his mercy, and he proposed to torment us to death. Could a fourth person have witnessed this play, he would have found it a truly diverting affair. First Cynthia was made to writhe, and then I; and then both of us together; yet at the same time each quite unknown to the other; whilst the audacious rogue of a fellow mocked at us both, and defied us to prevent ourselves being made ridiculous. The unfortunate Cynthia was led on by his disparagement of me to take up the cudgels warmly on my behalf. The sly look of satisfaction that shone in him when she did so, was proof enough, if any were needed, that she was still ministering to his diversion.

"I give you the lie there, sir," says she angrily. "How dare you presume to malign such a noble brave gentleman! You utter behind his back that which you dare not utter to his face."

"Good a thousand times," says Mr. Fielding. "This is delightful. Harkee, my noble, brave gentleman, and tell me if I do not utter it to your face!"

I clenched my fists; I vowed to myself I would not suffer this impudent sport another minute. But then there was no gainsaying that I was abominably drunk; that my pretty innocent was but a child; and that it was our wedding-day. Come what may, I must bear with the fellow's mad humour for the present, and requite him in a more seasonable hour.

Cynthia might be angry and I extremely discomposed, but Mr. Fielding still pressed his jest.

"No, madam, I will not be put off with your arrogance," says he. "I demand one token from those charming lips as the price of the satisfaction that you seek."

Covered with a modest confusion, Cynthia was preparing to comply with this demand unwillingly enough, when I was no longer able to contain my just resentment. Whatever the consequences, we should not be flouted so. Therefore as the impudent fellow was in the very act of forcing this concession from her, I threw caution to the winds, and sprang forth from my concealment in a violent rage. I aimed a mighty blow at Mr. Fielding's head; but what with my impetuosity, combined with my drunken condition, I miscalculated the distance sadly, and instead of getting home on that audacious person, missed him entirely, and fell full length at Cynthia's feet.

Between her distressed exclamations and Mr. Fielding's immoderate laughter I was got up again, to find myself a little sobered by the fall. With a joyful recognition of me, and a truly withering glance of contempt for Mr. Fielding, neither of which I can positively depict, Cynthia fell into my arms, and showered upon me those salutes Mr. Fielding had been so importunate to obtain. But I must confess that I received them with a great deal more of shame than pleasure; for Mr. Fielding regarded us with such a degree of boisterousness, that the bitter fact suddenly came upon me that in my guilt I had committed her to the tender mercies of a person even more drunk than I was myself.

CHAPTER XIV

AMANTIUM IRÆ

"Curse my jacket," says the drunken fellow, "if this is not the first time I have kissed a wife in the presence of her husband."

"It shall be the last, sir," I hiccoughed furiously.

"What words are these to use before a lady?" says Mr. Fielding, amiably measuring out glasses of wine for the three of us. "If I were not the most easy man in the world, I vow and protest it should be coffee and pistols at five."

"By God, sir, it shall be whatever you are," says I, holding on by the table. "I swear I will pup—punish you for this."

"Well, as you are determined to pup—punish me," says he, "here is another glass of Tommie's claret, another hair of the dog that bit you, to confirm you in that meritorious resolve."

As he laughingly offered me the glass of wine, Cynthia came forward and took it from him. But instead of giving it to me, she flung both the wine and the glass in his face. Whereon he stood with the claret dripping from his features, and the blood too where the broken glass had cut his forehead, so that he made the very picture of his own Parson Adams, when he was assailed in a similar way by the hostess of the inn with the pan of hog's blood.

Poor Cynthia stood white and trembling, but she never once looked at me for counsel or countenance. The tears were in her eyes too, but she never uttered so much as a word of reproach, although I am sure her misery was very great. I never felt such a mean villain and coward in my life as I did then.

"Come," says she, "let us leave these—these people."

Here she threw such a glance at the sleeping justice that must have pierced him to the marrow had he but been conscious of it. By this, however, Mr. Fielding with the aid of his silk handkerchief had wiped a good deal of the wine and blood from his features, and stood staunching the wound on his forehead. A more truly whimsical expression I never observed in any man before. There was a highly comic look of contrition, humility, and self-abnegation in him, and withal an air of the most perfect good-breeding, that could not possibly have been more contrary to his appearance. Although Cynthia was white and speechless with anger, and she had made what might easily have been construed into a very unprovoked attack on a benefactor, Mr. Fielding behaved, whatever his faults, as only a true gentleman could have done. Cynthia's act had brought him to his senses; he saw that he had pushed the matter too far; but after all he did not apprehend, as I more shrewdly did, that the head and front of his offending lay, not so much in his own conduct, as in that he had been the inspirer of mine.

"I crave a thousand pardons of you, madam," says he, "if I have been so unlucky as to carry a jest farther than a jest should go. Perchance it was not conceived in quite the best taste at the outset; but at least I make you all amends. I am sure I am your duteous humble servant, madam, if you will but permit me to be so."

Only a person with the instincts of a true gentleman could have shown such a punctilious regard for the feelings of another, and such a disregard for his own. For in a sense he had been deeply provoked, and had suffered more indignity on his own part than any that he had inflicted on Mrs. Cynthia. But no, my little madam refused to be mollified by his humble demeanour. She looked steadily past him, as though he had ceased to be there at all. Upon that my own brief spirit of anger cooled down immediately; for certainly I thought, considering his unhappy plight, poor Fielding was playing a very gallant part.

"I think there is enough said, sir," says I, striving to speak as articulately as possible. "I am sure you do very well; and I am equally sure that the apologies should not be all on your side."

Whereon we grasped the hand of one another, and were sworn friends again. Yet although Cynthia would not deign to notice my behaviour one way or the other, on the other hand, greatly to Mr. Fielding's distress, she would not condone the conduct of that honest fellow. Her imperviousness hurt him the more, I think, because he did not apprehend the true reason for it. She could have forgiven his having smoked her so badly, but what she could not forgive was that he had made her husband drunk. I dare say it was that she was acting on the invariable principle that a woman will never own her lord and master in the wrong to a third person. And as she must vent her anger on some

one, and she could not very well vent it on me, the true culprit, Mr. Fielding was made to suffer vicariously.

"Come, Jack," says she haughtily, disdaining Mr. Fielding's repeated solicitude; "let us wipe the foulness of this disgraceful place off our feet. If daylight came and caught us in it, I could never respect myself again."

The stress of these events had done a great deal for my sobriety. I was still acutely conscious of my condition, but I had recovered enough of my wits to be able to battle with it successfully. That being the case, I clearly saw that my little one was like to do a great injustice to Mr. Fielding.

"Cynthia," says I, "I conceive you do not know what we owe to the generosity of this gentleman. Had it not been for his friendly offices I should have been still in the hands of the constables."

"I had rather you had," says she cruelly, "than that you should have passed into his."

Not only was I hurt by such arbitrary behaviour; I was angered by it too. It seemed monstrous that so small a fault in a liberal character should be allowed to outweigh the essential goodness of it.

"Cynthia," says I, "I trust you will not refer to our benefactor in these terms. He is far too good a friend of ours to merit your reproaches."

Mrs. Cynthia lifted her chin again, and disdained to reply.

"Come," says I, "I would have you take back the expressions you have used towards him. For I am sure no man merited them less."

"Never," says she.

"The lady is overwrought a little," says Mr. Fielding, coming gallantly if somewhat unwisely to my aid. "Is she not weary and distrest? Sir Thomas, were he not otherwise engaged, would be delighted to place a chamber at madam's disposal for the remainder of this evening. May I have the honour to do so in his name, for I am sure she is in a great need of repose?"

"I thank you, sir," says Cynthia coldly, "but I am surprised that you should presume to propose a service that you must know, after what hath passed, must be highly distasteful to me."

"You do the gentleman a great wrong," says I, with some heat. "And I am sure, madam, when you look at this matter more reasonably, you will be the first to acknowledge it. I thank you, sir, from the bottom of my heart for this kind offer, also for those other services you have rendered to us; and I beg to accept it of you, sir, in the name of my wife, in the spirit in which it is given."

I thought that some such speech was no more than Mr. Fielding's due, but the effect of it was greatly marred by Cynthia's unreasonable conduct. Drawing herself up into all the majesty of her five feet nothing, she bowed to us both in an imperious manner.

"I wish you a good evening, Mr.——, I did not catch your name," says she. "You also, my lord, as you choose to remain."

Before we could reply, or any attempt could be made to detain her, she turned on her heel and swept forth of the room, straight out of the house into the black midnight. There was no other course open to me but to follow her. But ere I did so, I clasped Mr. Fielding warmly by the hand, again thanked him for his generous behaviour, and made some sort of an apology for that of Cynthia. He, good fellow, although evidently perturbed that he should have so distrest her, was yet very warm on his part too, and as I was going out, slipped the only guinea he had in the world into my hand. I protested strongly and refused to take it.

"My dear fellow," says he, "you are ill-advised to refuse it. I know what even that sum must mean to one in your condition, when the hand of every man is against you. To be sure by accepting it you will be a guinea better off than your benefactor. But at least I have a few friends left, however little I may merit them; and although it be ever my fate to have my character judged by those foibles that I am least willing to have it judged by."

Indeed he so insisted on my accepting this highly desirable guinea, that there was no other course than to take it, however reluctantly; for to have refused it might have seemed churlish. And Heaven knows that it is the last thing I would have risked after what had happened.

"Sir," says I, "I can wish no better than that we should meet again, and in happier circumstances. You have been a true friend, and I hope I may live to requite you. And I hope, sir, you will think no more of the humours of my poor little wife; you who have shown such a knowledge of the ways of her adorable sex will be the first to condone them in her. You will not forget, sir, that she hath lately been called on to endure a great deal."

"More than enough of that matter, my dear fellow," says he heartily.

I am sure he must have been hurt, but he was by far too true-bred a gentleman to betray as much. I fear we were both still a little drunk, but I do not think the fervour of our leave-takings owed anything to the heat of our brains. To this day I have always thought of this fine spirit, this great master of the science of human nature, with the same degree of affection. As for him, I do not suppose he ever gave me a second thought, or if he did, I could be nothing more than a whimsical circumstance, a piece of romantical history. But at the time of our parting, his pitiful, generous heart enabled him to feel a very real concern for my welfare, and also for that of my wayward little one who had treated him so harshly.

No sooner had I left Mr. Fielding waving his frank good-bye from the steps of the house, than I set off running in hot pursuit of Cynthia. The gate of the porter's lodge at the end of the long dark avenue of overhanging trees was just closing upon her, when I overtook her. She was in too proud and defiant a mood to pay any attention to the fact that I had done so, and that I was walking greatly out of breath by her side.

I followed her implicitly into the weary darkness. I did not dare to break the dogged silence she maintained, and therefore maintained one too. For I had not walked a mile in the cool night air before I was as sober as any man could be. And perfect sobriety brought a new shame and a fuller measure of repentance. Lord knows, I had been drunk often enough before; more completely and uproariously so; I had committed far greater excesses in that state than any I had been guilty of that evening; and yet now for almost the first time I conceived a disgust for such a folly. Lord knows, I am so little of a pietist that the sense of humiliation which came upon me as I walked by the side of the silent Cynthia was so foreign to my character, that I almost laughed at myself for suffering it. Yet at the same time I was bitterly angry with myself. No man's weaknesses could have led him to play a more unworthy part.

As we walked mile upon mile on the dark, tree-shadowed highway that led to anywhere, everywhere, and nowhere, there never was so moral a person as I outside the moral pages of Mr. Richardson. Self-abasement creaked out of my boots, self-reproach fluttered out of my brains, self-abnegation beat out of my heart. I forget the name of the Moral Muse; indeed, now I come to think of it, there is most probably none such among them, for I fear they are baggages all. But in the name of the righteous lady, whoever she be, was there ever such a hang-dog rogue as I?—such a whipt cur with his tail between his legs?

Hours came and hours went, the steeples of neighbouring village churches chimed two o'clock, three and four, but still we wandered on, while never a word passed from one to the other. At times I feared my poor little one was crying softly to herself, but I had not the courage to attempt to find out if that were so. Instead, my fingers would tighten on Mr. Fielding's guinea, whereon such a poignancy would be added to my sufferings that I was tempted at times to cast his money incontinently to the road, as a heroic but not very intelligible concession to them, in the hope that I might purchase at that price a moment's surcease to my pains.

CHAPTER XV

AMORIS INTEGRATIO: WE ARE CLAPT IN THE STOCKS

The measure of Cynthia's resentment might be inferred from that of her endurance. The weary silent miles she trudged along must have called forth a great impetus from within, for without that stimulus the poor little creature must have drooped and flagged upon the dark road long ere she did. It was not until the birds began to chirp in the trees, and the grey face of the dawn began to speckle the darkness that she abated her defiant paces. But once she had begun to do so, the weakness grew rapidly upon her.

Presently she stumbled and nearly fell. Then it was I took the courage to venture on the first of my penitent advances. I lightly touched her shoulder to support her. Finding that she had not the strength, I hardly dare say the inclination, to resist, I took her at last by the arm, very tenderly at first, but then a little more firmly, and then more firmly still. Thus, without a word passing on the side of either, the sense of our comradeship was re-established. If I could not feel that I was forgiven, I might take the comfort to myself that I was suffered.

It soon grew apparent, now that the meridian of poor Cynthia's wrath was overpast, that the child would have to pay the price of it. She became a very weight in my arms, and with the first beams of daylight was ready to faint with fatigue. In the reaction of her mood she yielded herself to my will as readily and completely as ever. Therefore, to spare her as much as I could, I seized the first occasion to give her a place of rest.

In the little light there were no houses to be seen, and even had there been, it was too early to hope to gain sanctuary in them. There was a wood, however, close at hand, whither I partly led and partly carried her. Within its warm and dry recesses, I selected a couch of green earth for her underneath a great tree, whose rough bark made something of a pillow for her head. First, I took off my great-coat and spread it on the ground as comfortably as I could, placed her upon it, and then divesting myself of my thick, rough jacket wrapped her snugly in it. The poor child was no sooner fixed in a position of some little comfort than she fell fast asleep.

While she was very mercifully occupied thus, I spent several hours in pacing up and down the glades of the wood to keep myself warm, for, after all, in the air of the dawn, the sleeves of one's shirt are no very adequate protection. To diversify this occupation I hunted an occasional squirrel, but with no prospect of catching one; and lay in wait, stone in hand, for many a white-tailed rabbit, but did so in vain. Indeed, the only good fortune that fell to me in these nefarious pursuits was the discovery of a bird's-nest with several fine eggs in it. But somehow I had not the heart to disturb those exquisite things; it may have been, especially as a small piece of sentiment may not come amiss even to the sworn enemies of it on an occasion of this kind, that the distrest birds and the distrest Cynthia had something in common.

Any lingering fumes of wine being long since out of my head, thanks to the operations of the wholesome open air, I grew conscious of a very distinct craving for food about eight of the clock. It was then that the thought of the generous Mr. Fielding's guinea proved such a source of solid comfort. One must be a vagrant by the wayside, dependent on chance for one's crusts of bread, to experience what the contemplation of twenty-one shillings sterling means, when that contemplation is sharpened and assisted by a biting hunger. In the days of my material greatness, not my houses, lands, revenues, not all my precious possessions had the power to bestow upon me that inexpressible sense of delightful anticipation which Mr. Fielding's guinea was able to do. A whole guinea to a desperately hungry mortal who for two days had begged his bread! What would it not purchase? How much sheer honest feeding did it represent! It would permit of delicate feeding, too, for Cynthia. A fine lusty mutton-pasty for the earl; and a bowl of cream-covered milk, flanked with the whitest bread and the purest butter, for his countess.

Cynthia still slept so soundly that I could not find it in my heart to rouse her. Quite a long time I debated within myself whether to leave her thus whilst I betook myself to the nearest house in quest of food. At last, as she showed no signs of waking yet, I determined to do so. Fixing the spot with particular care in my mind where she lay, I went off briskly on my errand. Happily a farm-house of goodly size was but a little distant; and here, by the aid of the magic guinea, was I accommodated, though,

to be sure, without any special degree of favour. And at least my appearance could not be said to merit it. I was without my coat, my clothes were coarse, and the worse for travel, I still bore a black eye, and the small wound at the side of my head was still rendered visible by the blood that had dried about it. But as I had promised myself I got a draught of most excellent ale, a mutton-pasty too, which I bore along with me to eat at my leisure; whilst I procured for Cynthia a jug of warm milk, and fresh butter spread on some dainty slices of bread.

As soon as I returned to the place where Cynthia lay, she awoke, wonderfully refreshed and with no trace of the distresses of the previous night about her. She gave expression to her delight when I proudly produced her breakfast; whereon I redonned my coat. And no sooner did she observe the use to which it had been put, than she upbraided me for discarding it. Seating myself beside her, we made a perfectly admirable meal, but perhaps it was not after all our keen hunger that made the best sauce to it, but rather the fact that we were both in our natural minds again, and that our differences were forgotten. All the same, I devoutly hoped that my dear Cynthia would not pause to inquire from what source the royal breakfast sprang. I had no wish, you may be sure, to associate it with Mr. Fielding, however black the ingratitude. Happily the question was not asked.

When we had made our meal in this happy fashion, we repaired to the farm-house from which it had been obtained, to crave permission to perform our ablutions. By paying for the same, we were able to make them in some comfort. Like the arrant spendthrifts that we were, money was no object to us so long as our fortune lasted. This accomplished, we set off again wonderfully refreshed in mind and body. It was a sweetly fair spring morning, that made us step forth blithely. It takes a very old and hardened cynic to resist nature at her vernal period. And I think our reconciliation added to our happiness, although not once did we allude to the unlucky events of the night before. But we exhibited such a fine consideration for one another now, and were so scrupulous of every little detail of our demeanour one towards the other, as plainly showed that the articles of peace were being heartily subscribed to by us both. All the way it was, "Let me carry thy coat, my pretty one," or "Darling, walk this side of me in the shade lest the sun should overpower you," or "I do hope this bright sunshine will not affect your poor, broken pate."

Sedulously avoiding all places of any size, lest our enemies should be lurking in them, we selected a modest roadside inn, in which to rest at mid-day, having left, I think, the town of Guildford some two miles to our right. Here we ate and drank again with a degree of comfort that, considering our low estate, was quite luxurious. So discreetly had we ordered the reckoning too, that there would be means enough left to us to furnish us with supper and a bed at some similar unpretentious inn when evening came. You may believe me, or believe me not, but merely to think of sleeping once again on a bed of feathers, after having passed the best part of the two previous nights and days afoot, was almost a distracting pleasure. I suppose a beggar's happiness consists solely in his belly and his bones; and even if it is not of the highest kind, what can be so intimate and full of zest?

The evening came without any adventure worthy to be recorded. We still kept well off the beaten tracks and were therefore so happy as not to encounter runners from Bow Street, indignant parents, nor scheming rivals. The inn we selected was an ungenteel one enough in a remote village; and that night we supped and lay in it in conscious state, and royally spent the last of Mr. Fielding's guinea on a breakfast the following morning. It was wanton in us, I dare say, to spend such a sum in a fashion so prodigal, but as yet our extremity had taught us no measure of prudence. Besides, when we had not the wherewithal, were we not imbued with the excitements of those hunters who pursue for their needs? It is an incomparable kind of sport to seek for food and lodging with devil a farthing to purchase it.

With every penny of our late fortune squandered, we were again reduced to this employ. It was then I bethought me of the gypsy's flute. I bore it still in the pocket of my cloak; and had improvised several melodies already upon it to cheer our lonely way. Thus, when we came to a village about noon, wanting refreshment and even a penny to furnish it, I boldly took forth the instrument and blew it for all I was worth as we walked slowly along the principal street. Probably my notes were lustier and in better tune than is ordinary with others of this profession; or again, even an itinerant musician may have been a strange bird in this out-of-the-way place; for be it known that when Cynthia holding my hat in her hand sweetly importuned every staring yokel and every opened window with her daintiest smile and her gracefullest curtesy, we had

acquired the sum of fourpence, mostly in halfpence, by the time we had come to the village alehouse. Thither we repaired to invest this reward of our toil in as good a repast of bread and cheese and ale as could be obtained for the money. We seasoned it by a fine argument as to whom the credit of it belonged. I vowed it was my fine playing that was alone responsible for it; whilst Cynthia was equally firm in her conviction that it was entirely due to the elegance of her solicitations.

We were mightily pleased with a prospect that offered a new source of revenue. But ere long we were doomed to discover that it was not fair as we had supposed, and that it had its drawbacks. This melancholy incident happened the very next time we put it in practice. The scene of it was a somewhat larger village than the first, and we attracted such an amount of attention that I believe Cynthia collected as much as sevenpence in a very little while. And so encouraged were we by the amount of favour with which we were received that we were emboldened to give a kind of set performance in front of the village ale-house. It had even been decided that Cynthia should sing a love ballad, for she had a very sweet voice and was prettily accomplished in the use of it.

Everything prospered with us admirably well for some time. An audience gathered about us; and although a little inclined to be abashed at first, we overcame those feelings very soon and gave our singing and music with great spirit. But just before we had come to the conclusion of the last piece, the throng was invaded by several stalwart fellows, amongst whom were the beadle of the parish and the squire of the place, both highly indignant to be sure. The latter was red and fat and full of choler.

"Take 'em both, Thomas," says he, wonderfully angry and stern, "and they shall be clapt into the stocks, sink me so they shall. The idea of two vagrant wretches daring to affront me thus under my very nose. There shall be no playing of profane tricks and loud music in this parish, curse me if there shall be."

Meanwhile the beadle, in the exercise of his authority, had twice set his dirty hands on my coat, and twice had I gently but firmly removed them.

"I will venture to say we are doing no harm to any one, sir," says I to the squire, controlling my resentment as well as I could, and striving to ape a humility I did not feel. "And surely, sir, you will not be too hard on poor people."

This fellow, however, was plainly of that tribe that loves to exult over the weak. It was his pleasure to display a greater and more despotic authority the less occasion there was for its exercise. The meeker he found us the more unbending was his indignation.

"How dare you venture to address me, you wandering vagabond?" says he. "Your damnable impertinence does but aggravate your offence. I will see whether you will defy me, I will so. You shall go to the stocks at once, and you may bless your fortune it is not the house of correction."

It needed but a glance to assure us that to resist would be vain. Not only the beadle, but several other persons under the immediate eye of this despot, were but too ready to curry favour with him by doing his bidding. In fact, one and all of those present seemed to conceive a mighty admiration of his rage. They felt such a display of anger and unfettered will to be sublime. Therefore, we were pushed and hustled with many unnecessary indignities, all the throng following to the village green, and were set side by side in the stocks forthwith. When we had been duly affixed in this place of humiliation, the squire made us quite a lengthy harangue, not so much I suspect for our edification as for the glory of himself. His anger against us inoffensive creatures who answered him not a word, mounted higher and higher till it grew truly magnificent. He stamped and raved and swore; he had a mind to do this, and a mind to do that, and 'fore God he would if it were not for the abominable leniency of his character. The beadle kept nodding his head, and fretted himself into a kind of ecstasy of admiration of the squire's remarks; whilst the villagers could be heard to say to one another: "Lord, an't squire noble angry-like to be sure." But neither of us retorted on the fellow by so much as a word, and I think we were well advised not to do so, for had we but unbosomed ourselves of a very small part of what was in our hearts he might have had a real grievance to set against us.

Therefore we both regarded him in silence, and strove to maintain a demeanour of the coldest disdain. It was not very easy, to be sure, in that posture, with jeers and humiliation besetting us on every side. Yet we persevered in it so well that presently it did not fail in its effect. For our persecutor was such a poltroon at heart that although we were secured and quite at his mercy, he no sooner observed that we scorned him, than

the torrent of his eloquence grew sensibly less. So long as we were humble and appeared to shrink and tremble before him, his rage knew no bounds. But the moment we called in a little disdain to our aid, he grew less certain of himself, and was so baffled and held in check by it, that at last he bethought himself that he would best serve his dignity by taking himself off. His parasite the beadle went with him, but a considerable number of the yokels stayed to keep us company. Their disposition was to make sport of our misfortune. But how true is that old saw—so the master, so the man.

For with a good deal of difficulty, as you may guess, we managed to preserve an appearance of mighty dignified unconcern, however far we might be from feeling it, and contrived to converse one with another in a perfectly natural and amiable manner, for all the world as though we were not sitting in the stocks at all, but in the village alehouse. In the face of such a fine contempt the spectators were just as much at a loss as ever the squire had been. They were there to bully and bait us, but under our unwavering eyes had not the courage to do so. Indeed it seemed to involve such a degree of initiative on their part to kick two persons who after all were not thoroughly and effectually knocked down, that one by one they followed the example of the squire and slunk away.

When the best part of these idle and mischievous persons had departed, and our admirers were diminished to about a score of the village urchins who were not to be so easily daunted, says I to my little companion, who to be sure had been wonderfully steadfast through all our misfortunes:

"I think, your ladyship, we shall best forget the distresses of our present situation by arrogating to ourselves the grandeur of our former state. How was the dear queen when you saw her last? Had she quite recovered of her whooping-cough?"

"Oh yes, I thank your lordship," says Cynthia glibly. "But surely your lordship was at the levée last Tuesday month?"

"No, rat me if I was," says I, with a languid air. "The fact of the matter is, I have not the taste for these routs and drums and crushes and assemblies. My father, the late lord, I have heard boast that he never missed above three in thirty years. But I think your ladyship will be the first to own that in these days the *haut ton* is not so vastly energetic as it once was. For myself, I would be the first to confess that the practices and observances of the genteel and polite world weary me to distraction. I never get into my Court suit but what I die of fatigue in the operation!"

"His Grace of Middlesex I have heard speak to the same tenor," says Cynthia; "and often enough have I heard her grace the duchess reprove it in him."

"I think," says I, "it was a fashion that first obtruded itself in the Prince of Wales."

"Ah, the dear prince!" says she. "How like his poor dear Royal Highness it is, to be sure! I hope your lordship was not with him at that particular drawing-room where he took off so many of the gentlemen to play a game at basset or hazard or what not in the antechamber."

"Primero, your ladyship," says I gravely.

It was in this edifying fashion that we supported ourselves in our present trials. Our conversation was carried to the very heights of the genteel, and was chiefly concerned with the Royal Family. We mentioned nobody under a peer, and contrived to bring in those great persons in a highly inept and fashionable manner. Had any one heard our conversation they must have marvelled to know how two people so vastly polite and who moved in such exalted circles could ever have come in that place. The smack of humour in the thing was undeniable, but I am not sure that we did not retail those details, anecdotes, and reminiscences in the mincing, clipping tone of St. James's as much for a vindication of ourselves and a salve for our wounded feelings as for the whimsicality of the occupation.

We were still beguiling the time in this way when the beadle came to release us. In the performance of this office he gave us a great deal of advice that we could very well have dispensed with. He was also charged with a message from the squire as to how much more serious the consequences would be if either of us were caught in those parts again. Having at last obtained our freedom, we were not long in shaking the dust of this unlucky parish off our feet.

As we went away we were a good deal disconcerted by the turn our affairs were taking. It was already growing dark, and sensibly colder, and worse, it was coming on to rain. And we had but a matter of sevenpence to provide us with the supper that we should soon be greatly

in need of, and a protection from the night's inclemency. To have had recourse to the flute once more, and I gravely doubt after what had happened whether we should have had the stomach to have done so, would not have served us. We were a long way from the next village, and the evening had already come.

CHAPTER XVI

WE ARE SO SORELY TRIED THAT WE FAIN HAVE RECOURSE TO OUR WITS

Hand-in-hand we trudged along valiantly. The rain came, at first a thin, hesitating haze, then with a quicker patter and a brisker resolution, which presently settled into a steady sullen all-night down-pour. We were very well shod, happily, and we drew our cloaks tightly about us, and turned our faces to the deluge. To pass the night in the open air in weather of this sort was impossible, but we were like to be in the predicament of that first evening out of London. Once more were we wholly ignorant of the way, were in great discomfort of body, and had no wherewithal by which we could relieve it. We were again called on to endure all the discomforts inseparable from our lot. The only sound from the great darkness that covered the land was the squish of the water under our feet, and the ceaseless twitter of the rain on the road. Although our clothes were a steaming burden, and clung about us in a sop, we tried not to be daunted. We pursued our way through mud and puddles, resisting the hunger and weariness that crept so insidiously upon us. And whatever the outward conditions of our state I don't think we minded greatly. The example of one another kept us from flagging, even as the possession of one another kept us from complaining.

At last, having dragged our weary limbs up a steep hill, and having crested the brow, we saw all at once quite a number of lights gleaming below in the valley. It was plainly a considerable place, to judge by them; and though it was in our best interests to keep away from all towns and villages of any size and importance, on this occasion we did not pay much heed to these scruples, but went boldly and gladly towards it.

"But what shall we profit when we get there?" says Cynthia. "We have but a matter of sevenpence between us, which will avail us little enough for food and a lodging. And I am sure there will be nobody to be found who will extend their charity to such a pair of drenched beggars as we are. Oh, what can we possibly do!"

I pondered on this hard problem for a full minute. Cynthia's gloomy views were hopelessly right. We were indeed a pair of beggars, homeless and destitute. But we could not walk about all through that wretched wet night on the open road. We must find some asylum for our weariness, if only a cow-hovel as it had been formerly. This night, however, put us in no mind for that kind of thing. We longed for the luxuries of a bright fire at which to dry our clothes, a warm supper at which to defeat the dismal weather, and a snug bed afterwards. But how could we make sevenpence go so far? Beat my brains as I might, I could find no solution to this hard problem. Yet we both yearned for these comforts so keenly, that at last we came to the resolve that we would obtain them by hook or by crook, if not by fair means, by those more desperate, and be hanged to the consequences! Accordingly, when we arrived at the first house in the place, I thrilled Cynthia by boldly knocking on the door, and thrilled her further by more boldly asking the title of the principal inn. As it bore the promising name of the Angel, and was less than half-a-mile along that very road, and was said to be a remarkably good inn, we were encouraged to push on in search of it.

"Oh, Jack," says poor Cynthia nervously, "whatever will the consequences be? It must be quite a public place; the landlord will certainly ask to see our money before he serves us, such a poor vagrant pair must we seem in the eyes of everybody; some of those horrid Bow Street runners may be there too, or possibly my father. And if we take that for which we are unable to pay, we may get sent to prison, or——"

"Put in the stocks," says I.

Cynthia shuddered, and then laughed a little.

"I don't think," says she, "we shall ever fear that indignity again. At least we came triumphantly through that ordeal."

"Merely by being bold," says I, "and the exercise of our sense of mirth. And that is what will be demanded of us in the adventure that is before us. Let us play our parts as bravely here, and I am convinced that we shall come out of it just as successfully. Let us be bold and take our courage in our hands, and I'll answer for it we'll get a supper, a fire, a bottle, and a bed, and no questions asked. But only a sufficient hardihood can do it, do you understand? We must not bear ourselves as a pair of beggars at this inn, but rather as persons of consideration and great place. You must be daughter to the duke, my prettiness, and I will be a devil of a peer."

"That is all very fine, Jack," says Cynthia, who on occasion could be very shrewd, "but how are we to reconcile our lost and destitute state with our exalted degree?

"A most happy idea," says I, suddenly seized with the same. "I have it exactly. We must be a pair of travellers who have been set on by a highwayman, turned out of our carriage, and robbed of all our money and valuables."

"Yes," urged Cynthia, "but what carriage can we have to show?"

"We can provide for that too," says I, in the throes of invention. "Our servants were so affrighted at the highwayman's appearance, that they made off pell-mell, carriage and all, without once stopping to look behind them."

"A not very plausible story," urged Cynthia again.

"I agree with you there," says I, "but we must strengthen any defects in our tale by the vigour and sincerity of its narration. We must play our parts at the very height of our ability, and the landlord, whoever he is, shall be put to it very hard to catch us tripping. A bold demeanour and a loud voice go a long way in these days. I can smell that supper already, and I feel my feet to be toasting before the warm blaze. And here we are to be sure under the very sign of the house, as goodly a country hostel i'faith as I ever saw, at which to arrive on a pouring wet night."

Forsooth we were already come to the door. By its substantial, well-lit, comfortable look, and the space in front of it, it had the appearance of a coaching inn. And for that matter it did not call for much observation to prove such to be the case. It stood at the junction of four roads. The one that had carried us thither was a by-road, running at this point across one of the main coaching highways. When we discovered this to be the case we paused a moment. There was a degree of publicity about such a hostelry that we could have very well done without. We were certainly taking a great risk lest our enemies should enter it; and again, the charges were likely to be high. Yet it took only a brief reflection to decide us. We were utterly cold, hungry and jaded, our cloaks were soaked with rain, and the mud rose above our ankles. Therefore leaving discretion outside in the rain, we entered boldly.

The chamber we found ourselves in was in singular and delightful contrast to the conditions from which we had emerged. It was brightly lit, a rare wood fire crackled and sputtered on the hearth, and threw its shadows on the oaken panellings. An incomparable smell of cookery pervaded it, and a table was laid for supper. The whole apartment was spotlessly clean, replete with comfort, and altogether was a model of what such a room should be in an inn of the better sort.

The room had only one occupant; he, a gentleman who sat at his ease, waiting for his supper in a chair by the brisk fire. He was a wonderfully handsome man, young, bold-eyed, and with a look of gay impudence more winning than displeasing. He threw up his eyes as soon as we entered and frankly took our measure. He went over us from top to toe with the frank audacity of a pretty woman or a child. He was plainly a little puzzled by us. He could not reconcile our appearance with our address. We must indeed have looked to a stranger at that moment the most draggle-tailed couple that ever came out of Bridewell. But we had got all our best town airs about us too, and the contrast between our state and our address must have been ludicrous, truly.

We had hardly got in to the room ere the landlord came bustling forward. His mode of assessing the character of his guests was more peremptory. We were in a wretched plight, and had come afoot without baggage and unattended. He gave us one shrewd contemptuous glance and says:

"You are come to the wrong house, are you not, master? The Chequers, a bit further along the road to your left, is more in your style, I'm thinking. The quality comes to this house, dy'e see?"

"God bless my soul," I roared, "was there ever such effrontery! Why, you pot-bellied ruffian, I would knock you down as flat as your own ale were it not for fatigue and the presence of a lady. The wrong house, is it? Do you take us for a pair of pickers and stealers then, you beer-barrel! Call a chambermaid this minute and have her ladyship taken to the best bedroom you have got in the place, or I will rub my boots into the small of your fat back, upon mine honour so I will."

A less forcible method of address might have permitted of a controversy, in which we should have everything to lose and nothing whatever to gain. But this fine assault, this taking of the landlord by storm, completely disarmed him. In an instant his demeanour completely changed, as is usual with those of his kidney. From the contemptuous

critic he was transformed into the grovelling lackey. On the instant he was ours to command. With many bows and congees he was soon inquiring what we would have for supper, and which wine we would prefer. He also presumed that our luggage and attendants would presently arrive.

"Devil a bit of it," says I. "Neither one nor the other will you see this night. Our wretched rogues have had such a fright that I will bet my leg they never draw rein until they make the blessed town o' London. A murrain upon them, and may they die of a vertigo!"

The landlord clasped his palms in a fine attitude of humility, curiosity and awe.

"Lord save us!" says he, "what can have happened to your lordship?"

"Why, something that is always happening to us, of course," says I, with a great air of a glib matter of fact. "One of these pestilential highwaymen stopped us and tried us on this very road, not five miles off. Cocked his ugly mug through the carriage-window as cool as a church, and had us step out of our cushions into the pouring rain. Took our money and jewels off us before you could say your prayers. And not content with all this, burn me for a heretick! if out of pure wantonness this villain did not discharge his barker across the nose of the leader, and away they flew downhill to the devil before we could jump in again. They are miles away ere this, and lord knows how we shall contrive to return to town."

I suppose there must have been a nice tone of verisimilitude in this tissue of lies, or a ring of truth in my tone, or an expression of perfect veracity in my eyes, for the landlord put never another question to us upon that matter, but accepted my heart-moving tale with a mien of deep solicitude. I think I must be unusually gifted in this particular, since this bold story worked on his credulity to such a remarkable degree. And either our supposed misadventures or my command of great oaths must have invested us in the landlord's mind with the indisputable evidences of high quality, for his obeisances grew profounder for the recital, and though by our own confession we had not a penny about us with which to requite him, he proposed to entertain us to the utmost of his capacity.

"Your lordship and your ladyship will doubtless prefer an entirely private apartment in which to sup," says he. "If you will very kindly bear with this one while a fire is lighted in another, I will go about it at once, and also prepare you as good a meal as it is in the power of this poor place to furnish."

However, as I was rather taken than otherwise with the appearance of the solitary occupant of this room, and even more so by the rare warmth and comfort of it, I was fain to suggest that if our company was not disagreeable to the present occupant, we should be well content to stay where we were, and take our supper in his society. And, indeed, the frank, amused, wonderfully naïve countenance he turned on the innkeeper, and the air of perfect good-breeding with which he asked the honour of our company at his table, promised excellent companionship to follow. I having gratefully accepted his offer, he very politely insisted that I should choose the wine, adding that our host kept a very tolerable cellar, and paid a particular compliment to the Burgundy.

In a variety of amiable ways we were very well advanced in a companionship long before supper was served. Our friend, in addition to his handsome looks and elegant manners, appeared to have a good deal of knowledge of the world. His tastes, too, seemed extremely refined. He was well versed in Dryden, Virgil, and Shakespeare, and passed the highest encomiums on the genius of Mr. Henry Fielding. He contributed some excellently apposite remarks to the long-standing controversy respecting the merits of the author of *Tom Jones* in comparison with those of the author of *Clarissa*. To my extreme gratification he declared strongly for the former, whereon Mrs. Cynthia, following the fashion of her sex, took up the cudgels very warmly for the latter.

"My dear madam," says our friend, laughing in his musical tones, "the difference between those two authors is that between honest, searching brandy punch and tea twice watered with a good deal of sugar in it."

"That is doubtless the case," says Cynthia. "But whereas the one may degrade a man to the level of a beast,"—I will do her the justice of saying she laid no particular stress on this simile, neither did she look at me, greatly to my relief—"the other is perfectly harmless, wholesome and stimulating. Mr. Richardson's morality hath never been impeached, but Mr. Fielding's hath never been defended."

"It is not always the person who lifts up his voice the loudest, madam, who is the most worthy to be heard," says our friend gravely. "Nor is it

he who makes the best parade of his virtue who is invariably the most valuable member of society. I dare say Mr. Fielding would blush as much to be found out in a good act as Mr. Richardson would to be caught in a bad one; but for all that I would prefer to recommend myself to the author of the so-called loose and scandalous *Tom Jones*, than he of the so-called high-toned *Clarissa*, were I in need of a dinner and a guinea."

"Sir," says I, "you have put the gist of the matter excellently. You are one of the very few persons I have met who hath had the wit to draw this essential distinction between the characters of two such diverse writers. What the world is for ever failing to apprehend is that true morality, like true religion, has nothing to do with the profession of it; and that man who as often as not best serves his species is he who least pretends to do so."

Yet no sooner had I ventured to confirm the wisdom of my friend with my own opinion, than my dear Mrs. Cynthia began to take my interference as a personal matter aimed at her rather than at the argument. Thus in a truly feminine fashion she got upon her dignity and invested her championship of Mr. Richardson, and more especially her animadversion of Mr. Fielding, with several palpable references to my recent behaviour in his company. At least the unease of my conscience put this construction upon her replies, although when I reflected upon the matter afterwards I could find no grounds except those of my own guilty knowledge for supposing that she was at all acquainted with our meeting.

It was a real relief none the less when our heated discourse on morality was at last interrupted by the arrival of the first dish, a highly delectable loin of pork flanked with sage and onions. We sat down in much comfort and did ample justice to the fare. Our friend's manners at the table had all the elegance of good-breeding, whilst his conversation under the benign influences of excellent dishes and good wine was as entertaining and various as any one need listen to. He was at a loss on no subject whatever; and there was such an easy air of gallantry about him, too, as commended him extremely to the susceptible Cynthia, however they might differ in their opinions on the subject of morality. Indeed his mien was so winning and so perfectly acceptable withal to her ladyship, that I could have wished he had less of those graces to recommend him. For I'll swear that her eyes shone to his speeches, and there was a fine colour in her cheeks, however indignantly she may be moved to deny it. There was a sly humour in the fellow too, which as the meal wore on and the excellence of the fare warmed his heart, he manifested in various ways. To start with, he made more than one allusion to our supposed misfortune. What kind of a person was the highwayman, he asked in a tone equally pregnant with mischief and concern.

"Oh, pretty tallish," says I, with admirable vagueness and promptitude.

Thereupon he put a vast number of questions all bearing on the appearance of our assailant. Had he a cast in his eye? a scar on his lip? Did he speak with a west country burr? and so forth. These were but a few. For strive as we would to turn the topic towards something that might disconcert us less, he persisted in returning again and again to our supposed adventure on the road. The theme seemed to have a kind of fascination for him. At last it grew too plain that his pertinacity had serious purpose behind it. Either my fencing grew too obvious or his queries grew too direct, for I was presently led to see that he had formed his own opinion on the matter, and that he proposed to convict us out of our own mouths. It was with an effort therefore that I retained my politeness, since the deeper one is in the wrong the more is one inclined to resent its being proved against one.

"I should be obliged, sir," says I, "if you will do us the favour of forgetting this unfortunate circumstance. We have already come to regard our property as lost, and having made up our minds upon that we cease to regret it. Indeed, we had already dismissed so trivial a matter from our minds, and should not have thought fit to recall it, had not the predicament of our penury, and the obstinate importunities of this fellow the landlord, compelled us to allude to it again. You will vastly oblige me, sir, by ceasing to mention it."

"You are very well schooled in the art of evasion, sir," says the other. "But I am much too greatly interested in this affair to consent to its stopping at this. The manner of the appearance of your adorable companion and yourself here in this place this evening perplexes and surprises me beyond measure. I humbly crave your pardon if I may seem to transgress the bounds of good taste, sir, but might I venture to ask whether you were coming from London or were you going there?"

"Going there," says I incautiously.

"Then I confess," says he smoothly, "my perplexity increases. If you were going to London, how could it happen that you were descending, instead of mounting Marling Hill?"

I plainly saw that the fellow had lured me into a trap.

"Really, sir," says I, with some show of heat, "I am sorry that you cannot see fit to respect my protests. You will do me a real service, sir, if you will cease to pursue this disagreeable subject."

"I do not doubt you on that last point, sir," says the other. "And I wonder if I might make so bold as to inquire how it befalls that two persons who are presumably of the first quality, or at least of great gentility, are to be found travelling the country in an attire that the meanest of their servants would think twice before they affected?"

"This is insufferable, this is intolerable," says I. "I decline peremptorily to answer such questions. They are impertinent, sir, impertinent; and it grieves me to think that a gentleman of your taste and discretion could have thought fit to put them."

However, my annoyance could restrain him no better than my persuasion. He laughed openly, and then suddenly cast off the veil. With a curl at his lips, and an unmistakable impudence in his eyes, says he:

"I think the time is come, sir, when we might with profit understand one another a little better. Might we not deal a little more frankly with one another, do you not think? For instance, if you are prepared to confess that you have been beset by no highwayman whatever, and the whole invention of him, the coach, the valuables, the servants, and the horses is a cock-and-bull story intended to divert the attention of our honest host from your destitute condition, I am just as prepared to accept that statement."

"Sir," says I, "I fear that you forget yourself. You insult me wantonly."

However difficult it may be to condone the truth when it is so unblushingly expressed, I was hardly in a position to punish him for the publication of it. Not that it was any sneaking respect for the truth that restrained me. It was rather that I had arrived at years of a certain discretion. Was there not everything in the world to lose and nothing whatever to gain by indulging in open passages with a total stranger? Cynthia was at my side, and wholly dependent upon me. And it was her presence and that thought which enabled me to keep so tight a rein on my furious inclination. Meanwhile this person had turned such a cool impudent scrutiny upon me that it seemed as though he calmly spelt out every phase of thought through which I was at that moment passing.

CHAPTER XVII

WE MAKE ACQUAINTANCE WITH A PERSON OF DISTINCTION

I was by now worked up to a pretty rage. The stranger regarded it, however, with perfect calmness, not to say enjoyment.

"In your own particular branch of the profession, sir," says he, laughing, "I am the first to admit that you do remarkably well. A good carriage, a refined appearance, an excellent address, and a quite singular degree of assurance, there is but little wanting to your success. The lady, your fair companion, is wholly admirable. She hath the very look and air of a gentlewoman. She is vastly engaging too, and hath some sweet looks of her own; and I am prepared to say that she would reassure the most suspicious of landlords and the most incredulous of travellers."

"I protest, sir," says I, "that I do not follow you in the least."

"I think between friends, sir," says the other, "you might reasonably drop the high tone. I am not at all imposed on by it. Besides, where is the need? Believe me, I am the last man in the world to betray a brother in the pursuit of his calling. I have some few gifts myself, and my name for some years past hath been considered an ornament to the profession; but whatever my vanity, I am ever foremost in recognizing true merit in others. I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before, sir, but the very real talent you have already evinced will make William Sadler proud to be numbered among your friends."

Although Mr. William Sadler, whoever he might be, pronounced his name in the manner of one who is accustomed to have it greeted with flattering recognition, as this was the first time I had happened to hear of so exalted a personage, I was unable to pay it the homage I think he expected from me.

"You must really pardon me, sir," says I, "but who you are or what your name is does not particularly interest me. I do not remember to have heard it before, and certainly as you appear to entertain such strange views as to the manner in which friendship is to be conducted, I have no very burning desire to hear it again."

At last it seemed I had found in him a tender spot. The purple deepened in his cheeks, and there was a brightness of anger in his eyes. It was plain that to be ignorant of the name of Mr. William Sadler was to be guilty of a grave solecism. But his chagrin was only momentary, for he had an admirable command of himself, and at once resumed the control of his feelings.

"It strikes me as something of an affectation, sir," says he, "that one who practises a very similar calling should yet profess an ignorance of a name, which I may say, without making a boast of it, stands foremost in a kindred profession, and hath ever been reckoned an honour and an embellishment to it. The name of William Sadler, sir, is known and reverenced wherever gentlemen of the pad of all shades and degrees do congregate or hold their intercourse. It grieves me, sir, that such a fine example of our calling at its best, as is to be seen in the person of yourself, sir, and in that of your fair companion, should yet deny the smallest recognition to one who hath been allowed by the ablest practitioners of the time, and by publick opinion also, to be worthy of his meed of praise."

I confess I was getting out of my depth. My companion was wholly unintelligible to me. What he meant by his allusions to our kindred professions, his own celebrity, and my own skill in an art of which I did not even know the name, gravelled me completely. In his smooth, even tones, it was impossible not to find a genuine regret. But methought there was even more of irony in it too, a very delicate irony that seemed entirely to consist with his cultivated and polished character. Indeed the man was an enigma altogether. His manner, his appearance, his address were those of a gentleman. He was an elegant, well-informed, well-equipped man of the world, capable of exciting the admiration of a lady of quality, as many a time I have been fain to acquaint Mrs. Cynthia subsequently. But who he might be passed me altogether. He could not be a great author like Mr. Fielding. In that case I should have been more familiar with his name. He could not be a man of the first fashion, for the same reason. Neither was he foremost in Parliament, in the King's service, in the Queen's favour, nor was he a virtuoso in the arts. In what manner was he celebrated then? I could not forbear from putting the question to him. As it happened, our host was fussing about the supper-

table at that moment with the pudding.

"I refer you, sir," says he, "to our worthy Boniface, our excellent Mr. Jim Grundy, for the panegyric of my character."

Upon this the innkeeper looked from one to the other of us with a great deal of unction, and involved his rosy countenance in such a number of nods and winks as conferred a great air of mystery on a simple question.

"Come, my good Grundy," says our companion, "inform the lady and gentleman who Mr. William Sadler is."

"They don't know who Mr. William Sadler is," says the landlord. "Who ever heard the like of it! He, he, he!"

Instead of giving us any precise information on this point, the landlord laughed and laughed again. Once or twice he seemed to brace himself to break the important news to us, yet on each occasion as he was about to open his mouth to do so, a fresh gust of mirth nearly choked him into a fit. Indeed, he was wholly incapable of getting farther than:

"Not know who Mr. Will Sadler is; well, I call that a good 'un."

And I suppose we might have still remained in ignorance of the identity of our companion to this hour, for apparently Mr. William Sadler was too proud to exhibit his claims to notoriety, and the innkeeper was physically incapable of doing so, had it not been for a whimsical occurrence that presently befell. Amity had been in a great measure restored, and we had nearly finished our supper in peace, having at the same time behaved very creditably by the wine and the victuals, when the landlord suddenly burst in upon us again with a very agitated face. "Oh, Mr. William," cries he to our friend, "whatever shall we do? A sheriff's posse is coming along, and I fear it is you they are seeking hot-foot. They will be here in a minute, and I do not see that you can possibly get out in time."

Words of this nature vastly interested us, you may be sure. We noted that despite the shaken condition of the landlord, Mr. Sadler was perfectly cool.

"Hold 'em as long as you can in talk," says he, "and I will play 'em my old trick. But, my dear fellow, let me beg of you to compose yourself a little. Such a face as you are wearing is enough to betray the cunningest knight in the country, and I must also crave the indulgence of my two friends here. I am sure their true sporting instincts, to say nothing of a professional fellow-feeling, will enable them to give me any small assistance I may be in need of."

While he was speaking in this singular manner, he was occupying himself in one no less remarkable. He casually produced a fresh wig from one of the huge pockets of the riding-coat that hung on the back of a chair near his elbow, and having shook it out, discarded the modest tie wig he was wearing in favour of this much grander one, which he placed on his head with absolute nicety and correctness. Having got as far as this, the landlord apprehended which line he was going to take. Armed with that knowledge, the host accordingly moved to the threshold to greet the sheriff's posse, whilst Mr. Sadler went on with his toilet. This consisted in attaching a grey beard to his chin, a pair of moustachios to his upper lip, and a formidable pair of horn spectacles to his eyes. All of these he produced from the same pocket as the wig. The consequence was a complete and effectual transformation; and had we not been witnesses of the process itself, we could not possibly have identified our companion of the previous moment in this venerable sage.

This strange play which was passing in front of our eyes was so bewildering that at first we could hardly realize what was taking place, or gauge the singular situation in which we found ourselves. But hearing the lusty demanding voices of the persons who even at that moment were at the threshold of the inn, the whole meaning of this odd matter suddenly flashed into my mind. Our elegant companion was a professional breaker of laws, a highwayman most probably, and the sheriff's men were hot on his track. Yet as I looked at the venerable figure before me, the embodiment of stately grace and honoured age, I could not forbear from laughing at him.

"An excellent jest," says he, in a voice that so utterly differed from his natural one as to bestow the last and crowning touch to his altered character. "But it is one that I have played so often in one form or another upon these and similar people that I begin to fear it may grow a little worn-out. However, I must trust to my proverbial luck, and your kind co-operation."

He had no time to say anything more before these unwelcome visitors came into the room with the landlord at their head.

"You can really take my word for it, gentlemen I assure you," he said

positively, protesting, "I have seen no such person as you describe. Nor is it at all likely that my house, which has ever been famous for its high respectability, would harbour such a desperate ruffian. You say that His Majesty's mail has been stopped and tried this evening by Will Sadler not five miles off, and that booty exceeding four thousand pounds hath been taken. Lord defend us, gentlemen, whoever heard the like! It is incredible; can this be the eighteenth century?"

By this about half a-dozen dirty, rain-soaked ruffians, comprising the sheriff's posse, had come into the room. And at the head of them, if you please, was that very despotic justice, the squire of the neighbouring parish, who that afternoon had clapt us in the stocks. His appearance certainly complicated matters a good deal, and was like to make them vastly more awkward for us. Yet the fellow at this time was in such an excited state of mind, due to the recent terrible event and his high sense of what he was pleased to call his public duty, that he gave neither Cynthia nor myself the slightest recognition. Indeed, he had most probably forgotten our recent encounter.

I had hardly on my side recognized the justice ere my decision was taken. It may be to my lasting discredit as a good citizen and true subject that I hardly so much as gave a thought to betraying the desperate fellow who was so completely delivered into our hands. One word from either of us, and his last exploit would have been perpetrated. But it would have called for a greater humanity or a less, sure I know not which, and a deeper instinct of the public weal than either of us appeared to possess, to deliver up Mr. Sadler in cold blood to the tender mercies of the law. Accordingly I took a bold course, perhaps as much to assist the disguise of our companion as to preserve our own impunity.

Swinging round on the justice and the inn-keeper, I exhibited a degree of excitement at the news by no means inferior to their own.

"Zounds!" I cried, "what are you saying, landlord? King's mail, four thousand pounds, villain escaped. Whenever did I hear the like? He must be pursued; we must leave no stone unturned. Do I understand that he is on these premises?"

The stress of my concern and the degree of authority I contrived to insinuate into it, stood me in good stead with the squire, who saw in me a person as law-abiding as himself. Indeed, the number of breathless questions I pestered him with concerning how the matter happened, when it happened, who could be made responsible for it, and what steps could be taken to prevent it happening again, all of which were so futile and worth so little, as presently suggested to the squire that he might conceivably be in the company of a brother justice.

"Are you in the commission, may I ask, sir?" says he.

"Aye, that I am, sir," says I, "for the county of Wilts. I never was more distressed by anything than the news of this grievous affair."

"Very pleased to meet you, sir," says the squire. "I am in the commission too, sir, and I quite agree with every word you have thought fit to utter. Every word, I do upon my word, sir."

It was remarkable how the fact that I was a justice of the peace as well as himself affected his demeanour. He developed a sudden affability towards me, and used a special tone in which to address me. He discovered such a respect for my opinion, showed so many marks of his consideration for me, and generally endeavoured to ingratiate himself into my esteem in a way that allowed it to be clearly understood that to his mind the office of a magistrate had lifted me at once out of the ruck of common men. I was one who, like himself, had been as it were initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries. My look, my lightest word, was to him of vastly more importance than even the business he had come upon. Indeed he was quite overjoyed to find himself in the society of a person who was of his own rank in life, and one with whom he might converse without imperilling his own uneasy dignity. It was delightful to observe how my presence unfitted him to pay the slightest attention to any one other than myself. He could hardly bring himself to address the innkeeper or his attendants in the presence of a brother magistrate. And to such an extent was he worked upon that even the business that had brought him thither paled into insignificance before so felicitous a meeting.

After a full five minutes had been spent on his affable reception of me, and he had repeated again and again how pleased and honoured he was to meet me; and he had asked me how long I had been in the commission, and had told me how long he had been in it, and how long his father had been in it before him; with other matters of the first importance, and all mightily pertinent to the robbery of the royal mail,

one of his men had the temerity to make a suggestion.

"Begging your honour's pardon," says he, politely touching his hat, "but what does your honour think we had better do, seeing as how the man don't seem to be here?"

"Do," says the squire, taking him up angrily. "Burn me, was there ever such insolence? Are you not aware that I am at present engaged with your betters, and yet you have the damnable impertinence to ask me what you shall do."

"But the highwayman, if you please, your honour," says the other, who was rather a stubborn fellow.

"Oh, the highwayman," says the squire. "How dare you intrude a person of that low character when I am engaged with a brother magistrate? Let the highwayman go to the devil too."

"In short," says I, reading the squire's disposition, "you can all go to the devil, the sooner the better. Do you think the meeting of two gentlemen can be disturbed by such a petty matter? I am about to ask the honour of the company of my brother justice over a bottle. Landlord, have the goodness to bring up some more of your excellent Burgundy, and also do us the service of sending these dirty rascals about their business. There are no highwaymen here, and if there were, do you suppose that gentlemen are to be put to inconvenience by them?"

Hereupon the squire, finding himself received in such high favour, hastened to second my proposal. The posse was sent packing into the wind and rain to continue the pursuit of Mr. William Sadler, although they evidently had not the least idea as to which direction he might be in; whilst the magistrate proposed to take his ease in his inn, in the society of the very rogue his men had gone forth to seek.

The host soon returned with the wine, and we settled ourselves to good-fellowship. To judge by the sly satisfaction that appeared at intervals in Mr. Sadler's venerable countenance, he was very well pleased with the arrangement; whilst I am sure the squire was vastly so. As for Cynthia and myself, I think we both had some share in this satisfaction also. We figured to ourselves the eventuality of being able to repay this numscull fellow in his own coin, by putting upon him some of the indignity he had been so prompt to put upon us that afternoon.

In a person of a better capacity it might have been a matter of surprise that we should have gone unrecognized. But this squire was but a poor apology of a fellow, with probably as many wits as a rabbit, and as great a discernment as a mole. And in my case there may have been some little excuse, for after all one man is very much like another, and differs not so much in his appearance as in his circumstances. In the parlour of a tavern it is as easy to pass for a justice of the peace as it is in the stocks to pass for a rogue. Perhaps in Cynthia's case an even better excuse could be found for him. Instead of a dejected and bedraggled creature (madam hath twice already blotted this sentence out!) trudging at the side of a forlorn musicianer that blew the flute, here was a very different person. Her muddy cloak had been discarded to disclose a very tolerable travelling attire beneath, which, laced as it was, could pass very well in the country for the first fashion. Besides, in some impalpable feminine way, by some cunning trick of the sex, she had added here and there a touch to her hair and her person, till she shone forth as fair and trim in the glow of the fire and the candles as Herrick's Julia. She was no longer the wandering female (saving her presence!), but the lady of quality, holding her court of three. The brightness of the place was communicated to her cheeks and her eyes. The dainty malice, the grave insolence, the superb disdain, the assurance and yet the solicitude of fashion wedded to beauty, youth to breeding, was a sufficient masque to the draggle-tailed little creature of the afternoon. If it may be said of men that they are the victims of their circumstances, and cut their figure in the world according to them, how much more truly may the same be said of women, for are they not chameleons that receive their hue from their surroundings?

Being completely confident that we ran no risk of discovery from any exercise the squire might make of his natural faculties, I had no compunction about introducing Mrs. Cynthia and Mr. Sadler, that the feast of reason and the flow of soul might be unimpeded. Thoroughly alive to the whimsicality of the passages that were like to ensue from such ill-assorted company sitting down together, I mischievously determined to give the thing a more extravagant touch if possible, by sailing as near to the truth as I could. Therefore, fully aware of the delicious savour of the whole affair, Mrs. Cynthia was presented as my wife, the Countess of Tiverton, and our friend Mr. Sadler, the highwayman and lord knows what besides, as her ladyship's choleric

papa, his grace of Salop.

Never, I vow, was a man so overcome with the society in which he found himself as this rustical clown of a justice. Having plainly been used to no better all his life than that of his pigs, his sheep, his cows, his horses, the village beadle, and the worthies of the village ale-house, he had no higher sense of rendering what he conceived was due to our superior dignity, than they had in rendering the same to his. His bows, his smirks, his grimaces, his gross flatteries, would have excited our pity had he deserved any. They were so grotesque that even Mr. Sadler grinned through his great beard.

The landlord too fell in very sagaciously with the whole thing. Whatever opinion he might entertain on his own part of our figure in the world, the fact that we had been admitted to the friendship of Mr. Sadler was a sufficient guarantee of his not going unrequited. Armed with this assurance he produced some really excellent wine in liberal quantities, and furnished us with the fullest meed of his respectful service; though it is gravely to be doubted whether he considered we had any better right to enjoy our titles than had Mr. Sadler. But I will go bail for the justice, who rejoiced in the name of Hodgkin, that no such doubts invaded his mind. He was simply happy. His wildest dreams were realized. His loftiest ambitions were fulfilled. Was he not hobnobbing with the great at their own table on terms of perfect equality? He never addressed any of us without bringing in our titles somehow, either as the prologue or the epilogue of what he had to say, sometimes as both, and in the middle too. And just as a duke is a personage of more consideration than an earl, even if he be a justice of the peace, or a countess if she be young and fair, so did our squire, after he had felt his way a bit, had drunk a glass or two and got used to such unaccustomed company, direct the main of his attention to his grace of Salop. Indeed such advances did he presently make in the good esteem of that venerable nobleman that he was fain to direct nearly the whole of his discourse to him. He played him, and ogled him, your grace'd him this, and your grace'd him that, until he felt he had ingratiated himself into the highest favour. And having attained to this good fortune, he could hardly bring himself to so much as look at Cynthia and me. As in the case of his rustics and the inn-keeper, we, as it were, presently discovered him engaged with our betters; and he clearly hoped we should understand that to be the case.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONTAINS A PANEGYRIC ON THE GENTLE PASSION

It was truly a novel kind of amusement to enjoy the patronage of such a clodhopper; but it was one infinitely rich in the comic. The highwayman fell in exactly with the spirit of this comedy. He seemed to take an almost diabolical pleasure in causing this pitiful specimen of human nature to reveal the weakness and sterility of his mind. And I fear that this pleasure was communicated to Cynthia and myself. Could we have forgotten the persecution endured at the hands of the fellow that afternoon, we must have found it in our hearts to pity him in his fool's paradise. But with the sense of our late indignities yet abiding within us, we followed the course of the play with the keenness and zest of the leading actor in it. It was our revenge, and a very ample and satisfying one we felt it to be, although in the tameness of print it may not appear to possess the solid satisfaction of one administered with a cudgel or a pair of resolute fists.

When at last the squire proposed to depart, he vowed that never had he spent an evening with such profit and enjoyment. It far exceeded, he was good enough to say, the memorable one he had once had the honour to pass in the society of Colonel Musket of Barker's Hill. He swore he would cherish the memory of it to his last day; and having humbly thanked his grace for his condescension and his affability; and having given a curt nod to Cynthia and myself, since the boon companion of a duke is surely entitled to dispense his patronage, our justice stumbled out into the rainy night, with more good wine in him than he deserved, and certainly more than he could decently carry.

"Ships, pegs, coos and 'osses," says the highwayman, breaking out into laughter as soon as our guest had lurched into the rain. "Let a man live with them long enough, and they shall reduce his wit and understanding to the level of their own. Was there ever such a pitiful cheese of a fellow in the world before? If it were not such a foul night, and I lay less snug in my corner, I would go after him, drub him soundly, and fling him into the kennel. But at least we have had an entertainment, and I have thought well to exact a ransom of him for his own."

Here to our surprise our strange companion pulled forth a purse which a few minutes since had been the squire's. The justice had been seated next the venerable duke, and had paid for the high privilege. Besides, is it not an axiom among the great that they never condescend unless they are in need of a service, or can get something by their condescension? His grace's exaction was the latter. Neither Cynthia nor I could find it in our hearts to blame the highwayman for his trick. Nay, I do not know that in one sense we were not secretly glad that a tangible and material punishment had been inflicted upon the fellow. When the purse was opened it was found to contain the sum of nineteen pounds and a few odd shillings. The highwayman, after a careful mental calculation, doled the money out into three heaps of equal value, and having slipped one portion, some six pounds twelve shillings, into his fob, pushed the two remaining portions over to us, insisting that in this adventure it was share and share alike.

Of course we could not bring ourselves to accept of our friend's somewhat embarrassing generosity. But the sight of such a fortune to people in our penurious state, who had already partaken of much more than they could pay for, was temptation indeed. Although we refused the gifts with the same courtesy with which they were offered, I fear that our eyes shone with a singular lust, and our minds rebelled as we did so. The highwayman himself was astonished by our scruples.

"My dear friends," says he. "I confess I have never observed such reluctancy in persons of your kidney before. You baffle me. I cannot hold it to be generosity in you, since there can be little doubt that William Sadler makes a fatter living than you do with all your talents. Why then should you refuse a gift from a brother of your calling? And it cannot be pride either, for if we come down to plain terms it is not a gift at all. By all those unwritten laws that obtain amongst the brethren of our profession, you are each honourably entitled to take a share with me. Come, my friends, pocket the affront and let no more be said."

The highwayman's high sense of right and wrong in regard to those he was pleased to call "the brethren of our profession" was really touching. Nothing in the first place could convince him that we were not in that sense his brethren, and that we did not earn our livelihood by his uncompromising methods. We had entered the inn by the aid of false protestations; we had ordered a meal that he was sure we had no means

of paying for; we had connived at the escape of a desperate malefactor, and had committed a gross fraud on a justice of the peace; therefore he had every good reason to stand firm in his estimate of our character. To my rejoinder that we hoped he would not pursue the matter, as we were anything but what we appeared to be, and were debarred by circumstances that had recently befallen us from publishing our true condition to him or to any one else, he replied with laughter of the most immoderate sort.

"Rat me," says he, "this is no new tale. I wonder how many times in a twelvemonth it does duty at Old Bailey! But I do not like to be baffled by anybody, and I must say your behaviour is inexplicable. It is Quixotic, my friends, it is Quixotic. I cannot possibly let it pass. I must beg you to accept these small monies as a token of my gratitude."

He had the devil for his advocate too. It truly was Quixotic. It was wealth untold to persons in our condition; persons condemned to blow the flute from place to place for a livelihood. We were reminded of nights in the rain; of empty bellies; of fainting limbs; of rags, misery and mud, and the hundred other ills that attend on a bitter poverty. We had sevenpence in our pockets with which to discharge a score that would be reckoned in pounds. What wonder that we felt our resolution falter before the lure that was laid before us? Together, however, we prevailed where one of us singly might have given way.

The highwayman vented his perplexity in various ways. He put forth a dozen theories that would cover our irreconcilable conduct. But all of them were equally wide of the mark. To all sources but the true one did he trace our demeanour. That we were striving to be as honest as our circumstances would permit, never entered his head. And when at last we gave him a cordial good-night prior to retiring to the chamber that had been prepared for us, he was fain to acknowledge that he was never so completely beaten by anything as by our behaviour.

"Smart you are, the pair of you," says he, "there's no manner of use in denying that. But I'm damned if I can make head or tail of you. Never heard of such a thing in my life as two pads on the road refusing their share of the booty. But I like you none the less. You are a well-favoured well-mannered pair, with rare good heads on your shoulders. I'faith you are endowed with a most excellent presence. You are bound to succeed in the line you have adopted; but if you are not above taking a piece of advice from one who hath had a pretty long apprenticeship on the road, you will dress a trifle better. Clothes go for a great deal. A lord in rags counts for less than a postilion in ruffles and a laced coat. You will not forget now; it is sure to mean such and such a sum per annum to you. And harkee, here's a proposal. I've got such a fancy for you both, that if you like to take up with me, we will do the country in company and share the profits; and this I may tell you is an offer not to be blinked at, when it is made by William Sadler. Little madam there shall be the decoy, and you and I, my lad, shall lift the blunt and generally attend to the practical matters. Come now, I can't speak fairer; what do you say!"

Much to Mr. Sadler's disappointment, and I believe to his astonishment too, I politely declined this liberal proposal. It was almost incredible to him that a gentleman of his eminence and success could meet with a refusal. It was like two green apprentices declining to enter into partnership with a master of the highest credit!

"I confess you pass me altogether," says he in despair.

The last glimpse we had of this strange, whimsical, and in a sense gifted man, was his sitting at the table, with his wig, his spectacles and false whiskers removed, waving his good-night in the most cordial fashion. He was as handsome and intelligent a fellow as I ever encountered; and I can readily believe what was asserted of him at the time of his hanging less than a year from this date, that he was a cadet of a noble family. Certainly in his gaiety, generosity, and gallant good humour, he was the very type of man to win the great fame of the public that I believe was his. Strange as it may appear, there was not one trace of vulgarity that I could discern in him; and leaving his peculiar ideas in regard to *meum* and *tuum* out of the question, in all other particulars he was a charming gentleman. And if I am one day burnt for the heresy, I shall be ever the first to admit that in my short acquaintance of this wicked rogue that so richly came to be hanged on the Tree, I discovered better parts, a more chivalrous heart, and vastly more liberal talents than in half the persons of high consideration and great place, whose intimacy it has been my misfortune to submit to for a longer period.

As for Cynthia, the first thing she did in the privacy of our chamber was to burst into tears.

"Oh," she sobbed, "to think that a man like that should be such a

villain. Oh, I am sure I cannot believe it of him."

"Then why weep for him?" says I. "But what a pity it is that these villains are so delectable. Even a man like your husband if he gets his deserts will come to be hanged. Can you tell me, my dear, why it is that virtue never walks in these radiant colours? Can it be that you strait-laced madams secretly lean to the wicked?"

Poor Cynthia sobbed louder than ever.

"Oh, I cannot, I will not believe it of such a dear fine gentleman!" says she.

The next morning found us heavy of heart. In what manner we could meet the landlord's charges we did not know. Although we were both too proud to say so, I am sure we should have been greatly thankful could we have had our share of the highwayman's booty to comfort us. After all it was a queer kind of scruple that preferred to rob the innkeeper rather than the squire. For it was plain that he, poor fellow, must go unpaid. Honesty, I take it, is largely a question of terms; and why we should hold it to be more venial to rob the one than the other I cannot tell. We breakfasted over the hard problem of what to do. We had no other course, we decided, than to persevere in the original fiction of our misfortunes on the road at the hands of a highwayman, and defer the settlement of the landlord's account against the time when our affairs had assumed a more prosperous shape.

As it happened, our misgivings and searchings of conscience were in vain. The highwayman, who had ridden away in the small hours of the morning, had insisted unknown to us in giving at least some token of his gratitude. He had discharged our score and his own in a handsome manner, the innkeeper said. Perchance it was he held that our host merited some sort of reward for his behaviour too; and he doubtless held in the shrewd opinion he had formed of our condition, that it was little enough he was likely to receive at our hands.

In this fortunate manner we were able to go forth into the world again. Our hunger and weariness had been amply refreshed and our debts paid. We did not pause to consider that these happy contingencies had been brought about by the very means that we had so loftily disdained. It was the squire's purse after all that had paid our charges. Honesty, as I have said, is largely a question of terms.

To the downpour of the night had succeeded a sullen morning. The lowering sky promised more misery to follow. The air was wet with mists; the trees dripped incessantly; every blade of grass shone with the dankness that clung to it, and the state of the deep-rutted, rude, uneven roads was terrible. But even all these things together, and the fact that we had to plough our way, step by step, slowly through seas of mud could not entirely depress our spirits. We felt ourselves in the society of one another, to be in spite of everything, invincible in our common courage, unconquerable in our common resolution. The one sustained the other in these adventures.

"My prettiness," says I, "it is under embarrassing conditions such as these that we should endeavour to sustain ourselves with a few tender, amorous passages of love. I think I will pay you a compliment or two upon your beauty, if you will give me but a minute's time in which to rack my mind to find them."

"For your pretty speeches to be sincere, sir," says Cynthia, "they should be quite spontaneous."

"Here is one," says I. "The sunshine of your countenance lights up the morning's gloom."

"A common enough figure, I confess," says she, "which a hundred poets have better exprest."

"Here is another, then," says I, undaunted. "The solace of your companionship sweetens the bitter miles."

"Nay," says she, "I think no better of that trope than the first. It wants a poet to give an originality, a point and grace, to things of this sort."

"But every lover is a poet," says I triumphantly.

"I am deluded then," says Cynthia, "for if your love is measured by your poetry I am like to die of a broken heart. But after all, that last glib phrase of yours is but a poor sort of speech for a man to make to his mistress. A poet, as all the world knows, is but an embellisher of common things."

"A poet is more than that," says I. "A thousand times more. A poet is —— A poet is——"

"A poet is?" says Cynthia archly.

"The human mind cannot express what a poet is," says I. "He is all, and

he is nothing. He weaves a sovereign spell about material things. He can put a new glamour in the stars, although he cannot hold a candle to the sun. He is the airy nothing that can reveal the face of God to simple men."

"But what hath all this to do with Love?" says Cynthia. "And I confess I never suspected this phase to your character. I always held you for a common four-square kind of a fellow enough, by no means given to these sudden heats and violences, these sudden whimsies and nonsensicals."

"No more did I," says I ruefully. "But it is so like this wretched passion to take us in our weakest part, which in me, as you are ever the first to remind me, is the head."

"It is not such a wretched passion neither," says Cynthia, "if it is but left to itself. It is these low poets and people that debase it. Love is the noblest thing in the world, until your puny twopenny poets and the like sing of it, and prate of it, and write an advertisement of it, that they may earn enough to spend at the nearest tavern."

"Alas! mistress," says I, "you are too severe on the muse. There have been elegies composed to Love that could dignify even that sacred passion."

"All of which the sacred passion could very well have done without," says my didactic miss. "There is not a painter in the world, be he never so cunning, that can put a new colour in the sunset, nor is there an author of them all that can add a new rapture to a kiss."

"Body o' me," says I, "you are not a little right there."

If there is any vindication needed of the sex's incontestable prerogative to enjoy the last word in any argument, be it of the nature of metaphysics, reason or common practice, here is it to be found. We stopped in the middle of the road and concluded our discourse with a chaste salute. And I think there was a strain of poetry in us both as we did so. The weeping heavens smiled upon us; all the wet verdure of the spring was a sparkling face that laughed and greeted us. We went along refreshed and more cheerful of heart.

Yet it was a toilsome journey. The mud clogged our feet, the damp pervaded our clothes, and our unaccustomed fatigues of the last few days were beginning to tell upon us terribly. Never in all our lives had we given our feet such exercise. We had not walked much beyond an hour this morning before I noticed with something of a sinking heart that poor Cynthia was limping. At first these symptoms were hardly to be discerned, and when I taxed her with them, she denied them stoutly. But too soon were they revealed beyond a doubt. It was getting towards noon before my proud little miss would in any wise admit this to be the case, though. By then, however, she was so footsore that she could scarce drag one foot behind the other. Chancing to pass near a handrail bridge a little later, that spanned a small clear stream running over long floating moss and stones, nothing would content me but she should go and sit upon it, take off her shoes and stockings, and bathe her bruised feet by dangling them over the side. A little cottage nestling close at hand, fenced with box in front and apple-trees behind, thither I repaired to beg clean linen rags to wrap them in.

The cottage door was opened at my knock by a smiling, buxom housewife, who stood out upon a background of crowing babes. No sooner had I made my request than with cheerful energy, says she:

"Oh yes, sir, to be sure I can," and feeling that we were like to find a true friend in her, no sooner had I explained the occasion for it than she proved a friend indeed. Having procured these requisites with a bustling promptitude, she carried them to Cynthia and found her seated on the bridge as I had left her, bathing her toes in the cool sweetness of the stream. With many a "poor lamb!" and many a "deary, deary me!" she played the good Samaritan to my unlucky little one. She dried them, comforted them, and bound them up with all the honest grace of her great good nature. Never did I see a woman so brisk and motherly, and certainly never one so overflowing with true charity. When she had fulfilled her tender offices, and having kissed poor Cynthia on both cheeks in a most resounding manner, "because she was such a little beauty," she had us both go back with her to the cottage, that we might eat a bowl of curds and whey in the arbour cut in the laurel bushes, next the well, at the bottom of the garden.

Looking back on the scenes of our itinerary, this bustling, kindly housewife makes the fairest picture of them all. Can the great who dwell in palaces conceive the degree of simple happiness it is in the power of such a creature to bestow? Whenever subsequently, in an hour of gloom, I may have been led to doubt the essential goodness that lies buried in

the hearts of our human kind, I insensibly recall the conduct of this honest woman on that wet spring morning when we came to her door afflicted of mind and body.

By gentle walking we were able to make many more miles that day. But a shadow had come over us. We had no longer the joyous intrepidity with which we had set out less than a week ago. A foreboding had come upon us. We could not hope to go much farther by our present mode. My little companion, strive as she might to conceal the dire fact, was rapidly being overcome. Her boots were wearing thin, she was already suffering much pain, and there was the sum of sevenpence left to us by which she could obtain her ease. We had not the heart to endeavour to increase it by blowing further on the flute. Besides, if the truth of that matter must be told, the stocks had given us a particular distaste for the gentle instrument. As the slow, cloud-laden hours passed to the occasional accompaniment of rain, with no glint of sunshine to relieve their drab monotony, it called for all the courage of which we had made a boast that morning to keep us from repining. The nearer we approached the evening the greater was our gloom. There was the eternal problem of food and shelter to be solved. The previous night our audacity had solved it for us. But in our present state we both felt quite incapable of furnishing the necessary spirit and effrontery for a repetition of that bold trick. Alas! our one desire was to be wafted by some magic into warmth and plenty that we might sup and fall asleep.

We spent our last pence at a hedge inn on our habitual repast of bread and cheese and ale. But the longer we lingered, the cheerless, wretched place appeared to heighten our dejection, so that we hailed the wet countryside as a relief when we walked out again upon it. But I cannot tell you how we dreaded the coming of night. The barren character of the landscape, and the few people and the fewer habitations that we came upon probably increased the depression of our spirits. Indeed, towards evening, the only human being that we encountered in several miles was a travelling tinker singing on a stile, and I think we could have wished to have been spared this meeting. In our forlorn state we regarded such an irresponsible gaiety in the light of a personal affront. But the dirty rogue had such a cheerful, jolly look that I was fain to accost him with my curiosity.

"I beg your pardon, sir," says I, "but why do you uplift your soul in merriment on such a dismal afternoon?"

The tinker looked at me suspiciously, and then at his bundle reposing at his feet. He evidently speculated as to what designs I could have upon it.

"It is a good world, my lad, that is why I sing," says he, "and you'd be singing too, I fancy, if this was your first day out o' jail."

However that might be I am sure we both envied the tinker his frame of mind. Our own was desperate indeed. There was nothing for it but to push on relentlessly, and to hope against hope for some happy chance. We were both utterly wearied and dispirited by this; no houses were near at hand; and the night was closing in. We were consoled in a slight degree with the thought that we were on a high road and that a shelter of one sort or another should not be far to seek. By what means we should be able to avail ourselves of it in our destitute state was another question.

In the very height of our distresses we suddenly came upon a wayside inn, and a scene of a violent and singular character was being enacted on the threshold. Two persons, a man and a woman of mean appearance, had evidently just been ejected from it, since they stood resentfully in the middle of the road with divers bundles containing their goods and chattels scattered around them. The landlord stood at the inn door, shaking his fist and declaiming his great indignation, whilst his wife, standing in a haven of security behind him, was giving rein to her own sentiments with neither hesitation nor uncertainty.

CHAPTER XIX

WE APPEAR IN A NEW CHARACTER

It seemed that the man and woman in the middle of the road were the ostler and chambermaid to the inn, who had just been convicted of a grave misdemeanour. The language in which it was designated and described by the host and hostess, energetic in form and warm in colour as it was, could not, I fear, be reproduced in this chaste narrative. It must suffice to say that the guilty persons had been discharged at a moment's notice. They were now resenting this extreme course from their station in the middle of the road; and whatever were the colours in which their own conduct had been depicted, it is greatly to be doubted, whether they could possibly have been more vivid than those applied to that of their late master and mistress.

To these people in the midst of their altercation came Cynthia and I. Almost at the same instant a similar thought entered the minds of us both. Why should we not apply for these vacated situations? We had had no experience of such duties, it was true. Our lot indeed would be arduous. But we should at least be provided with a shelter for the night; and we could relinquish our unaccustomed tasks the moment we might feel ourselves better served by doing so. A brief whispered conference as we stood apart in the road, and we decided to make application. Never for an instant did the idea cross our minds that such a highly superior ostler and chambermaid could be anything but acceptable to the good people of the inn. Yet when taking our courage in our hands we came up to the door, and I put forward my suggestion with a becoming modesty, the landlord seemed by no means so eager to close with this tempting offer as I had fully expected he would be.

"Have you a character?" says he sharply.

"Oh yes, I think I have a very good character," says I.

"Humph," says he, "you think you have a very good character, do you? Well, my lad, I should like to see it."

"Well," says I, "a character is not very easy to see, unless there is something to show it by."

"I am quite aware of that," says the landlord sharply. "However, we will leave this precious pair and go inside, light a candle and look at it."

With that, man and wife led the way within, and we followed meekly, leaving the discharged couple in the road to pursue their own devices. In what way a candle would enable them to discern our characters we could not tell, although we were half inclined to think that the common phrase "to hold a candle to" might have in fact a more literal significance than any we had dreamt of. The inn kitchen presented a rosy fire and a cosy appearance. The sight of it seemed to increase the sense of our unhappy plight, and I think we both anxiously awaited the landlord's judgment, for it was impossible to contemplate being turned out into the night again with equanimity.

"Now then, my lad," says the landlord, "I will thank you to let me see your character."

"I do not know how I can show you my character, sir," I ventured to say, "until I have been some little time in your service."

"Come, that won't do, my lad," says the landlord, "I must either see your character or out you go."

Filled with misgiving, I was about to ask the landlord for an explanation of this odd demand, when it suddenly occurred to me that he wished to have it in writing, like any other master who was about to engage a servant. I had to confess that I had not a character.

"Ha," says the landlord keenly. "Then why did you leave your last place?"

I had to confess that I had never had a last place.

"You don't mean to tell me," says the landlord, "that you have had the impidence to apply to me when you have never had no experience of the dooties?"

I had to explain that such was the case, but earnestly stated that whatever I might lack in knowledge I would certainly make up in zeal. For all that it was like to have gone hard with our engagement had it not been for the intervention of the landlord's wife. It may have been that vanity which is inseparable from the male character, but it did seem to me that from the first the good woman had been disposed to regard me with favour.

"Well, Joseph," says she at this critical moment, "he is a very proper

looking young man, I am sure, and as honest looking as the day. I am sure he will do his best if he says he will. Besides, they are man and wife, which is a very main thing."

This reference to the pair of us had the effect of diverting the worthy landlord's attention to Cynthia. No sooner did he observe her than his objections became sensibly less formidable than they had been. And I am afraid it was my little madam's *beaux yeux* and not our qualifications and accomplishments that got us the situation. Yet even when we had been duly engaged at four pounds a year and our keep, there was like to have been a hitch. The landlady's closer inspection of us revealed the fact that although I might, as she had been good enough to say be "a very proper-looking young man," Cynthia in her opinion was vastly too fine-looking a young woman. She even went the length of describing her as "a blue-eyed slut." Whatever the force of her objections, however, as she herself was entirely responsible for the engagement of the ostler, she could hardly have gainsaid, much as she could have wished to have done so, her husband's right to engage the chambermaid.

It was in this singular but fortunate fashion then that we found ourselves once more provided for. The inn being on a coaching road was not such a mean one as we had at first supposed. The host and hostess of it did not seem to be such bad people either, and as they did not except to have company in the place until later in the evening, and observing that our travels had left us in a sorry condition, they allowed us to make a rough meal, and afterwards to sit by the fire a bit.

It went to my heart that my poor little companion should be brought to this pass, but she acquiesced in it so cheerfully, and with such a merry sense of the occasion as did a great deal to diminish my concern. She was indeed a courageous little creature; and there was something about her new duties that seemed to amuse her, for she went about them with a humorous zest as though she was laughing at herself while she did so. All the same we were genuinely glad when at last the hour came for our retirement. We were thoroughly wearied and footsore too.

We rose in much better heart betimes on the following morning, and set about our unaccustomed tasks with a vigour that compensated for our inexperience. After all, they were of an elementary character, not at all difficult to learn. To be sure it was more than a little strange at first to find ourselves engaged in such lowly capacities, but when after an hour or two the singularity had worn off, they became by no means irksome. Indeed, the novelty of the thing might be said to pass the time pleasantly. But as it happened, we were to be startled out of these pursuits in the rudest manner.

It chanced that about noon I had led the horse of a gentleman, who had passed the previous night at the inn, out of the stable round to the front door. And while I was holding its head against its master's departure there arose a clatter of wheels on the road. In a minute, or less, a chaise drew up at the door. No glance was needed at its occupants to tell me to whom it belonged. The peculiar shape and colour were quite sufficient to advertise me of that matter. It was the Duke in person, accompanied by the indefatigable Mr. Waring. His Grace lost no time in relinquishing the reins, and together they stepped from the vehicle to ease their legs somewhat, and entered the inn in quest of any little refreshment it might afford them. Happily neither paid much heed to me. Indeed beyond an order to give an eye to the horses and to fetch them a drink of water, I claimed no share of their attention.

No sooner had they entered the inn, however, than in the midst of some self-congratulation on my present impunity from discovery, I was beset with a sudden fear of Cynthia. What more likely than that they should directly encounter her, unless she could be apprised of their proximity? She must be warned at all costs. Fortunately at that moment the owner of the horse, whose head I was holding, appeared and relieved me of its charge. Thereupon I hastily entered to advise Cynthia of her danger. Yet I did so only to find that the worst had happened already.

From the parlour the Duke's voice issued in a tremendous key. There could be no doubt that it was as I feared. I lost no time in hastening to my poor little one's assistance, if only to divert a portion of her father's wrath. The scene that confronted me when I entered the inn parlour would not by any means have been devoid of a certain whimsicality had it not had so sinister a bearing on our fortunes. The innkeeper and his wife stood aghast. Mr. Waring was languidly helping himself to a pinch of snuff with an air of the frankest amusement. Cynthia was in a dreadful taking, and weeping bitterly. The Duke, her father, was hopping about like a pea on a hot plate, and threatening to go off any minute into an apoplexy. At my appearance he very nearly did so.

"You villain," he squeaked, shaking his fist in my face, and dancing round me, "you impudent, unblushing villain! Have I routed you out at last? Have I run you to earth, you damned young scoundrel? By God, you shall pay a price; yes, you shall, so help me. Your purse may be bankrupt, but you shall pay this account with the last drop of blood that is left in your black heart. Pass your box, Humphrey."

Mr. Waring passed his box with a grim chuckling countenance; and his Grace paused in the midst of his violent denunciation to make use of it. It appeared to lend him succour, whereon he continued with renewed vigour. I would not like to set down here the number of hard names he put his tongue to, every one of which was levelled at my devoted head. To be sure I had used him pretty badly, but I fear that I was not in the least repentant. I listened to his passionate abuse which he delivered in a curious senile staccato, with an amusement possibly as great as Mr. Waring's own, and certainly more cynical. I don't think at the moment I cared much about the pass I was come to. I was utterly desperate.

Poor little Cynthia, bitterly frightened as she was, and despite the tears that streamed from her eyes, was still very brave. She could not bear to hear my name degraded in this manner. In the face of her father's wrath she came to my side and took my hand, and I loved her the better for the deed.

"Landlord," says his Grace, "don't stand gaping there like a pig on a spit. Just have the goodness to bestir yourself, and fetch the constables. This young scoundrel shall not go out of my sight, except in custody. The law hath wanted him long, and as I'm a person, it shall have him, too."

It was somewhere about this point in the scene, I think, that a bold expedient came unexpectedly into my head. It had a full measure of audacity befitting the occasion. If only we could make a dash out into the road and gain possession of the chaise one short instant before our enemies, all was not lost even now. It was truly a remote chance, yet it was the only one that offered. Therefore no sooner had it entered my mind than I set my will to work to put it in practice. With this end in view I gave a furtive eye to the position of the parlour door. I found myself even now the nearest person to it. I must contrive to get still nearer and acquaint Cynthia of the nature of my desperate design without arousing the suspicions of our furious papa or the languid Mr. Waring.

As the landlord stood hesitating as to which course he should adopt, the Duke directed some attention to him, and gave him freely of his orders. It was while our papa was thus engaged that I bent down to Cynthia and whispered my audacious plan into her ear. From that moment we turned all our energies towards getting closer to the door without being suspected of doing so. Every step we could encroach might presently be of the greatest possible service. Unfortunately the fact that the parlour-door was closed was a great barrier. We should not have time to open it and get away.

The Duke having at last prevailed on the landlord to go for the constables, it was with inexpressible anxiety that we watched him go out of the room. If he would but leave that door unlatched we had just a chance of getting to the chaise in time. With a thrill of satisfaction we saw him go out, leaving the door wide open behind him. The Duke and Mr. Waring were apart at the other end of the room, quite oblivious of any scheme we might be evolving. They had forgotten apparently that a chaise and a pair of horses stood outside the door. Carefully noting the actions of our enemies and the degree of attention they thought fit to pay us, we sidled nearer and nearer, an inch at a time, to the parlour-door. And at last, having concluded that the landlord had got well clear of the premises, and was therefore not likely to present any obstacle, I decided that now or never was the moment. I whispered my last brief instructions to my little companion; and then taking our careless captors entirely unawares, she darted out through the door, and I as swiftly followed her.

The scheme had been thoroughly matured in my mind. To allow Cynthia time to run on and gain access to the chaise, a proper control of the reins, and to set the horses in motion, I did not follow her at once, but preferred to bang the parlour-door in the face of our pursuers, and clung with both hands to the handle that they might be impeded as much as possible. Once aroused to their danger, they lost not a second of time in besieging the door, but with my back firmly planted against the opposite wall I was quite a match for them in the matter of hauling. I was able to detain them the wrong side therefore, until a cry from Cynthia informed me that she had fulfilled her part of the business. Thereon I suddenly released the handle, and our enemies found themselves so unexpectedly in possession, that they fell back one upon another, whilst I

ran forth to the chaise.

It was already starting briskly down the road. I was able to overtake it and get in by the time the Duke and his friend showed at the door; and though they ran after us for a few yards they soon came to the conclusion, with the horses fleeing faster and faster, that immediate pursuit was hopeless, and relinquished the chase accordingly. We had not gone very far, however, when we overtook the landlord on his way to fetch the constables. That puzzled fellow made no effort to detain us, and in that I think he was well advised.

It was some little time before we could get the excitement engendered by these events out of our minds, and realize that we were still in possession of our freedom, that most cherished thing, for which we were doing and suffering so much. We had a chaise and a pair of horses too. But I do not think that any two persons could have looked so little in their places in such a handsome vehicle. The appearance we presented must have been highly ridiculous. Neither of us had cloaks or coverings for our heads, whilst I, in the pursuit of my late occupation, had divested myself of my coat in addition. We were thus in absurd contrast to our fine manner of procedure. Having put an honest mile between us and the inn, we began to examine the contents of the chaise with an eager curiosity, not unmingled with anxiety. The first articles to rejoice our hearts were several thick rugs, which we lost no time in putting to use. There was a case of pistols, too; and over and above these things we discovered to our supreme satisfaction a couple of travelling valises, the property of Mr. Waring and his Grace.

Our straits were much too dire for our minds to be greatly oppressed with the morality of things. To us it seemed as though these travelling valises had come from heaven. Robinson Crusoe on his island could not have had a devouter thankfulness when he recovered the articles from the wreck than we had in the contemplation of our treasure. We experienced an exquisite curiosity as we speculated on what they might contain. However, we deferred the opening of them, partly because the time and place would for the present be ill-chosen (we must put many more miles between us and the enemy before we could venture to draw rein) and again, because we desired, like a pair of children, to draw out to the outmost the pains of our delicious expectation.

CHAPTER XX

DISADVANTAGES OF A CHAISE AND A PAIR OF HORSES

In this rapt condition of mind, and in this remarkable fashion did we proceed along the road. Through villages and hamlets, past churches and inns, up hill and down we took our gallant way. The sense of rapid motion made without the least inconvenience to our own jaded limbs, coming after hours of arduous travelling by their painful exercise, was incomparable, unless it be likened to what the soul must feel when wafted to Elysium on a cloud, after suffering the slow agonies of death. The exhilaration of our progress was wonderful indeed. Steaming along the highways in an elegant equipage, the late oppression fell off our spirits and gaiety came out in us once again. We did not know whither we were going, to be sure; it was sufficient that we were fortified with ways and means once more, and that we had so audaciously contrived to leave our pursuers in the lurch.

"I wonder what are the contents of these boxes," says I, indulging a delightful speculation as we sped along.

"I suppose we ought not to touch them, whatever they are," says Cynthia nervously.

"In that case," says I, "we must not open them."

"Oh, I think we might safely do that," says Cynthia in a voice of the deepest disappointment. "Although they are not ours, that is no reason, as far as I can see, why we should not have just one peep at what they are. That will be doing harm to no one, will it?"

"I fear it will be otherwise," says I mischievously. "For if we get so far as the opening of the boxes I am sure we shall not be content with a mere inspection of the contents."

"Oh, Jack," says the indignant Cynthia, "how can you talk so. I am sure you cannot mean to infer that we should be guilty of anything—of anything we ought not to be guilty of."

"Of appropriating articles that belong to others, for example."

"Yes," says she, "that is what I meant."

"Well," says I, "is there not the melancholy case of our refusing the highwayman's booty in one form and accepting it in another?"

"That I am sure we did not," says Mistress Virtue. "We did not ask him to pay our bill."

"To be sure we did not," says I, "but he paid it, none the less. Now, had we acted in that matter according to your fine ideas, we should, in the first place, have delivered that highwayman up to the King's justice; then the rape of the squire's guineas would never have been committed, and the landlord's bill would not have been paid at all. That is why one is ever so perplexed by these high principles of conduct. Why draw the line in one place and not in another? Do we not make these arbitrary distinctions and often deny ourselves all manner of things thereby, when we can least afford to do without them, and yet there is not a day that passes but what we commit offences against our codes of honour with a cheerful heart. So much depends upon the title by which an act is dignified. Persons in our degree of life refer to certain sources of their emolument as privilege and monopoly, whereas if they were enjoyed by those in a humbler sphere, who would hesitate to denounce them as robbery and fraud? Now these boxes being in our possession, and as we are quite destitute of means, is not there a hundred ways by which we can prevail upon our consciences to permit us to enjoy their contents?"

Cynthia stoutly denied this specious reasoning at the time. But after awhile, when the horses began to flag, and hunger, our ancient dogged enemy, began once more to assert himself, she was inclined to look at the matter in a rather more lenient light.

"We must incontinently perish of starvation by the way," says I, "unless these chests of Mr. Waring and his Grace, your papa, can help us. Now which course shall we adopt? And we to take the articles therein as a loan, fully intending to recompense their owners at a more fortunate season? or shall we simply take them without any reservation whatever, as lawful prizes won from the enemy in open fight?"

"I think I like the idea of the 'borrowing' best," says the scrupulous Cynthia.

"Very well, then, we will effect a loan," says I.

We could hardly venture to pull up at the door of any reputable inn in our present state. We were the beggars no longer, but a lady and gentleman of quality. Persons who drive about the country a pair of fine

horses and a chariot of the first fashion are compelled to support their responsibilities. That is ever the eternal drawback. I, clad in the meanest of garments, divested of my coat and hat, would have been entirely at ease in my former mean character, and should have passed unnoticed in it. But once I drove to the inn door in the Duke's chaise, attired in that fashion, I should be the talk of the place. Therefore I brought the horses to a halt, in a secluded part of the road, and proceeded to investigate the nature of the articles in the chests, in order to see if they could afford an embellishment to our present unfortunate garb. We hoped to discover some money, too, for we had not so much as a penny between us.

However, no sooner did we try to open these valises, than we received a serious set back. They were both securely locked. Search as we might among the cushions of the chaise, we could find, as we anticipated, never a trace of the keys. We were greatly dashed, but still it was an opportunity for the display of our resources. I got out of the vehicle, and after much poking about in a ditch at the side of the road, discovered a heavy stone. Armed with this, I attempted to knock off the fastenings from Mr. Waring's box. It was a tedious, weary business, for they were stout indeed, but at last patience, if not virtue, met with its reward. The lid flew open and disclosed the precious contents.

Conscious of our ragged, penniless condition, we enjoyed every thrill that such treasure trove could afford us. To prolong our pleasure we refrained from all reckless rummaging, but drew forth and duly examined each article in the order in which it was packed. First came a suit of clothes, and then silk stockings, shoes, another suit of clothes, handkerchiefs, a razor, brushes, a cocked hat, and all the details that go to make up the masculine attire.

But although we delved to the bottom of the box and searched every inch of it, we could not discover so much as a copper piece in money. This was a severe disappointment, and we addressed ourselves fearfully to the opening of the Duke's box, for should that prove barren of it too, our pass would be indeed a sore one.

It was no easier matter to force this box than it had been the other, but at last our task was accomplished and the thing stood open before us. The articles within it bore a striking resemblance to those in the other, only that they were not so elegant and costly. They began with a shirt and a white cotton night-cap, and below we came upon a wig and a dressing-gown, but although our hearts might beat never so wildly it was in vain that we looked for money. Indeed, the only things that we might regard as a substitute for it were a few trifling articles of jewellery, such as a solitaire and a gold pin or two for the Duke's neckcloth, a pearl button, and a pair of shoes with silver buckles.

"Oh," says I, bitterly, "never again will I be at the trouble of picking his Grace's baggage if this be the manner of his travelling. One would have thought that a duke of all people would have gone equipped handsomely. I expected to find guineas galore; or, allowing his Grace to be a thrifty soul, and that he preferred to carry them in his boots or next his heart, I had certainly looked for a profusion of gold diamond ornaments. Why, curse it all, never one of his toilet requisites hath so much as a pearl or silver handle. Why, even his night-cap, which should be studded with precious stones, like the fez of the Shah of Persia, is but a common affair of white cotton. A Duke is not alive to the responsibilities of his position who goes about with these mean accompaniments."

"Poor papa," says Cynthia, sadly, "I confess that I ought to have known that we must go wanting should we rely on him. It was ever his chief foible to make a halfpenny go as far as two farthings possibly could. Even the solitaire surprises me. I am sure he must be proposing to break his journey at the house of the rich widow at Bath, to whom he hath been paying his addresses this twelvemonth, else he would never have encumbered himself with such an extravagant finery."

We were, indeed, bitterly disappointed. Here we were, two persons of quality, with our own horses and chariot, with two boxes of luggage and a case of pistols, and not a grey groat piece to the two of us. This fact seemed to acquire a new irony from our otherwise liberal circumstances. Whatever could we do? Cynthia suggested that we should sell one of the horses, as two were not essential. However, I was firm in the opinion that so long as we retained the chaise we must have two horses to draw it, for the Duke was certain to lose not an instant in pursuing us in the hottest manner. I then proposed that we should part with the vehicle itself and both the horses, and resume our wandering nomad life once more.

Cynthia shuddered at this. She had plainly no zest now for our former mode, nor could it be wondered at, poor child, when her trials and

exertions came to be considered. Had there only been me in the case I should not have hesitated to try to find a purchaser for our equipage, difficult as the matter might have proved. For I was convinced that we were really in a more unsafe situation now than ever before. It would be impossible to avoid publicity; and at every inn we came to we should be the objects of conjecture, and everything pertaining to us would be discussed and commented on. Besides, we could no longer sleep where we listed. The horses would require rest and succour whatever the deprivations of their masters.

After addressing and re-addressing ourselves to the great problem of how to obtain the service of innkeepers without paying for the same, we came to the conclusion that we could best hope to do so by adopting a former expedient, which was attended with not unhappy results. In lieu of hard cash we must present them with a grievous tale of being stopped by a highwayman, who had taken our last penny. To do this with the best effect, however, we must neglect no opportunity of maintaining in our own persons the status of our chaise and horses. My own attire did well enough for an ostler, but as our friend Mr. Sadler had pointed out, it was likely to detract from the story we had to tell. Therefore, I decided to exchange my raiment for the more appropriate clothes of Mr. Waring. I did not apprehend any difficulty in regard to the fit, as we were greatly alike in stature.

With this end in view I selected the necessary articles of apparel from the box, and left Cynthia to take care of our vehicle, whilst I retired into the shelter of a neighbouring hedge and made a complete transformation of my outward semblance. Mrs. Cynthia was hugely delighted at the result. She had never quite been able to acquiesce in my late style, and her feelings on the subject were pretty clearly indicated by her immense satisfaction now.

"Shoes, and silk stockings too," says she with a childlike pleasure. "And what a dear laced coat, and what nice white ruffles! I am certain you make a far more perfect gentleman than you do an ostler, though to be sure you are greatly lacking a shave."

"It is ever so," says I. "The moment one goes up in the world one's responsibilities multiply. When I was an ostler my unrazored chin passed without comment; but the moment I improve my condition I must shave every morning, or else be more miserable than ever I was in my former station."

Mrs. Cynthia was too preoccupied with my appearance to chide me for long-winded truisms of this sort. I must not omit to state that during my absence she had supplied the deficiencies in her own attire by taking a smart three-cornered hat of Mr. Waring's which, though greatly too large for her, she had contrived artfully to adjust on the back of her head, and thereby gained a sweetly rakish appearance from it; and further supplied her lack of a cloak in a no less skilful fashion by draping one of the rugs about her in a way that simulated such an article.

We came to an inn with our pitiful tale. We had it all most wonderfully pat, having rehearsed it carefully, until we were able to pour it forth with an infinity of detail. If the distressed condition of the horses, and our own evident sincerity were not enough, there were the boxes all tumbled and ransacked to add weight to the evidence. Our imposition being so well received, and the attitude of the landlord seeming so friendly, we determined to run the risk of being overtaken, and break our journey here for an hour while we made a meal, and the horses were fed and rested. Whether it was that the landlord was a man of a most tender heart, or that our address was so truly excellent, I cannot say, but certainly the honest fellow did not hesitate to take us at our own valuation. If there was any small particular in which he could serve the earl and countess he should be more than happy. The small particular in which he was able to do so was by remitting the amount of our charges against a future occasion, and by lending us a guinea or two on no better security than the possession of our pleasant manners and a chaise and a pair of horses.

We went our way in much better heart. We were fortified indeed by such a generous confidence. And so susceptible is the mind to the opinion of others, that on the strength of the landlord's disposition, we began to hold up our heads again in the world, and to take a rose-coloured view of our affairs. All was not lost yet by a good deal. With our admirable equipage we had resources of a sort; and we were still in the complete possession of our freedom. It remained for us to utilize it to the full.

It was while we were engaged with this train of speculation that a concrete and definite idea came into my head. Why not make for the port

of Bristol and flee the country? Why not indeed?

"A brave plan, truly," Cynthia says, "but we cannot do it without money."

"We will sell our horses and chariot to some honest vintner of Bristol city," says I, "and the proceeds should easily suffice to take us to the Americas."

Although Mrs. Cynthia shook her head and deprecated it as a wild-goose scheme, she was compelled to admit that it was the best that offered. Her protests were not unmingled with regret, for she could not be got to consider it so light a thing to renounce her country. For my part I must confess that I was troubled with no such scruples. Like all persons who serve it scurvily, and who are least of an ornament to it, I held myself to be as ill-used by it as ever it had been by me. I felt that I could renounce it for ever without a pang.

After some little meditation I became immeasurably taken with this scheme. There was no reason why with one bold stroke we should not renounce our liabilities and put away our dangers. Every hour we spent in England now was at our peril. But let us reach the port of Bristol and turn our chaise and horses into ready money sufficient to defray the expenses of the voyage, and once again should we be able to breathe the air of freedom. Seeing me more than ever possessed with the notion, Mrs. Cynthia, like a dutiful wife, began presently to yield to it. She owned at least that a life over seas could not be much more precarious than the one we were at present enjoying, and it might conceivably be less so.

"But I could wish," says she, "that we had more to found our fortunes on. How can we support ourselves when we get to—to what-d'ye-call-'em?"

"You will spin, my dear," says I, "and I shall delve, in some lone wood cabin on the prairie."

"But we shall perish of the dulness in a twelve-month."

"Oh no, my dear," says I, "there will be wild beasts and Red Indians to provide us with more than enough of relaxation."

By slow degrees I brought her so entirely to my way of thinking, that she became as keen to make the port of Bristol as ever I could be. Indeed, so much were we put in mind of this that we began to make inquiries of our whereabouts, that we might set our faces thither at the earliest moment. We lay that night at an honest, comfortable inn, and learned to our surprise that our wanderings had brought us to within a day's journey of Exeter. We had certainly not supposed that we had come so far from town, nor that we had penetrated so far into the country of the enemy. For, as Cynthia excitedly exclaimed, in the near neighbourhood of Exeter was her father's seat. This unexpected circumstance wrought upon her in a singular way.

"I would dearly love to look on the old place for the last time," she said.

Although her father's house had in itself so slight a hold on her affection that she had renounced its advantages for ever, despite all the desperate consequences of such an act, its proximity had still the power to kindle a sentiment in her heart. Besides, as a little later she pointed out, there was a certain expedience in going thither. There were some small pieces of her personal property that she had left behind in the sudden recklessness of her flight, which could be easily retrieved and would add materially to our resources. This to my mind was something like an argument. I had no longer that fine disregard for ways and means with which I had set out on our pilgrimage. Money was a base consideration enough, but it seemed a mighty difficult matter to do without it. Cynthia's few jewels and trinkets were likely to serve us too well, even in the Americas, for us to afford to disregard them.

Here then was an end to all my objects. We would diverge a little out of the straight road to Bristol, and pay a visit to Cynthia's home in the absence of her papa. We counted for our safety on the fact that we must be some hours ahead of that irate old gentleman. All the same, we were taking a considerable risk. Much depended on how soon our papa had been able to replace the chaise and horses we had stolen from him. But I do not think we hesitated an instant on this account, having once committed ourselves to this daring course. Besides, there was a certain savour of humour in paying a call on his Grace in these circumstances, which did a great deal to reconcile us to the inconvenience.

CHAPTER XXI

WE REAP THE FRUITS OF OUR AUDACITY

The whimsical plan fixed in our minds, we began at once to conceive a keener rest for our affairs. Notwithstanding the urgency of our travelling, we had not exchanged the Duke's horses at any of the posting-houses we had passed. Poverty had taught us a fine economic prudence. Whatever we might gain in speed we should lose in momentary value, for his Grace's animals were an admirable pair, on which the best part of our fortune depended at Bristol. The continuous strain was already telling on them, however, and they flagged a good deal during the day.

The evening had already come when we approached our destination. Among the country lanes in the twilight it called for all Cynthia's intimate knowledge of the neighbourhood to enable us to pursue the direct path to her father's house. The moon was showing over the trees, and we were within a mile of the place, according to madam's account, when we were startled by a disconcerting incident. A sudden clatter of horses' hoofs arose in the lane. From whence they came we could not tell; but before we had time to think much about them, a horseman was riding beside us, with a particularly sinister-looking pistol presented at our faces.

My poor little madam nestled to me in a great deal of terror; but for my own part I must confess that I was more annoyed than daunted by such an unwarrantable intrusion.

"My dear fellow," I protested, "you are but wasting your time; and you are wasting ours too, which just now I am inclined to think is the more valuable. We have not a guinea in the world. Had we one we should be only too happy to present it to you."

The highwayman laughed in a familiar voice.

"Why," says he, putting a pair of mischievous eyes into the chaise, "is it not my friend, Lord What's-his-name?"

"My love," says I to the trembling Cynthia, "here is your papa."

"Of course," says the highwayman, "you mean the Duke of Thing-em-bob."

"To be sure I do," says I. "We are very well met, I think."

By this our chaise had stopped, and Mr. Sadler had pulled his horse up too. I was not at all displeased by this interruption, for in any circumstances the sight of this merry, cheerful fellow was welcome. He was one of those rare persons whose voice alone had the power to charm. He was a genial rogue indeed; an engaging spirit whom to meet was to ask to dinner. We were already the better for his society.

Therefore, as we had but a mile to go to the Duke's house—Hurley Place was the name of it—I proposed that we should carry him along with us, and enjoy his company at dinner. Mr. Sadler was nothing loth.

Wherefore it fell out that the Lady Cynthia returned to her ancestral home in the company of a notorious highwayman, and a bankrupt, a discredited peer. What a suppressed excitement there was to be sure when we drove up to the door, and it became known among the servants that the Lady Cynthia had returned of her own free will! More than one aged servitor, who had grown old in the service of the Duke, was so affected by the erring child's return that he shed a silent tear. Inquiry elicited the fact that there was no reason to expect our papa at present: and that not a word had been heard of his Grace since he had left the house in pursuit of his naughty daughter.

Nothing could have been more delightful than the sensations we experienced on our brief re-entry into civilization. What luxuries in the matter of washing, shaving, and polishing generally were we able to enjoy after the discomforts of our itinerary!

Cynthia had her own maid to dress her; Mr. Sadler was provided with a valet of the Duke's, and another man was found for me. Orders were given to the butler that the best dinner for three persons the cook could devise was to be served in an hour, and in the meantime we arrayed ourselves in our choicest garments to do justice to it. It was the last evening of luxury we were likely to spend; and we were determined that we would neglect no opportunity of making the most of it.

The contents of Mr. Waring's valise were a material assistance to my wardrobe, and for that matter to Mr. Sadler's too. His silk stockings and breeches, brocaded vests, and laced coats, served us admirably. We took advantage of them, chiefly, I think, for the laudable reason that we might do the more honour to Cynthia and the dinner. And I at least am free to

confess that the sensation of having once again clean smart clothes upon my person gave a wonderful impetus to my self-esteem. I felt that I could look the world in the face once more, and that I was again my own man. I never was a scoffer at the virtues of fine clothes, and distrust him that is. So long as one is sure of one's tailor, one's soul may take care of itself. The grace of a good coat is communicated to the wearer.

Although Mr. Sadler and I were attired as near the first fashion as our borrowed plumes would permit, we were as nothing to Mrs. Cynthia. When she joined us in the room where the dinner was laid, my friend, the highwayman, *blasé* as he was, could not repress his admiration. She did indeed appear to perfection not only in the cunning of her gown, but in the sparkling animation of her face, her lively colour, and the mocking intrepidity lurking in her eyes.

Her mood was a match for the occasion. She clearly recognized the extravagant whimsicality of sitting down to dinner in such company, at such a season, and in such a place. It was a piece of mad folly, of cynical bravado; and she took her seat at the table with an air of reckless mischief that was wholly adorable. She played the game. To-morrow we must leave our native land for ever, but that night we contrived to forget everything—our perilous situation, our destitution and our desperate case, in quips and jests, good wine and boisterous laughter.

Mr. Sadler afterwards, very deservedly I do not doubt, came to be hanged. But it was sound judgment in me to invite him to our last dinner. What a fine merry rogue he was, to be sure! What an instinct he betrayed for goodfellowship! He came to be hanged, it is true, but that night his laugh rang the loudest and frankest, his jests had the keenest edge, and it was from his eyes that the most whole-hearted humour beaconed. He was as merry a rascal as any with whom I ever had the honour to drain a glass. But he was a man of true breeding too, so that he neither embarrassed Mrs. Cynthia as a highwayman less of a gentleman doubtless would have done in such singular circumstances; nor did he once arouse anger or jealousy in me.

"To your eyes, your ladyship, and to your lordship's nose," so far from provoking offence, became a source of mirth from the frank jovial tones with which it was uttered, and the inimitable gestures by which it was accompanied. For his own part, Mr. Sadler admitted that this meeting was highly piquant to him, since on a former occasion he had solemnly written us down in his own mind as a pair of cheats and impostors. It struck him as an entirely remarkable circumstance that after all we should prove to be the very persons we had purported to be; and as one no less so, that he should ever have presumed us to be otherwise. But as I pointed out to him, after all, his error was not so surprising. The judgment of the world is at the mercy of the obvious. It prefers to appraise a picture by its frame. Were it otherwise, our very titles, and material distinctions of that kind, would cease to have a meaning.

Oblivious of everything, we continued to eat and drink, and be of good cheer. In the audacity of our mood neither Cynthia nor I gave a thought to our pursuers. We did not consider that we were in the house of the enemy, and that it could be by no means unexpected that we should be surprised at any hour. And I am not sure that we were prepared greatly to care should aught so untoward happen. By this I believe we were utterly desperate. A reaction had come upon us. We, who had been so excessively solicitous for the well-being of our skins and the preservation of our perfect liberty, were at this moment unable to muster much interest in these matters. We were in a warm room, in a congenial society, snug, well fed, and mighty well content. No two persons could have been in a happier case in which to confront the worst. Let the devil walk in if he chose. For once we were in a condition to beard him. Our cheeks burnt; our eyes shone; our hearts were overflowing and generous.

Such was the state of our minds, when without a solitary note of warning, and as a wholly natural consequence, the devil walked in. In the very height of our cheerful rattle, of our foolish talk that hallowed by the bottle was so witty, the door opened suddenly, and the oath that sprang to my lips involuntarily to greet the servant who had so unceremoniously obtruded himself upon our familiar gaiety, was stifled before it was uttered. The little Duke hopped in, purple, and gobbling like a turkey. The cool and smiling Mr. Humphrey Waring, chewing his eternal wisp of straw, followed at his heels at a more elegant leisure.

I suppose their sudden unheralded appearance was to us in the nature of a thunderbolt. Yet after all it was so little unexpected as not to astonish us. And, speaking for myself, now that I was fairly cornered, my last card played, the old recklessness returned, and instead of faltering

before this outraged old gentleman, I rose, bowed, and greeted him with the completest self possession. And as I did so, whether by virtue of the noble wine of his Grace's cellar, or as probably by an ecstasy of desperation, I conceived a kind of joy of our meeting.

Between his alternate gobblings and hoppings and gaspings for breath, the old gentleman must have come perilously close to his inevitable apoplexy. At first in his inarticulate fury he could neither speak nor act; and I found myself awaiting his good pleasure quite a long time, with a smile of greeting on my lips, and my hand on my heart.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LAST

In the end it was neither his Grace nor I who broke the spell. Mr. Waring took the wisp of straw from his teeth, and says:

"Tiverton, my dear fellow, you amuse me."

"I rather amuse myself," says I, a little wearily. "We are come to the last act in this somewhat pitiful poor-hearted sort of farce, and I suppose we must continue furiously to laugh until the curtain is rung down."

"Of course, my dear fellow, of course," says Waring. "But before we do so, would it not be as well if we had a few brief explanations in the true stage manner? In the first place, may I ask why you so persistently shun the society of the one person who is the most likely to contribute something towards setting you right in the eyes of the world?"

"I confess I do not understand you," says I.

"Then I am sorry for it," says my rival, with a strange frank smile. "For, after all, the person I refer to is myself."

"You?" says I.

The incredulity in my voice caused the man to open his snuff-box very deliberately, and to offer its contents to me.

"Perhaps, after all," says he, "there is no particular reason why you should take my meaning. For you have doubtless forgotten that I am the only person now alive who was privileged to witness a certain incident. But that of course may be a fact you may wish to forget; or the incident in question may be too trifling for your recollection. In any case I ask your pardon if I weary you."

"On the contrary," says I coldly, "you interest me vastly."

"The topic is one I should crave your pardon for mentioning," says the other, with his baffling air; "were not your interest so greatly at stake. I presume you are not unacquainted with the construction the world hath already put upon this matter?"

"I am not," says I curtly.

"Then I hope, my dear fellow," says Waring, "you will accept a service, however slight, at my hands. My testimony may be of some little value to you before a jury of your peers."

My rival held out his hand with a jovial grace. I stood looking at it, groping, with the wine still in my brain. For the candour sparkling in the fellow's eyes was a thing I had never seen in that place before; the winning earnestness of it was so hard to realize that it overwhelmed me. The bitter truth suddenly poured into my heart like a torrent.

"My God," says I, "all this time I have been weighing your character by the measure of my own. Is it not ever the fate of the mean and the little to do so? You have been the phantom, from whom we have fled. The phantom, however, was not in a chaise and pair, but in our own hearts!"

"The old fault, Tiverton, I protest," says Waring. "What a trite, pragmatical, moralizing fellow it is! I do hope you will not, like your damned old ancestor, lay a burden on an unprovoking posterity and write a book."

"Ecod, I will," says I, "one day. I will take a revenge of my mean mind by exhibiting it naked to the sneers of the world. But in the meantime, Waring, I must show you in your true colours to my little Cynthia. Even her feminine penetration had not divined them."

It was a light word, lightly uttered; and I cursed myself. The man was as pale as his neckcloth, and the old mocking whimsicality—alas! I had nearly writ ugliness—was in his eyes. There was but an instant in which this was to be observed, however, for with shaking fingers he opened his snuff-box, and regained possession of himself.

I offered him my hand.

"Waring," says I, "we cannot ever be friends. You will continue to loathe me as you would a thief; and I on my part shall continue to hate you for the consummate hypocrite and charlatan you are. But, curse my jacket, sir! as a dilettante in the arts, as a lover of the beautiful, I shall reverence for ever your singularly noble character."

"Then I am repaid," says this cynical, candid devil. "'Tis the reward I had looked for, my good Tiverton, that you, robber and ruffian as you are, whose foremost desire will ever be to put an inch of steel in my heart, should yet be condemned to lay your neck in the dust while Humphrey Waring walks upon it. I do not think I could desire a prettier revenge. 'Tis a dear pretty chit, though."

Involuntarily his eyes wandered across the room to Cynthia. Mine followed them, in spite of myself, jealously. It was then I saw that a strange thing had happened. Father and daughter were seated together, tears streaming down their faces, locked in one another's arms.

"Your victory is completer than I had supposed," says my rival coolly.

At the moment I did not perceive the full force of his meaning. An instant later, however, I had that felicity. The old man in a broken voice called me over to him. The tears still streamed down his cheeks.

"I am a foolish, fond old man," says his Grace. "Curse it all, was there ever such a damned, snuffling, weak old fool as I am! Ecod, I must be very old. How old am I, Humphrey?"

"Eighty-two in December, Duke."

"Curse me, so I am," says his Grace. "If I hadn't been so old—if I had been eighty now, if I had been eighty—I would 'a broken a stick across your shoulders, miss, and I would 'a peppered your hide with lead, young what's-your-name. But as I'm so old, 'od's lud! I suppose I must be benevolent. Miss says she loves you, young man—don't you, my pretty pet?—And she says you love her, so I suppose you had better marry her. Humphrey won't mind; will you, Humphrey? You be an old bachelor, and don't be plagued with daughters. But I forget the fellow's name; what's his name, Humphrey?"

"Tiverton," says Humphrey.

"Of course," says the Duke. "Knew your father, young man; thin man with a bald head and no chin; used to stutter when he got excited. Knew your grandfather too. Of course I knew your grandfather, he, he, he! Was at Eton with him. Great man, your grandfather; writ a pamphlet or something. Dirty little varlet at Eton; had red hair. What is the amount of your debts, young man? I suppose I must pay 'em, though why I don't know. But we'll go into it to-morrow, young Tiverton. I must go to bed. Give me your shoulder, Humphrey."

Here is the end of my prosaic history. The Duke's credit and influence, and Mr. Waring's testimony averted those calamities that had been such a nightmare to us. We also had the banns cried; and were married all over again by Parson Scriven, lest any irregularities in regard to the union of Jane Smith and John Jones, or Jane Jones and John Smith, should recoil on their heirs. Mr. Waring lives on his property in Ireland, troubles Saint James's little, and Devonshire less. Mr. Sadler, as I have said, came to be hanged. No man of the world was more courteous and polite than he; no man was more genial; yet I should be the last to deny that his fate was richly merited. Even in the very moment of our reconciliation on that eventful night, he stole away. A pair of cameos of great price went with him, I grieve to say. It may, of course, have been his boast that he too was a lover of the beautiful.

THE END

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