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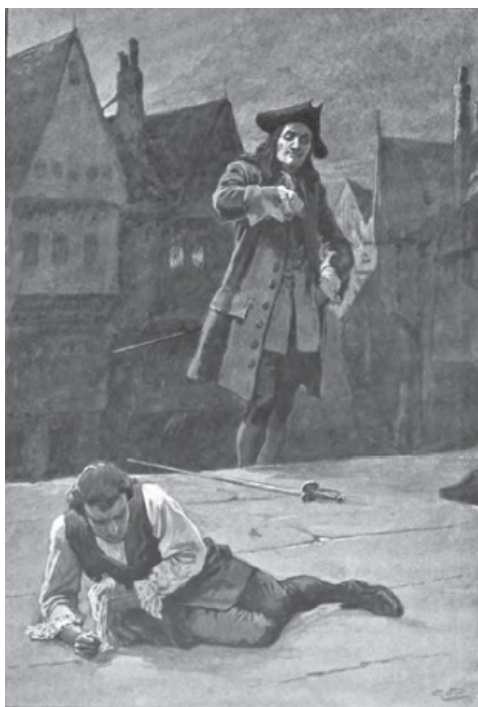
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" BUT I AM GRIEVED I HAVE NO VIRGIL "

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PARSON KELLY

BY

A. E. W. MASON

AND

ANDREW LANG

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TO THE
BARON TANNEGUY DE WOGAN

*The Representative of a House illustrious for its Antiquity:
In Prosperity splendid: in Exile and Poverty gay
and constant: of Loyalty unshaken;*

Is Dedicated

This Narrative, founded on the deeds of his Ancestor,

THE CHEVALIER NICHOLAS DE WOGAN.

A. E. W. M.
A. L.

PREFACE

The authors wish to say that the proceedings of Lady Oxford are unhistorical. Swift mentions a rumour that there was such a lady, but leaves her anonymous.

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PARSON KELLY

CHAPTER I

THE PARSON EXPRESSES IRREPROACHABLE SENTIMENTS AT THE MAZARIN PALACE

"What mighty quarrels rise from trivial things!"

So wrote Mr. Alexander Pope, whom Nicholas Wogan remembers as a bookish boy in the little Catholic colony of Windsor Forest. The line might serve as a motto for the story which Mr. Wogan (now a one-armed retired colonel of Dillon's Irish Brigade in French Service) is about to tell. The beginnings of our whole mischancy business were trivial in themselves, and in all appearance unrelated to the future. They were nothing more important than the purchase of a couple of small strong-boxes and the placing of Parson Kelly's patrimony in Mr. Law's company of the West. Both of these events happened upon the same day.

It was early in February of the year 1719, and the streets of Paris were deep in snow. Wogan, then plotting for King James's cause, rode into Paris from St. Omer at ten o'clock of the forenoon, and just about the same hour Parson Kelly, plotting too in his way, drove through the Orleans gate.

A few hours later the two men met in the Marais, or rather Nicholas Wogan saw the skirts of Kelly's coat vanishing into an ironmonger's shop, and ran in after him. Kelly was standing by the counter with a lady on either side of him, as was the dear man's wont; though their neighbourhood on this occasion was the merest accident, for the Parson knew neither of them.

'Sure it's my little friend the lace merchant,' said Wogan, and clapped his hand pretty hard on the small of his friend's back, whom he had not seen for a twelvemonth and more. Kelly stumbled a trifle, maybe, and no doubt he coughed and spluttered. One of the ladies dropped her purse and shuddered into a corner.

'*Quelle bête sauvage!*' murmured the second with one indignant eye upon Nicholas Wogan, and the other swimming with pity for Mr. Kelly.

'Madame,' said Wogan, picking up the purse and restoring it with his most elegant bow, 'it was pure affection.'

'No doubt,' said Kelly, as he rubbed his shoulder; 'but, Nick, did you never hear of the bear that smashed his master's skull in the endeavour to stroke off a fly that had settled on his nose? That was pure affection too.'

He turned back to the counter, on which the shopman was setting out a number of small strong-boxes, and began to examine them.

'Well, you must e'en blame yourself, George,' said Nick, 'for the mere sight of you brings the smell of the peat to my nostrils and lends vigour to my hand.'

This he said with all sincerity, for the pair had been friends in county Kildare long before Kelly went to Dublin University, and took deacon's orders, and was kicked out of the pulpit for preaching Jacobitism in his homilies. As boys they had raced bare-legged over the heather, and spent many an afternoon in fighting over again that siege of Rathcoffey Castle which an earlier Nicholas Wogan had held so stoutly for King Charles. The recollection of those days always played upon Wogan's foolish heartstrings with a touch soft as a woman's fingers, and very likely it now set George Kelly's twanging to the same tune; for at Wogan's words he turned himself about with a face suddenly illumined.

'Here, Nick, lay your hand there,' said he and stretched out his hand. 'You will be long in Paris?'

'No more than a night. And you?'

'Just the same time.'

He turned again to the counter, and busied himself with his boxes in something of a hurry, as though he would avoid further questioning. Wogan blew a low whistle.

Maybe we are on the same business, eh?' he asked. 'The King's business?'

'Whisht, man,' whispered Kelly quickly, and he glanced about the shop. 'Have you no sense at all?'

The shop was empty at the moment, and there was no reason that Wogan could see for his immoderate secrecy. But the Parson was much like the rest of the happy-go-lucky conspirators who were intriguing to dislodge the Elector from the English throne--cautious by fits and moods, and the more often when there was the less need. But let a scheme get ripe for completion, and sure they imagined it completed already, and at once there would be letters left about here, for all the world to read, and a wink and a sly word there, so that it was little short of a miracle when a plot was launched before it had been discovered by those it was launched against. Not that you are to attribute to Mr. Wogan any superior measure of reticence. On the contrary, it is very probable that it was precisely Mr. Wogan's tongue which George Kelly distrusted, and if so, small blame to him. At any rate, he pursed up his lips and stiffened his back. Consequence turned him into a ramrod, and with a voice pitched towards the shopman:

'I am still in the muslin trade,' said he, meaning that he collected money for the Cause. 'I shall cross to England to-morrow.'

'Indeed and will you now?' said Wogan, who was perhaps a little contraried by his friend's reserve. 'Then I'll ask you to explain what these pretty boxes have to do with the muslin trade?'

'They are to carry my samples in,' replied Kelly readily enough; and then, as if to put Wogan's questions aside, 'Are you for England, too?'

'No,' said Wogan, imitating Mr. Kelly's importance; 'I am going to visit my Aunt Anne at Cadiz; so make the most of that, my little friend.'

Wogan was no great dab at the cyphers and the jargon of the plots, but he knew that the Duke of Ormond, being then in Spain, figured in the correspondence as my Aunt Anne. It was now Kelly's turn to whistle, and that he did, and then laughed besides.

'I might have guessed,' said he, 'for there's a likely prospect of broken heads at all events, and to that magnet you were never better than a steel filing.'

'Whisht, man,' exclaimed Wogan, frowning and wagging his head preposterously. 'Is it yourself that's the one person in the world to practise mysteries? Broken heads, indeed!' and he shrugged his shoulder as though he had a far greater business on hand. Kelly's curiosity rose to the bait, and he put a question or two which Wogan waived aside. The Parson indeed had hit the truth. Wogan had no business whatsoever except the mere fighting, but since the Parson was for practising so much dignified secrecy, Wogan would do no less.

To carry the joke a step further, he turned to the counter, even as Kelly had done, and examined the despatch-boxes. He would buy one, to convince Kelly that he, too, was trusted with secret papers. The boxes were as like to one another as peas, but Wogan discovered a great dissimilitude of defects.

'There's not one of them fit to keep a mouldy cheese in,' said he, tapping and sounding them with his knuckles, 'let alone--' and then he caught himself up with a glance at Kelly. 'However, this perhaps may serve--but wait a little.' He felt in his pockets and by chance discovered a piece of string. This string he drew out and carefully measured the despatch-box, depth and width and length. Then he put the tip of his thumb between his teeth and bit it in deep thought. 'Well, and it must serve, since there's no better; but for heaven's sake, my man, clap a stouter lock on it! I could smash this with my fist. A good stout lock; and send it--wait a moment!' He glanced towards Kelly and turned back to the shopman. 'I'll just write down where you are to send it to.'

To Kelly's more complete mystification he scribbled a name and an address on a sheet of paper, and folded it up with an infinity of precautions.

'Send it there, key and all, by nine o'clock tomorrow morning.'

The name was Mr. Kelly's, the address the inn at which Mr. Kelly was in the habit of putting up. Wogan bought the box merely to gull Kelly into the belief that he, also, was a Royal messenger. Then he paid for the box, and forthwith forgot all about it over a bottle of wine. Kelly, for his part, held his despatch-box in his hand.

'Nick, I have business,' said he as soon as the bottle was empty, 'and it appears you have too. Shall we meet to-night? Mr. Law expects me at the Mazarin Palace.'

'Faith, then I'll make bold to intrude upon him,' said Nicholas, who, though Mr. Law kept open house for those who favoured the White Rose, was but a rare visitor to the Mazarin Palace, holding the financier in so much awe that no amount of affability could extinguish it.

However, that night he went, and so learned in greater particular the secret of the Parson's journey. It was nine o'clock at night when Wogan turned the corner of the Rue Vivienne and saw the windows of the Mazarin Palace blazing out upon the snow. A little crowd shivered and gaped beneath them, making, poor devils! a vicarious supper off the noise of Mr. Law's entertainment. And it was a noisy party that Mr. Law entertained. Before he was half-way down the street Wogan could hear the peal of women's laughter and a snatch of a song, and after that maybe a sound of breaking glass, as though a tumbler had been edged off the table by an elbow. He was shown up the great staircase to a room on the first floor.

'Monsieur Nicholas de Wogan,' said the footman, throwing open the door. Wogan stepped into the company of the pretty arch conspirators who were then mismanaging the Chevalier's affairs. However, with their mismanagement Wogan is not here concerned, for this is not a story of Kings and Queens and high politics but of the private fortunes of Parson Kelly. Olive Trant was playing backgammon in a corner with Mr. Law. Madame de Mezières, who was seldom absent when politics were towards, graced the table and conversed with Lady Cecilia Law. And right in front of Mr. Wogan stood that madcap her sister, Fanny Oglethorpe, with her sleeves tucked back to her elbows, looking gloriously jolly and handsome. She was engaged in mincing chickens in a china bowl which was stewing over a little lamp on the table, for, said she, Mr. Law had aspersed the English cooks, and she was minded to make him eat his word and her chicken that very night for supper. She had Parson Kelly helping her upon the one side, and a young French gentleman whom Wogan did not know upon the other; and the three of them were stirring in the bowl with a clatter of their wooden spoons.

'Here's Mr. Wogan,' cried Fanny Oglethorpe, and as Wogan held out his hand she clapped her hot spoon into it. 'M. de Bellegarde, you must know Mr. Wogan. He has the broadest back of any man that ever I was acquainted with. You must do more than know him. You must love him, as I do, for the broadness of his back.'

M. de Bellegarde looked not over-pleased with the civility of her greeting, and bowed to Wogan with an affectation of ceremony. Mr. Law came forward with an affable word. Olive Trant added another, and Madame de Mezières asked eagerly what brought him to Paris.

'He is on his way to join the Duke of Ormond at Cadiz,' cried Kelly; 'and,' said this man deceived, 'he carries the most important messages. Bow to him, ladies! Gentlemen, your hands to your hearts, and your knees to the ground! It's no longer a soldier of fortune that you see before you, but a diplomatist, an ambassador: His Excellency, the Chevalier Wogan;' and with that he ducked and bowed, shaking his head and gesticulating with his hands, as though he were some dandified court chamberlain. All the Parson's diplomacy had been plainly warmed out of him in his present company. Mr. Law began to laugh, but Fanny Oglethorpe dropped her spoon and looked at Wogan.

'The Duke of Ormond?' said she, lowering her voice.

'Indeed? and you carry messages?' said Miss Olive Trant, upsetting the backgammon board.

'Of what kind?' exclaimed Madame de Mezières; and then, in an instant, their pretty heads were clustered about the table, and their mouths whispering questions, advice, and precautions, all in a breath. 'It's at Bristol you are to land?' 'The Earl Marischal is for Scotland?' 'You carry 5,000 barrels, Mr. Wogan?' meaning thereby stands of arms. And, 'You may speak with all confidence,' Miss Oglethorpe urged, with a glance this way and that over her shoulders. 'There are none but honest people here. M. de Bellegarde,' and she looked towards the French spark, blushing very prettily, 'is my good friend.'

Mr. Wogan bowed.

'It was not that I doubted M. de Bellegarde,' he replied. 'But 'faith, ladies, I have learnt more of the prospects of the expedition from your questions than ever I knew before. I was told for a certain thing that heads would be broken, and, to be sure, I was content with the information.'

At that Mr. Law laughed. Kelly asked, 'What of the despatch-box, then?' The ladies pouted their resentment; and Mr. Wogan, for the first and last time in his life, wore the reputation of a diplomatist. 'A close man,' said M. de Bellegarde, pursing his lips in approval.

'But sped on an unlikely venture,' added Mr. Law, getting back to his backgammon. 'Oh, I know,' he continued, as the voices rose against him, 'you have grumblings enough in England to fill a folio, and so you think the whole country will hurry to the waterside to welcome you, before you have set half your foot on shore. But, when all is said, the country's prosperous. Your opportunity will come with its misfortunes.'

But Madame de Mezières would hear nothing of such forebodings; and Olive Trant, catching up a glass, swung it above her head.

'May the Oak flourish!' she cried.

Fanny Oglethorpe sprang from her seat. 'May the White Rose bloom!' she answered, giving the counter-word. The pair clinked their glasses.

'Aye, that's the spirit!' cried the Parson. 'Drink, Nick! God save the King! Here's a bumper to him!'

He stood with his face turned upwards, his blue eyes afire. 'Here's to the King!' he repeated. 'Here's to the Cause! God send that nothing ever come between the Cause and me.' He drained his glass as he spoke, and tossed it over his shoulder. There was a tinkling sound, and a flash of sparks, as it were, when the glass splintered against the wall. George Kelly stood for a moment, arrested in his attitude, his eyes staring into vacancy, as though some strange news had come of a sudden knocking at his heart. Then he hitched his shoulders. 'Bah!' he cried, and began to sing in a boisterous voice some such ditty as

Of all the days that's in the year,
The tenth of June's to me most dear,
When our White Roses do appear
To welcome Jamie the Rover.

Or it may have been

Let our great James come over,
And baffle Prince Hanover,
With hearts and hands in loyal bands,
We'll welcome him at Dover.

It was not the general practice to allow the Parson to sing without protest; for he squeezed less music out of him than any other Irishman could evoke from a deal board with his bare knuckles. When he sang, and may Heaven forgive the application of the word in this conjunction, there was ever a sort of mortal duello between his voice and the tune--very distressing to an audience. But now he sang his song from beginning to end, and no one interrupted him, or so much as clapped a hand over an ear; and this not out of politeness. But his words so rang with a startling fervour; and he stood, with his head thrown back, rigid in the stress of passion. His voice quavered down to silence, but his eyes still kept their fires, his attitude its fixity. Once or twice he muttered a word beneath his breath, and then a hoarse cry came leaping from his mouth.

'May nothing ever come between the Cause and me, except it be death--except it be death!'

A momentary silence waited upon the abrupt cessation of his voice: Wogan even held his breath; Miss Oglethorpe did not stir; and during that silence, there came a gentle rapping on the door. Kelly looked towards it with a start, as though there was his answer; but the knocking was repeated before anyone moved; it seemed as if suspense had hung its chains upon every limb. It was Mr. Wogan who opened the door, and in stalked Destiny in the shape of a lackey. He carried a note, and handed it to George Kelly.

'The messenger has but this instant brought it,' he said.

Kelly broke the seal, and unfolded the paper.

'From General Dillon,' he said; and, reading the note through, 'Ladies, will you pardon me? Mr. Law, I have your permission? I have but this one night in Paris, and General Dillon has news of importance which bears upon my journey.'

With that he took his hat, and got him from the room. Fanny Oglethorpe sprang up from her chair.

'Sure, my chicken will be ruined,' she cried. 'Come, M. de Bellegarde,' and the pair fell again to stirring in the bowl, and with such indiscriminate vigour that more than once their fingers got entangled. This Mr. Wogan observed, and was sufficiently indiscreet to utter a sly proposal that he should make a third at the stirring.

'There is no need for a third,' said Miss Oglethorpe, with severity. 'But, on the other hand, I want a couple of pats of butter, and a flagon of water; and I shall be greatly obliged if Mr. Wogan will procure me them.' And what with that and other requests which chanced to come into her head, she kept him busy until the famous supper was prepared.

In the midst of that supper back came Mr. Kelly, and plumped himself down in his chair, very full of his intelligence. A glass or two of Mr. Law's burgundy served to warm out of his blood all the reserve that was left over from the morning.

'We are all friends here,' said he, turning to Miss Oglethorpe. 'Moreover, I need the advantage of your advice and knowledge. General Dillon believes that my Lord Oxford maybe persuaded to undertake the muslin trade in Britain.'

'Lord Oxford,' exclaimed Miss Oglethorpe, with a start, for Oxford had lain quiet since he nearly lost his head five years ago. 'He is to collect the money from our supporters?'

'It is the opinion that he will, if properly approached.'

Mr. Law, at the top of the table, shook his head.

'It is a very forward and definite step for so prudential a politician,' said he.

'But a politician laid on a shelf, and pining there,' replied George. 'There's the reason for it. He has a hope of power,--*Qui a bu, boira!* The hope grows real if we succeed.'

'I would trust him no further than a Norfolk attorney,' returned Mr. Law; 'and that's not an inch from the end of my nose. He will swear through a two-inch board to help you, and then turn cat in pan if a Whig but smile at him.'

'Besides,' added Miss Oglethorpe, and she rested, her chin thoughtfully upon her hands. As she spoke, all the eyes in that company were turned on her. 'Besides,' and then she came to a stop, and flushed a little. 'Lord Oxford,' she continued, 'was my good friend when I was in England.' Then she stopped again. Finally she looked straight into M. de Bellegarde's eyes, and with an admirable bravery: 'Some, without reason, have indeed slandered me with stories that he was more than my friend.'

'None, Madame, who know you, I'll warrant,' said M. de Bellegarde, and gravely lifting her hand to his lips, he kissed it.

'Well, that's a very pretty answer,' said she in some confusion. 'So Mr. Kelly may know,' she went on, 'that I speak with some authority concerning my Lord Oxford. It is not he whom I distrust. But he has lately married a young wife.'

'Ah,' said Mr. Law, and 'Oh!' cried Mr. Wogan, with a shrug of his shoulders. 'If a lady is to dabble her tender fingers in the pie--'

'And what of it, Mr. Wogan?' Madame de Mezières took him up coldly.

'Yes, Mr. Wogan, what of it?' repeated Olive Trant hotly, 'provided the lady be loyal.' In an instant Mr. Wogan had the whole nest swarming about his ears, with the exception of Fanny Oglethorpe. It was intimated to him that he had a fine preposterous conceit of his sex, and would he be pleased to justify it?

Madame de Mezières hinted that the ability to swing a shillelagh and bring it down deftly on an offending sconce did not comprise the whole virtues of mankind. And if it came to the test of dealing blows, why there was Joan of Arc, and what had Mr. Wogan to say to her? Mr. Wogan turned tail, as he always did when women were in the van of the attack.

'Ladies,' he said, 'I do not think Joan of Arc so singular after all, since I see four here who I believe from my soul could emulate her noblest achievements.'

But Mr. Wogan's gallantry went for very little. The cowardice of it was apparent for all that he bowed and laid his hand on his heart, and performed such antics as he thought likely to tickle women into good humour.

'Besides,' put in Lady Cecilia, with a soothing gentleness, 'Mr. Wogan should know that the cause he serves owes, as it is, much to the good offices of women.'

Mr. Wogan had his own opinions upon that point, but he wiped his forehead and had the discretion to hold his tongue. Meanwhile Fanny Oglethorpe, who had sat with frowning brows in silence, diverted the onslaught.

'But it is just the loyalty of Lady Oxford which is in question. Lady Oxford is a Whig, of a Whig family. She is even related to Mr. Walpole, the Minister. I think Mr. Kelly will have to tread very warily at Lord Oxford's house of Brampton Bryan.'

'For my part,' rejoined Mr. Law, 'I think the Chevalier de St. George would do better to follow the example of Mr. Kelly and my friends here.'

'And what is that?' asked Wogan.

'Why, scrape up all the money he can lay hands on and place it in my company of the West.'

Mr. Wogan was not well pleased to hear of his friend's speculation, and, when they left the house together, took occasion to remonstrate with him.

'How much have you placed?' he asked.

'All that I could,' replied George. 'It is little enough--the remnant of my patrimony. Mr. Law lent me a trifle in addition to make up a round sum. It is a very kindly man, and well disposed to me. I have no fears, for all the money in France dances to the tune he fiddles.'

'To his tune, to be sure,' grumbled Wogan; 'but are you equally certain his tune is yours? Oh, I know. He is a monstrous clever man, not a doubt of it. The computation of figures--it is the devil's own gift, and to my nose it smells damnably of sulphur.'

Mr. Wogan has good occasion to reflect how Providence fleers at one's apprehensions when he remembers the sleepless hours during which he tossed upon his bed that night, seeing all the Parson's scanty savings drowned beyond redemption in the China seas. For no better chance could have befallen Kelly than that Wogan's forebodings should have come true. But the venture succeeded. Fanny Oglethorpe made a fortune and married M. de Bellegarde. Olive Trant, the richer by 100,000 pistoles, became Princess of Auvergne. Do they ever remember that night at the Hotel de Mazarin, and how Parson Kelly cried out almost in an agony as though, in the heat of passion, he surmised the future, 'May nothing come between the Cause and me'? Well, for one thing the money came. It placed in his hands a golden key wherewith to unlock the gates of disaster.

CHAPTER II

MR. WOGAN REFUSES TO ACKNOWLEDGE AN UNDESIRABLE ACQUAINTANCE IN ST. JAMES'S STREET

Mr. Wogan left Paris early the next morning without a thought for the despatch-box that he had sent to Kelly, and, coming to Cadiz, sailed with the Spaniards out of that harbour on the tenth of March, and into the great storm which dispersed the fleet off Cape Finisterre. In company with the Earl Marischal and the Marquis of Tullibardine, he was aboard one of those two ships which alone touched the coast of Scotland. Consequently, he figured with better men, as Field-Marshal Keith, and his brother the Ambassador, and my Lord George Murray, in that little skirmish at Glenshiel, and very thankful he was when the night shut black upon the valleys and put its limit to the attack of General Wightman's soldiers from Inverness. A council of war was held in the dark upon a hill-side, whence the fires of General Wightman's camp could be seen twinkling ruddily below, but Wogan heard little of what was disputed, for he went to sleep with his back against a boulder and dreamed of his ancestors. He was waked up about the middle of the night by the Earl Marischal, who informed him that the Spaniards had determined to surrender at discretion, and that the handful of Highlanders were already dispersing to their homes.

'As for ourselves, we shall make for the Western Islands and wait there for a ship to take us off.'

'Then I'll wish you luck and a ship,' said Wogan. He stood up and shook the dew off his cloak. 'I have friends in London, and I'll trust my lucky star to get me there.'

'Your star's in eclipse,' said the Earl. 'You will never reach London except it be with your legs tied under a horse's belly.'

'Well, I'm thinking you have not such a clear path after all to the Western Islands! Did you never hear of my forefather, Thomas Wogan, that rode with twenty-eight Cavaliers through the heart of Cromwell's England, and came safe into the Highlands? Sure what that great man could do with twenty-eight companions to make him conspicuous, his degenerate son can do alone.'

Mr. Wogan began his journey by walking over the hill, near to the top of which his friends had been driven off the road to Inverness by the English fire, which was very well nourished. He made his way to Loch Duich, as they call it, and so by boat round Ardnamurchan, to a hamlet they call Oban. There he changed his dress for the Campbell black and green, and, joining company with a drove of Rob Roy's cattle from the Lennox, travelled to Glasgow. His Irish brogue no doubt sounded a trifle strange in a Highland drover, but he was in a country where the people were friendly. At Glasgow he changed his dress again for a snuff-coloured bourgeois suit, and so rode into England by the old Carlisle and Preston route, which he had known very well in the year 1715.

Wogan was at this time little more than a lad, though full-grown enough to make a man and a good-sized boy into the bargain, and the exploit of the Cavalier Thomas Wogan, as it had prompted his design, so it exhilarated him in the execution. He went lightly on his way, weaving all manner of chivalric tales about his ancestor, to the great increase of his own vanity, bethinking him when he stopped for an hour at a wayside inn that here, too, perhaps Thomas Wogan had reined in his horse, and maybe had taken a draught from that very pint-pot which Nicholas now held to his lips. Thus the late burst up the hill-side above the Shiel was quickly robbed of its sting, and by the time that he had reached London he was so come to a pitch of confidence in the high destinies of the Wogan family that, after leaving his horse in the charge of Mr. Gunning, of Mussell Hill, whom he knew of old as a staunch friend of George Kelly's, and borrowing from him a more suitable raiment than his stained travelling dress, he must needs walk down St. James's Street with no more disguise than the tilting of his hat over his nose, and the burying of his chin in his cravat.

Soon Mr. Wogan's confidence and, with his confidence, his legs were brought to a sudden check. For when he was come half-way down the hill he saw the figure of one Captain Montague in the uniform of the Guards turn the corner out of Ryder Street and walk towards him. Wogan had met the officer before on an occasion of which he did not wish at this particular moment to be reminded. He wheeled about, took a step or two, and so came again to a halt. Was it known, he asked himself, that he had sailed from Cadiz and landed in Scotland? If so, and it was a most likely conjecture, then for Wogan to be straggling about St. James's Street was egregious impertinence, and the sooner he got under shelter the better for his neck. Now Wogan's destination was the lodging of George Kelly, not five hundred yards away, in Bury Street. But to reach that lodging it would be necessary for him to turn about again and face the Captain. Would the Captain know him again? Wogan debated the question, and finding no answer, asked himself another. What would Thomas Wogan have done under the like contingency? The answer to that was evident enough. Wogan turned about on the instant, cocked his hat on the back of his head, took his chin out of his cravat, twirled his cane, whistled a tune and sauntered past the Captain, looking him over as if he were so much dirt. The Captain stopped: Wogan felt his heart jump into his throat, whistled a bit louder, and twirled his cane a trifle ferociously. Over his shoulder he saw the Captain draw his brows together and rub a check with the palm of his hand like a man perplexed. The Captain took a step towards Wogan, and stopped again. Wogan sauntered on, expecting every moment to hear his name called, and a clattering run, and then to feel a heavy hand close upon his shoulder. But no voice spoke, no steps clattered on the pavement. Wogan reached the corner and spied up St. James's Street as he turned. The Captain was still standing in

the attitude of perplexity; only, instead of smoothing his cheek, he had tilted his peruke aside and was scratching his head to ease the labour of his recollections. At the sight of him the ancestor and his twenty-eight Cavaliers rode clean out of Mr. Wogan's mind. 'Sure, Thomas wouldn't have done it, but Nicholas will,' said he, and kicking up his heels he ran. He ran along Ryder Street, turned into Bury Street, raced a hundred yards or so up the cobbles, and thundered on the door of Kelly's lodging. Here and there a head was poked from a window, and Mr. Wogan cursed his own noisiness. It seemed an age before the door was opened. Fortunately it was Mrs. Barnes, Kelly's landlady, in person, and not her serving-woman, who stood in the entrance.

'Is the Parson in London?' says Wogan. 'Say that he is, Mrs. Barnes, and say it quick.'

'Why, it's Mr. Wogan!' cries she.

'Whisht, my dear woman!' answered Wogan, pushing through the doorway. 'It's Mr. Hilton. There's no Wogan anywhere in England. Remember that, if you please.'

Mrs. Barnes slammed the door in a hurry.

'Then you are in trouble again,' said she, throwing up her hands.

'Well, there's nothing unusual in that,' said he. 'Sure man is born to it, and who am I that I should escape the inheritance?' and he opened the door of Mr. Kelly's sitting-room. He saw the figure of a man bending over the table. As the door was thrown open, the figure straightened itself hurriedly. There was a sound of an iron lid clanging down upon a box, and the sharp snap of a lock. George Kelly turned and stood between the table and the door, in a posture of defence. Then--

'Nick!' he cried, and grasped his friend's hand. The next moment he let it go. 'What brings you here?' he exclaimed.

'My ancestor,' said Wogan, dropping into a chair. "'Twas his spirit guided me.'

'Then take my word for it,' cried George, 'if there's a Bedlam beyond the grave your ancestor inhabits it.'

Wogan made no reply in words at first. But he rose stiffly from his chair, bowed to Kelly with profuse ceremony, took his hat, and with his hat a step towards the door. Kelly, on the other hand, shut the door, locked it, put the key in his pocket and leaned his back against the panels. Wogan affected to see nothing of these actions, but spoke in a tone of dignity like a man taking his leave.

'Such insults as you are pleased to confer on me,' said he, 'no doubt I deserve, and I take them in all Christian meekness. But when my ancestor Thomas Wogan, God rest his soul for ever and ever, rode with twenty-eight Cavaliers from Dover to Scotland through the thick of his bloodthirsty foes to carry the succour of his presence to the friends of his blessed Majesty of sacred memory King Charles the Second, it was not, I'd have you know, Mr. Kelly, in order that his name should be bespattered after he was dead by a snuffling long-legged surreptitious gawk of a parson who was kicked out of his Dublin pulpit with every circumstance of ignominy because his intellect didn't enable him to compose a homily.'

At this point Wogan drew a long breath, which he sorely needed. It was not at all truth that he had spoken, as he knew--none better. The Parson was indeed stripped of his gown because he preached a very fine homily on the text of 'Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's,' wherein he mingled many timely and ingenious allusions to the Chevalier. Nor was there any particular force in that epithet 'surreptitious,' beyond that it had an abusive twang. Yet it was just that word at which Mr. Kelly took offence.

'Surreptitious,' said he, 'and if you please what is the meaning of that?'

And then surveying Wogan, he began of a sudden to smile.

'Ta-ta-ta,' he said with a grimace.

'It is a pretty though an interjectional wit,' replied Wogan in a high disdain, falling upon long words, as was his fashion on the rare occasions when he cloaked himself with dignity.

'Faith,' continued George, with the smile broadening over his face, 'but it is indeed the very picture of Christian meekness,' and then, breaking into a laugh, 'Will you sit down, you noisy firebrand. As for Thomas Wogan--be damned to him and to all his twenty-eight Cavaliers into the bargain!'

Mr. Wogan will never deny but what the man's laugh was irresistible, for the Parson's features wore in repose something of clerkly look. They were cast in a mould of Episcopal gravity; but when he laughed his blue eyes would lighten at you like the sun from a bank of clouds, and the whole face of him wrinkled and creased into smiles, and his mouth shook a great rumbling laugh out of his throat, and then of a sudden you had come into the company of a jolly man. Wogan put his hat on the table and struggled to preserve his countenance from any expression of

friendliness.

'It is the common talk at the Cocoa Tree that you sailed from Cadiz. It is thought that you were one of the remnant at Glenshiel. Oh, the rumour of your whereabouts has marched before you, and that you might have guessed. But see what it is to know no Virgil, and,' shaking a minatory finger,

'Fama, malum quo non aliud velocius ullum.'

Mr. Wogan bowed before Latin like a sapling before the wind. He seated himself as he was bid.

'And you must needs come parading your monstrous person through the thick of London, like any fashionable gentleman,' continued George. 'What am I to do with you? Why couldn't you lie quiet in a village and send me news of you? Did you meet any of your acquaintance by chance when you came visiting your friend Mr. Kelly? Perhaps you passed the time of day with Mr. Walpole--' and as he spoke the name he stopped abruptly. He walked once or twice across the room, shifting his peruke from one side of his head to the other in the fluster of his thoughts. Then he paused before Wogan.

'Oh, what am I to do with you?' he cried. 'Tell me that, if you please.' But the moment Wogan began,

'Sure, George, it's not you that I will be troubling for my security'--Kelly cut in again:

'Oh, if you have nothing better to say than that, you say nothing at all. It is dribbling baby's talk,' and then he repeated a question earnestly. 'Did you see anyone you knew, or rather did anyone that knows you see you?'

'Why,' replied Wogan meekly, 'I cannot quite tell whether he knows me or not, but to be sure I ran into the arms of Captain Montague not half a dozen yards from the corner of Ryder Street.'

'Montague!' exclaimed Kelly. Wogan nodded.

'The man who fought against you at Preston siege?'

'The same.'

'Tis a pity you were at so much pains to save his life in that scuffle.'

'Haven't I been thinking that myself?' asked Wogan. 'If only I had left him lying outside the barricades, where he would have been surely killed by the cross-fire, instead of running out and dragging him in! But it is ever the way. Once do a thoroughly good-natured action and you will find it's the thorn in your side that will turn and sting you. But I am not sure that he knew me,' and he related how the Captain had stopped with an air of perplexed recollection, and had then gone on his way. Kelly listened to the account with a certain relief.

'It is likely that he would not remember you. For one thing, he was wounded when you carried him in, and perhaps gave little heed to the features of his preserver. Moreover, you have changed, Nick, in these years. You were a stripling then, a boy of fifteen, and,' here he smiled and laid a hand on Wogan's shoulder, 'you have grown into a baby in four years.'

Then he took another turn across the room. 'Well, and why not?' he said to himself, and finally brought his fist with a bang upon the table. 'I'll hazard it,' said he. 'I am not sure but what it is the safest way,' and, drawing a chair close to Wogan, he sat himself down.

'It was the mention of Mr. Walpole set me on the plan,' he said. 'You heard in Paris that Lady Oxford is a kinsman of his. Well, I go down to Lord Oxford's in two days. It is a remote village in the north of Herefordshire. You shall come with me as my secretary. Faith, but I shall figure in my lord's eyes as a person of the greatest importance.'

Mr. Wogan resisted the proposal as being of some risk to his friend, but Kelly would hear of no argument. The plan grew on him, the more he thought of it. 'You can lie snug here for the two days. Mrs. Barnes is to be trusted, devil a doubt. You can travel down with me in safety. I am plain Mr. Johnson here, engaged in smuggling laces from the Continent into England. And once out of London there will be little difficulty in shipping you out of the country until the affair's blown over.'

So it was arranged, and Kelly, looking at his watch, says--

'By my soul, I am late. I should have been with my Lord of Rochester half-an-hour since. The good Bishop will be swearing like a dragoon.'

He clapped his hat on his head, took up his cane, and marched to the door. His hand was on the knob, when he turned.

'By the way, Nick, I have something which belongs to you. 'Twas sent to my lodging in Paris by mistake. I brought it over, since I was sure to set eyes on you shortly.'

'Ah,' said Nick. 'Then you expected me, for all your scolding and bullying.'

'To speak the honest truth, Nick,' said Kelly, with a laugh, 'I have been expecting you all the last week.'

He went into his bedroom, and brought out the strong-box which Wogan had purchased in Paris.

'Sure there was no mistake,' said Wogan. 'I sent it to you as a reward for your discretion.'

'Oh, you did. Well, you wasted your money, for I have no need for it.'

'Nor I,' replied Wogan. 'But it has a very good lock, and will serve to hold your love-letters.'

Kelly laughed carelessly at the careless words, and laid the box aside upon his scutcheon. Many a time in the months that followed Wogan saw it there, and the sight of it would waken him to a laugh, for he did not know that a man's liberty, his honour, his love, came shortly to be locked within its narrow space.

CHAPTER III

MR. WOGAN INSTRUCTS THE IGNORANT PARSON IN THE WAYS OF WOMEN

Mr. Wogan then remained for two days closeted in his friend's lodgings, and was hard put to it to pass the time, since the Parson, who acted as secretary and right-hand man to Bishop Atterbury, was ever dancing attendance upon his lordship at Bromley or the Deanery of Westminster. Wogan smoked a deal of tobacco, and, knitting his brows, made a strenuous endeavour to peruse one of George Kelly's books--a translation of Tully's *Letters*. He did, indeed, read a complete page, and then being seized with a sudden vertigo, such as from his extreme youth had prevented him from a course of study, was forced to discontinue his labours. At this juncture Mrs. Barnes comforted him with a greasy pack of cards, and for the rest of that day he played games of chance for extraordinary stakes, one hand against t'other, winning and losing millions of pounds sterling in the space of a single hour. By bedtime he was sunk in a plethora of wealth and an extremity of destitution at one and the same time; and so, since he saw no way of setting the balance right, he bethought him of another plan. On the morrow he would write out a full history of his ancestors, as a memorial of their valour and a shame to the men of this age.

The Parson, when he was informed of the notable design, quoted a scrap of Latin to the effect that it would be something more than a brazen proceeding. Wogan, however, was not to be dissuaded by any tag of rhyme, and getting up before daylight, since he had but this one day for the enterprise, was at once very busy with all of Kelly's spluttering pens. He began with the founder of the family, the great Chevalier Ugus, who lived in the time of my little Octavius Cæsar, and was commissioned by that unparalleled monarch to build the town of Florence. 'Ugus,' wrote Mr. Wogan in big round painful letters with a flourish to each, and, coming to a stop, woke up George Kelly to ask him in what year of Our Lord Octavius Cæsar was born into this weary world. 'In no year of Our Lord,' grumbled George, a little churlishly to Wogan's thinking, who went back to his desk, and taking up a new pen again wrote 'Ugus.' Thereupon he fell into a great profundity of thought; so many philosophic reflections crowded into his head while he nibbled his pen, as he felt sure must visibly raise him in the estimation of his friends. So, taking his candle in one hand and his pen in the other, he came a second time to Kelly's bedside and sat him down heavily upon his legs, the better to ensure his awakening. It is to be admitted that this time the Parson sat up in his bed, and swore with all the volubility of a dragoon or even of my Lord Bishop of Rochester. But Wogan smiled amiably, knowing when he communicated his thoughts how soon those oaths would turn to cries of admiration.

'It is a very curious thing,' said Wogan, shifting himself a little so that Kelly's shins should not press so sharply, 'how the mere inking of one's fingers produces speculation. Just as great valorous deeds are the consequence of swords,' here he paused to snuff the candle with his fingers, 'so great philosophic thoughts are the consequence of pens. Put a sword in a man's hand! What does he want to do but cut his neighbour right open from the chine to the ribs? Put a pen between his fingers, on the other hand, and what does he want to do but go away by himself and write down great thoughts?'

'Then, in Heaven's name, why don't you do it?' cried George.

'Because, my friend,' replied Wogan, 'out of the great love I bear for you, I shall always, always communicate my thoughts first of all to you.' Here the Parson groaned like a man giving up the ghost, and Wogan continued:

'For instance, you have doubtless heard of my illustrious forbear the Chevalier Ugus.' At this Kelly tried to turn on his side; but he could not do so, since his legs were pinned beneath Wogan's weight. 'The Chevalier Ugus,' repeated Wogan, 'who built and beautified the city of Florence to the glory of God in the reign of the Emperor Octavius. How many of the English have loitered in the colonnades, and feasted their eyes upon the cathedral, and sauntered on the bridges of the Arno? How many of them, I say, have drawn profitable thoughts and pleasurable sensations from the edifices of my great ancestor? And yet not one of them--if poor Nicholas Wogan, his degenerate son, were to poke his nose outside of Mrs. Barnes's front door--not one of them but would truss his hands and heels and hang him up to derision upon a nasty gibbet.'

So far Wogan had flowed on when a sigh from Kelly's lips brought him to a pause. He leaned forward and held the candle so that the light fell upon Kelly's face. Kelly was sound asleep.

'To be sure,' said Wogan in a soft voice of pity, on the chance that Kelly might be counterfeiting slumber, 'my little friend's jealous of my reflective powers,' and going back to his chair wrote 'Ugus' a third time with a third pen; and then, in order to think the more clearly, laid his hand upon the table and closed his eyes.

It was Mrs. Barnes's hand upon his shoulder, some three hours afterwards, which roused him from his so deep reflections, and to a man in Wogan's course of life the shoulder is a most sensitive member. She took the paper, whereon the great name was thrice inscribed, very daintily between her forefinger and thumb, as though she touched pitch; folded it once, twice, thrice, and set it on the mantelshelf. There Mr. Kelly, coming into the room for breakfast, discovered it, hummed a little to himself like a man well pleased, and turned over the leaf to see what was written t'other side.

'That is all,' said Wogan, indifferently.

'And it is a very good night's work,' replied Kelly, with the politest gravity, 'not a letter--and there are precisely twelve of them in all--but is writ with scrupulous correctness. Such flourishes, too, are seldom seen. I cannot call to mind that ever I saw a *g* so pictorially displayed. Ugus--Ugus--Ugus--' and he held the paper out at arm's length.

'I went no further with my work,' explained Wogan, 'because I reflected--'

'What, again?' asked the Parson in a voice of condolence.

'That the mere enunciation of the name Ugus gives an epitome of the Wogan family.'

'Indeed, it gives a history in full,' said the Parson.

'It comprises--'

'Nay, it conveys--'

'All that need be known of the Wogan family.'

'All that need be known, indeed, and perhaps more,' added George with the air of a man turning a compliment Mr. Wogan was sensibly flattered, and took his friend's words as an apology for that disrespect which he had shown towards Thomas Wogan two days before, and the pair seated themselves to breakfast in the best of good humour.

'We start at nine of the evening,' said George. 'I have commanded a sober suit of grey cloth for you, Nick, since you cannot squeeze into my coats, and it should be here by now. Meanwhile, I leave you to Mrs. Barnes's attentions.'

Of these attentions Mrs. Barnes was by no means sparing. For the buxom widow of the bookseller, who, to her credit be it said, had her full share of good looks, joined to an admirable warmth of heart a less adorable curiosity. With the best intentions in the world for her lodgers' security, she was always prying into their secrets. Nor did she always hold her tongue outside her own doors, as Mr. Kelly had bitter reason afterwards to know. In a word, she had all the inquisitiveness of her class, and sufficient wiles to make that inquisitiveness difficult to parry. Not that Nicholas Wogan was at all troubled upon this score, for if there was one quality upon which the good man prided himself, it was his comprehension of the sex. 'Woman,' he would say with a sententious pursing of the lips and a nod of the head; and again 'woman,' and so drop into silence; as who should say, 'Here's a nut I could show you the kernel of were I so disposed.'

This morning, however, Mrs. Barnes made no demand upon Wogan's cunning. For she took the paper with the thrice iterated Ugus which the Parson had replaced upon the mantelshelf, and, with the same gingerly precautions as she had used in touching it before, dropped it into the fire.

'And why that?' asked Wogan.

Mrs. Barnes flung out at him in reply.

'I have no patience with you,' she cried. 'What's Ugus, Mr. Wogan? Answer me that,' and she struck her arms akimbo. 'What's Ugus but one of your cypher words, and you must needs stick it up on your mantelshelf for all the world to see?'

'It's no cypher word at all,' replied Wogan with a laugh.

'What is it then?' said she.

'My dear woman, the merest mare's nest,' said he.

'Oh, you may "dear woman" me,' cried she, and sat herself down in a chair, 'and you may laugh at a woman's fears; but, good lack, it was a bad day when Mr. Kelly first found a lodging here. What with his plottings here and his plottings there, it will be a fortunate thing if he doesn't plot us all into our graves.'

'Whisht,' interrupted Wogan. 'There are no plots at all, any more than there's sense in your talk.'

But the woman's eloquence was not so easily stemmed.

'Then if there are no plots, why is Mr. Kelly "Mr. Johnson," why is Mr. Wogan "Mr. Hilton"; and why, oh why, am I in danger of my life and liberty, and in peril of my immortal soul?'

'Sure you are bubbled with your fears, answered Wogan. 'It is sufficiently well known that since Mr. George Kelly ceased to minister to souls he has adopted the more lucrative profession of a lace merchant. There's some secrecy no doubt in his comings and goings, but that is because he is most honourably engaged in defrauding the revenue.'

'A pretty lace merchant, upon my soul,' said she, and she began to rock her body to and fro. The sight alarmed Nicholas Wogan, since he knew the movement to be a premonition of tears. 'A lace merchant who writes letters in Latin, and rides in the Bishop of Rochester's coach, and goes a-visiting my Lord Oxford in the country. Thirteen shillings have I paid for letters in one day. Laces, forsooth! It is hempen ropes the poor gentleman travels in, and never was a man so eager to fit them to his own neck.' And, at the affecting prospect which her words called up, the good woman lifted her apron to her eyes and forthwith dissolved into tears. Sobs tore her ample bosom, her soft frame quivered like a jelly. Never did Mr. Wogan find his intimate knowledge of the sex of more inestimable value. He crossed the room; he took one plump hand into his left palm and gently cherished it with his right. The tears diminished to a whimpering. He cooed a compliment into Mrs. Barnes's ear, 'A little white dove of a hand in a brown nest, my dear woman,' said he, and affectionately tweaked her ear. Even the whimpering ceased, but ceased under protest! For Mrs. Barnes began to speak again. Wogan, however, kissed the tearful eyes and sealed them in content.

'Hoity-toity, here's a set out,' he said, 'because my Lord Oxford wants a pair of Venice ruffles to hide his gouty fingers, or a new mantilla for his new spouse,' and so, softly chiding her, he pushed her out of the room.

At nine o'clock to the minute the chaise drove up to the door. Mr. Kelly took a stroll along the street to see the coast was clear; Mrs. Barnes was in two minds whether to weep at losing her lodgers, or to smile at their prospects of security, and compromised between her emotions by indulging them alternately; and finally the two friends in burgess dress entered the chaise and drove off. Mr. Wogan thrust his head half out of the window, the better to take his fill of the cool night air, but drew it back something of the suddenest at the corner where Ryder Street debouches into St. James's.

'Sure the man's a spy,' said he, flinging himself back. Parson Kelly leaned cautiously forward, and under an oil-lamp above the porch of a door he saw Captain Montague. The Captain was standing in an indecisive attitude, tapping with his stick upon the pavement and looking up and down the street.

'I doubt it,' returned Kelly. 'I have ever heard he was the most scrupulous gentleman.'

'But he's a Whig. A Whig and a gentleman! But it's a contradiction in terms. Whigging is a nasty insupportable trade, and infects a man like a poison. A Whig is a sort of third sex by itself that combines all the failings of the other two.'

However, this time it was evident that Captain Montague had taken no note of Nicholas Wogan. He could not but reflect how it was at this very spot that he had come upon the captain before, and mighty glad he was when the lights of Knightsbridge had sunk behind them, and they were driving betwixt the hedgerows. Then at one spring he jumped to the top of his spirits.

'George, what a night!' cries he. 'Sure I was never designed to live in a house at all, but to be entirely happy under the blue roof-tree of the sky. Put me out on a good road at night and the

whole universe converses with me on the most familiar terms. Perhaps it's a bush that throws out a tendril and says, "Smell that, you devil, and good luck to you." Or, maybe it's the stars that wink at me and say, "Here's a world for you, Nick, my little friend. Only wait a moment, and we'll show you a bit of a moon that'll make a poet of you." Then up comes the moon, perhaps, in a crescent like a wisp of fire, and, says she, "It's all very well here, Nicholas, but take my word for it, I can show you as good on the sea and better. For you'll have all this, and the hiss of the water under your lee besides, and the little bubbles dancing on the top." But what troubles you, George?

But Kelly made little or no reply, being sunk in the consideration of some difficulty. For two days he remained closeted with his trouble, and it was not until they had got to Worcester that he discovered it. They changed horses at the 'Dog and Turk' and drove through the town under the Abbey clock.

'It is five minutes to twelve,' said Wogan, looking at the clock.

'Yes,' said Kelly with a sigh, 'the face is very plain to read.' Then he sighed again.

'Now, if the clock were a woman,' said he, 'it might be half-past four and we still thinking it five minutes to twelve.'

'Oh, is it there you are?' said Wogan.

'Why, yes,' replied Kelly. 'Lord Oxford, do you see, Nick, is a half-hearted sort of trembler--that we know and are ready for him. But what of my lady?'

Wogan crossed his legs and laughed comfortably. Here was matter with which he could confidently deal.

'Well, what of her?' he asked.

'You heard what Fanny Oglethorpe said. She is a kinswoman of Mr. Walpole's. How shall we be sure of her at all? A woman, Nick, is a creature who walks in the byways of thought. How shall an obtuse man follow her?'

Wogan took a pinch of snuff.

'It is very well, George,' said he, 'that I took this journey with you. I'll make your conduct plain to you as the palm of my hand. In the first place, there was never a woman yet from Cleopatra downwards that cared the scrape of a fiddle for politics. 'Twas never more than a path that led to something else, and is held of just as small account as the road a girl dances down when she goes to meet her lover. Look at Fanny Oglethorpe, Olive Trant, and the rest of them in Paris! D'you think it's the Cause they ever give a thought to? If you do you're sadly out, my friend. No; what troubles their heads is simply that the Chevalier is a romantical figure of a man, and would look extraordinarily well with a gold crown on the top of his periwig. Now I'm wagering it will be just the same with my Lady Oxford. You have all the qualifications down to your legs, and let my lady once take a liking to your person she will gulp your politics without a grimace.'

Mr. Kelly turned a startled face towards his instructor.

'You would have me pay court to her?' says he.

'Just that,' says Wogan, imperturbably. 'Keep your politics for my lord and have a soft word ready for my lady. Pen her a delicate ode in Latin. To be sure the addresses of an erudite man have something particularly flattering to the sex. Or drop out a pretty compliment on her ear.'

'Oh, on her ear?' said Kelly, beginning to smile. 'Of what sort?'

'Faith, George, but you exasperate me,' said Nick. 'Isn't there an infinity of images you could use? For instance--,' said he, and hummed a little.

'Well, for instance!' said Kelly, urging him on.

'For instance,' returned Wogan, 'you can speak of its functions--'

'I understand. I am to tell her that it is a very proper thing for a woman to sit and listen to other people.'

'Tell her that,' cries Wogan, lifting up his hands, 'and you will be drubbed down the staircase pretty quick! No. Tell her there is never a poet laureate in the world would print a single one of his poems if he could treasure his music within her ear.'

'Ah,' says Kelly. 'That is a compliment of quite a different kind,' and he repeated it three times to commit it to memory. 'But one, Nick, will not suffice. I must have more sayings about her ear.'

'And you shall,' says Wogan. 'You can speak of its appearance.'

'Of its appearance?'

'And fit a simile to it.'

'Give me one,' said Kelly.

'You can say her ear is like a rosy shell on the sea-banks.'

Mr. Kelly began to laugh outright.

'Sure,' said he, 'I might as well tell her at once her hair is sandy.'

'Oh, she will not examine your words so nicely. She will just perceive that you intend a compliment.'

'And take me for a very impertinent fellow.'

'George' said Wogan, 'for a parson you are a man of a most unnatural modesty.' In which remark Wogan did his friend no more than the merest justice. For he had nothing in common with that usual foible of the young chaplains and tutors who frequent the houses of the great.

To listen to them over a bottle you would think them conquerors of all hearts, from the still-room maid to my lady and her daughters. But Mr. Kelly was in a different case. The Bishop of Rochester himself gave him the character of being prudent and reserved beyond his years. And perhaps it was by reason of that very modesty that he slid insensibly into the thoughts of more women than he knew of. Of these, however, Lady Oxford was not one.

It was about three in the afternoon of the next day when the chaise drove up to the door of the great house at Brampton Bryan. The Parson and Nicholas Wogan had barely stepped into the hall before an inner door opened and my lady came forward to greet them. She was for her sex uncommonly tall, and altogether of a conquering beauty, which a simple country dress did but the more plainly set forth. For, seeing her, one thought what a royal woman she would look if royally attired, and so came to a due appreciation of her consummate appearance. Whereas, had she been royally attired, her dress might have taken some of the credit of her beauty. She stood for a second between the two men, looking from one to the other as though in doubt.

'And which is Mr. James Johnson?' said she, with a sly emphasis upon the name.

'I am,' said George, stepping forward, 'and your Ladyship's humble servant.'

She gave him a smile and her hand. Mr. Kelly clicked his heels together, bent over the hand and kissed it reverentially.

The lady sighed a quick little sigh (of pleasure) as she drew her hand away.

'I have taken the liberty, your Ladyship,' said Kelly, 'to bring my secretary, Mr. Hilton, with me,' and he waved a hand towards Wogan.

'Mr. Hilton,' she returned, 'is very welcome. For, indeed, we hear too few voices in the house.' She bowed very graciously, but she did not give her hand to Mr. Wogan. 'Gentlemen,' she continued, 'my lord bids me make you his apologies, but he lies abed. Else would he have welcomed you in person.'

'Your Ladyship,' said Kelley, 'if we come at an inopportune time--'

'By no means,' interrupted Lady Oxford. 'My lord is troubled with the gout, but the fit is passing. And if for a couple of days my poor hospitality will content you--'

'Your Ladyship,' protested Kelly, but that was all he said. Now, to Mr. Wogan's thinking, here was as timely an occasion for a compliment as a man could wish. And since Mr. Kelly had not the tact to seize it, why, his friend must come to his help. Accordingly,

'So might the holy angels apologise when they open the gates of Paradise,' said Wogan with his hand on his heart, and bowed. As he bowed he heard some stifled sounds, and he looked up quickly. My lady was crimson in the face with the effort to check her laughter.

'Mr. Hilton is too polite,' said she instantly, with an elaborate courtesy, and turned again to Kelly with some inquiries about his journey. Wogan was shown up the stairs before the inquiries were answered. The staircase ran round the three sides of the hall up to a landing on the fourth, and as Wogan came to the first turn he saw Lady Oxford cross to the great wood fire which was burning on the hearth; when he came to the second he saw that the Parson had crossed too and stood over against her; when he reached the third turn, my lady was seated toasting a foot at the blaze; when he reached the landing, Mr. Kelly had drawn up a chair.

Wogan leaned for a moment over the balustrade. It was a very small foot with an admirably arched instep; Mr. Wogan had seen the like in Spain. Well, very likely she only thrust it out to warm it. The firelight coloured her face to a pretty rose hue, sparkled in her dark eyes, and searched out the gold threads in her brown hair. Mr. Wogan was much tempted to whisper a reminder to his friend concerning her ear. But he resisted the temptation, for after all it seemed there would be little to do about my lady's politics.

CHAPTER IV

SHOWS THE EXTREME DANGER OF KNOWING LATIN

An hour later the three sat down to dinner, though, for all the talking that one of them did, there might have been present only the two whom Wogan had left chatting in the hall. It was not that Lady Oxford omitted any proper courtesy towards Mr. Johnson's secretary, but the secretary himself, sensible that he was something too apt to say in all companies just what came into his head, was careful to keep his tongue in a strict leash, lest an inconvenient word should slip from him. His deficiency, however, was not remarked. Lady Oxford was young, and for all that my lord lay upstairs in a paroxysm of the gout, she was in the highest feather; she rattled from course to course, plying Mr. Kelly with innumerable questions as to the latest tittle-tattle of the tea-parties, and whether Lady Mary Wortley and Mr. Pope were still the best of friends.

'Then your Ladyship is acquainted with Lady Mary?' says Kelly, looking up with some eagerness. For Lady Mary, then a toast among the wits and a wit among the toasts, was glanced at by some tongues as if, being sister to the Duchess of Mar, she was not of the most loyal to the Elector. The Duke of Mar was still Secretary to King James over the water.

'Without doubt,' returned Lady Oxford. 'Lady Mary is my bosom friend. The dear malicious creature! What is her latest quip? Tell me, Mr. Johnson, I die to hear it. Or rather whisper it. It will be too deliciously cruel for loud speaking. Lady Mary's witticisms, I think, should always be spoken in a low voice, with a suggestive nod and a tap of the forefinger on the table, so that one may not mistake where the sting lies. Not that the sayings are in themselves at all clumsy--how could they be, when she has such clever friends? But they gain much from a mysterious telling of them. You agree with me?'

It was evident that Lady Oxford wasted no love on Lady Mary, and Kelly's face fell.

'Your ladyship,' he replied, 'though I have no claims to be considered clever, I have the honour to be ranked amongst her friends.'

'Indeed!' said she with a light laugh at the rebuff. 'No doubt you have brought her some of your laces and brocades from France, Mr.--Johnson.' She paused slyly upon the name.

Kelly glanced quickly at her, their eyes met, and the lady laughed. There could be no doubt that she knew something of Kelly's business. Indeed, she would hardly have asked him for the fashionable gossip at all had she taken him for just what he represented himself to be. Wogan put his foot on his friend's pretty heavily, and, he knows not how, encountered her ladyship's. To his horror, Lady Oxford made a moan of pain. Kelly starts up in a hurry.

'Your ladyship is unwell,' says he, and bids the servant bring a bottle of salts.

'No,' she replied with a smile on her lips and her eyes full of tears, 'but your secretary has dropped a blot on the wrong paper.'

'Your ladyship,' cried Wogan in an extremity of confusion, 'it was the most miserable accident, believe me. A spasm in the leg, madam, the consequence of a sabre cut across the calf,' he explained, making the matter worse.

'Oh, and in what battle was Mr. Johnson's secretary wounded?' she said, taking him up on the instant.

'In a struggle with the Preventive men,' replied Wogan hurriedly, and he too broke off with a wry face, for Mr. Johnson was warning *him* and with no less vigour. Before he knew what he was doing Wogan had stooped down and begun to rub his leg. Lady Oxford's smile became a laugh.

'To be sure,' said she, 'and I think Mr. Johnson must have been wounded too, in just that same way, and in just that same encounter.'

'Faith, madam,' said Kelly, 'the smuggling trade is a hard one. No man engages in it but sooner or later he gets a knock that leaves its mark.'

Lady Oxford expressed the profoundest sympathy with a great deal of disbelief; and when her ladyship left her guests to their wine, they looked at one another across the table.

'Well,' said Wogan cheerfully, 'if my Lady Oxford is in Mr. Walpole's interest we have not made

the best beginning in the world,' and in a little he went off to smoke a pipe in the stables.

Kelly withdrew to the great library, and had not been there many minutes before Lady Oxford came in. It seemed she did not see him at the first, although he sat bent up over the fire and his shadow huge upon the walls. Mr. Kelly certainly did not remark her entrance. For one thing, he was absorbed in his book; for another, the carpet was thick and the lady's step of the lightest. She went first to the bookcase, then she crossed the room and shuffled some papers on a table, then she knocked against a chair, the chair knocked against the table, and at the noise Kelly looked up. He rose to his feet. Lady Oxford turned round, started, and uttered a sharp little cry.

'My lady,' began Mr. Kelly.

'Oh, it is you, Mr. Johnson,' she broke in with a hand to her heart, and dropped into the chair. 'I believe,' she said with a broken laugh, 'I was foolish enough to be frightened. I fancied you had gone with your friend to the stables,' which was as much as to say that she knew he had not. Kelly commenced an apology for so disordering her, but she would not listen to it.

'No,' she said, 'it is I that am to be blamed. Indeed, such stupid fears need chiding. But in a house so lonely and silent they grow on one insensibly. Indeed, I have known the mere creak of the stairs keep me awake in terror half the night.'

She spoke with the air of one gently railing at her own distress, but shivered a little to prove the distress genuine, and Kelly, as he looked at her, felt a sudden pang of pity.

'Your place, my lady, is not here,' he cried, 'but in the Mall, at the Spring Gardens, in the lighted theatres, when even your ladyship's own sex would pay you homage for outrivalling them.'

'Nay,' she replied, with the sweetest smile of reproof, 'you go too fast, Mr. Johnson. My place is here, for here my duty lies.' She looked up to the ceiling with a meek acceptance of the burden laid upon her fair shoulders. 'But I am not come to disturb you,' she continued briskly; 'I came to fetch a book to read aloud to my lord.' At that a sigh half broke from her and was caught back as it were upon her lips. 'Perhaps, Mr. Johnson,' she said in a well-acted flurry, 'you will help me in the selection?'

'With all the heart in the world,' said he, laying down his volume. The choice took perhaps longer than need have been, for over each book there was some discussion. This one was too trivial to satisfy my Lord Oxford's weighty mind; that other was too profound to suit his health. 'And nothing too contentious, I implore you, lest it throw him into a heat,' she prayed, 'for my lord has a great gift of logic, and will argue with you by the hour over the merest trifle.' This with another half-uttered sigh, and so the martyr sought her lord's bedside. It appeared, however, that Lord Oxford was sleepy that night, or had no mind for the music of his lady's voice, for in a very little while she returned to the library and Mr. Kelly, where Wogan presently found them discussing in a great animation the prospects of Mr. Law's ventures.

'You are in for a great stake?' she asked.

'For all I have,' replied Kelly, 'and a little more. It is not a great sum.'

'But may become one,' said she, 'and will if a friend's good wishes can at all avail.' And so she wished her guests good night.

The next morning Lord Oxford sent a message that he was so far recovered as would enable him to receive his visitors that afternoon. Meanwhile Lady Oxford, after breakfast carried off the two gentlemen to visit a new orchard she was having planted. The orchard was open to the south-west, and Kelly took objection to its site, quoting Virgil in favour of a westerly outlook.

'Ah, but the west wind,' she said, 'comes to us across the Welsh mountains, which even in the late spring are at times covered deep in snow. However, I should be pleased to hear the advice of Virgil,' and the Parson goes off to the library and fetches out a copy.

It was a warm day in April, with the sky blue overhead and the buds putting out on the trees, and for the most part of that morning Mr. Kelly translated the Georgics to her ladyship, on a seat under a great yew-tree, in a little square of grass fenced off with a hedge. She listened with an extraordinary complaisance, and now and then a compliment upon the Parson's fluency; so that Mr. Wogan lost all his apprehensions as to her meddling in the King's affairs. For, to his thinking, than listening to Virgil, there was no greater proof of friendship.

Nor was it only upon this occasion that she gave the proof. Lord Oxford was a difficult man from his very timidity, and the Parson's visit was consequently protracted. His lordship needed endless assurances as to the prospects of a rising on behalf of King James, before he would hazard a joint of his little finger to support it. Who would take the place of the Royal Swede? Could the French Regent be persuaded to lend any troops or arms or money, or even to wink? Had the Czar been approached? Indeed he had, by Wogan's brother Charles. And what office would my Lord Oxford hold when James III. was crowned? Each day saw these questions reiterated and no conclusion come to. Lady Oxford was never present at these discussions; the face of her conduct was a sedulous discretion. It is true that after a little she dropped the

pretence of laces, and, when the servants were not present, styled the Parson 'Mr. Kelly.' But that was all. 'These are not women's matters,' she would say with a pretty humility, and then rise like a queen and sail out of the room. Mr. Wogan might have noticed upon such occasions that the Parson hesitated for a little after she had gone, and spoke at random, as though she had carried off some part of his mind from affairs with the waft of her hoop. But he waited on the lady's dispositions and set down what he saw of his friend's conduct at the time as merely the consequence of an endeavour to enlist her secrecy and good-will.

These councils with Lord Oxford took place, as a rule, in the afternoon, his lordship being a late riser, and even when risen capable only of sitting in a chair, with a leg swathed in a mountain of flannel. So that, altogether, Mr. Kelly had a deal of time upon his hands, and doubtless would have found it hang as heavy as Nick Wogan did, but for the sudden interest he took in Lady Oxford's new orchard. He would spend hours over the 'Observations on Modern Gardening,' and then,

'Nick,' he would cry, 'there's no life but a country life. One wakes in the morning, and the eye travels with delight over the green expanse of fields. One makes friends with the inanimate things of nature. Nick, here one might re-create the Golden Age.'

'To my mind,' says Nick, 'but for the dogs and horses it would be purely insupportable. With all the goodwill in the world I cannot make friends with a gatepost, and I'm not denying I shall be mightily glad when the wambling old sufferer upstairs brings his mind at last to an anchor.'

But the Parson was already lost in speculation, and would presently wake to ask Wogan's opinion as to whether a Huff-cap pear was preferable to a Bar-land. To which he got no answer, and so, snatching up his Virgil, would go in search of Lady Oxford. He acquired, indeed, a most intimate knowledge of apples and pears, and would discourse with her ladyship upon the methods of planting and grafting as though he had been Adam, and she Flora, or, rather, our mother Eve, before the apple was shared between them. For apples the store, the hayloe-crab, the brandy-apple, the red-streak, the moyle, the foxwhelp, the dymock-red; for pears the squash pear, the Oldfield, the sack-pear, never a meal passed but one of these names cropped up at the table and was bandied about between Kelly and her ladyship like a tennis-ball. Now all this, though dull, was none the less reassuring to Wogan, who saw very clearly that Lady Oxford was altogether devoted to country pursuits, and wisely inferred that while there might result confusion in the quality of the pears, there would be the less disorder in the affairs of the Chevalier.

Moreover, her ladyship's inclination towards Mr. Kelly plainly increased. He translated the whole of the second book of the Georgics to her, five hundred and forty-two mortal lines of immortal poetry, and she never winced. Nor did she cry halt at the end of them, but, thereafter, listened to the Eclogues; and, all at once, their conversation was sprinkled with Melibœus and Mœris, and Lycidas and Mopsus, and Heaven knows what other names. Mr. Wogan remembers very well coming upon them one wet afternoon in the hall when it was growing dark. The lamps had not been lit, and Kelly had just finished reading one of the pastorals by the firelight. Lady Oxford sat with her hands clasped upon her knees, and, as he closed the book,

'Oh for those days,' she cried, 'when a youth and a maid could roam barefoot over the grass in simple woollen garments! But now we must go furbelowed and bedecked till there's no more comfort than simplicity,' and she smoothed her hand over her petticoat with a great contempt for its finery. Lady Mary Wortley, to whom Wogan related this saying afterwards, explained that doubtless her ladyship had laced her stays too tight that morning; but the two men put no such construction on her words, nor, indeed, did they notice a certain contradiction between them and Lady Oxford's anxiety for London gossip--the Parson, because he had ceased to do anything but admire; Wogan, because a little design had suddenly occurred to him.

It was Lady Oxford's patience under the verses which put it into Wogan's head. For since she endured to listen to poetry about trees and shepherds, poetry about herself must be a sheer delight to her. So, at all events, he reasoned, not knowing that Lady Oxford had already enjoyed occasion to listen to poetry about herself from Lady Mary's pen, which was anything but a delight. Accordingly he hinted to his friend that a little ode might set a firm seal upon her friendliness.

'Make her a Dryad in one of the trees of her own orchard, d'ye see?' he suggested; 'something pretty and artful, with sufficient allusions to her beauty. Who knows but what she may be so flattered as to carry the verses against her heart; and so, when some fine day she brings her husband's secrets to Mr. Walpole, she may hear the paper crackling against her bodice, and turn back on the very doorstep.'

'She will carry no secrets,' replied Kelly with a huff. 'She is too conscious of her duties. Besides, she knows none. Have you not seen her leave the room the moment politics are so much as hinted of?'

'True,' said Wogan. 'But what's her husband for except to provide her with secrets when they are alone to which she cannot listen without impertinence in company?'

Kelly moved impatiently away. He stood with a foot upon the fender, turning over the pages of

his Virgil.

'You allow her no merit whatsoever,' he said slowly with a great gentleness.

'Indeed, but I do,' replied Wogan. 'I allow that she will be charmed by your poetry, and that's a rare merit. She will find it as soothing as a soldier does a pipe of tobacco after a hard day's fighting.'

'I would not practise on her for the world,' says Kelly with just the same gentleness, and goes softly out by the door.

Wogan, however, was troubled by no such delicate scruples. An ode must be written, even if he had to write it himself. He slapped his forehead as the notion occurred to him. The ode might be dropped as though by accident at some spot where her ladyship's eyes could not fail to light on it. Wogan heaved a deep breath, took a turn across the room, and resolved on the heroic feat. He would turn poet to help his friend. For two nights he fortified himself with the perusal of Sir John Suckling's poems, and the next morning took pencil and paper into the garden. He walked along the terrace, and seated himself on the bench beneath the yew-tree. Wogan sucked strenuously at his pencil.

'Strephon to his Smilinda, running barefoot over the grass in a gale of wind,' he wrote at the top, and was very well pleased with the title. By noonday he had produced a verse, and was very well pleased with that, except, perhaps, that the last line halted. The verse ran as follows:--

Nay, sweet Smilinda, do not chide
The wind that wantons with thy hair;
The grass will all his prickles hide
Nor harm thy snowy feet and bare.
And, listen, the enamoured air
Makes lutestrings of thy locks so fair.
At night the stars are mirrors which reflect
Thine eyes: at least that is what I expect.

Mr. Wogan spent an hour and three pipes of tobacco over his unwonted exercise, which brought him into a great heat.

Having finished the verse he blew out his cheeks and took a rest from his labours. It was a fine spring morning, and the sun bright as a midsummer day. To his right the creepers were beginning to stretch their green tendrils over the red bricks of the garden wall. To his left half-a-dozen steps led up to a raised avenue of trees. Wogan looked down the avenue, noted the border of spring flowers, and a flash of a big window at the extreme end; and in all the branches the birds sang. The world seemed all together very good, and his poem quite apiece with the world. Wogan stretched his arms and kicked out his feet. His feet struck against something hard in a tuft of grass. He stooped down and picked it up. It was Kelly's Virgil. The book was open, and the pages all blotted and smeared with the dew. It had evidently lain open on the grass by the bench all night. Wogan wiped the covers dry, and, using it as a desk, settled himself to the composition of his second verse. He had not, however, thought of an opening for it before a voice hailed him from behind.

He turned round and saw Kelly coming towards him from the direction of the orchard, and at that moment the opening of his verse occurred to him; Strephon offered to Smilinda his heart's allegiance. Wogan set his pencil to the paper, fearful lest he should forget the line.

'Nick,' cries Kelly, waving a bundle of letters, and starts to run. Wogan slipped his paper between the leaves of the book; just as he did so, Strephon, in return for his heart's 'allegiance,' asked for Smilinda's soft 'obedience.'

'Nick,' cries Kelly again, coming up to the bench, 'what d'you think?'

'I think,' says Wogan, 'that interruption is the true source of inspiration.'

'What do you mean?' asked Kelly, looking at Wogan's pencil.

'I mean,' says Wogan, looking at the cover of the book, 'that if I lived by my poetry, I would hire a man to rap at my door all day long.'

Kelly, however, had no ears for philosophy.

'Nick,' says he, 'will you listen to me, if you please? I have a letter from Miss Oglethorpe. It explains--'

'Yes,' interposed Wogan thoughtfully. 'It explains why the best poets are ever those who are most dunned by their creditors.'

Kelly snatched the Virgil out of Wogan's hand, and threw it on to the grass. The book opened as it fell. It opened at the soiled pages, and it was behind those pages that Wogan had slipped his poem.

'You are as contrarious as a woman. Here am I, swollen with the grandest news, and you must babble about poets and creditors. Nick, there'll be few creditors to dun you and me for a bit. Just listen, will you?'

He leaned his elbows on the back of the bench, and read from his letter. It was to the effect that, during April, an edict had been published in France, transferring to Mr. Law's company of the West the exclusive rights of trading to the East Indies and the South Seas.

'Think of it, Nick!' he cried. 'The actions have risen from 550 livres to 1,000, and we are as yet at the budding of May. Why, man, as it is we are well to do. Just imagine that, if you can, you threadbare devil! We shall be rich before August.'

'We shall dine off silver plates in September!' cries Nick, leaping up in the contagion of his friend's good spirits..

'And drink out of diamond cups in November,' adds Kelly, dropping at once into the Irish accent.

'Bedad!' shouts Wogan, 'I'll write my poetry on beaten gold,' and he sprang on to the seat.

'You shall,' replies Kelly; 'and your ink shall be distilled out of black pearls.'

'Sure, George, one does not write on gold with ink, but with a graving tool.'

'This nonsense, and poetry, are what the lucky heart sings,' said Kelly.

'To a tune of clinking coins,' said Wogan. He stooped down to his friend. 'Have it all in solid gold, and tied up in sacks,' said he earnestly. 'None of their bills of exchange, but crowns, and pieces of eight, and doubloons, and guinea-pieces; and all tied up in sacks.'

'What will we do with it?' asked Kelly.

'Why, sit on the sacks,' replied Nick, and then grew silent. He looked at Kelly. Kelly looked away to the garden-wall.

'Ah!' said the Parson, with a great start of surprise. 'There's a lizard coming out of the bricks to warm himself,' and he made a step away from the bench. Wogan's hand came quickly down upon his shoulder.

'George,' said he, 'I think we are forgetting something. Not a farthing of it is mine at all.'

'Now, that's a damned scurvy ungenerous remark,' replied George. 'Haven't I borrowed half of your last sixpence before now?'

Wogan got down from the seat.

'Poverty may take a favour from poverty, George, and 'tis all very well.'

Kelly sat himself down on the bench, crossed his knees, and swung a leg to and fro.

'I don't want the money,' said he, with a snort.

'My philosophy calls it altogether an encumbrance,' said Wogan, sitting down by his side.

Kelly turned his back on Wogan, and stared at the garden-wall. Then he turned back.

'I know,' said he of a sudden, and smacks his hand down on Wogan's thigh. 'We'll give it to the King. He can do no more than spend it.'

'He will certainly do no less.' But they did not give it to the King.

Wogan was sitting turned rather towards the house, and as he looked down the avenue, he saw the great windows at the end open, and Lady Oxford come out.

'Here's her ladyship come for her Latin lesson,' said Wogan, and he rose from his seat.

'I'll tell her of our good fortune,' said Kelly, and he walked quickly to the steps at the end of the avenue. Lady Oxford stopped on the first step, with a hand resting on the stone balustrade. George Kelly stood on the grass at the foot of the steps, and told her of his news.

'The shares,' he ended, 'have risen to double value already.'

It seemed to Wogan that her eyes flashed suddenly with a queer, unpleasant light, and the hand which was resting idly on the balustrade crooked like the claws of a bird. He had seen such eyes, and such a hand, at the pharo tables in Paris.

'It is the best news I have heard for many a day,' she said the next instant, with a gracious smile, and coming down the steps, walked by Mr. Kelly's side towards the bench.

'And what will you do with it?' she asked. It was her first question, for she was a practical woman.

'In the first flush,' replied Kelly, hesitating as to how he should put the answer, 'we had a thought of disposing of it where it is sorely needed.'

She looked quickly at Kelly; as quickly looked away. She took a step to the seat with her eyes on the ground.

'Oh,' she observed slowly; 'you would give it away.' There was, perhaps, a trifle of a pucker upon her forehead, perhaps a shade of disappointment in her eyes. But it was all gone in a moment. She clasped her hands fervently together, raised her face to the heavens, her cheeks afire, her eyes most tender. 'Indeed,' she exclaimed, 'the noblest, properest disposition of it! Heaven dispense me more such friends who, in a world so niggardly, retain so ancient a spirit of generosity,' and she stood for a little, with her lips moving, as if in prayer. It was plain to Mr. Wogan that her ladyship had guessed the destination of the money. No such thought, however, troubled George Kelly, who was wholly engaged in savouring the flattery, and, from his appearance, found it very much to his taste.

'I would not, however, if a woman might presume to advise,' she continued, 'be in any great hurry to sell the shares. Though they have risen high, they will doubtless rise higher. And your gift, if you will but wait, in a little will grow worthier of the spirit which prompts it.'

'Madam,' returned Kelly, 'it is very prudent advice. I will be careful to follow it.'

Was it relief which showed for an instant in Lady Oxford's face? Kelly did not notice; Wogan could not tell; and a second afterwards an event occurred which wholly diverted his thoughts.

All three had been standing with their faces towards the garden-seat, the yew-tree and the orchard beyond, Lady Oxford between, and a little in advance of Kelly and Wogan, so that each saw her face obliquely over her shoulders. Now, however, she turned and sat down, giving thus her whole face to the two men; and both saw it suddenly blanch, suddenly flush as though all the blood had leaped from her heart into her cheeks, and then fade again to pallor. Terror widened and fixed her eyes, her lips parted, she quivered as though she had been struck a buffet across the face.

'Your ladyship--' began Kelly, and, noticing the direction of her gaze, he broke off his sentence, and turned him about. As he moved, Lady Oxford, even in the midst of her terror, stole a quick, conscious glance at his face.

'Sure, 'tis a predecessor to George,' thought Wogan; and he too turned about.

Some twenty paces away a man was waiting in an easy attitude. He was of the middle height, and, judged by his travelling dress and bearing, a gentleman. His face was thin, hard, and sallow of complexion, the features rather peaked, the eyes dark, and deepset beneath the brows. Without any pretension to good looks, the stranger had a certain sinister distinction--stranger, for that he was to the two men at this time, whatever he may have been to Lady Oxford. Yet George thought he had seen the man's eyes before, at Avignon, when the King was there; and Wogan later remembered his voice, perhaps at Genoa, which he had used much at one time. He stood just within the opening in the hedge, and must needs have come through the trees beyond, while Lady Oxford and her guests were discussing the Parson's good fortune.

As soon as he saw the faces turned towards him, he took off his hat, made a step forwards, and flourished a bow.

'Your ladyship's most humble and obedient servant.'

He laid a stress upon the word 'obedient,' and uttered it with a meaning smile. Lady Oxford returned his bow, but instinctively shifted her position on the bench towards Kelly, and timidly put out a hand as though she would draw him nearer.

The stranger took another step forwards. There was no change in his expression, but the step was perhaps more swiftly taken.

'Mr. George Kelly,' he said quietly, and bowed again. 'The Reverend Mr. George Kelly, I think,' and he bowed a third time, but lower, and with extreme gravity.

Wogan started as the stranger pronounced the name. Instantly the stranger turned to him.

'Ah,' said he, 'Captain Nicholas Wogan, I think,' and he took a third step. His foot struck in a tuft of grass, and he stumbled forward; he fell plump upon his knees. For a gentleman of so much dignity the attitude was sufficiently ridiculous. Wogan grinned in no small satisfaction.

'Sure, my unknown friend,' said he, 'I think something has tripped you up.'

'Yes,' said the stranger, and, as he stood up, he picked up a book from the grass.

'It is,' said he, 'a copy of Virgil.'

CHAPTER V

A LITERARY DISCUSSION IN WHICH A CRITIC, NOT FOR THE FIRST TIME, TURNS THE TABLES UPON AN AUTHOR

Kelly frowned at Wogan, enjoining silence by a shake of the head. Her ladyship was still too discomposed to speak; she drew her breath in quick gasps; her colour still came fitfully and went. The only person entirely at ease in that company was the disconcerting stranger, and even behind his smiling mask of a face one was somehow aware of sleeping fires; and underneath the suave tones of his voice one somehow felt that there ran an implacable passion.

'Upon my word,' said he, 'I find myself for a wonder in the most desirable company. A revered clergyman, a fighting captain, a lady worthy of her quality, and a poet.' He tapped the Virgil as he spoke, and it fell open between his hands. His speech had been uttered with a provocative politeness, and since no one responded to the provocation, he continued in the same strain. 'The story of Dido'--the book was open at the soiled pages--'and all spluttered with tears.'

'It has lain open in the dew since yesterday,' interrupted Wogan.

'Tears no less because the night has shed them,' he replied; 'and indeed it is a sad story, though not all true as the poet relates it. For Dido had a gout-ridden husband hidden discreetly away in a dark corner of the Palace, and Æneas was no more than an army chaplain, though he gave himself out for a general.'

Kelly flushed at the words, and took half a step towards the speaker of them.

'It is very true, Mr. Kelly. A chaplain, my soul upon it, a chaplain. Didn't he invoke his religion when he was tired of the lady, and so sail away with a clear conscience? A very parsonical fellow, Mr. Kelly. *O infelix Dido!* he burst out, 'that met with an army chaplain, and so became food for worms before her time!'

He shut up the book with a bang, and, as ill-luck would have it, Mr. Wogan's poem peeped out from the covers as if in answer to his knock.

'Oho,' says he, 'another poet,' and he read out the dedication.

'Strephon to his Smilinda running barefoot in a gale of wind.'

Kelly laughed aloud, and a faint smile flickered for the space of a second about Lady Oxford's lips. Wogan felt his cheeks grow red, but constrained himself to a like silence with his companions. His opportunity would come later; meanwhile some knowledge was needed of who the stranger was.

'A pretty conceit,' resumed the latter, 'though consumption in its effects. Will the author pardon me?'

He took the sheet of paper in his hand, dropped the Virgil carelessly on the grass, and read out the verses with an absolute gravity which mocked at them more completely than any ridicule would have done. 'It breaks off,' he added, 'most appropriately just when the gentleman claims the lady's obedience. There is generally a break at that point. "At least, that is what I expect," he quoted. Then he looked at each of his two adversaries. For adversaries his language and their faces alike proved them to be. 'Now which is Strephon?' he asked, with an insinuating smile, as he calmly put the verses in his pocket. 'Is it the revered clergyman or the fighting captain?'

Kelly's face flushed darkly.

'The revered clergyman,' he broke in, and his voice shook a little, 'would be happy to be reminded of the occasion which brought him the honour of your acquaintance.'

'A sermon,' replied the stranger. 'I was much moved by a sermon which you preached in Dublin upon the text of "Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's."'

Mr. Kelly could not deny that he had preached that sermon; and for all he knew the stranger might well have been among his audience. He contented himself accordingly with a bow. So Wogan stepped in.

'And the fighting captain,' he said, with a courtesy of manner no whit inferior to his

questioner's, 'would be glad to know when he ever clapped eyes upon your honour's face, if you please.'

'Never,' answered the other with a bow. 'Captain Nicholas Wogan never in his life saw the faces of those who fought behind him. He had eyes only for the enemy.'

Now, Mr. Wogan had fought upon more than one field of which he thought it imprudent to speak. So he copied the Parson's example and bowed.

'Does her ladyship also wish to be reminded of the particulars of our acquaintance?' said the stranger, turning now to Lady Oxford. There was just a tremor, a hint of passion discernible in his voice as he put the question. Both Wogan and Kelly had been waiting for it, had restrained themselves to silence in the expectation of it. For only let the outburst come, and the man's design would of a surety tumble out on the top. Lady Oxford, however, suddenly interposed and prevented it. It may be that she, too, had caught the threatening tremble of his words, and dreaded the outburst as heartily as the others desired it. At all events, she rose from the bench as though some necessity had spurred her to self-possession.

'No, Mr. Scrope,' she said calmly, 'I do not wish to be reminded of our acquaintance either in particular or in general. It was a slight thing at its warmest, and I thank God none of my seeking. Mr. Kelly, will you give me your arm to the house?'

The stranger for a second was plainly staggered by her words. Kelly cast a glance at Wogan which the 'fighting captain' very well understood, offered his arm to Lady Oxford, and before the stranger recovered himself, the pair were up the steps and proceeding down the avenue.

'A slight thing!' muttered Mr. Scrope in a sort of stupor. 'God, what's a strong thing, then?' and at that the passion broke out of him. 'It's the Parson now, is it?' he cried. 'Indeed, Mr. Wogan, a parson is very much like a cat. Whether he throws his cassock over the wall, or no, it is still the same sly, soft-footed, velvety creature, with a keen eye for a soft lap to make his bed in,' and with an oath he started at a run after Kelly. Wogan, however, ran too, and he ran the faster. He got first to the steps, sprang to the top of them, and turned about, just as Mr. Scrope reached the bottom.

'Wait a bit, my friend!' said Wogan.

'Let me go, if you please,' said Mr. Scrope, mounting the lowest step.

'You and I must have a little talk first.'

'It will be talk of a kind uncommon disagreeable to you,' said Mr. Scrope hotly, and he mounted the second step.

Wogan laughed gleefully.

'Why, that's just the way I would have you speak,' said he. Mr. Scrope stopped, looked over Wogan from head to foot, and then glanced past him up the avenue.

'I have no quarrel with you, Mr. Wogan,' he said politely, and took the third step.

'And have you not?' asked Wogan. 'I'm thinking, on the contrary, that you took exception to my poetry.'

'Was the poetry yours? Indeed, I did not guess that,' he replied. 'But the greatest of men may yet be poor poets.'

'In this case you're mightily mistaken,' cried Wogan, and he stamped his foot and threw out his chest. 'I am my poetry.'

Mr. Scrope squinted up the avenue under Wogan's arm.

'Damn!' said he.

Wogan turned round; Parson Kelly and her ladyship were just passing through the window into the house. Wogan laughed, but a trifle too soon. For as he still stood turned away and looking down the avenue, Mr. Scrope took the last three steps at a bound, and sprang past him. Luckily as he sprang he hit against Wogan's shoulder, and so swung him round the quicker. Wogan just caught the man's elbow, jerked him back, got both his arms coiled about his body, lifted him off his feet, and flattened him up against his chest. Mr. Scrope struggled against the pressure; he was lithe and slippery like a fish, and his muscles gave and tightened like a steel spring. Wogan gripped him the closer, pinioning his arms to his side. In a little Scrope began to pant, and a little after to perspire; then the veins ridged upon his face, and his eyes opened and shut convulsively.

'Have you had enough, do you think?' asked Wogan; 'or shall I fall on you? But you may take my word for it, whatever you think of my love-poems, that I never yet fell on any man but something broke inside of him.'

Mr. Scrope was not in that condition which would enable him to articulate, but he seemed to gasp an assent, and Wogan put him down. He staggered backwards towards the house for a yard or two, leaned against one of the trees, and then, taking out his handkerchief, wiped his forehead; at the same time he walked towards the house, but with the manner of a man who is dizzy, and knows nothing of his direction.

'Stop!' cried Wogan.

Scrope stooped, and turned back carelessly, as though he had not heard the command. Indeed, he seemed even to have forgotten why he was out of breath.

'Mr. Wogan,' he said, 'I do not quite understand. It seems you write love-poems to her ladyship, and yet encourage the Parson to court her.'

Wogan was not to be drawn into any explanation.

'Let us leave her ladyship entirely out of the question. There's the value of my poetry to be argued out.'

Mr. Scrope bowed, and they walked down the steps side by side, and through the opening in the hedge. A path led through the trees, and they followed it until they came to an open space of sward. Wogan measured it across with his stride.

'A very fitting place for the argument, I think,' he said, and took off his coat.

'What? In Smilinda's garden?' asked Scrope easily. 'Within view of Smilinda's windows? Surely the common road would be the more convenient place.'

'Why, and that's true,' answered Wogan. 'It would have been an outrage.'

'No,' said Scrope, 'merely a flaw in the argument. This is the nearest way. At least, I think so,' and he turned off at an angle, passed through a shrubbery, and came out opposite a little postern-gate in the garden-wall.

'You know the grounds well,' said Wogan.

'It is my first visit,' replied Scrope, with a trace of bitterness, 'but I have been told enough of them to know my way.'

He stepped forward and opened the gate. Outside in the road stood a travelling chaise with a pair of horses harnessed to it.

'There is no one within view,' said Wogan. The road ran to right and left empty as far as the eye could reach; in front stretched the empty fields.

'No one,' said Mr. Scrope, and he looked up to the sky.

'Well, I would as lief take my last look at the sunlight as at anything else, and I doubt not it is the same with you.'

Wogan, in spite of himself, began to entertain a certain liking for the man. He had accepted each stroke of ill-fortune--his discomfiture at Lady Oxford's hands, the grapple on the steps, and now this duel--without disputation. Moreover Wogan was wondering whether or no the man had some real grievance against her ladyship and what motive brought him, in what expectation, in his chaise to Brampton Bryan. He felt indeed a certain compunction for his behaviour, and he said doubtfully,

'Mr. Scrope, you and I might have been very good friends in other circumstances.'

'I doubt it very much, Mr. Wogan.' Scrope shook his head and smiled. 'Your poetry would always have come between us. I would really sooner die than praise it.'

He looked up and down the road as he spoke, and then made an almost imperceptible nod at his coachman.

'That field opposite will do, I think,' Scrope said, and advanced from the doorway to the side of his chaise as though he was looking for something. It was certainly not his sword; Wogan now thinks it was his pistols. Wogan felt his liking increase and was inclined to put the encounter off for a little. It was for this reason that he stepped forward and passed an arm through Scrope's just as the latter had set a foot on the step of the chaise, no doubt to search the better for what he needed.

'Now what's amiss with the poem?' asked Wogan in a friendly way.

'It is altogether too inconsequent,' replied Scrope with a sudden irritation for which Wogan was at a loss to account.

'But my dear man,' said he, 'it was not intended for a syllogism.'

Scrope took his foot off the step and turned to Wogan as though a new thought had sprung into his brain.

'Mr. Wogan,' he said, 'I shall have all the pleasure imaginable in pointing out the faults to you if you care to listen and have the leisure. Then if you kill me afterwards, why I shall have done you some slight service and perhaps the world a greater. If I kill you, on the other hand, why there's so much time wasted, it is true, but I am in no hurry.'

There was no escape from the duel; that Wogan knew. Mr. Scrope had insulted the Parson, Lady Oxford, and himself; he was aware besides that the Parson and Wogan, both of them at the best suspected characters, were visiting the Earl of Oxford; and he had, whether it was justified or no, a hot resentment against the Parson. He might, since he knew so much, know also more, as, for instance, the names under which the Parson and Wogan were hiding themselves. It would not in any case need a very shrewd guess to hit upon their business, and if Mr. Scrope got back safe to London, why he might make himself confoundedly unpleasant. Wogan ran through these arguments in his mind, and was brought to the conclusion that he must most infallibly kill Mr. Scrope; but at the same time a little of his company meanwhile could do no harm.

'Nor I,' replied Wogan accordingly. 'I shall be delighted to confute your opinions.'

Mr. Scrope bowed; it seemed as though his face lighted up for a moment.

'There is no reason why we should stand in the road,' he said, 'when we can sit in the chaise.'

'Very true,' answered Wogan.

Scrope mounted into the chaise. Wogan followed upon his heels. They sat down side by side, and Scrope pulled out the verses from his pocket. He read the dedication once more:

'Strephon to Smilinda running barefoot over the grass in a gale of wind.'

'Let me point out,' said he, 'that you have made the lady run barefoot at the very time when she would be most certain to put on her shoes and stockings. And that error vitiates the whole poem. For the wind is severe, you will notice. So when she reprimands the storm, she should really reprimand herself for her inconceivable folly.'

'But Smilinda has no shoes and stockings at all in the poem,' replied Wogan triumphantly.

'That hardly better the matter,' returned Scrope. 'For in that case her feet might be bare but they would certainly not be snowy.'

He stooped down as he spoke and drew from under the seat a bottle of wine, which he opened.

'This,' he said, 'may help us to consider the poem in a more charitable light.'

He gave Wogan the bottle to hold, and stooping once more fetched out a couple of glasses. Then he held one in each hand.

'Now will you fill them?' he said. Wogan poured out the wine and while pouring it:

'Two glasses?' he remarked. 'It seems you came prepared for the conversation.'

Scrope raised his eyes quickly to Wogan's face, and dropped them again to the glasses.

'One might easily have been broken,' he explained.

They leaned back in the chaise, each with a glass in his hand.

'It is to your taste, I hope,' said Scrope courteously.

Wogan smacked his lips in contentment.

'Lord Oxford has no better in his cellars.'

'I may agree without boastfulness. It is indeed Florence of a rare vintage, which I was at some pains to procure.' He laughed with a spice of savagery and resumed the consideration of Wogan's verses.

'You seem to me to have missed the opportunity afforded by your gale of wind. A true poet would surely have made great play with the lady's petticoats.'

'Smilinda had none,' again replied Wogan in triumph, and he emptied his glass.

'No shoes and stockings and no petticoats,' said he in a shocked voice. 'It is well you wrote a poem about her instead of painting her portrait,' and he filled Wogan's glass again, and added a little to his own, which was no more than half empty.

'Don't you comprehend, my friend,' exclaimed Wogan, 'that Smilinda's a nymph, an ancient Roman nymph?'

'Oh, she's a nymph!'

'Yes, and so wears no clothes but a sort of linsey-wolsey garment kirtled up to her knees.'

'Well, let that pass. But here's a line I view with profound discontent. "The grass will all its prickles hide." Thistles have prickles, Mr. Wogan, but the grass has blades like you and me; only, unlike you and me, it has no scabbards to sheathe them in.'

'Well,' said Wogan, 'but that's very wittily said,' and he laughed and chuckled.

'It is not bad, upon my faith,' replied Scrope. 'Let us drink to it in full glasses.'

He emptied the bottle into Wogan's glass and tossed it into the road.

'Now here's something more. The wind, you observe, makes lutestrings of Smilinda's hair.'

'There is little fault to be discovered in that image, I fancy,' said Wogan, lifting his glass to his lips with a smile.

'It is a whimsical image,' replied Scrope. 'It is as much as to call her hair catgut.'

Wogan was startled by the criticism. He sat up and scratched his nose.

'Well, I had not thought of that,' he said. He was somewhat crestfallen, and he looked to his glass for consolation. The glass was empty; he looked on to the road where the empty bottle rolled in the dust.

'I have its fellow,' said Scrope, interpreting Wogan's glance. He produced a second bottle from the same place. The second bottle brought them to the end of the verse. There was, however, a little discussion over the last line, and a third bottle was broached to assist.

"At least that is what I expect." It is a very vile line, Mr. Wogan.'

'It is, perhaps, not so good as the others,' Wogan admitted. 'But you must blame the necessities of rhyming.'

'But the art of the poet is to conceal such necessities,' answered Scrope. 'And observe, Mr. Wogan, you sacrifice a great deal here to get an accurate rhyme, but in the remaining two lines of the next verse you do not trouble your head about a rhyme at all.'

'Oh, let me see that!' said Wogan, holding out a hand for the paper. He had clean forgotten by this time what those two lines described.

'Allegiance, Mr. Wogan,' said Scrope, politely handing him the verses, 'is no rhyme to obedience.'

'Allegiance--obedience--obedience--allegiance,' repeated Wogan as clearly as he could. 'Nay, I think it's a very good rhyme.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Scrope in a sudden comprehension. 'If you tell me the verses are conceived in the Irish dialect, I have not another word to say.'

Now Mr. Wogan, as a rule, was a little touchy on the subject of his accent. But at this moment he had the better part of three bottles of admirable Florence wine under his belt and was so disposed to see great humour in any remark. He grew uproarious over Mr. Scrope's witticism.

'Sure, but that's the most delicate jest I have heard for months,' he cried. 'Conceived in the Irish dialect! Ho! Ho! I must tell it at the Cocoa Tree--though it hits at me,' and he stood up in the chaise. 'Obedience--allegiance.' Mr. Scrope steadied him by the elbow. 'Faith, Mr. Scrope, but you and I must have another crack one of these days.' He put a foot out on the step of the chaise. 'I love a man that has some warmth in his merriment--and some warmth in his bottle too.' He stepped out of the chaise on to the ground. 'The best Florence I have tasted--the best joke I have heard--the Irish dialect. Ha, ha!' and he waved a hand at Scrope. Scrope called quickly to the coachman; the next instant the chaise started off at a gallop.

Wogan was left standing in the road, shouting his laughter. When the coach chaise was some thirty yards away, however, his laughter stopped completely. He rubbed his hand once or twice over his bemused forehead.

'Stop!' he yelled suddenly, and began to run after the chaise. Scrope stood up and spoke to the driver. The horses slackened their pace until Wogan got within twenty yards of it. Then Scrope spoke again, and the coachman drove the horses just as fast as Wogan was running.

'You have forgotten something, my friend,' cries Wogan.

'And what's that?' asked Scrope pleasantly, leaning over the back of the chaise.

'You have forgotten the duel.'

'No,' shouted Scrope with a grimace. 'It is you that forgot that.'

'Ah, you cheese-curd!--you white-livered coward!' cried Wogan, 'and I taking you for a fine man--equal to myself--you chalky cheese-curd!' He quickened his pace; Scrope called to the coachman; the coachman whipped up his horses. 'Oh wait a bit till I come up with you. I'll eat you in your clothes.'

Wogan bounded along the road, screaming out every vile epithet he could lay his tongue to in the heat of the moment. His hat and wig fell off on the road; he did not stop, but ran on bareheaded.

'But listen, the enamoured air
Makes lutestrings of thy locks so fair,'

quoted Scrope, rubbing his hands with delight. Wogan's fury redoubled, he stripped off his coat and ran till the road grew dizzy and the air flashed sparks at him. But the chaise kept ever at the same distance. With this interval of twenty yards between them, chaise and Wogan dashed through the tiny street of Brampton Bryan. A horde of little boys tumbled out of the doors and ran at Wogan's heels. The more he cursed and raved, the more the little boys shouted and yelled. Scrope in the chaise shook with laughter, clapped his hands as if in commendation of Wogan's powers, and encouraged him to greater efforts. They passed out of the village; the children gave up the pursuit, and sent a few parting stones after Wogan's back; in front stretched the open road. Wogan ran half a mile further, but he was too heavily handicapped with his three bottles of wine, and Scrope's horses were fresh. He shouted out one last oath, and then in a final spasm of fury sat down by the roadside, stripped off his shoe, and springing into the middle of the road, hurled it with all his might at the retreating chaise. The shoe struck the top of the hood, balanced there for a moment, and bounced over on to the seat. Scrope took it up and waved it above his head.

'The grass will all its prickles hide,
Nor harm thy snowy feet and bare.'

The driver plied his whip; the chaise whirled out of sight in a cloud of dust; and the disconsolate Wogan hobbled back to Brampton Bryan with what secrecy he could.

Mr. Scrope was on his way with the road to London open, were he disposed to follow it. Mr. Wogan seemed to see his chaise flashing through the turnpikes, and his sallow cheeks taking on an eager colour as the miles were heaped behind him.

He knew that Mr. Kelly and Nicholas Wogan were at Lord Oxford's house at Brampton Bryan. He knew enough, therefore, to throw some disorder on the Chevalier's affairs were he disposed to publish his news. But not in that way did he take, at this time, his revenge upon the Parson.

CHAPTER VI

MR. NICHOLAS WOGAN REMINDS THE PARSON OF A NIGHT AT THE MAZARIN PALACE

While Wogan pursued in vain a flying foe, Lady Oxford and Parson Kelly waited in the house for his return, her ladyship in a great discomposure and impatience, and the Parson more silent than ordinary. Whatever he may have thought of Scrope's unexpected visit, his pride forbade him questions.

'The most unfortunate affair,' exclaimed her ladyship distractedly. 'Sure never was a woman so cursed. But indeed I was born under a frowning star, Mr. Kelly, and so my lord's friends cannot visit him, but some untoward accident puts them into peril.'

'You need be troubled by no fears on our account,' replied Kelly, 'for Nick will ensure the fellow's silence before ever he lets him out of his sight.'

'True,' said she, with a fresh pang of anxiety, 'Mr. Wogan is with him and will doubtless seek an explanation.'

Kelly smiled, but without any overwhelming amusement.

'Neither,' said he, 'need your ladyship fear that he will listen to any indiscreet explanation. Words have very little to do with the explanations which Nicholas favours.'

Lady Oxford remarked the distant stateliness in Kelly's tone and was in a hurry to retrieve the slip she had made.

'It is just that I mean,' she cried, coming over to Kelly. 'If Mr. Wogan--kills this man,' and her eyes flashed as though she did in her heart desire that consummation, 'here at the Park Gates--'

'Believe me,' replied Kelly reassuringly, 'he will omit no proper ceremony if he does.'

'No, nor will the county justices either,' retorted Lady Oxford, 'and there are Mr. George Kelly and Mr. Nicholas Wogan to explain their presence at Brampton Bryan Manor, as best they can, to a bench of bumpkins.'

'Again your ladyship is unnecessarily alarmed. For if Mr. Scrope is now no more, Mr. George Kelly and Mr. Nicholas Wogan are still Mr. James Johnson and his secretary Mr. Hilton. No harm threatens Brampton Bryan Manor from their visit.'

This he said no less coldly, and to cut the conversation short, stalked with excessive dignity to the door. Lady Oxford was gazing ruefully down the avenue from the window, when she heard the knob of the door move under his hand. She turned quickly about.

'It was not of Brampton Bryan Manor I was thinking,' she said hurriedly, 'nor of our safety. Why, in what poor esteem do you hold me! Am I then so contemptible a thing?' There was no anger in her reproach. Rather it melted in a most touching sadness. 'Have I no friends whose safety troubles me?' she added. At that out came her handkerchief and fluttered at her eyes. 'Nay, but I thought I had--two of the noblest.' It was a mere scrap of a handkerchief, and the greater part of that a lace edging. It would not have sopped up many tears, but it served her ladyship's turn. For indeed the mere sight of it convinced Kelly of his monstrous cruelty.

'Your ladyship!' he cried, turning back. 'Tears! And I have caused them. Faith, I should be hanged for that. Yet they flow for my friend and me, and I am blessed instead.'

But she would have none of his apologies. She stepped back as he approached.

'No,' said she, and wiped an imaginary tear-drop from the driest of eyes; 'you have asked me for an explanation of Mr. Scrope's coming and you have a right to ask it.'

'Madam,' expostulated Kelly, 'I was careful, on the contrary, to ask for no explanation whatever. For I have no right to it.'

'Oh, but you have,' returned her ladyship with asperity; and then up went her handkerchief again.

'All men,' she said, in a voice most pathetic, 'have a right to ask any explanation of any woman, at anytime. Women, poor sad creatures, are suspect from their cradles, and to distrust them is the prerogative of manhood.' Here she tore away her handkerchief and lifted her hands in an ardent prayer. 'Oh that some day I might meet with one single man who would believe us worthy of respect!' She walked away to the window and said in a low voice, 'With what friendship would I requite him.'

Thus the unfortunate Mr. Kelly was not merely plunged in remorse, but brought to see that he had missed the one solitary path which would have led him into this great lady's friendship.

'Your ladyship,' he implored, 'mistakes my sentiments altogether.'

'Mr. Kelly,' she replied, proudly, 'we will not, if you please, pursue the matter. You have your explanation and I trust you will allow it to content you,' and so she sailed majestically out of the room, leaving Mr. Kelly in that perturbation that he quite failed to notice he had received no explanation whatever. She dropped her stateliness, however, when the door was closed behind her, and, hurrying across the hall, lay in wait behind a shrubbery for Wogan's return. Wogan, on the other hand, had admirable reasons for avoiding all paths, and so slipped into the back of the house unseen. Consequently it was not until half-an-hour later, when Lady Oxford was fairly distracted, that she discovered him, decently clothed, and urging upon Kelly the necessity of an immediate retreat. He broke off from his advice as Lady Oxford entered.

'You have done him no hurt?' she asked, looking Wogan over from head to foot in search of a speck of blood, and ready to swoon if she saw one.

'Not the least in the world,' replied Wogan.

'Nor he you?'

'There was never any likelihood of that.' Wogan had to put the best face on the matter possible, and since he could not own to the humiliating truth, why, the necessary lie might just as

well redound to his credit. 'I swore him to secrecy upon his bended knees. He took the oath on the hilt of this very sword, 'and Wogan hitched forward his hanger.

A footman at this moment announced that dinner was served.

'Will you give me your hand, Mr. Wogan?' asked Lady Oxford, and detaining him until Kelly had passed out of the room:

'He gave you doubtless a reason for his coming?' she asked.

'Surely he did,' said Wogan, who was not for admitting any omission on his own part.

'And what reason?' asked her ladyship.

Mr. Wogan looked at the ground and got a flash of inspiration.

'Why,' said he as bold as brass, 'precisely the same reason which you gave to my friend George Kelly,' in which answer Wogan hit the literal truth, although her ladyship looked puzzled, as well she might, and then flushed a fine crimson.

However, she made up an ingenious story, and that same day hinted rather than told it with a pretty suggestion of sympathy which quite melted Mr. Kelly's heart, and threw Wogan into some doubt whether to believe her or no. Scrope, it appeared, had been at some indefinite time a secretary to Mr. Walpole, and was entrusted with the keeping of the good man's accounts. Lady Oxford was then simply Mistress Margaret Middleton and intimate with her cousin, Mr. Walpole, although since her marriage, as Mr. Kelly and his friend were requested to note, that intimacy had entirely ceased. Hence it came about that the rash Scrope cast longing eyes upon the humble relation of his patron, and was indeed so carried away by passion that Margaret was forced now and again to chide him for the forwardness of his demeanour. Also, alas! he transgressed in a more serious way. For Mr. Walpole's accounts fell into the saddest disorder; there were sums of money of which no trace could be found until--well, the deplorable affair was hushed up. Mr. Scrope was turned off and set down his dismissal to Margaret, who, gentle soul, would not have hurt a fly. From that time he had not spared her his resentment, and would go miles out of his way if by any chance he might fix a slight upon her. Which conduct she most Christianly forgave, since indeed the poor man's head must needs be turned.

'Yet he had all the appearances of prosperity,' objected Wogan.

'I fancied that I said that there were large sums missing,' replied her ladyship.

'Yes, you did indeed say so,' said Mr. Kelly, 'but you avoided the implication out of your generous pity.'

It is not in truth very difficult to befool a man who does half the fooling himself. Mr. Kelly was altogether appeased by Lady Oxford's explanation, which to his friend seemed to explain nothing, but none the less he readily acknowledged to Wogan the propriety of hurrying his business to a close.

'To tell the truth,' said Wogan, as soon as her ladyship had withdrawn, 'I feel my cravat stiffening prophetically about my neck. My presence does not help you; indeed, it is another danger; and since we are but a few miles from Aberystwith, I am thinking that I could do nothing wiser than start for that port to-night.'

The Parson drew figures with his forefinger on the table for a while; then:

'I would not have you go, he said slowly. 'I will use what despatch I may; but I would not have you go, and leave me here.'

Kelly was true to his word, and used so much despatch that within two days he extorted a promise from Lord Oxford to undertake the muslin trade in England, as the cant phrase went. Possibly he might have won that same promise before had used the same despatch. But Lord Oxford's foible was to hold long discourses, and Mr. Pope truly said that he had an epical habit of beginning everything at the middle. However it may be, the two men left the Manor on the morning of the third day. Wogan drove back with the Parson as far as Worcester, who for the first few miles remained in a melancholy silence, and then burst out of a sudden.

'To think that she should be mewed up in a corner of Herefordshire, with no companions but drunken rustics! Mated to an old pantaloon, too!'

'Sure it was her ladyship's own doing,' murmured Wogan.

'No woman in all London could hold a candle to her. And we distrusted her--we distrusted her, Nick.' He beat a clenched fist into the palm of his other hand to emphasise the enormity of the crime. 'Why, what impertinent fools men are!'

Then he again relapsed into silence and again broke out.

'Damme! but Fortune plays bitter tricks upon the world. 'Tis all very well to strike at a pair of

rascals like you and me, Nick, but she strikes at those who offend her least. Faith, but I am bewildered. Here is a woman indisputably born to be a queen and she is a nurse. And no better prospect when my lord dies than a poor jointure and a dull Dower House.'

'Oh, she told you that, did she?' said Wogan. 'Sure it was a queenly complaint.'

'She made no complaint,' said Kelly fiercely. 'She would not--she could not. It is a woman of unexampled patience.'

He grumbled into silence, and his thoughts changed and turned moodily about himself.

'Why did I ever preach that sermon?' he exclaimed. 'But for that I might now have the care of half-a-dozen rambling parishes. Instead of hurrying and scurrying from one end of Europe to the other, at the risk of my neck, I might sit of an evening by the peat fire of an inn kitchen and give the law to my neighbour. I might have a little country parsonage all trailed over with roses, and leisure to ensure preferment by my studies and enjoy the wisdom of my Latin friend Tully. I might have a wife, too,' he added, 'and maybe half a score of children to plague me out of my five wits with their rogueries.'

He fetched up a sigh as he ended which would have done credit to my Lady Oxford; and Wogan, seeing his friend in this unwonted pother, was minded to laugh him out of it.

'And a credit to your cloth you would have been,' says he. 'Why, it's a bottle you would have taken into the pulpit with you, and a mighty big tumbler to measure your discourse by. Indeed there would have been but one point of resemblance between yourself and your worthier brethren, and that's the number of times you turned your glass upside down before you came to an end.'

Kelly, however, was not to be diverted from his melancholy. The picture of the parsonage was too vivid on the canvas of his desires. And since he dreamed of one impossibility, no doubt he went a step further and dreamed of another besides. No doubt his picture of the parsonage showed the figure of the parson's wife, and no doubt the parson's wife was very like to my Lady Oxford.

Wogan, though he had laughed, was, to tell the truth, somewhat disturbed, and began to reckon up how much he was himself to blame for setting Kelly's thoughts towards her ladyship. He had not thought that his friend had taken the woman so much to heart. But whenever the Parson fell a dreaming of a quiet life and the cure of souls, it was a sure sign the world was going very ill with him.

'I would have you remember, George,' said Wogan, 'that not so long ago I saw you stand up before a certain company in Paris and cry out with an honest-ay, an honest passion, "May nothing come between the Cause and me!"'

Kelly flushed as his words were recalled to him and turned his head away. Wogan held out his hand.

'George, am I then to understand that something has come between the Cause and you?' And he had to repeat the question before he got an answer. Then Kelly turned back.

'Understand nothing, Nick, but that I am a fool,' he cried heartily, and slapped his hand into Wogan's. 'True, the Cause, the Cause,' he muttered to himself once or twice. After all, Nick,' he said, 'we have got the old man's assurance. My Lord Oxford will lend a hand. We have not failed the Cause.' And they did not speak again until they drove into Worcester. Then Kelly turned to Nick with a sad sort of smile.

'Well, have you nothing to say to me?' said he.

Mr. Wogan could discover nothing to say until he had stepped out of the chaise at the post-house and was shaking his friend's hand. Then he delivered himself of the soundest piece of philosophy imaginable.

'Woman,' he said, 'is very much like a jelly-fish--very pretty and pink and transparent to look at, but with a devil of a sting if you touch it.'

CHAPTER VII

LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU HAS A WORD TO SAY ABOUT SMILINDA

From Worcester Nicholas Wogan made his way to Bristol, and, taking passage there on a brigantine bound for Havre-de-Grace with a cargo of linen, got safely over into France. He travelled forthwith to Paris that he might put himself at the disposition of General Dillon, and, being commanded to supper some few days after his arrival by the Duke of Mar, saw a familiar swarthy face nodding cheerily at him across the table. The lady was embrowned with the Eastern sun, and, having lost her eye-lashes by that disease which she fought so manfully to conquer, her eyes were fierce and martial. It was indeed the face of the redoubtable Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, sister to the Duchess of Mar, who chanced to be passing through Paris on her travels from Constantinople. Wogan remembered that Mr. Kelly's rustic friend at Brampton Bryan had spoken of Lady Mary with considerable spleen. And since he began to harbour doubts of her rusticity, he determined to seek some certain information from Lady Mary.

Lady Mary was for a wonder in a most amiable mood, and had more than one question to put concerning 'Kelly as the Bishop that was to be when your King came to his own.'

'Why, madam, he has a new friend,' said Wogan.

Lady Mary maybe caught a suspicion of uneasiness in Wogan's tone. She cocked her head whimsically.

'A woman?'

'Yes.'

'Who?'

'My Lady Oxford.'

Lady Mary made a round O of her lips, drew in a breath, and blew it out again.

'There go the lawn-sleeves.'

Wogan took a seat by her side.

'Why?'

Lady Mary shrugged her shoulders.

'In what esteem is she held?' continued Wogan, 'of what character is she?'

'I could never hear,' returned Lady Mary carelessly. 'For her friends always stopped abruptly when they chanced upon her character, and the rest was merely pursed lips and screwed-up eyes, which it would be the unfairest thing in the world to translate in her disfavour. Her character, Mr. Wogan, is a tender and delicate plant. It will not grow under glass, but in a dark room, where I believe it flourishes most invisibly.'

Lady Mary seemed ill-disposed to pursue the topic, and began to talk of her journey and the great things she had seen at Constantinople. Wogan waited until she came to a pause, and then stepped in with another question.

'Is Lady Oxford political?'

'Lady Oxford! Lady Oxford!' she repeated almost pettishly. 'Upon my word, the woman has infected you. You can speak of nothing else. Political?' and she laughed maliciously. 'That she is, and on both sides. She changes her party more often than an ambitious statesman. For politics to my Lady Oxford are just pawns in the great game of Love.'

'Oh, Love,' exclaimed Wogan, with a recollection of Mr. Scrope. 'Is Love her quarry?'

'She will play cat to any man's mouse,' returned Lady Mary indifferently.

'And there are many mice?'

Lady Mary shrugged her shoulders and made no reply. However, Wogan's appetite for information was only whetted, and to provoke Lady Mary to speak more freely he made an inventory of Lady Oxford's charms. He dwelt on her attractions. Lady Mary played with her fan, pulled savagely at the feathers, opened it, shut it up, while Wogan discoursed serenely on item--a dark eye, big, with a glint of light in it like sunshine through a thundercloud. Lady Mary laughed scornfully. Wogan went on to item--a profusion of blackish-brown hair, very silky, with a gloss, and here and there a gold thread in the brown; item--a Barbary shape; item--an admirable instep and a most engaging ankle.

'It would look very pretty in the stocks,' Lady Mary snapped out.

Wogan shook his head with a knowing air.

'"Twould slip out.'

'Not if I had the locking of it in,' she exclaimed with a vicious stamp of the foot, and rose, as though to cross the room.

'I have omitted the lady's most adorable merit,' said Wogan thoughtfully. Lady Mary was altogether human, and did not cross the room.

'She has the greatest affection for your ladyship. She spoke of your ladyship indeed in quite unmeasured terms, and while praising your ladyship's wit would not have it that one single spark was due to the cleverness of your ladyship's friends. Upon that point she was most strenuous.'

Lady Mary sat down again. The stroke had evidently told.

'I am most grateful to her,' she said, 'and when did Lady Oxford show such a sweet condescension towards me?'

'But a few weeks ago at Brampton Bryan, where she was nursing her husband with an assiduous devotion.'

'I have known her show the like devotion before, when her losses at cards have driven her from London.'

'So she gambles?' inquired Wogan. 'Altogether, then, a dangerous friend for George.'

Lady Mary nodded.

'Particularly for George,' said she with a smile. 'For observe, she is compact of wiles, and so is most dangerous to an honest man. She is at once insatiable in her desires, and implacable if they are not fulfilled. She is always in love, and knows nothing of what the word means. She is tender at times, but only through caprice; she is never faithful except for profit or lack of occasion to be anything else. Coquetry is the abiding principle of her nature, and her virtue merely a habit of hiding her coquetry. Her mind is larded with affectations as is her face with paint, and once or twice she has been known to weep--when tears were likely to deceive a man. There, Mr. Wogan, you have her likeness, and I trust you are satisfied.'

It was not a character very much to Wogan's liking (Lady Mary, he learned later, was quoting from a manuscript 'portrait' of her own designing), though he drew a spice of comfort from the thought that Lady Mary might have coloured the effigy with her unmistakable enmity. But events proved that she had not over-coloured it, and even at that time Lady Oxford had no better reputation than Lady Mary Wortley attributed to her. The ballad-makers called her gallant, and they did her no wrong--the ballad-makers of the *ruelles*, be it understood, not they of the streets, but such poets as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu herself and his Grace Sophia of Wharton.^[1] The street-singers knew not Lady Oxford, who, indeed, was on the top of the fashion, and could hold her own in the war of written verses. It was in truth to her ability to give as good as she took in the matter of ballads that she owed Lady Mary's hostility, who had no taste for the counter-stroke. There were many such daring Penthesileas of the pen who never gave each other quarter; but neither Wogan nor the Parson were at this time in their secrets, although subsequently a ballad, not from Lady Mary's pen, was to have an astonishing effect upon their fortunes.

'Your ladyship can help me to make the best of it, at all events,' said Wogan. 'Since you have told me so much, will you tell me this one thing more? Have you ever heard of Mr. Scrope?'

'Scrope? Scrope?' said she casting about in her recollections. Wogan told her the story of Mr. Scrope's appearance at Brampton Bryan, and the explanation which Lady Oxford had given to account for it. Lady Mary laughed heartily.

'Secretary to Mr. Walpole?' she said. 'And how, then, did he come to hear that mad sermon of Mr. Kelly's at Dublin?'

'Sure I have been puzzled to account for that myself,' says Wogan. 'But who is he? Where does he come from? What brought him to Brampton Bryan? What took him away in such a mighty hurry? For upon my word I find it difficult to believe the man's a coward.'

'And you are in the right,' replied her ladyship. 'I know something of Mr. Scrope, and I will wager it was no cowardice made him run. I doubt you have not seen the last of Mr. Scrope. It is a passionate, determined sort of creature. He came to London a year or so ago. It was understood that he was a country gentleman with a comfortable estate in Leicestershire. He had laid his estate at Lady Oxford's feet, before she was as yet her ladyship. Lady Oxford would have it, and then would have none of it, and married the Earl. Well, he had been her valet for a season, and, I have no doubt, thought the service worth any price. She gave him her fan to hold, her gloves to caress, and what more can a man want? He spent much of his money, and some whisper that he turned informer afterwards.'

'Oh, did he?' asked Wogan, who was now yet more concerned that he had let the informer slip through his fingers.

'Yes. An informer for conscience' sake--a gentleman spy. His father died for Monmouth's affair.'

He has ever hated the Pretender and his cause. He is a Protestant and a fanatic.'

Then she looked at Wogan and began to laugh.

'I would have given much to have seen you bouncing down the road after Mr. Scrope's chaise,' and she added seriously, 'But I doubt you have not heard the last of Mr. Scrope.'

That also was Wogan's thought. For Lady Mary's story, though vague enough, was sufficiently clear to deepen his disquietude. Well, Mr. Wogan would get no comfort by the mere adding his brains with thinking of the matter, and he thrust it forth of his mind and went upon his way, that led him clean out of the path of this story for a while. He was despatched to Cadiz to take charge of a ship, and, in company with Captain Galloway of the *Resolution*, who was afterwards seized at Genoa, and Morgan, of the *Lady Mary*, he spent much fruitless time in cruising on and off the coasts of France, Spain, and Sweden. It was given out that they carried snuff, or were engaged in the Madagascar trade. But they took no cargoes aboard but barrels of powder and stands of arms, and waited on the Rising, which never came. There were weeks idled away at Morlaix, at Roscoff in Brittany, at Lisbon in Portugal, at Alicant Bay in Spain, until Wogan's heart grew sick with impatience. At rare times, when the venture wore a face of promise, the little fleet would run the hazard of the Channel and creep along the English coast, from Dartmouth, across the West Bay to Portland, from Portland on to the Isle of Wight. Mr. Wogan would pace the deck of his little ketch, *Fortune*, of a night, and as he looked at the quiet fields lying dark beneath the sky, would wonder how the world wagged for his friend the Parson, and whether my Lady Oxford was shaping it or no, until a longing would seize on him to drop a boat into the water and himself into the boat, and row ashore and see. But it was not for more than a full twelve months that his longing was fulfilled, and during those twelve months the harm was done.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. KELLY HAS AN ADVENTURE AT A MASQUERADE BALL

For the greater part of that year Mr. Kelly simply went about his business. He travelled backwards and forwards from General Dillon, Lord Lansdowne, the Duke of Mar, in Paris, to the Bishop of Rochester, in London, and from the Bishop to the others of the five who mismanaged the Chevalier's affairs in England, Lord Arran, Lord Strafford, Lord North and Grey, Lord Orrery, and last, though not least, the Earl of Oxford. Thus business brought him more than once knocking again at the doors of Brampton Bryan Manor, though he did not always find her ladyship at home to welcome him. On such occasions he found the great house very desolate for the want of her footstep and her voice, and so would pull out his watch and fall to wondering what at that precise moment she was engaged upon in town.

Thus things dallied, then, until a warm wet night of summer in the year 1720. Mr. Kelly was in London and betook himself to His Majesty's Theatre in Drury Lane, where he witnessed a farce which was very much to his taste. It was entitled 'South-Sea; or the Biter Bit,' and was happy not merely in its quips, but in the moment of its performance. For the King, or, as the honest party called him, the Elector, and his lords had sold out, and were off to Germany with their plunder, and the stocks were falling by hundreds every week. Mr. Kelly might well laugh at the sallies on the stage and the wry faces with which the pit and boxes received them. For he had recently sold out his actions in the Mississippi scheme at a profit of 1,200 per cent., and had his money safe locked up at Mr. Child's, the goldsmith. Kelly's, however, was not a mere wanton pleasure. For the floating of the bubble out of reach meant a very solid change in the Jacobite prospects. So long as the South-Sea scheme prospered and all the town grew wealthy, there would be no talk of changing kings and no chance for Mr. Kelly's friends. That great and patriotic bishop whom he served, my Lord of Rochester, had said to him this many a month past, 'Let 'em forget their politics, let 'em all run mad in Change Alley, and the madder the better. For the funds will fall and be the ruin of thousands, and when England is sunk into a salutary wretchedness and discontent, then our opportunity will come.'

It was altogether, then, in a very good humour that Mr. Kelly left the theatre. The night was young, and he disinclined for his lodgings. He strolled across to the Groom Porters, in White Hall, where his spirits were mightily increased. For taking a hand there at Bassette, in three deals he won nine rich septlevas, and, for once, did not need the money, and when he left the Groom Porters his pockets were heavy with gold, and his head swimming with the fumes of punch.

It is not to be wondered at that those same fumes of punch floated Lady Oxford into Mr. Kelly's mind. He swaggered up St. James's Street with her ladyship consequently riding atop of

his bemused fancies. It was a gay hour in St. James's, being then about half past one of the morning. Music rippled out of windows open on the night. Kelly heard the dice rattle within and the gold clink on the green cloth; lovers were whispering on the balconies; the world seemed to be going very well for those who had not their money in the Bubble, and for no one better than for Mr. Kelly. He looked about him, if by chance he might catch a glimpse of his divinity among the ladies of fashion as he watched them getting into their chairs, pushing their hoops sidelong before them, and the flambeaux flaring on their perfections. He imagined himself a Paladin rescuing her from innumerable foes. She was an angel, a sprite, a Hamadryad, in fact everything tender and immaterial.

He was roused from these dreams by an illumination of more than ordinary brilliancy, and looking up saw that he had wandered to the theatre in the Haymarket. A ragged crowd of pickpockets and the like was gathered about the portico. Carriages and chairs set down in quick succession, ladies in dominoes, gentlemen in masks. Mr. Kelly remembered that it was a night of the masquerades; all the world would be gathered in the theatre, and why not Lady Oxford, who was herself the better half of it? Kelly had a ticket in his pocket, pushed through the loiterers, and stood on the inner rim of the crowd watching the masqueraders arrive. Every carriage that drew up surely concealed her ladyship, every domino that passed up the steps hid her incomparable figure. Mr. Kelly had staked his soul with unruffled confidence upon her identity with each of the first twelve women who thus descended before he realised that he was not the only one who waited. From the spot where he stood he could see into the lobby of the theatre. Heidegger, M. le surintendant des plaisirs du Roi de l'Angleterre,

'With a hundred deep wrinkles impressed on his front,
Like a map with a great many rivers upon 't,'

was receiving the more important of his guests. The guests filed past him into the parterre, Heidegger remained. But another man loitered ever in the lobby too. He was evidently expecting someone, and that with impatience. For as each coach or chaise drew up he peered eagerly forward; as it delivered its occupants he turned discontentedly away. It is perhaps doubtful whether Mr. Kelly would have paid him any great attention but for his dress, which arrested all eyes and caused the more tender of the ladies who passed him to draw their cloaks closer about them with a gesture of disgust. For he was attired to represent a headsman, being from head to foot in black, with a crape mask upon his face and a headsman's axe in his hand. He had carried his intention out with such thoroughness, moreover, that he had daubed his doublet and hose with red.

Mr. Kelly was in a mood to be charmed by everything strange and eccentric, and the presence of this bloodsmear'd executioner at a masquerade seemed to him a piece of the most delicate drollery. Moreover, the executioner was waiting like Mr. Kelly, and with a like anxiety. Mr. Kelly had a fellow-feeling for him in his impatience which prompted him suddenly to run up the steps and accost him.

'Like me, you are doubtless waiting for your aunt,' said the Parson courteously.

The impulse, the movement, the words had all been the matter of a second; but the executioner was more than naturally startled, as Mr. Kelly might have perceived had he possessed his five wits. For the man leaped rather than stepped back; he gave a gasp; his hand gripped tight about the handle of his axe. Then he stepped close to Kelly.

'You know me?' he said. The voice was muffled, the accent one of menace. Kelly noticed neither the voice nor the menace. He bowed with ceremony.

'Without a doubt. You are M. de Strasbourg.'

The headsman laughed abruptly like a man relieved.

'You and I,' he returned, mimicking Kelly's politeness of manner, 'will be better acquainted in the future.'

Kelly was overjoyed with the rejoinder. 'Here's a devil of a fellow for you,' he cried, and with his elbow nudged Heidegger in the ribs. Heidegger was at that moment bent to the ground before the Duchess of Wharton, and nearly stumbled over her Grace's train. He turned in a passion as soon as the Duchess had passed.

'Vas you do dat for dam?' he said all in a breath. Kelly however was engaged in contemplating the executioner. He ran his thumb along the edge of the axe.

'It is cruelly blunt,' said he.

'You need not fear,' returned the other. 'For your worship is only entitled to a cord.'

'Oh, so you know me,' says Kelly, stepping close to the executioner.

'Without a doubt,' replied the latter, stepping back, 'Monsieur le Marchand de dentelles.'

It was Kelly's turn to be startled, and that he was effectually; he was shocked into a complete recovery of his senses and an accurate estimation of his folly. He walked to the entrance and stood upon the steps. The executioner knew him, knew something of his trade. Who, then, was M. de Strasbourg? Kelly recalled the tones of his voice, conned them over in his mind, and was not a penny the wiser. He glanced backwards furtively across his shoulder and looked the man over from head to foot.

At that moment a carriage drove up to the entrance. Mr. Kelly was standing on the top of the steps and the face of the coachman on the box was just on a level with his own. He stared, in a word, right at it, and so took unconsciously an impression of it upon his mind, while pondering how he should act with regard to M. de Strasbourg. Consequently he did not notice that a woman stepped out of the carriage and, without looking to the right or left, quickly mounted the steps. His eyes, in fact, were still fixed upon the coachman's face; and it needed the brushing of her cloak against his legs to rouse him from his reflections.

He turned about just as she disappeared at the far end of the lobby. He caught a glimpse of a white velvet cloak and an inch of blue satin petticoat under a muffling domino. He also saw that M. de Strasbourg was drawn close behind a pillar, as though he wished to avoid the lady. As soon, however, as she had vanished he came boldly out of his concealment and followed her into the theatre. Mr. Kelly began instantly to wonder whether a closer view of the domino would help him discover who M. de Strasbourg really was, and entering the theatre he went up into the boxes.

At first his eyes were bedazzled by the glitter of lights and jewels and the motley throng which paraded the floor. There was the usual medley of Chinese, Turks, and friars; here was a gentleman above six feet high dressed like a child in a white frock and leading strings and attended by another of very low stature, who fed him from time to time with a papspoon; there was a soldier prancing a minuet upon a hobby horse to the infinite discomfort of his neighbours; and as for the women--it seemed to Mr. Kelly that all the goddesses of the heathen mythology had come down from Olympia in their customary négligé.

Among them moved M. de Strasbourg like a black shadow, very distinguishable. Kelly kept his eyes in the man's neighbourhood, and in a little perceived a masked lady with her hair dressed in the Greek fashion. What character she was intended to represent he could not for the life of him determine. He learnt subsequently that she went as Iphigeneia--Iphigeneia, if you please, in a blue satin petticoat. To be sure her bosom was bared for the sacrifice, but then all the ladies in that assembly were in the like case. She had joined a party of friends, of whom M. de Strasbourg was not one. For though he kept her ever within his sight, following her hither and thither, it was always at a distance; and, so far as Kelly could see, and he did not take his eyes from the pair, he never spoke to her so much as a single word. On the contrary he seemed rather to lurk behind and avoid her notice. Kelly's curiosity was the more provoked by this stealthy pursuit. He lost his sense of uneasiness in a wonder what the man designed against the woman. He determined to wait the upshot of the affair.

The night wore away, the masqueraders thinned. The inch of blue satin petticoat took her departure from the parterre. M. de Strasbourg followed her; Mr. Kelly followed M. de Strasbourg.

The lobby was crowded. Kelly threaded his way through the crowd and came out upon the steps. He saw the lady, close wrapped again in her velvet cloak, descend to her carriage. The coachman gathered up his reins and took his whip from its rest. The movement chanced to attract Kelly's eyes. He looked at the coachman, at the first glance indifferently, at the second with all his attention. For this was not the same man who had driven the carriage to the masquerade. And then the coachman turned his full face towards Kelly and nodded. He nodded straight towards him. But was the nod meant for him? No! Well, then, for someone just behind his shoulder.

Kelly did not turn, but stepped quietly aside and saw M. de Strasbourg slip past him down the steps. So the nod was meant for him. M. de Strasbourg was still masked, but he had thrown a cloak about his shoulders which in some measure disguised his dress. The mystery seemed clear to Kelly; the lady was to be forcibly abducted unless someone, say Mr. James Johnson, had a word to say upon the matter. The carriage turned and drove slowly through the press of chairs and shouting link-boys; M. de Strasbourg on the side-walk kept pace with the carriage. Kelly immediately crossed the road, and, concealed by the carriage, kept pace with M. de Strasbourg. Thus they went as far as the corner of the Haymarket, and then turned into Pall Mall.

At this point Kelly, to be the more ready should the lady need his assistance, stepped off the pavement and walked in the mud hard by the hind wheels of the carriage. It was now close upon four of the morning, but, fortunately, very dark, and only a sullen sort of twilight about the south-eastern fringes of the sky.

In Pall Mall the carriages were fewer, but the coachman did not quicken his pace, doubtless out of regard for M. de Strasbourg, and at the corner of Pall Mall, where the road was quite empty, he jerked the horses to a standstill. Instantly M. de Strasbourg ran across the road to the carriage, the coachman bent over on that side to watch, and Mr. Kelly, on the other side, ran forward to the box. M. de Strasbourg wrenched open the door and jumped into the carriage. Mr.

Kelly heard a woman's scream and sprang on to the box. The coachman turned with a start. Before he could shout, before he could speak, Kelly showed him a pistol (for he went armed) under the man's nose.

'One word,' said Kelly, 'and I will break your ugly face in with the stock of that, my friend.'

The woman screamed again; M. de Strasbourg thrust his head out of the window.

'Go on,' he shouted with an oath, 'you know where. At a gallop! Kill the horses, they are not mine! Flog 'em to death so you go but fast enough.'

'To the right,' said Kelly, quietly.

The man whipped up the horses. They started at a gallop up St. James's Street.

'To the right,' again whispered Kelly.

The carriage turned into Ryder Street, rocking on its wheels. M. de Strasbourg's head was again thrust from the window.

'That's not the way. Are you drunk, man?--are you drunk?' he cried.

'To the left,' says Kelly, imperturbably, and fingered the lock of the pistol a little.

The carriage swung into Bury Street.

'Stop,' said Kelly.

The coachman reined in his horses; the carriage stopped with a jerk.

'Where in the devil's name have you taken us?' cried M. de Strasbourg, opening the door.

Kelly sprang to the ground, ran round the carriage to the open door.

'To the Marchand de dentelles, M. de Strasbourg,' said he with a bow. 'I have some most elegant pieces of *point d'Alençon* for the lady's inspection.'

M. de Strasbourg was utterly dumbfounded. He staggered back against the panels of the carriage; his mouth opened and shut; it seemed there was no language sufficiently chaotic to express his discomposure. At last:

'You are a damned impudent fellow,' he gasped out in a weak sort of quaver.

'Am I?' asked Kelly. 'Shall we ask the lady?'

He peeped through the door. The lady was huddled up in a corner--an odd heap of laces, silks, and furbelows, but with never a voice in all the confusion. It seemed she had fainted.

Meanwhile M. de Strasbourg turned on the unfortunate coachman.

'Get down, you rascal,' he cried; 'you have been bribed, you're in the fellow's pay. Get down! Not a farthing will you get from me, but only a thrashing that will make your bones ache this month to come.'

'Your honour,' replied the coachman piteously, 'it was not my fault. He offered to kill me unless I drove you here.'

M. de Strasbourg in a rage flung back to Kelly. He clapped a hand on his shoulder and plucked him from the carriage door.

'So you offered to kill him, did you?' he said. 'Perhaps you will make a like offer to me. But I'll not wait for the offer.'

He unclasped his cloak, drew his sword (happily not his axe) and delivered his thrust with that rapidity it seemed all one motion. Mr. Kelly jumped on one side, and the sword just gleamed against his sleeve. M. de Strasbourg overbalanced himself and stumbled a foot or two forwards. Kelly had whipped out his sword by the time that M. de Strasbourg had recovered, and a battle began which was whimsical enough. A quiet narrow street, misty with the grey morning, the carriage lamps throwing here a doubtful shadow, a masked headsman leaping, swearing, thrusting in an extreme passion, and, to crown the business, the coachman lamenting on the box that whichever honourable gentleman was killed he would most surely go wanting his hire, he that had a woeful starving family! Mr. Kelly, indeed, felt the strongest inclination to laugh, but dared not, so hotly was he pressed. The attack, however, he did not return, but contented himself with parrying the thrusts. His design, indeed, reached at no more than the mere disarming of M. de Strasbourg. M. de Strasbourg, however, lost even his last remnants of patience.

'Rascal!' he cried. 'Scullion! Grasshopper!'

Then he threw his hat at Kelly and missed, and at last flung his periwig full in Kelly's face,

accompanying the present with a thrust home which his opponent barely parried.

It was this particular action which brought the contest to a grotesque conclusion quite in keeping with its beginnings. For the periwig tumbled in the mud, and the coachman, assured that he would get no stiver of his hire, scrambled down from his box, rushed at a prize of so many pounds in value, picked it up and took to his heels.

M. de Strasbourg uttered a cry and leaped backwards out of reach.

'Stop!' he bawled to the coachman. The coachman only ran the quicker. M. de Strasbourg passed his hand over his shaven crown and looked at the carriage. It was quite impossible to abduct a lady without a periwig to his head. He swore, he stamped, he shouted 'Stop!' once more, and then dashed at full speed past Kelly in pursuit.

Kelly made no effort to prevent him, but gave way to his inclination and laughed. The coachman threw a startled glance over his shoulder and, seeing that M. de Strasbourg pressed after him, quickened his pace; behind him rushed a baldheaded executioner hurling imprecations. The pair fled, one after the other, to the top of Bury Street, turned the corner and disappeared. Kelly laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks, and leaned against the carriage.

The touch of the panels recalled him to the lady's presence. The street was now fairly roused by the clamour. Night-capped heads peeped from the windows; an indignant burgher in a dressing-gown even threatened Mr. Kelly with a blunderbuss; and, as he turned to the door of the carriage, he saw Mrs. Barnes at a window on the second floor looking at him with an air of the gravest discontent.

'Take me into shelter, good sir, at once, at once,' cried the lady from out the confusion of her laces, in a feigned tone of the masquerade.

'With all my heart, madam,' said Kelly. 'This is my door, and my lodging is at your disposal. Only the street is fairly awake, and should you prefer, I will most readily drive you to your own house.'

The lady looked out of the window. She was still masked so that Kelly could see nothing of her face, and she hesitated for a little, as if in doubt what answer she should make.

'You may make yourself at ease, madam,' said Kelly, believing that she was not yet relieved of fear; 'you are in perfect safety. Our worthy friend had to choose between your ladyship and his periwig, of which he has gone in chase. And, indeed, while I deplore his taste, I cannot but commend his discretion.'

'Very well,' she replied faintly. 'I owe you great thanks already, Mr.--' she paused.

'Johnson,' said Kelly.

'Mr. Johnson,' she replied; 'and I shall owe you yet more if you will drive me to my home.'

She gave him the address of a house in Queen's Square, Westminster. Kelly mounted on the box, took up the reins, and drove off. He looked up, as he turned the carriage in the narrow street, towards the second floor of his lodging. Mrs. Barnes shook her head at him in a terrible concern.

'I shall write and tell Mr. Wogan,' she bawled out.

'Hush, Mrs. Barnes, have you no sense?' cried Kelly, and he thought that from within the carriage he heard a stifled peal of laughter. 'Poor woman,' thought he, 'tis the hysterics,' and he drove to Queen's Square, Westminster, at a gallop.

CHAPTER IX

WHEREIN THE CHIVALROUS MR. KELLY BEHAVES WITH DEPLORABLE FOLLY

Mr. Kelly did not drive very straight perhaps, but to be sure he had the streets entirely to himself, and he certainly hit upon Queen's Square. The house was unknown to him, and he drove through the square before he found it.

It made an angle at the south corner, and was conspicuous for a solid family air, and a fine new statue of Queen Anne. Level windows of a distinguished respectability looked you over with indifference and said, 'Here's a house you'll take off your hat to, if you please.' 'Faith, but those windows must have shuddered in their sashes when they saw the Parson driving Madam home at five o'clock of the morning from a masquerade ball. A sleepy footman opened the door; a no less sleepy maid yawned in the hall. However, they both waked up to some purpose when Mr. Kelly jumped down from the box, bade the footman take the carriage round to the stables, called the maid to attend upon Madam, and himself opened the carriage door. He opened it quickly with a thought that Madam might very likely have removed her mask, for he was not so tipsy but that he was curious to know who it was that he had befriended. Madam, however, had done nothing of the kind.

'Is my lady ill?' asked the maid, hurrying forward. So Madam was a woman of title.

'A trifle discomposed, no doubt,' answered Kelly.

My lady said nothing whatever. It seemed she was unwilling to speak in the feigned voice before her maid, and in the natural voice before Mr. Kelly. She took his arm, and, leaning on it somewhat heavily, yet walked with a firm enough step into the hall, as Mr. Kelly could not but remark.

The maid threw open a door on the right. It gave into a little cheery room with a wainscot of polished oak, and a fire blazing on the hearth. My lady did not release Mr. Kelly's arm, and they both stood in front of the fire, and no doubt found the warmth comfortable enough after the chill of the morning. Her ladyship, indeed, went so far as to untie the strings of her domino, and make as though she would turn it back upon her shoulders. But with a glance at Mr. Kelly, she changed her mind, and hugged it somewhat closer over her dress than before.

'Were you at the masquerade, Mr. Johnson?' she asked in a low voice.

Mr. Kelly took the movement and the words together, and set them down as mere coquetry. Now, coquetry to Kelly at that time was a challenge, and it was contrary to his principles of honour to remain under such a provocation from man or woman. So he answered:

'Indeed, your ladyship, I was, to my eternal happiness. I shall dream of blue satin for a month to come.'

Her ladyship hitched her domino a little tighter still about her neck, and quickly tied the strings again, but made no other reply to his sally. The action, while it inflamed his curiosity, put him into something of a quandary. Was it but another piece of coquetry, he asked himself, or did she indeed wish to hinder him from discovering who she was? He could answer neither question, but he felt constrained, at all events, to offer to take her concealment as a hint that he should depart. It seemed a pity, for the adventure promised well.

'Your ladyship,' he said, and at that she gave a start and glanced at him, 'for so I understand from your maid I may address you,' he added, 'it grows late, the world is getting on to its legs, and your ladyship has had an eventful night.'

He took a step backwards and bowed.

'No,' said she, in a sharp quick voice, and put out a hand to detain him. Then she stopped as quickly, and drew in her hand again.

Mr. Kelly had borne himself very prettily in the little affair with M. de Strasbourg. Madam, in fact, was in the typical attitude of woman. She knew it was inconvenient to keep him, but for the life of her she could not let him go, wherefore she found a woman's way out of the trouble. For she staggered on her legs, and fainted to all appearance clean away, leaving matters to take their own course and shift for themselves. She fainted, of course, towards Mr. Kelly, who caught her in his arms and set her in an arm-chair. The maid, who all this while had been standing in the doorway, smiled. 'I will run to her ladyship's dressing-room for the salts,' she said, and so went out of the room, carefully closing the door behind her. Kelly kneeled by the lady's side, and taking up her fan, sought to waft her that way back into the world. She did not stir so much as a muscle, but lay all huddled up in her domino and mask. Mr. Kelly leaned over her, and so became aware of a penetrating perfume which breathed out from her dress. The perfume was bergamot.

Kelly dropped the fan and sat back on his heel. The maid had called her 'my lady,' and bergamot was Lady Oxford's favourite perfume. What if it was Lady Oxford he had unwittingly rescued! The possibility caught his breath away. If that were only true, he thought, why, he had done her some slight service, and straightway a great rush of tenderness came upon him, which went some way to sober him. In a minute, however, he dropped into despondency; for Lord Oxford's house was in the northern part of the town, as he knew, though he had never as yet been there, and neither the footman nor the maid were of her ladyship's household. Yet, if by some miracle the lady might be Smilinda! She was of the right height. Mr. Kelly looked at her, seeking vainly to trace out the form hidden under the folds of the domino. But if it were Smilinda, then Smilinda had swooned.

Mr. Kelly woke to this conclusion with a start of alarm. He clapped his hand into his pocket,

pulled out his snuff-box, opened it quickly, and held it close beneath her ladyship's nose. The effect of the snuff was purely magical, for before she could have inhaled one grain of it--before, indeed, Mr. Kelly's box was within a foot of her face, up went her hands to the tie-strings of her mask.

So the swoon was counterfeit.

'Madam,' said Kelly, 'you interpret my desires to a nicety. It is your face I would see, but I did not dream of removing your mask. I did but offer to revive you with a pinch of snuff.'

She took the box from his hand, but not to inhale the macawba.

'It is for your own sake, Mr. Johnson, that I do not unmask. 'Tis like that I am a fright, and did you see my face you would take me for a pale ghost.'

'Madam,' said Kelly, 'I am not afraid of ghosts, nor apt to take your ladyship for one of those same airy appearances. A ghost! No,' he cried, surveying her. 'An angel! It is only the angels in Heaven that wear blue satin petticoats.'

The lady laughed, and checked the laugh, aware that a laugh betrays where a voice does not.

'Ghost or angel,' she said, 'a being of my sex would fain see herself before she is seen. 'Tis a mirror I seek.' She was still holding Mr. Kelly's snuff-box. It was open and within the lid a little looking-glass was set; and as she spoke she turned away and bent over it with a motion as if she was about to lift her mask.

'Nay,' said Kelly abruptly; he stretched out his hand towards the snuff-box. 'The glass will be unfaithful, for the snuff has tarnished it. Madam, I beseech you, unloose that mask and turn your face to me and consult a truer mirror, your servant's eyes.' He spoke, perhaps, with a trifle more of agitation than the occasion seemed to warrant. Madam did indeed turn her face to Mr. Kelly, but it was in surprise at his agitation, and the mask still hid her face. Mr. Kelly could see no more than a pair of eyes blazing bright and black through the eyelet holes.

'You are gallant, I find, as well as brave,' she said, 'unless some other cause prompted the words.'

'What cause, madam? You wrong me.'

'Why,' said she, 'you still hold out your hand.' Mr. Kelly drew it away quickly. 'Ah,' she continued, 'I am right. There was a reason. You would not have me examine your snuff-box too closely.'

In that she was right, for the snuff-box was at once the dearest and the most dangerous of Mr. Kelly's possessions. It was a pretty toy in gold and tortoiseshell, with brilliants on the hinges, and had been given to Mr. Kelly on a certain occasion when he had been presented to his king at Avignon. For that reason, and for another, he was mightily loth to let it out of his possession. What that other reason was Madam very soon discovered.

'It is a dangerous toy,' she said. 'It has perhaps a secret to tell?'

'Madam, has not your mask?' returned Kelly.

'There is a mystery behind the mirror.'

'Well, then, it's mystery for mystery.'

For all that he spoke lightly he was in some uneasiness. For the lady might not be Smilinda, and her fingers played deftly about the setting of the mirror, touching a stone here and there. To be sure she wore gloves, and was the less likely therefore to touch the spring. But give her time enough--however, at that moment Kelly heard the maid's footsteps in the hall. He stepped to the door at once and opened it.

'You have the salts?' he asked. 'You have been the deuce of a time finding them.'

The maid stared at him.

'But her ladyship fainted,' she argued.

'Well,' said he, 'wasn't that why you went for the salts?'

'To be sure,' says she. "'Twas an order to go for the salts.'

She pushed open the door. My lady was still fingering the box. The maid paid no attention to the box, but she looked at my lady's mask; from the mask she looked towards Kelly with a shrug of the shoulders, which said 'Zany' as plain as writing.

Kelly had no thoughts to spare for the maid.

'Madam,' he said, 'here is your maid, to whose attentions I may leave you.'

He advanced, made a bow, took up his hat, held out his hand for his snuff-box.

'But I cannot let you go,' she answered, 'without I thank you'--all the time she was running her fingers here and there for the spring. Kelly noticed, too, with some anxiety, that while he had gone to the door she had made use of the occasion to strip off her glove--'and thank you fitly, as I should have done ere this. But the trouble I was in has made me backward.'

'Nay, madam,' said Kelly impatiently, and taking a step nearer, 'there is no need for thanks. No man could have done less.'

Her ladyship's fingers travelled faster in their vain attempt.

'But you risked your life!' said she in admiration.

'It is worth very little,' said he with a touch of disdain; 'and, madam, I keep you from your bed.'

The maid turned her eyes up to the ceiling, and then Madam by chance pressed on a diamond which loosed a hidden spring; the glass in the snuff-box flew down and showed a painting of the Chevalier in miniature.

'Oh!' cried my lady with a start in which, perhaps, there was a trace of affectation. Then she turned to the maid and bade her bring some wine and glasses. She spoke quickly, now forgetting for the moment to disguise her voice. Mr. Kelly recognized it with absolute certainty. The voice was Smilinda's.

The maid went out of the door. Kelly looked at the lady, and seeing that she was seemingly engrossed in the contemplation of the little picture, stole after the maid.

'Betty!' he called in a whisper.

'Sir?' she asked, coming to a stop.

He took a crown from his pocket, spun it in the air, and caught it.

'The Margout,' said he, 'will doubtless be more difficult to discover than the salts,' he suggested.

'It might indeed be necessary to go down to the cellar,' she replied readily.

'And that would take time,' said Kelly, handing her the crown.

'It would take an entire crown's worth,' said the maid, pocketing the coin.

Kelly slipped back into the room.

The lady seemed not to have noticed Mr. Kelly's absence, so fondly did she study the portrait; but none the less, no sooner had he closed the door than she cried out, not by any means to him but in a sort of ecstasy, '*Le Roi!*' Then she hid the snuff-box suddenly and glanced with a shudder round the room. The panic was altogether misplaced, since there could be no other person in the room except the owner of the box, who, if her ladyship was guilty for admiring, was ten thousand times more so for possessing it.

She caught with her hand at her heart when she perceived Mr. Kelly, then her eyes smiled from out of her mask, as though in the extremity of her alarm she had forgotten who he was, and so fell back in her chair with an air of languor, breathing deep and quick.

'Upon my word, I fear, Mr. Johnson,' she said, 'that if I have escaped one danger by your help I have fallen into another. You seem to me to be a man of dangerous company.'

'Indeed I find it so when I am with you, madam, since you discover my secrets and show me nothing of your own,' replied Kelly.

The maid it appears, had no less perversity than her mistress, for precisely at this moment she rapped on the door, and without waiting for any answer sharply entered the room, bearing the wine and glasses on a salver. There was a distance of three yards between Kelly and her ladyship. The maid measured the distance with her eyes, and her face showed some disappointment. Her ladyship dismissed her, filled both the glasses and took one in her hand. Mr. Kelly drained the other, and the bumper carried off the remnant of his brains.

'You run no danger from my knowing your secret, Mr. Johnson,' said she, 'for--'

Breaking off her sentence, she turned her head aside, swiftly pushed up her mask and kissed the portrait in the box, stooping her fragrant hair over it. Mr. Kelly, speeded by the wine, was this time too quick for her ladyship. Before she could raise her face he had paid the same compliment to her lips as she to his Majesty. She lifted her head with a bewitching air of anger.

'Lady Oxford!' he cried out as if in amazement, since he had bottomed the mystery for now some time. 'Forgive me, madam, if my hasty loyalty to my Sovereign prevented me from

recognising his latest adherent. The Cause must now infallibly triumph.'

'Sir,' she began, looking up at him with her eyes melting from anger to reproach, 'your apology is something graceless. For though my colour be gone--it was only the worse or artificial part of her matchless complexion which the mask had rubbed off--you yet had time to know and respect a face you--'and then she came suddenly to a stop, as she untied the strings of her domino and threw it back from her shoulders. 'You blame me,' she said pitifully. Her ladyship was a ready woman, and even went more than half-way to meet an attack. At Brampton Bryan the talk had been of duty and the charms of a rustic life; but here the dutiful country wife, violently disarrayed in the extreme of fashion, had been alone to a masquerade ball and Mr. Kelly might conceive himself tricked. And so 'You blame me,' she said, 'you blame me even as you blamed me at Brampton Bryan, and with no more justice.'

'At Brampton Bryan!' exclaimed Kelly suddenly.

'M. de Strasbourg! M. de Strasbourg was Scrope.'

Her ladyship nodded.

'And 'twas he attacked *you*--would have carried you off.'

Her ladyship shivered.

'And I let him go. Curse me! I let him go even as Nick did. But the third time! Oh, only let the third time come.'

Her ladyship shook her head with the most weariful resignation.

'It will come too late, that third time,' she said; 'too late for me. I have no husband who can protect me, and no friend so kind as to serve me in his place.'

'Nay, madam,' cried Kelly, instantly softened by the lonely picture which her words called up in his mind. She was transfigured all at once into Una, Andromeda, Ariadne, or any other young woman of great beauty and virtue who has ever been left desolate to face a wintry world. 'Believe me, you have one friend whose only aspiration is to serve you with his life-blood. Faith, madam, had you but shown me your face when first I came to the door of your carriage, I would never have let M. de Strasbourg run away until I had offered you his smoking heart on the point of my sword.'

Her ladyship gave the Parson to understand that she had gone to the ball on the King's service. Had his brain been of its customary sobriety the adventure would doubtless have surprised him more than it did. He might have questioned the nature of the service which took her ladyship to the masquerade. But she had sufficient art to tell him nothing and persuade him that she told all. Moreover, he had other matters to engage him.

There is no need to extend more particularly the old story of a young man's folly with a woman of Lady Oxford's kind. She had sought to hide who she was, she said, because she dared not trust herself; and the fact that she was not living in her own house, which was being repaired, but in one that she had borrowed, with the servants, from a friend who had gone to the Bath, seemed to make her intention possible. But Heaven had been against her. Mr. Kelly was readily beguiled into the sincere opinion that she had fought against her passion, but that her weakness and his transcendent bravery, of which she would by no means allow him to make light, had proved her ruin. It was all in a word set down to gratitude, which was a great virtue, she suggested. Love, indeed, was just the charge of powder which would have never flashed--no never--had not gratitude served as a flint and thrown off the spark.

Well, Mr. Kelly walked home in the dawning of a new day and painted his thoughts with the colours of the sky. For weeks thereafter he seemed in his folly to tread on air; and no doubt he had more than ordinary warrant for his folly. He had a fortune safely lodged with Mr. Child, the goldsmith; his mistress was no less fair than she showed fond; and so fond she was that she could not bring herself to chide the coachman who was discovered the next morning drunk with drugged wine at a tavern near the Haymarket, whither one of Scrope's hirelings had lured him. Mr. Kelly was prosperous in the three great games of life, love, and politics. For he was wholly trusted by the Bishop, by Lord Oxford and the rest; he took his place in the world and went and came from France with hanging matter in his valise. The valise weighed all the lighter for the thought that he was now serving Lady Oxford as well as the King. She was at this time always in his dreams. His passion indeed was in these days extreme, a devouring fire in brain and marrow. He believed her a most loyal conspirator, and, of course, all that he knew came to her ladyship's ears. But his bliss in the affection of Lady Oxford quite blinded him to danger, and he seemed to himself to walk invisible, as though he had the secret of fernseed.

For a season, then, Mr. Kelly was the happy fool, and if the season was short--why, is it ever long? Mr. Wogan is not indeed sure that the Parson has got altogether out of her ladyship's debt, in spite of what happened afterwards. For when the real morning broke and the true love came to him, troubles followed apace upon its coming. It is something to have been a happy fool, if only for a season and though the happiness ended with the folly.

CHAPTER X

WHAT CAME OF MR. KELLY'S WINNINGS FROM THE SOUTH SEA

Luck is a chameleon, and in November of that same year 1720, thought fit to change its complexion. The date, to be precise, was the 17th of the month. Mr. Wogan can determine on the particular day, for the reason that Mrs. Barnes carried out her threat, and sent him a laborious long letter concerning the Parson's moral iniquities. The letter reached Mr. Wogan in October, who was then cleaning his ship at Morlaix in Brittany, and what with his fifteen months of purposeless cruises, felt himself as encrusted with idleness as his ship's bottom with barnacles. It was just this eternal inactivity which no doubt induced him to take the serious view of Mrs. Barnes's epistle. 'It is a most cruel affair,' said he to Mr. Talbot, who was with him, 'and of the last importance that I should hurry to London and set it straight.'

'But you are fixed here,' said the Crow, for so Talbot was commonly called from the blackness of his complexion. 'Can I undertake the business for you?'

'No,' says Nick, shaking his head very solemn; though maybe his eye twinkled. Mr. Wogan forgets what point the plot was at then, for since the black year, 1688, there had been but one plot, though it had changed and shifted shape like the faces you see in the dark before you sleep. But he could not hear that anything immediate was intended; and it would be, therefore, the most convenient occasion to refit his ketch *Fortune*. He gave orders to that effect, travelled to Paris, obtained from General Dillon a month's leave to dispose of his own affairs, and went whistling to London like a schoolboy off on his holidays. For, to tell the truth, he was not greatly concerned at George Kelly's backslidings, but on the contrary was inclined to chuckle over them, and trusted completely to his friend's discretion.

He arrived in London on November 20, and drove boldly to Kelly's lodging in Bury Street. For the Glenshiel affair had completely blown over--there had never been more than a rumour that he was there--and as for the Fifteen, why Mr. Wogan had his pardon like the rest. That he got for his behaviour to Captain Montagu at Preston; moreover, who could know the boy Wogan that ran away from Westminster School, and his task of copying Lord Clarendon's history, in Mr. Hilton, the man of six feet four in his stockings. He found Kelly's lodgings empty.

'A letter came for him three days ago,' explained Mrs. Barnes, 'and he set off almost on the instant in an agitation so great that he did not wait to pack his valise, but had it sent after him.'

'Where to?'

'I do not know,' replied Mrs. Barnes with a sniff of the nose and a toss of the head, 'and no doubt I am a better woman for not knowing.'

'No doubt, replied Wogan gravely. 'But, Mrs. Barnes, who signed the letter? Where did it come from?'

'And how should I know that?' she cried. 'Would I demean myself by reading the letters of a nasty trull? For she's no better for all her birth, and that's not so high neither.'

'Ah,' says Wogan, 'I see you don't know who signed the letter.'

'And that's truth,' said she, 'but I saw the superscription. As for the letter, he hid it in his bosom.'

'Well, that's as good as showing the signature. Who carried his valise after him?'

'Francis Vanlear,' she said, 'the porter who plyed in St. James's Street and Piccadilly and lodged at the Crown ale-house in Germain Street.'

Thither Wogan sent for him, and when he was come asked him whither he had carried the valise.

'To Mr. Gunning's at Mussell Hill,' Vanlear answered, where he had found a horse ready saddled at the door and 'Mr. Johnson' in a great fume to be off.

Wogan gave the porter a crown for his trouble and went forthwith to Mr. Gunning's, whom he had not seen since the occasion of his coming down from Glenshiel. From Mr. Gunning he learned that Kelly had undoubtedly taken the Aberystwith road, since he had left the horse he

borrowed at Beaconsfield, and thither had Mr. Gunning sent to fetch it. Kelly's destination was consequently as clear to Wogan as the urgency of his haste, and coming back into London he dropped in at the Cocoa Tree, where he found the story of Lady Oxford and Mr. Kelly a familiar pleasantry.

He heard of it again that night at Will's coffeehouse in Covent Garden, and at Burton's in King Street, where Mr. Kelly was very well known. For, besides being close to Kelly's lodging, it was one of the houses to which his letters were directed under cover. From Burton's Wogan came back to Bury Street, and, while smoking a pipe in the parlour before going to bed, he chanced to notice his strongbox. It stood on the scrutoire by the side of Mr. Kelly's big Bible, where Wogan had left it eighteen months before. It was the brother to Mr. Kelly's strong-box, in every particular but one, and that one a stouter lock. Wogan remembered that when he had placed the box on the scrutoire the key was attached to it by a string. Now, however, he noticed that the key was gone. He was sufficiently curious to cross the room and try the lock. But the box would not open; it was securely locked. There were papers too within it, as he found out by shaking it. Kelly, then, was using the box--but for what purpose? His own box served for his few political papers. Any other papers that needed the shelter of a strong box must be love-letters. Here, then, were amorous, not political epistles. Besides, he was in the habit of burning all those which had done their work, and the rest which he needed he carried about in his own dispatch-box.

'Now, I wonder,' said Wogan, tapping the lid, 'I wonder whether a certain letter, signed--shall we say Smilinda?--and summoning my friend to Brampton Bryan, is locked up inside you.' Wogan's guess hit the truth even to the signature, though he was destined to get little satisfaction from this proof of his sagacity. The letter, he later learned, lay in box with not a few others in the same handwriting, and they all ended in the same manner with a request: 'Burn this.' Mr. Kelly would have been honest if he obeyed it, but, like many a man when passion gets hold of him, he could not part with them. Faint whispers breathed, as it seemed, from Heaven, and caught and written loud in my lady's hand, pure diamonds fetched up from the obscure mines of a woman's heart, sure he treasured them up beyond all jewels, and locked them up in Mr. Wogan's despatch-box to his own undoing.

This letter was, (Wogan learned afterwards) the most laconic of them all, and it was the most momentous. It began, 'My own Strephon,' and then Strephon was crossed out and again written on the top, and it was signed 'Smilinda' in a doubtful hand; as though, at first, Brampton Bryan had recalled to her ladyship the beginning of their affections with so overpowering a compulsion that she must needs use the names which were associated with it, and then the dear woman's modesty timidly crossed them out, and in the end love got the upper hand and wrote them in again. At least that was a small portion of all the great meanings which Kelly read in the hesitation of her ladyship's address. Between the Strephon and the Smilinda there was but one line--'Come; there is a secret. I have great need of you.' But this had been quite enough to send Mr. Kelly spurring out into the November night with such speed that he came to Oxford the next day, where he found the snow lying very deep. The snow troubled him, no doubt, because it delayed him, but he took little account of the cold beyond a sharp pang or two lest Smilinda might have caught a chilblain. For himself--well, Smilinda had need of him--the great lady turned for help to the Irish outlaw. Wasn't it always so? Her Majesty throws her glove to the page, my lord the King Cophetua goes clean daft for a beggar wench, and the obliging Cupid builds a rickety bridge whereby the despairing lovers leap into each other's arms.

Smilinda needed him! There was a tune ravished from Heaven! His whole frame moved to it as the waves to the direction of the moon. It sang in his blood, his heart beat to it, the hooves of his horse drummed it out on the road. Even the boughs of the trees whispered the words with a tender secrecy to the wind, much as the reeds whispered that other saying, ages ago, which the Queen in the fable had entrusted to them. And, 'faith, when you come to think of it, there was little difference in meaning between the two remarks. Smilinda needed Mr. Kelly! It was, after all, as much as to say 'Mr. Kelly has ass's ears.' He made such haste that on the evening of the second day after his departure from London he cantered up the drive of the Manor House.

Lady Oxford met him in the hall, and Mr. Kelly's heart gave a great jump of pride when he saw her stately figure all softened to an attitude of expectation.

'I knew you would come,' she said; and, as Mr. Kelly bent over her hand, she whispered, 'My Strephon,' for all the world as if her emotion choked her. Then she raised her voice for the servants to hear: 'My lord is from home, Mr. Johnson, but he has commissioned me at once to pay you his regrets and to act as his deputy in your business.'

Mr. Kelly was all impatience to broach his business, but her ladyship's solicitude would not allow him to speak until he had supped. She came near to waiting upon him herself, and certainly plied him with her best wine, vowing that it was ill weather for travellers, and that if he kept his glass full beside his elbow it was a sure sign he hated her. This, of course, after the servants had been dismissed. Mr. Kelly chided her for the thought, and, with a shake of the finger, quoted her a text: 'We are bidden not to look upon the wine when it is red,' said he.

'And a very good text, too,' says she; 'so, if you please, shut your eyes and drink it,' and, coming behind him, she laid her cool hand upon his eyes and forehead. So Mr. Kelly drank, and the bumper floated his wits into my lady's haven.

'Now,' says my lady; and, leading the way into her boudoir, she sat herself down before the fire, and, clasping her hands at the back of her head, smiled at Mr. Kelly.

'Strephon,' she murmured on a lilt of her voice, and with all the provocation that witchery could devise. Mr. Kelly was on his knees at her side in a moment. She laid a white hand upon his breast, and, gently holding him off:

'Tell me,' says she, 'why I sent for you.'

'Because my Smilinda needed me,' he answered with a laugh of pride. Her hand caressed his shoulder. She nodded, bit her under lip and smiled very wisely.

'What is the service Strephon can do?' cried Kelly. 'Is it to lift the world? Give me but your love and I'll accomplish that.'

Smilinda clapped her hands with delight, like a child.

'It is nothing so important,' said she. 'It is not in truth any service you can do for me, but rather one that I can do for you.'

Kelly's face lost all its light, and dropped to the glummost disappointment. He had so nursed that aspiration of doing her some great service. Through the night, through the day, it had borne him company. Some great service--that was to be the bridge of Cupid's building whereby they were to stand firm-footed on equal ground. And now it was some service Lady Oxford was to do for him. Lady Oxford noticed the change; it may have been to read the thought which it expressed, and that the thought touched her to unwonted depths. For the smile faded from her lips, her eyes became grave, thoughtful, there was a certain suspense in her attitude.

'Must the woman always owe, the man always pay?' she asked, but in a broken way, and with almost a repugnance for herself. Indeed, she barely finished the question, and then, with an abrupt laugh, crossed to the window, drew aside the curtains, and gazed out upon the darkness and the glimmering snow.

'A strange, cold world,' she said in an absent voice, 'with a strange white carpet.' Mr. Kelly in truth had given her a glimpse into a world yet stranger to her ladyship than that which her eyes beheld--a world that had an odd white carpet too, though the feet of those who paced it as often as not were stained--a world of generous impulses and unselfish devotions. Into this world Lady Oxford was peering with an uneasy curiosity. Perhaps for a moment she compared it with her own; perhaps she was caught by it and admired it; but, if so, it was with a great deal of discomfort. For she dropped the curtain petulantly across the window, and, coming back to the fire--well, what she would have said it is impossible to guess, for a gentle tap on the door was followed by a servant's entrance into the room. He carried a letter on a salver, and, advancing to Lady Oxford, offered it to her.

Now, Mr. Kelly was standing almost at the centre of the mantelpiece, Lady Oxford at one end; and they faced one another. So the man inevitably stopped between them, and, when he lifted up the salver, it was impossible but that the Parson should observe the superscription. He recognised the handwriting of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Lady Oxford recognised it too, for she flushed as she picked the letter up. But she flushed deeper as she read it through, and then crumpled it up and flung it into the fire with an anger which showed very clearly she would have done the like for Lady Mary were the writer instead of her letter within reach of her vindictive fingers.

'A strange, incomprehensible creature is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu,' said Lady Oxford with a laugh and a glance at Mr. Kelly. 'The most whimsical contradiction. She offers you a kindness with one hand and slaps you in the face with the other. For instance, this letter here. 'Twas written out of pure kindness. It completes the friendliest service, yet it ends with so rough a jest that but for Strephon's sake I should be much drawn to reject the service.'

'For my sake?' asked Kelly.

'Why, to be sure. Lady Mary gave me a piece of news a week ago in town. It was that news which made me send for you, and she writes now expressly to confirm it. But, let my Strephon answer me,' and she asked whether he had yet sent his winnings from the Mississippi to be used for the King's service.

Now, Mr. Kelly was, after all, a human being. It was all very well in the first flush of prosperity to propose to scatter his few thousands, but afterwards he had come to see that they would not go so very far. Besides, he had now obvious reasons for desiring to cut as agreeable a figure as he could. At all events the money still remained with Mr. Child, the goldsmith, and so he told her ladyship, with a little remorse.

'Then,' she cried in joy, 'that chance has come for which Smilinda has been longing. My presents, Strephon, you have always refused,' which was true enough; indeed, on the other hand, she had Mr. Kelly's royal snuff-box and a few of his jewels. 'But now I can make your fortune, and with yours my own. There's the sweetness of it,' she said, and clasped her hands on her heart. 'Your fortune, too!'

'My fortune you have made already,' said he, with other compliments proper to the occasion. But her ladyship was in a practical mood.

'Listen,' says she. 'I am made acquainted that the tide has turned. I mean, you know, in the Straits of Magellan. The South-Sea stock that has been falling so long will certainly rise in a week; the Elector is buying secretly. Lady Mary has it from Mr. Pope, and he at the first and best hands from Mr. Craggs, the secretary. Mr. Craggs will insert my name in the next list and your money I shall send to the directors with my own. You shall be rich, Strephon, on the level of your merits.'

Mr. Kelly was very well content with his one speculation, but the evident joy with which Lady Oxford anticipated serving him was worth more than his thousands.

'My gold shall be in Smilinda's coffers the morning that I get back to town,' he said.

'You must go at once,' she exclaimed, 'we must lose no time. Stay. I will travel with you tomorrow morning if you will favour me with your company'; and so a new flow of compliments carried the South Sea out of sight. But a minute or two later Mr. Kelly, chancing to look down at the hearth, said, quite inconsequently:

'We must not forget to thank Lady Mary.'

Smilinda followed the direction of his eyes, and saw that Lady Mary's letter had tumbled out of the fire and now lay, half burnt, but the other half only curled up and scorched. She shivered as though she was cold, and the better to warm herself knelt down on the hearth-rug. Then she took up the letter (which Kelly must not see) and carelessly tossed it into the fire.

'You know Lady Mary,' she said. 'Yes, you told me.'

'I do, indeed,' said Kelly, with a smile.

'I could wish you did not,' said her ladyship with a frown. Smilinda made it plain that she was jealous. Kelly laughed heartily at the assumption, which was in truth ridiculous enough.

'Who am I,' said he, 'that I should attract Lady Mary's fancy,'

'You are--my Strephon,' replied Smilinda, with a sigh of exquisite tenderness.

Kelly argued the matter on other grounds. Smilinda listened to them all.

'I have no doubt you are right,' she said, with a meek resignation. 'But I remember you spoke very warmly of the friendship you had for her, and ever since--' here she broke off shyly. 'A weak woman's empty fears,' she continued, 'but they keep her awake at nights. Well, she must even make the best of them.'

Smilinda lying awake at nights out of jealousy! There was a notion to convict Mr. Kelly of slow murder. He was on his knees in a moment, and swore that for the future on earth and in Heaven he would avoid Lady Mary's company as though she was the devil in person. It was a confused sort of oath and deprived Mr. Kelly for a time of a very good friend; but on the other hand it undoubtedly raised a load from Lady Oxford's anxieties.

She left Brampton Bryan the next morning and travelled with Mr. Kelly up to London, where the coach set them down at the King's Head in the Strand. Kelly went straight from the King's Head to the goldsmith and his money was carried to Queen's Square that same afternoon. It would seem, however, that Mr. Pope had been choused, for the market fell from little to nothing. But when the Bubble presently burst into air, Smilinda burst into tears, and Mr. Kelly was smitten to the heart for her distress.

'I have ruined thee, my Strephon,' she sobbed. She had covered her face with her hands and the tears trickled through her fingers.

'Love arms me against such ill-fortunes,' replied Kelly. 'It is only Smilinda's tears that hurt. Each one of them falls upon Strephon's heart like a drop of molten lead.'

'Ah, Strephon,' she cried. 'Thou art ruined and Smilinda's hapless hand hath dealt the blow. The arrow came from her quiver,' she being one of Dian's nymphs, you are to suppose.

Then Mr. Kelly fell to comparing himself to Procris in the fable, who was shot by her lover, and said that it was sweet to perish by her inadvertent shaft. It seems that kind of love-making has now gone out of date. But that was the humour of it when Kelly and Wogan were young. Men and women, let them but fall in love, and they were all swains and nymphs, though they dabbled in the stocks and were as hard-headed as before and afterwards.

'That odious Lady Mary,' exclaimed Smilinda. 'She was born to be my bane and curse. 'Twas her counsel that ruined my Strephon. My Strephon has kept his oath?'

Her Strephon had, but on the other hand, Mr. Wogan had sworn no oath, and would not have kept it if he had done so. He paid a visit to Lady Mary soon after Kelly's return from Brampton

Bryan. She asked him his news and gave him a budget of gossip in return.

'And Lady Oxford has sold her diamonds!' she ended.

Wogan asked how that came about, and she answered:

'Lady Oxford was here at the bassette table three weeks since. Her stakes were ever inordinately high, and she lost to me all night. She drew a queen when she should have chose the knave, the knave was Sonica. "There go my diamonds," she said, and vowing she would punt no more, went home in her chair. I could not see her or hear of her for a little. I guessed that she had run away into the country until she could wheedle enough money to pay me out of the dotard husband. So at a venture I wrote a polite letter to her, hoping that the country air would restore her credit. Well, here she is back in London and her losses paid. That means selling her diamonds.'

Wogan laughed over Lady Oxford's straits and came home to the lodging in Bury Street. Wogan's time was getting short and he must return to Morlaix. But, as has been said, he left Brittany in a hurry with very little money in his pocket, and what was left at his journey's end he had since spent in London. So he said to the Parson:

'George, my friend, I must dip into your winnings after all. For here am I with a couple of crowns,' he took them out and laid them on the table. George flushed crimson.

'Nick,' said he, 'you have two crowns more than I have.'

Wogan turned away to the window and looked out into the street, bethinking him of what Lady Mary had told him.

'Sure, Nick, it's the truth,' Kelly pleaded, entirely miscomprehending Wogan's action. 'I drew the money out of the Mississippi and sunk it in the South Sea. It's all gone. I have not two penny pieces to rub together until this day week, when my pension is paid. Nick, you'll believe that. Why, Nick, you would ha' been welcome to all that I had. But you know that. Sure you know it.'

Wogan had no such mean thought as Kelly in his fluster attributed to him. He turned back to the table.

'So you are as poor as an Irish church mouse again, are you?' he said with a smile. 'Well, here's two crowns--one for me, one for you.'

He pocketed one coin and pushed the other over to the Parson. The Parson took it up and turned it over blinking his eyes. For a moment there was an awkward sort of silence. Wogan laughed; the Parson blew his nose.

'I hear,' said Wogan, 'that Lady Oxford has lost her diamonds.'

Kelly looked up in perplexity.

'Lost her diamonds!' said he. 'Why, she wore them last night!'

'I thought the rumour was untrue,' said Wogan.

Mr. Kelly slipped his crown into his pocket. There was no more said about the matter between them, though perhaps they clasped hands at parting with a trifle more than their ordinary heartiness.

Mr. Wogan, however, told Lady Mary of the Parson's loss, and she was at no pains to discover the explanation. Lady Oxford had paid Lady Mary with the Parson's guineas. They had never been in the South Sea Bubble.

'I should like to send the money I won back to Mr. Kelly,' said Lady Mary.

'That's plainly impossible,' returned Wogan, and to this Lady Mary perforce agreed. '*Olet*,' the Latin-learned lady said, and Wogan remarked, 'Certainly,' so she put the money aside, thinking that some day she might employ it on Mr. Kelly's behalf. That night Wogan borrowed his travelling money from Mr. Carte, the historian, whom he met at the Cocoa Tree, and so set out the next morning for Brittany.

CHAPTER XI

THE PARSON DEPARTS FROM SMILINDA AND LEARNS A NUMBER OF UNPALATABLE TRUTHS

Mr. Wogan then returned to Morlaix, and, finding his ketch by this time cleaned and refitted, and two others (the *Revolution*, a big ship of 40 guns, under Morgan, which was afterwards seized by Commodore Scot at Genoa, and the *Lady Mary*, a smaller vessel of 14 guns, commanded by Captain Patrick Campbell) at anchor in the harbour, he set sail for the Downs. There they picked up four thousand small arms and a couple of hundred kintals of cannon powder, for traffic, it was alleged, on the coasts of Brazil and Madagascar. But the arms and ammunition travelled no further than Bilboa, where they were stored in the country house of Mr. Brown, an Irish merchant of that part, against the next expedition to England. At Bilboa the three ships parted, and Mr. Wogan, taking in upon freight such goods as he could get, sailed to Genoa, and lay there behind the Mole.

Nor was the Parson to tarry long behind him in London; for less than a fortnight after Wogan's departure, he was sent to carry to Rome, for the Chevalier's approval, a scheme of a lottery for raising a quarter of a million pounds, which Mr. Christopher Layer (later hanged) most ingeniously imagined. With the scheme he carried some silk stockings as a present for the Chevalier and his spouse. This was none of the Bishop of Rochester's work, who knew nothing of Mr. Layer, and of what was later plotted by bold and impatient spirits. The Parson had sad work parting with Smilinda, but made light of the separation to save the lady from distress, and she had happily broken a bank at pharo that same night, which withheld her from entirely breaking her heart. Still, it was as affecting an affair as one could wish for.

The Parson received certain orders of Atterbury's as to business with General Dillon, the Chevalier's manager in Paris, just before he was to start; and, coming from the Deanery at Westminster where the Bishop resided, he walked at once through Petty France to Queen's Square. Lady Oxford's house was all in a blaze of light with figures moving to and fro upon the blinds of the windows. 'Mr. Johnson' was announced, but for some little while could not get a private word with her ladyship, and so stood of one side, taking his fill of that perfumed world of fans and hoops, of sparkling eyes and patches and false hearts wherein Lady Oxford so fitly moved. Many of the faces which flitted before his eyes were strange to him, but one he remarked in particular--a strong, square sort of face set on the top of an elegant figure that wore the uniform of the King's Guards. Mr. Kelly had seen that face under the oil-lamp of a portico in Ryder Street on the occasion when he and Nicholas Wogan set out on their first journey to Brampton Bryan, and the officer who owned the face was now a certain Colonel Montague.

Kelly remarked him because he was playing at the same table with her ladyship, and losing his money to her with all the grace in the world. At last Lady Oxford rose, and, coming towards him:

'Well?' she murmured, 'my Strephon is pale.'

'I leave for Rome to-morrow morning,' he returned in a whisper. At that her hand went up to her heart, and she caught her breath.

'Wait,' said she, and went back to her cards. As the guests were departing some two hours later, she called to Kelly openly.

'Mr. Johnson leaves for Paris to-morrow morning, and has the great kindness to carry over some of my brocades, which indeed need much better repairing than they can get in London.'

It made an excuse for Mr. Johnson to stay, but none the less provoked a smile here and there; and Colonel Montague, deliberately coming to a stop a few paces from Kelly, took careful stock of him. The Colonel did not say a word, but just looked him over. Mr. Kelly was tickled by the man's impudence, and turned slowly round on his heels to give him an opportunity of admiring his back. Then he faced him again. The Colonel gravely bowed his thanks for Mr. Kelly's politeness, Mr. Kelly as gravely returned the bow, and the Colonel stalked out of the door. It was in this way that Mr. Kelly and the Colonel first met.

But the moment Smilinda and Strephon were left alone!

'Oh,' wailed Smilinda, and her arms went round Strephon's neck. '*Heureuse en jeu, malheureuse en amour*. O fatal cards, would that I had lost this dross!' cries she, with her eyes on the glittering heap of guineas and doubloons strewed about the table. 'Oh, Strephon, thou wilt forget me in another's arms. I dread the French syrens.'

And then Mr. Kelly to the same tune:

'Never will I forget Smilinda. If I come back with the King, and he makes me a Bishop, with a pastoral crook, thy Strephon will still be true.'

Whereat the lady laughed, though Kelly was jesting with a heavy heart, and vowed that Lady Mary would write a ballad on 'Strephon, or the Faithful Bishop.' Then she fell into a story of lovely Mrs. Tusher, the Bishop of Ealing's wife, who was certainly more fair than faithful. Next

she wept again, and so yawned, and gave him her portrait in miniature.

'You will not part with it--never--never,' she implored.

The portrait was beautifully set with diamonds.

'It shall be buried with me,' said Kelly, and so Lady Oxford let him go, but called him back again when he was through the door to make him promise again that he would not part with her portrait. Mr. Kelly wondered a little at her insistence, but set it down to the strength of her affection. So he departed from the cave of the enchantress with many vows of mutual constancy and went to Rome, and from Rome he came back to Genoa, where he fell in with Nicholas Wogan.

Mr. Wogan remembers very well one night on which the pair of them, after cracking a bottle in Grimble's tavern, came down to the water-gate and were rowed on board of Wogan's ketch. This was in the spring of the year 1721, some four or five months since the Parson had left England, and Wogan thought it altogether a very suitable occasion for what he had to say. He took the Parson down into his cabin, and there, while the lamp flecked the mahogany panels with light and shade, and the water tinkled against the ship's planks as it swung with the tide, he told him all that he had surmised of Lady Oxford's character, and how Lady Mary had corroborated his surmises. At the first Mr. Kelly would hear nothing of his arguments.

'It is pure treason,' said he. 'From any other man but you, Nick, I would not have listened to more than a word, and that word I would have made him eat. But I take it ill even from you. Why do you tell me this now? Why did you not tell it me in London, when I could have given her ladyship a chance of answering the slander?'

'Why,' replied Wogan, 'because I know very well the answer she would have made to you--a few words of no account whatever, and her soft arms about your neck, and you'd have been convinced. But now, when you have not seen her for so long, there's a chance you may come to your senses. Did you never wonder what brought Scrope to Brampton Bryan?'

'No need for wonder since she told me.'

'She told you, did she? Well, I'm telling you now, and do you sit there until I have told you, for Mr. Scrope's history you are going to hear. Bah, leave that bodkin of a sword alone. If you draw it, upon my soul I'll knock you down and kneel on your chest. Mr. Scrope went before you in her ladyship's affections.'

Here Mr. Kelly flinched as though he had been struck, and thereafter sat with a white stern face as though he would not condescend to answer the insinuation. 'Sure he was a gentleman--out of Leicestershire, and of some fortune, which fortune Lady Oxford spent for him. He was besides a sad, pertinacious fellow, and nothing would content him but she must elope with him from her old husband, and make for themselves a Paradise on the Rhine. It appears that he talked all the old nonsense--they were man and wife in the sight of God, and the rest of it. Her ladyship was put to it for shifts and excuses, and at the last, what with his money being almost spent, and his suit more pressing, she fled into the country where we met her. Scrope was no better than a kitten before its eyes are opened, and, getting together what was left of his fortune, followed her with a chaise, meaning to carry her off there and then. However, he found us there, and I take it that opened his eyes. And I would have you beware of Mr. Scrope, George. A kitten becomes a cat, and a cat has claws. It is Lady Mary's thought that you have not heard the last of him, for his conscience hath made him a kind of gentleman spy on the honest party.'

George, who in spite of himself could not but see how exactly Wogan's account fitted in with and explained Scrope's attempt after the masquerade, caught at Lady Mary's name with an eager relief.

'Ah, it was she gave you this flimsy story,' he cried, leaning forward over the table. 'There's more malice in it than truth, Nick. The pair of them have been at loggerheads this long while. Lady Mary never could suffer a woman who can hold her own against her. Why, Nick, you have been gulled,' and he lit his pipe, which he had let go out.

'Oh, and have I? Well, at all events, I have not stripped myself of every penny in order to pay Lady Oxford's losses at cards. Scrope is not the only man whom her ladyship has sucked dry.'

'What do you mean?' cried Kelly, letting his pipe slip out of his fingers and break on the floor. Wogan told him of his visit to Lady Mary, and the story was so circumstantial, the dates of the loss at cards and the payment so fitted with Lady Oxford's message to Kelly and her proposal as to the placing of his fortune, that it could not but give him pause.

'It is not true,' was all he could find to say, and 'I'll not believe it,' and so fell to silence.

'You'll be wanting another pipe,' said Wogan. He fetched one from a cupboard and filled it. The two men smoked for a while in silence. Then Kelly burst out of a sudden:

'Nick, the fool that I was ever to preach that sermon in Dublin,' and stopped. Wogan knew well enough what the Parson meant. His thoughts had gone back to the little parsonage, and the rambling cure of half a dozen parishes, and the quiet library, and evenings by the inn-fire, where

he would tell his little trivial stories of the day's doings. It was always that dream he would play with and fondle when the world went wrong with him, though to be sure, could the dream have come true, he would have been the unhappiest man that ever breathed Irish air.

'Shall we go on deck?' Wogan proposed.

It was a fine clear night, but there was no moon. The riding-lights of ships at anchor were dotted about the harbour, the stars blazed in a rich sky; the water rippled black and seemed to flash sparks where the lights struck it; outside the harbour the Mediterranean stretched away smooth as a slab of marble. Kelly stood in the chains while Wogan paced up and down the deck. The Parson was in for his black hour, and silent companionship is the only alleviation for the trouble. After a time he came towards Wogan and caught him by the arm, but so tight that Wogan could feel his friend's finger-nails through the thick sleeves of his coat.

'I'll not believe it,' Kelly argued; but it was against himself he was arguing now, as Wogan perceived, and had the discretion to hold his tongue. "Faith," he continued, 'she came into my life like a glint of the sun into a musty dark room,' and then he suddenly put his hand into his bosom and drew out something at which he looked for a moment. He laughed bitterly and swung his arm back. Before, however, he could throw that something into the sea Wogan caught his hand.

'Sure,' said he, 'I saw a sparkle of diamonds.'

Kelly opened his hand and showed a miniature.

'Lady Oxford's diamonds,' he answered bitterly, 'which she did not sell, but gave out of a loving, generous heart.'

'George, you're moon-struck,' said Wogan. 'Diamonds, after all, are always diamonds.'

'True,' said Kelly, 'and I promised never to part with them,' he sneered. He put the miniature back in his pocket, and then dropping his arm to his side said,

'Put me ashore, Nick. I will see you to-morrow. I am very tired.'

But in the morning he was gone, and a few days later Nick, who was not spared certain prickings of conscience for the hand he had taken in bringing about the Parson's misfortunes (he had just now, by hindering him from throwing away the miniature, taken more of a hand than he guessed), sailed out from Genoa.

The rest of that year '21 was a busy time for all engaged in forwarding the Great Affair. England itself seemed ripe for the attempt, and it was finally determined to hazard it in the spring of the next year, when the Elector would be in Hanover. The new plan was that the exiled Duke of Ormond, whom the soldiers were thought to love, should sail from Spain with the Earl Marischal, Morgan, and Halstead, commanding some ragged regiments of Mr. Wogan's countrymen. The Duke was to land in the west, the King was to be at Antwerp ready to come over, and the young Prince Charles of Wales, who would then be not quite two years old, was to be carried to the Highlands. A mob was to be in readiness in town, with arms secretly buried; the soldiers were expected to declare for High Church and Ormond; and in a word the 'honest party' was to secure its interest on its own bottom, without foreign help, which the English people has never loved. The rich lords, but not Bishop Atterbury, knew of the beginning of this scheme, but abandoned it. They did not know, or only Lords North and Grey knew, that the scheme lived on without them.

Mr. Kelly therefore had his hands full, and it was very well for him that it was so. There were things at stake of more moment than his love-affairs, as he was the first to recognise. Yet, even so, he had time enough, in the saddle and on the sea, to plumb the black depths of his chagrin and to toss to and fro that shuttlecock of a question, whether he should accuse her ladyship for her trickeries or himself for misdoubting her. However, he got a complete answer to that question before the year was out. It was his habit now, whenever he was in London, to skulk out of sight and knowledge of Lady Oxford, to avoid theatres, routs, drums, and all places where she might be met, and Mr. Carte the historian took his place when it was necessary to visit Lord Oxford in the country. Mr. Carte had a ready pretence, for Lord Oxford kept a great store of old manuscripts concerning the history of the country, and these beauties, it is to be feared, came somewhat between Mr. Carte and his business, just as her ladyship's eyes had come between Mr. Kelly's and his. Accordingly the Parson saw little of her ladyship and heard less, since his friends avoided all mention of her and he himself asked no questions.

'Saw little,' and the phrase is intended. For often enough of an evening his misery would fetch him out of the coffee houses and lead him like a man blindfold to where her ladyship was accustomed to visit. There he would stand in the darkness of the street until the door opened and Lady Oxford, all smiles and hooped petticoats, would trip gaily out to her chair. But very likely habit--the habit of her conversation and appearance--had as much to do with this particular folly as any despairing passion. How many lovers the wide world over fancy they are bemoaning their broken hearts, when they are only deploring their broken habits! Well, Mr. Kelly, at all events, took the matter *au grand sérieux*, and so one night saw her ladyship come out from the porch of Drury Lane theatre in company with Colonel Montague.

There is one unprofitable piece of knowledge which a man acquires who has ever had a woman make love to him; he knows when that woman is making love to someone else. Lady Oxford's modest droop of the head when the Colonel spoke, her shy sidelong smile at him, her red lips a trifle parted as though his mere presence held her in a pleased suspense--all these tokens were familiar to Mr. Kelly as his daily bread, and he went home eating his own heart, and nursing a quite unjustifiable resentment against Nicholas Wogan for that he ever saved the Colonel's life. It did not take Kelly long to discover that his suspicions were correct. A few questions to his friends, who for his sake had kept silence, and the truth was out. Lady Oxford's constancy had lasted precisely seven weeks before the Whig colonel had stepped into the Jacobite parson's shoes. Mr. Kelly put his heart beneath his heel and now stamped her image out of it. Then he went upon his way, and the King's business took him to Avignon.

CHAPTER XII

THE PARSON MEETS SCROPE FOR THE THIRD TIME, AND WHAT CAME OF THE MEETING

It was early in the year 1722 when Mr. Kelly came to *la ville sonnante*, and took a lodging at L'Auberge des Papes in the Rue des Trois Faucons. He brought with him a sum of 5,000*l.* collected in England, and this sum he was to hand over to a messenger from the Duke of Ormond, who was then at Corunna in Spain, and, what with his disbursements in the purchase of arms, and the support of Irish troops, was hard put to it for money.

It was therefore of the last importance that this sum should come safe to Corunna, and so extraordinary precautions were taken to ensure that result. The Parson, since he did not know who the messenger might be, was to wait every morning between the hours of nine and ten on the first bench to the left of the Porte du Rhone in the boulevard outside the city walls, until a man should ask him if he had any comfortable greeting for Aunt Anne, that being the cant name for the Duke. This man was thereafter to prove to Mr. Kelly's satisfaction that he was indeed the messenger expected.

Now, the messenger was delayed in his journey, and so for a week George Kelly, having deposited his money with Mr. Philabe, the banker, sat every morning on his bench with what patience he might. He came in consequence to take particular notice of an oldish man and a rosebud of a girl who walked along the boulevard every morning at the time that he was waiting. They were accompanied by a French poodle dog, and indeed it was the poodle dog which first attracted Mr. Kelly's attention to the couple. It has already been said that Mr. Kelly had a trick of catching a woman's eyes, though this quality implies no great merit. On the other hand he drew dogs and children to him, and that implies a very great merit, as you may observe from this, that there is never a human being betwixt here and Cathay will admit that dogs and children have a dislike for him.

The poodle dog, then, comes to a halt opposite Mr. Kelly's bench on the very first morning that he sat there, cocks his ears, lifts a forefoot from the ground, and, looking after the old man and the young girl, says plain as print, 'Here, wait a bit! There's something on this bench very well worth looking into.' However, his master and mistress were in a close conversation and so the poodle puts his foot on the ground and trots after them. But the next morning he came up to the bench, puts his head of one side to display the fine blue riband round his neck, squats on his haunches, and flops a paw on to the Parson's knee.

'How d'ye do?' says the Parson politely.

'I think I'll stretch myself, thank you,' says the poodle, and promptly proceeds to do so, using Mr. Kelly's knee as a purchase for his paws. He was still engaged upon this exercise when his young mistress missed him. She whistled; the poodle looked at the Parson with the clearest invitation.

'Won't you come too?'

'I have not been presented,' replied the Parson.

Thereupon the girl turned round.

'Harlequin,' she called to the dog, and showed Mr. Kelly as sweet a face as a young man ever deserved to see. It was fresh and clear as the morning dew, with frank eyes and a scarlet bow of a mouth ready for a laugh. 'Harlequin!' said Mr. Kelly to himself with a start, as he looked

towards the girl. Harlequin trotted off to his mistress, and got prettily chided for his forwardness, of which chiding he made little or no account, and very properly. It is not every dog that achieves immortality by stretching itself against a stranger's knee. But Harlequin did. For had Harlequin not made Mr. Kelly's acquaintance, he would never have found a niche in Mr. Swift's verses.

Now let me tell you plainly, Sir,
Our witness is a real cur,
A dog of spirit for his years,
Has twice two legs, two hanging ears,
His name is *Harlequin*, I wot,
And that's a name in every plot:

* * * * *

His answers were extremely witty
Before the secret wise Committee;
Confest as plain as he could bark,
Then with his fore-foot left his mark:

wrote the Dean of St. Patrick's concerning this very poodle dog of Miss Rose Townley.

For Rose Townley was the girl's name, as the Parson now knew, and the old gentleman was her father, who had tended Mr. Nicholas Wogan after his wounds in the year '15 at Preston. Mr. Wogan had more than once spoken to Kelly of Dr. Townley and his daughter Rose, who had retired to Avignon, after the Rising, and he had made mention of their poodle Harlequin, of which poodle the present or reigning dog, Harlequin II., was the son and heir. So that, hearing the name called out by Rose, Kelly was aware who the two people were. Dr. Townley had been suspected in the Rising, and therefore had settled at Avignon as physician to the Duke of Ormond, and when the nobleman left the town, remained because he was grown old, and had lost his taste for politics and warrings. He had, moreover, received his pardon for his share in the struggle, and was indeed at this very time preparing to return into England. But of this Kelly was not aware.

The next morning Kelly was again on his bench, and again Dr. Townley and his daughter passed him. Harlequin came forward at once to wish the Parson good-morning. Rose spoke to her father, plainly telling him of Harlequin's new friendship, for the Doctor looked up towards Mr. Kelly and the girl looked away. In consequence there sprang up a queer sort of acquaintance between the Doctor and his daughter on the one hand, and Parson Kelly on the other. Every morning they looked for him on his bench; every morning he had a few words with Harlequin.

Doubtless he would have pursued the acquaintance further, but for Rose. She it was who kept the Parson from approaching Dr. Townley. For he was still sore with Lady Oxford's treacheries, and feminine beauty was *vanitas vanitatum* to him. Moreover, though he had snatched her ladyship's image out of his heart, some of her sayings had stuck in his mind, and amongst her sayings not a few were aimed at girls. Smilinda was a woman, and saw a rival in each youthful beauty. 'Girls of our time,' she would say with a sneer, 'were very kind, at all events, whatever one might think of their looks. And to hear them speak of marriage, why one would fancy oneself in the company of rakes dressed up like the other sex for a masquerade.' She would gloat over the misadventures of poor Mistress Dolly Walpole, the Minister's sister, by the hour, she had even written a ballad thereon, 'The Dolliad,' and since Mr. Kelly had never had been much in the society of young unmarried women, he had insensibly imbibed a deal of Smilinda's philosophy upon this head. And so he waited for the messenger in silence.

Now, upon the fourth day Mr. Philabe the banker sent round for the Parson to L'Auberge des Papes, and, when he was come, told him that on that morning a man called at the bank with a letter which he gave to a clerk. The clerk carried the letter to Mr. Philabe, who opened it. It enclosed a second letter superscribed to Mr. George Kelly, and prayed the banker to add to the superscription Mr. Kelly's address. This Mr. Philabe would not do, but sent out word that he would take care the letter came into Kelly's hands. The man, however, who had brought it immediately replied that it was of the last importance the letter should be delivered at once: otherwise there was no use in delivering it at all. If Mr. Philabe would send a messenger at once, well and good; if not, would he kindly return the letter forthwith.

This request roused Mr. Philabe's suspicions. For if he sent a messenger, as he was prayed to do, the man could follow him, and as easily discover the address as if Philabe had written it on the note. He replied consequently that neither could he accede to this request, but that Mr. Kelly should most certainly have the letter that day.

Upon this the man insisted that the letter should be returned to him, but the more strenuously he insisted, the stronger became Mr. Philabe's suspicions, until he determined not to part with the letter at all, and the man finally went away very ill-pleased.

Mr. Philabe, as he told this story, handed the letter to Mr. Kelly, who broke open the seal, and found nothing but a clean sheet of paper.

'Little doubt,' said he, 'why the fellow wanted his letter back. It is a pure trick to know where I

lodge. What was he like?'

'He wore a travelling-dress,' said Mr. Philabe, 'and a cocked hat.'

'And very likely a pair of boots,' added Kelly. 'But this tells me very little of his looks.'

Mr. Philabe was a poor hand at a description, and beyond that the man had a nose, two eyes, a mouth, two legs, and a pair of arms, Kelly learned nothing whatever of his appearance.

That very day, however, the mystery was to be made clear. Between daylight and dark Mr. Kelly chanced to walk up the narrow Rue St. Agricole, and had just come abreast of the broad flight of steps which leads upwards to the church, when a man leaped down in front of him.

'I beg your pardon,' said the Parson politely stepping aside.

'That is not enough,' said the other, and, turning on his heel, he faced Kelly and barred the way.

Kelly recognised the voice, recognised the face.

'Ah,' cried he, 'Mr. Scrope.' His first feeling was one almost of exultation. In the face of his enemy he forgot altogether that there was no longer any amorous reason for his enmity. He almost forgot, too, what he had heard from Wogan about Mr. Scrope's supposed quality as a gentleman spy. 'The third time,' he said with a laugh. 'I promised myself the third time.'

Scrope nodded his head.

'We are of one mind, then.' He looked up and down the street. It was empty from end to end. 'There is a little square terrace at the top of these steps, with blank walls upon the two sides, and the church door upon the third. The terrace will be very suitable and quiet.'

He turned as he spoke and set a foot upon the lowest step.

'One moment,' said Kelly. During Scrope's words he had reflected. Scrope and himself, politics apart, were really in the like case. For if he had followed Scrope in her ladyship's caprices, Montague had followed him, 'as Amurath to Amurath succeeds.' His enmity quite died away, and gave place to something very like a fellow-feeling. Moreover, he had to consider the messenger from the Duke of Ormond and the 5,000*l.* in Mr. Philabe's keeping.

'One moment,' he said. Scrope stopped with a sneer.

'If you can remain a few days at Avignon,' he continued, 'I shall be happy to oblige you in whatever you will. For the moment I have duties.'

'Of course,' interrupted Scrope. 'Duties are wonderful convenient things when one's bones are in danger. The pious Æneas knew that very well, Mr. Kelly; but then the worthy army-chaplain had not a Scrope upon his heels for the best part of a twelvemonth.'

'Oh,' cried Kelly, 'then it is you who have followed me.' More than once he had heard that his steps were dogged.

'Over a wearisome stretch of Europe,' agreed Scrope.

'It was you who came to Philabe this morning?'

'Who else? So, you see, I have been at some pains to come up with you, and those duties must wait.'

'Those duties,' replied Kelly, 'are so urgent that I am in two minds whether to take to my heels.'

To any man who was acquainted with the Parson this statement would have been proof enough that there was all the necessity in the world for delay. But then Scrope knew very little of his opponent, and:

'I am not at all surprised to hear that,' he replied contemptuously.

Mr. Kelly reddened at the sneer, but kept a tight hold upon his patience.

'Understand me,' said he quietly. 'If I ran away now, I should most certainly follow you afterwards, as you have followed me, and when I came up with you I should kill you.'

'And understand me,' broke in Scrope. His cold, sneering face suddenly lighted up with a fierce passion. 'Neither you will follow me, nor I you. We stand face to face, as I have hoped we should until I have dreamed the hope true. You have robbed me of what I held most precious. You have done worse. You have proved to me that what I held most precious was never worth so much as a cracked farthing. That morning I came to Brampton Bryan, I came at Lady Oxford's bidding. We were to have done with pretences for good and all. Oh, she had forgotten, if you will, but if she had forgotten, who made her forget? You, Mr. Kelly, the sneaking cuckoo! I would have

worn her proudly, for all the world to see--the star upon my coat, the scarf across my breast. I would have faced my fellows with one arm for her waist, and the other for a naked sword to silence their slanders with. Well, there's no waist, but there's still the naked sword.' As he spoke, with his left hand he jerked his sword out of the scabbard, and caught it by the hilt with his right. 'There's still the naked sword,' he laughed, with a sort of thrill in the laugh, and made the blade whistle through the air. There's still the sword and a vile cuckoo of a parson--'

'That's enough,' cried Kelly, marching to the steps in an anger now not a whit less than Scrope's, for there was a certain sting of truth in Scrope's abuse which put him to shame; 'more than enough.'

'No, not more than enough,' said Scrope quietly, and he followed.

'You want a little more?' said Kelly, who had reflected. 'Very well; your heroics may be candid enough, but it is less Mr. Scrope the lover and rival than Mr. Scrope, the spy, that I regard with a certain misliking.'

'*Assez*, you die!' said Scrope, with a hiss in his voice.

The space at the top of the steps was a pretty enough spot for their purpose. It was open only on the side towards the street, which was quite deserted, and raised so high above the pathway that a passer-by would see nothing of what was doing. On the other hand, however, the light was failing. Scrope was for bringing the encounter to a speedy end, and drove at the Parson in an impetuous fury. His sword glittered and darted very chill and cold in that grey twilight. He thrust swift as a serpent.

The blood of the Parson was also up. He had at first regarded Scrope's challenge as a pure piece of irony. Why should two men fight for a hilding who had equally jilted and cheated the pair? That had been George's first thought; but now his rapier was drawn for the Cause, and to rid it of a dangerous enemy. Scrope was probably on the track of Ormond and the gold, as well as on that of his rival.

The Parson was as brave as steel, but (though he never knew it) was no true master of the play. The men rushed at each other; their swords were locked, they were breast to breast; George wrenched his blade free, leaped back to get his distance, struck his heel against a cobbler, and the next moment he felt Scrope's blade burn into his side. Kelly clasped his hand over the wound, and sank on to the ground. The blood came through between his fingers; he snatched the cravat from his neck, and made a poor shift to bandage it about his body. The one thought in his mind was of the Duke of Ormond's messenger. Perhaps the very next morning he might come to Avignon and find no one on the bench.

'A surgeon,' he whispered to Scrope, saving his breath. Scrope was quietly wiping his sword, and made no reply.

'A surgeon,' repeated Kelly. 'I must live.'

'Or die,' said Scrope carelessly. He pulled on his coat, and came close to Kelly. Then he suddenly felt in his pockets.

'No,' he said, with an air of disappointment. 'I was hoping that I had a copy of Virgil wherewith to soothe your last moments. Shall I take a message to her ladyship?' He picked up his hat. 'Or shall I ask Mr. Nicholas Wogan to write a ballad--"Strephon's Farewell to his Smilinda"? Mr. Wogan would, I think, be extremely amusing with so pathological a subject for his Muse. Well, it grows late. You will, no doubt, excuse me.'

He made a bow to the Parson, clapped his hat on his head, and walked, whistling to the steps. He stopped when he had descended a couple of them, and, turning, shook his head thoughtfully at Kelly.

'But I am grieved I have no Virgil,' he said, and so disappeared below the level of the terrace.

Kelly listened till the sound of his feet died slowly down the street. Then he began to drag himself painfully upon his knees towards the steps. He did not dare to get to his feet, lest his blood should flow faster from his wound. He did not dare to shout. He crawled forward over the flags for miles, it seemed; then the knot of the bandage got loose, and a great faintness came over him. With fumbling fingers he re-tied the knot; the flags began to heave before his eyes like waves of the sea, the silence roared in his ears. He looked upwards, and a spinning procession of houses and churches turned him giddy. He sank down on his side, and then he was aware of something wet that rasped along his hand. He looked down. There was a joyous little bark, and the something wet rasped along his cheek.

'Harlequin!' he thought, with a pang of hope. He summoned all his strength, all his will; the houses ceased to spin. He let himself down to his full length, with great care drew a scrap from one pocket, a pencil from the other, and laboriously wrote. Then he poked the paper underneath the ribbon round the poodle's neck. 'Home!' he cried, clapping his hands; and fainted.

But ten minutes afterwards Miss Rose Townley unfolded a slip of paper, with here and there

the mark of a bloody thumb, and written on it these words, 'Help Harlequin's friend'; and at her feet a bright-eyed poodle dog stood, wagging his tail, ready to conduct her to the spot where Harlequin's friend lay in sore need.

CHAPTER XIII

OF THE ROSE AND THE ROSE-GARDEN IN AVIGNON.

Life is not wholly the lopsided business that some would have you esteem it. Here was the Parson paying, with a sword-thrust of the first quality, for a love-affair that was dead already; over and ended. That was bad, but, to balance his accounts, the Parson waked up from his swoon in Dr. Townley's house, with the Doctor's beautiful daughter, Rose, to be his nurse-tender. Lady Oxford had caused his duel with Scrope, to be sure, but she had thereby, as it were, cast him straight into the girl's arms, and in that very condition which was likely to make her most tender to him. Carry the conceit a little farther, and you'll see that here was Mr. Kelly, through her ladyship's behaviours, imprisoned in the hands of one of those very creatures which she was ever persuading him to avoid: namely, that terrible monster a girl, and she very young, frank, and beautiful. When the Parson came to his senses, he called Dr. Townley to his side, and telling him who he was, and how that, being a friend of Mr. Wogan's, he knew the doctor from hearing his daughter call the dog Harlequin, he continued:

'You were at Preston with my friend, and I therefore have the less reluctance in asking a service of you beyond those you have already done me;' and he began to tell the Doctor of the expected messenger from Spain whom he was to meet on the boulevard.

But the Doctor interrupted him.

'Mr. Wogan is indeed my friend, though I have seen nothing of him these past six years; and his name is a passport into our friendship, as my daughter will assure you. So, Mr. Kelly, such kindness and hospitality as we can show you you may count upon; but--well, I had my surfeit of politics at Preston. I have no longer any faith in your cause, in your King. I do not think that he will come before the coming of the Coquecigrues. I am, indeed, leaving Avignon in a few months, and hope for nothing better than a peaceful life in some village of my own country under the King who now sits on the throne.

This he said very kindly, but with a certain solemnity which quite closed Mr. Kelly's lips; and so, giving him a sleeping potion, the Doctor left the room. In spite of the potion, however, the Parson made but a restless night of it, and more than once from under his half-closed lids he saw the doctor come to his bedside; but towards morning he fell into something of a sleep and woke up in the broad daylight with a start, as a man will who has something on his mind. In a minute or two Mr. Kelly remembered what that something was. He got out of his bed, and, holding the door open, listened. There was no sound audible at all except the ticking of a clock in the parlour below. Mr. Kelly drew on his clothes carefully, so as not to disarrange the bandages of his wound, and, taking his shoes in his hand, crept down the stairs. It was a slow, painful business, and more than once he had to sit down on the steps and rest. He glanced into the parlour as he passed, and saw, to his great relief, that it was only half past eight in the morning. What with fomentations and bandages Mr. Kelly had kept the tiny household out of bed to a late hour, and so no one was astir. He drew back the bolt and slipped out of the house.

Half an hour later, Dr. Townley came into the bedroom and found it empty. He scratched his head to ease his perplexity, and then wisely took counsel with his daughter.

'There was a man he expected to come for him,' he said. 'He was very urgent last night that I should see to it. But I cut him short, and so do not know where they were to meet with each other.'

At that moment the clock in the parlour struck nine.

'I know!' cried Rose on a sudden, and dragged her father off to the boulevard outside the Porte du Rhone, where they discovered Mr. Kelly sitting bolt upright on his bench, with a flushed red face and extraordinarily bright eyes, chattering to himself like a monkey.

The Parson lay for a week after that at death's door, and it needed all Dr. Townley's skill and Rose's nursing to keep him out of the grave. Meanwhile the Duke of Ormond's messenger arrived from Corunna, and kicked his heels on the boulevard until Mr. Kelly recovered his senses and summoned Mr. Philabe to his aid. Mr. Philabe the next morning took Kelly's place on the bench,

and that day the money changed hands and the messenger started back post-haste to Corunna. At Corunna he told the story of the Parson's misfortune in more than one café, and so it came shortly to Wogan's ears, who put in with his ship at that port in order to give up his command.

The reason for this change in Wogan's condition was simple enough. Sufficient arms and ammunition had now been collected at Bilboa, and it was become urgent that the plans for the rising of the soldiers in England, and the capture of the Tower of London, should be taken earnestly in hand. The Duke of Ormond, who was to land in the West, was supposed a great favourite with the English troops, but it was none the less necessary that their favour should be properly directed. To that end Mr. Talbot, Tyrell, and Nicholas Wogan, amongst others, were deputed to travel into England, ready for the moment of striking. Nick was to have the rank of a colonel, and was bidden to repair to Paris by a certain date, where he was to take his instructions from General Dillon and the Earl of Mar. Now that date gave him half a week or so of leisure, and he knew of no better use to which he could put it than in stopping at Avignon, which lay directly in his path to Paris.

But before he reached the olives of Provence Mr. Kelly was convalescent and much had happened. How it had happened Mr. Wogan only discovered by hints which the Parson let slip unconsciously. For George had a complete distaste for the sensibilities, and, after all, a true man, even in the company of his closest friend, never does more than touch lightly upon the fringe of what he holds most sacred. He said that he was recovered of two fevers at one and the same time, and by the same ministering hands, and so was come forth into a sweet, cool life and a quiet air. His affairs, whether of stocks in the Mississippi scheme or of the Great Business, went clean out of his mind. His heart was swept and garnished like the man's in the Parable, and almost unawares a woman opened the door and stepped in, bringing with her train seven virtues, as of modesty, innocence, faith, cheerfulness, youth, courage, and love--qualities no better nor no fairer than herself.

How did it begin? Why, at the first there would be a smiling face at the doorway to wish him a good morning, or if he had slept ill a sweet look of anxious fear which would make up for a dozen sleepless nights. When he could get up from his bed and come into the parlour, the dog Harlequin, and Rose, and he became children and playfellows together, for the brute had been taught a hundred pretty tricks that would make a dying man laugh; until at length the girl grew familiar, and was seated at the very hearth and centre of his affections, where her memory remains enshrined.

Mr. Kelly spoke frankly of the matter only once in Mr. Wogan's hearing, and that was many years afterwards, and then he was not speaking of the matter at all. It was Lady Mary Wortley who set him on to it one night.

For she quoted a saying of some sage or another. 'In a man,' said she, 'desire begets love, and in a woman love begets desire.'

'And that is true,' said Kelly. 'I do think the steadfast and honourable passions between our sex and women are apt to have their beginnings on the woman's side, and then, being perceived and most gratefully welcomed, light up as pure a flame in the heart of a man. For otherwise, if a man sees a woman that she is fair, as King David saw Bathsheba, and so covets her, his appetite may in the end turn to love or may not. But if his eyes are first opened to an innocent woman's love, he being at best a sinful creature, he is then stirred with a wonderful amazement of grateful tenderness which never can pass away, but must endure, as I hold, even after death.' Which was all very modish and philosophical, and meant--well, just what anyone who had visited Avignon in February of the year '22 might have seen with half an eye. Rose was in love with the Parson and the Parson knew it, and so fell in love with Rose.

Mr. Wogan reached Avignon in the afternoon. The Doctor's house stood a stone's throw from the Palace of the Emperor Constantine, with a little garden at the back which ran down to the city wall. The top of the wall was laid out as a walk with a chair or two, and there Wogan found the Parson and Rose Townley. It was five years and more since Wogan had seen Rose Townley, and she was grown from a child to a woman. He paid her a foolish compliment, and then the three of them fell into an awkward silence. Mr. Wogan asked Kelly for a history of his wound, and then:

'So 'twas Scrope. Lady Mary was right when she warned me we had not seen the last of him. 'Faith, George, it was my fault. For, d'ye see, if I had not been so fond of my poetry I should have made my account with the gentleman at the gates of Brampton Bryan Manor, and you would never have been troubled with him at all.'

"Brampton Bryan?" asked Rose. "Where is that?"

Mr. Kelly made no answer, and perhaps Wogan's remark was not the discreetest in the world. Miss Rose would not forget that name, Brampton Bryan. At all events, the three of them fell to silence once more, and Mr. Wogan knew that he was trespassing and that he would have done better to have journeyed straight to Paris. Rose, however, came to the rescue and made him tell over again, as he had told her often before, his stories of the march to Preston. But, whereas before she had listened to them with a great enthusiasm and an eagerness for more, now her colour came and went as though they frightened her, and she would glance with a quick

apprehension towards the Parson.

'And the battles are to be fought all over again,' she said, clasping her hands on her knees, and then plied Wogan for more details. She shivered at the thought of wounds and cannon-balls and swords, yet she must know to the very last word all that was to be described of them. So, until the sun sank behind the low green hills of the Cevennes, and the Rhone at their feet, in that land of olives, took on a pure olive tint. Then she rose and went into the house to prepare the supper, leaving the two friends together; and it presently appeared that Rose Townley was not the only one who was frightened.

The Parson watched her as she went down the garden, brushing the pink blossoms from the boughs of a peach tree or two that grew on the lawn. There was an old moss-grown stone sundial close to the house; she paused for a moment beside it to pick up a scarf which was laid on the top and so passed through the window, whence in a moment or two a lamp-light shone. The Parson seemed sunk in a reverie.

'I am afraid, Nick,' he said slowly. 'I am afraid.'

'What! You too?' exclaimed Wogan. 'Afraid of the wars?'

'The wars--no, no,' replied Kelly scornfully dismissing the interpretation of his fears, and then following out his own train of thoughts, 'you have known her a long time, Nick?'

'Six years.'

'I would that I too had known her six years ago,' said the Parson with a remorseful sigh.

'She has changed in those six years.'

'How?'

'Why, she has grown a foot, and grown a trifle shy.'

'Ah, but that's only since--' began the Parson with a nod, and came to a sudden stop. Rose's shyness was the outcome of her pride. She was shy just because she knew that she loved a man who had breathed no word of love to her. Mr. Kelly sat for a little longer in silence. Then,

'But I am afraid, Nick,' he repeated, and so went down into the house leaving Nick in some doubt as to what he was afraid of.

The Parson repeated his remark the next morning after breakfast. Mr. Wogan was smoking a pipe upon the wall; the Parson was walking restlessly about as he spoke.

'I am afraid,' said he, and looks towards the house. As soon as he looked, he started. So Wogan looked too. Rose Townley had just come from the window and was walking across the lawn more or less towards them with an infinite interest and attention for everything except the two figures on the city wall.

'She comes slowly,' said Kelly in a great trepidation, as though he had screwed up his courage till it snapped like a fiddle-string. 'She is lost in thought. No doubt she would not be disturbed,' and he glanced around him for means of escape. There was, however, only one flight of narrow steps from the wall down to the garden; and if he descended that he would be going to meet her.

Wogan laughed. 'She comes very slowly,' said he. 'No doubt she saw you from the window.'

'It is plain she did not,' replied the Parson, 'for, as you say, she comes very slowly.'

'The vanity of the creature!' cried Wogan. 'D'ye think if she saw you she would run at you and butt you in the chest with her head?'

'No,' says Kelly quickly. 'I do not. But--well, if she saw us here she would at the least look this way.'

'Would she?' asked Wogan. 'Faith, my friend, you'll have to go to school again. Your ignorance of the ways of women is purely miraculous. She does not look this way, therefore she does not know you are here! She looks to every other quarter; observe, she stops and gazes at nothing with the keenest absorption, but she will not look this way. Oh, indeed, indeed, my simple logician, she does not know you are here. Again she comes on--in this direction, you'll observe, but how carelessly, as though her pretty feet knew nothing of the path they take. See, she stops at the dial. Mark how earnestly she bends over it. There's a great deal to observe in a dial. One might think it was a clock and, like herself, had stopped. There's a peach tree she's coming to. A peach tree in blossom. I'll wager you she'll find something very strange in those blossoms to delay her. There, she lifts them, smells them--there's a fine perfume in peach blossoms--she peers into them, holds them away, holds them near. One might fancy they are the first peach blossoms that ever blossomed in the world. Now she comes on again just as carelessly, but perhaps the carelessness is a thought too careful, eh? However, she does not look this way. Watch for her surprise, my friend, when she can't but see you. She will be startled, positively startled. Oh, she does not know you are here.'

The girl walked to the steps, mounted them, her face rose above the level of the wall.

'Oh,' she cried, 'Mr. Kelly!' in an extremity of astonishment. Wogan burst out into a laugh.

'What is it?' asked Rose.

'Sure, Mr. Kelly will tell you,' said Wogan, and he strolled to the end of the walk, turned, walked down the steps and so left them together.

'What was it amused Mr. Wogan?' asked Rose of Kelly as soon as Wogan had vanished. The Parson left the question unanswered. He balanced himself on one foot for a bit then on the other, and he began at the end, as many a man has done before.

'I can bring you nothing but myself,' said he, 'and to be sure myself has battered about the world until it's not worth sweeping out of your window.'

'Then I won't,' said she with a laugh. The laugh trembled a little, and she looked out over the river and the fields of Provence with eyes which matched the morning.

'You won't!' he repeated, and then blundered on in a voice of intense commiseration. 'My dear, I know you love me.'

It was not precisely what Rose expected to hear, and she turned towards the Parson with a look of pride. 'And of course I love you too,' he said lamely.

'You might almost have begun with that,' said she with a smile.

'Was there need?' he asked. 'Since I thought every blade of grass in your garden was aware of it.' Then he stood for a second silent. 'Rose,' said he, savouring the name, and again 'Rose,' with a happy sort of laugh. But he moved no nearer to her.

Rose began to smile.

'I am glad,' said she demurely, 'that you find the name to your liking.'

'It is the prettiest name in the world,' cried he with enthusiasm.

'I am much beholden to my parents,' said she.

'But, my dear,' he continued, 'you put it to shame.'

The girl uttered a sigh which meant 'At last!' but Mr. Kelly was in that perturbation that he altogether misunderstood it.

'But you mustn't believe, my dear, it's for your looks I love you,' he said earnestly. 'No, it's for your self; it's for the shining perfections of your nature. Sure I have seen good-looking women before to-day.'

'I have no doubt of that,' she said, tapping with her foot on the pavement.

'Yes, I have,' said he. 'But when I looked at them 'twas to note the colour of their eyes or some such triviality, whereas when I look at your eyes, it's as though a smiling heart leaned out of them as from a window and said, "How d'ye do?" Sure, my dear, I should love you no less if you had another guess nose, and green eyes.' (He reflectively deformed her features.) 'It's your shining perfections that I am on my knees to.'

'Are you?' she interrupted with a touch of plaintiveness. He was standing like a wooden post and there was at the least a couple of yards between them.

'Just your shining perfections. 'Faith, you have the most extraordinary charm without any perversity whatever, which is a pure miracle. I am not denying,' he continued thoughtfully, 'that there's something taking in perversity when it is altogether natural, but, to be sure, most women practise it as though it were one of the fine arts, and then it's nothing short of damnable--I beg your pardon,' he exclaimed waking up of a sudden. 'Indeed, but I don't know what I am saying at all. Rose,' and he stepped over to her, 'I have no prospects whatever in the world, but will you take them?'

Well, she did. Mr. Kelly had come to his meaning in a roundabout fashion enough, as he acknowledged that same day to Nicholas Wogan.

'Upon my conscience, but I made a blundering ass of myself,' said he.

'You would,' said Wogan. 'My dear man, why didn't you tell me of your intention and I would have written you out a fine sort of speech that you could have got by heart?'

'Sure I should have stammered over the first sentence and forgot the rest,' said Kelly with a shake of the head. 'To tell the truth, the little girl has sunk me to such a depth of humility and diffidence that I find it wonderful I said anything at all.' Then he grew silent for a minute or so. 'Nick,' said he secretly, drawing his chair a trifle closer. 'There's a question troubles me. D'ye

think I should tell her of My Lady Oxford?'

'It would be entirely superfluous,' replied Wogan with decision, 'since the thing's done with.'

'But is it?' asked Kelly. 'Is it, Nick? Look you here. We thought it was done with a year ago, and up springs Mr. Scrope at Avignon. Mr. Scrope does his work and there's not the end of it. For I am carried here and so my very betrothal is another consequence. It is as though her ladyship had presented me to Rose. Well, how are we to know it's done with now? If it ends here it is very well. But, d'ye see, Nick, it was after all not the most honourable business in the world, and am I to make this great profit out of it? Well, perhaps my fears confuse my judgment. I am all fears to-day, Nick,' and he stopped for a moment and clapped his hand into his pocket.

'I'll confess to you a very childish thing,' said he. 'Look!' and out of his pocket he drew a pistol.

'What's that for?' asked Nick.

'It's loaded,' replied Kelly. 'I went up to my room, after the little girl had taken me, and loaded it and slipped it into my pocket,' and he began to laugh, perhaps something awkwardly. 'For, you see, since she prizes me, why I am grown altogether valuable.' He put back the pistol in his pocket. 'But don't misunderstand me, Nick. The new fears are quite overbalanced by a new confidence. Sure, it's not the future I am afraid of.'

'I understand,' said Wogan gravely. 'It's what's to come.'

'Yes, that's it,' said Kelly.

Being afraid, and being a man of honour, Kelly did nothing, said nothing on the head of his old love affair, and trembled with apprehension of he knew not very well what. A path of flowers stretched before him, but a shadow walked on it, a tall, handsome shadow, yet unfriendly. It is Mr. Wogan's firm belief, based on experience, that a woman always finds everything out. The only questions are, when, and how will she take it? Sometimes it is a letter in the pocket of an old coat which the dear charitable creature is giving to a poor devil of a chairman. Sometimes it is a glance at a rout, which she shoots flying. Now it is a trinket, or a dead flower in a book, or a line marked in a poem, but there is always a trail of the past, and woman never misses it.

George's wooing seemed as flowery as the meadows about Avignon, white with fragrant narcissus, or as the gardens purple with Judas trees in spring. Rose was all *parfait amour*, and, in her eyes, Mr. Kelly was a hero, a clerical Montrose, or a Dundee of singular piety. Wogan has known women more zealous for the Cause, such as her Grace of Buckingham, or Madame de Mézières, who had ever a private plot of her own running through the legs of our schemes, like a little dog at a rout, and tripping us up. To Miss Townley George was the Cause, and the Cause was George, so that, in truth, she was less of a Jacobite than a Georgite.

There never had been such a George as hers for dragons. Why did he fight Mr. Scrope? She was certain it was all for the Cause! Indeed, that *casus belli*, as the lawyers say, proved a puzzle. Why, in fact, did the Parson come to be lying on the flags, in receipt of a sword-thrust of the first quality? George was the last man to brag of his services, but he was merely obliged to put the sword-thrust down to his credit with the Cause. His enemy had been a Whig, a dangerous spy, which was true, but not exactly all the truth, about as much of it as a man finds good for a woman.

Rose clasped her hands, raised her eyes to Heaven, and wondered that it did not better protect the Right. What other deeds of arms had her warrior done? She hung on George imploring him to speak of deadly 'scapes, and of everything that it terrified her to hear. Mr. Kelly, in fact, had never drawn sword in anger before; he was, by profession, a man of peace and of the pen. If ever he indulged a personal ambition, it would have been for a snug Irish deanery, and he communicated to Miss Townley a part of his favourite scheme, for leisure, a rose-hung parsonage, and Tully, his Roman friend.

But the girl put this down to his inveterate modesty, remarked by all Europe in his countrymen.

'Nay, I *know* you have done more,' she said one day alone with him in a bower of the garden. 'You have done something very brave and very great, beyond others. You helped to free the Queen from the Emperor's prison at Innsbruck!'

'I!' exclaimed Mr. Kelly in amazement. 'What put that notion into the prettiest head in the world? Why, it was Nicholas's brother Charles, with other Irish gentlemen, Gaydon, Misset, and O'Toole, who did that feat; the world rings of it. I was in Paris at that time.'

'Then you did something greater and braver yet, that is a secret for State reasons, or else, why does the King give you such rich presents?'

Mr. Kelly blushed as red as the flower after which his lady was named.

'Now,' he thought, 'how, in the name of the devil, did she hear of the box the King gave me, and I gave to Lady Oxford?'

That trinket was lying on Lady Oxford's table, but the face behind the mirror was now that of a handsomer man than either his Majesty, or Mr. Kelly, or Colonel Montague. Kelly knew nothing about that, but he blushed beautifully when Miss Townley spoke of a rich royal present.

'You blush,' cried the girl, before he could find an answer. 'I know you are hiding something, now.' (And here she added to his pleasure without taking anything from his confusion), 'Tell me why you blush to find it fame?'

'Troth, isn't my face a mirror, and reflects your rosy one, my Rose?' answered Mr. Kelly, putting on a great deal of the brogue, to make her laugh. For, if a woman laughs, she is apt to lose sight of her idea.

'I must be told; I cannot trust you to show me how brave you are.'

Mr. Kelly was upon dangerous ground. If he was expected to talk about the box given by the King, and if Rose wished to see, or to know what had become of it, Kelly had not a fable ready, and the truth he could not tell. He made a lame explanation:

'Well, then, I blushed, if I did, for shame that the King has to borrow money to help better men than me.'

'I don't care if he borrowed the money or not, for he could not have borrowed for a better purpose than to give you--what I have seen.'

Mr. Kelly was pale enough now. What in the wide world had she seen? Certainly not the snuffbox.

'Seen in a dream, my dear; sure the King never gave me anything but my little pension.'

'Then you know other kings, for who else give diamonds? Ah, you are caught! You have the Queen's portrait set with diamonds.'

'The Queen's portrait?' cried Kelly in perplexity. He was comforted as well as perplexed. 'Twas plain that Rose knew nothing of the royal snuffbox, now the spoil of Lady Oxford's spear and bow.

'Yes,' cried Rose. 'Whose portrait but the Queen's should it be that lies on your table? So beautiful a lady and such diamonds!'

Mr. Kelly groaned in spirit. The snuff-box was not near so dangerous as this new trail that Rose had hit. She had seen, in his possession, the miniature of Smilinda, and had guessed that it was a royal gift; the likeness of the Princess Clementina Sobieska, who had but lately married the King.

'I saw it lying on your table the day we brought you home from the seat on the boulevard, when we thought'(here Miss Rose hid her face on her lover's shoulder, and her voice broke) 'that--you--would--die.'

Now was this rose wet with a shower, and when Kelly, like the glorious sun in heaven, had dried these pretty petals, what (Mr. Wogan puts it to the casuists) was the dear man to say? What he thought was to curse Nick for holding his hand when he was about throwing Smilinda's picture into the sea.

What he said was that, under Heaven, but without great personal danger, he had been the blessed means of detecting and defeating a wicked Hanoverian plot to kidnap and carry off from Rome the dear little Prince of Wales, and Mrs. Hughes, his Welsh nurse. This prodigious fable George based on one of the many flying stories of the time. It satisfied Miss Townley's curiosity (as, indeed, it was very apt to do) and George gave her the strictest orders never to breathe a word of the circumstance, which must be reckoned a sacred mystery of the royal family. He also remarked that the portrait flattered her Majesty (as painters will do), and that, though extremely pretty and gay, she had not that air of dignity and command, nor was so dark a beauty. 'In fact, my dear,' said George, 'you might wear that portrait at the Elector's Birth Night rout (if you could fall so low) and few people would be much the wiser. These Roman painters are satisfied with making a sitter pretty enough to please her, or him.'

George was driven to this flagrant incorrectness because, though Miss Townley had not yet seen the Queen's portrait (her father having changed sides) she might see one any day, and find Mr. Kelly out.

The girl was satisfied, and the thing went by, for the time. But, on later occasions, his conscience gnawing him, the good George very unwisely dropped out general hints of the unworthiness of his sex, and of himself in particular, as many an honest fellow has done. In Mr. Wogan's opinion, by-gones ought to be by-gones, but it takes two to that bargain. Meanwhile Miss Rose might make as much or as little of her lover's penitences as she chose, and, indeed, being a lass of gold, with a sense of honour not universal in her sex, and perfectly sure of him, she made nothing whatever, nor thought at all of the matter.

But there was another dragon in the course that never yet ran smooth. The excellent surgeon,

who had not recovered the fright of Preston, was obdurate. He had no dislike for Mr. Kelly, but a very great distaste for Mr. Kelly's Cause. Rose might coax, the Parson might argue, Wogan might use all his blandishments--the good man was iron. In brief, Kelly must cease to serve the King, or cease to hope for Rose. This was a hard choice, for indeed Mr. Kelly could not in honour leave hold of the threads of the plot which were then in his hands.

So much Dr. Townley was at last brought to acknowledge, and thereupon a compromise was come to. Mr. Kelly was to go over to England once again, on the last chance. The blow was to be struck in this spring of the year 1722. If it failed, or could not be struck, Mr. Kelly was to withdraw from the King's affairs and earn his living by writing for the booksellers, and instructing youth.

The Parson was the more ready to agree to this delay, because of a circumstance with which he was now acquainted. The Doctor and his daughter were themselves on the point of returning to England. Mr. Kelly and Rose had no great difficulty in persuading the surgeon that he would find it more convenient to live in London than in the country, of the miseries of which they drew a very pathetic and convincing picture; and so, being assured that the delay would not mean a complete separation, they accepted the plan and fell to mapping out their lives.

They chose the sort of house they would live in and where, whether in Paris or in England: they furnished it from roof to cellar.

'There must be a room for Nick,' said the Parson, 'so that he can come in and out as if to his own house.'

Mr. Wogan had borne his part in persuading Dr. Townley, without a thought of the great change which the Parson's marriage meant for him. But these words, and the girl's assent, and above all a certain unconscious patronage in their voices, struck the truth into him with something of a shock.

Mr. Wogan escaped from the room, and walked about in the garden. These two men, you are to understand, had been boys together, George being by some years the older, and had quarrelled and fought and made friends again twenty times in a day. Mr. Kelly bore, and would bear till his dying day, a little scar on his cheek close to his ear, where he was hit by a mallet which Wogan heaved at him one day that he was vexed. Wogan never noticed that scar but a certain pleasurable tenderness came over him. His friendship with the Parson had been, as it were, the heart of his boyhood. And in after years it had waxed rather than diminished. The pair of them could sit one on each side of a fire in perfect silence for an hour together, and yet converse intelligibly to each other all the while. Well, here was Mr. Wogan alone in the darkness of the little garden at Avignon now. The Rhone looked very cold beneath the stars, and the fields entirely desolate and cheerless. Yet he gazed that way persistently, for if he turned his head toward the house he saw a bright window across which the curtains were not drawn, and a girl's fair hair shining gold against a man's black periwig. Mr. Wogan had enough sense to strangle his jealousy that night, and was heartily ashamed of it the next morning when he bade the couple good-bye and set out for Paris.

Mr. Kelly took his leave a few days later, being now sufficiently recovered to travel. The precise date was the eighth of April. To part from Rose you may well believe was a totally different matter from his adieus to Smilinda. Nothing would serve the poor girl, who had no miniature and diamonds to give, but to sacrifice what she prized most in the world after her father and her lover.

'You cannot take me,' she said with a tearful little laugh, 'but you shall take Harlequin, who made us acquainted. That way you will not be altogether alone.'

Harlequin wagged his tail, and sat up on his hind legs as though he thoroughly approved of the proposal, and Mr. Kelly, to whom the poodle could not but be an inconvenience, had not the heart to refuse the gift.

George had to give as well as to take, and felt even less blessed in giving than in receiving. For Miss Rose must have a souvenir of him, too, and what should it be but that inestimable testimony to her lover's loyalty and courage, the Portrait of the Queen! There was no way of escape, and thus, as a memorial of Mr. Kelly's singular attachment to the best of Causes and of Queens, Miss Townley was treasuring the likeness of the incomparable Smilinda. The ladies, in the nature of things, could never meet, George reckoned, for the daughter of the exiled country physician would not appear among the London fashionables.

In Paris, on his road to London, Mr. Kelly visited the Duke of Mar, who most unfortunately took notice of the dog, and asked him what he purposed to do with it.

'My Lord,' replied Kelly, 'when I am on my jaunts Harlequin will find a home with the Bishop of Rochester, whose wife has a great liking for dogs. The poor lady is ill, and, alas, near to her death; the Bishop is fretting under the gout, and his wife's sickness, and the jealousies among the King's friends. Moreover, he is much occupied with building his tomb in the Abbey, so that, altogether, their house is of the gloomiest, and Harlequin may do something to lighten it.'

For the poodle had more accomplishments than any dog that ever the Parson had met with,

and this he demonstrated to the Duke of Mar by putting him through his tricks. The Duke laughed heartily, and commended the Parson's kindness towards his patron. But in truth the Parson never did a worse day's work in the whole of his life.

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE GREAT CONFUSION PRODUCED BY A BALLAD AND A DRUNKEN CROW

From this time until Saturday, May 19, the world seemed to go very well for those concerned in the Bishop of Rochester's plot, which was a waiting plot; and in the other scheme, the scheme for an immediate rising, which was a hurrying scheme, and not at all known to the good Bishop. There was a comforting air of discontent abroad; the losses from the South Sea made minds heavy and purses light. Mr. Walpole had smoked nothing of what was forward, so far as a man could see; and within a month the country was to rise. Mr. Wogan from Paris travelled to Havre-de-Grace, whence James Roche, an Irishman, settled in that port, and a noted smuggler upon the English coast, set him across the Channel, and put him ashore at the Three Sheds and Torbay near Elephant Stairs in Rotherhithe. Mr. Wogan took his old name of Hilton, and went about his business, paying a visit now and again to the Cocoa Tree, where amongst other gossip he heard that Lady Oxford was still on the worst of friendly terms with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and the best of loving terms with Colonel Montague. There was more than one jest aimed at Mr. Kelly on this last account, since a man who has been fooled by a woman is ever a fair mark for ridicule; and when James Talbot began to talk of the Parson with a mock pity, Wogan could no longer endure it.

'Sure your compassion is all pure waste, Crow,' said he. 'I could tell you a very pretty tale about the Parson were I so minded.'

Of course he *was* minded, and he told the story of the Parson's betrothal with a good many embellishments. He drew so tender a picture of Rose, that he became near to weeping over it himself; he clothed her in high qualities as in a shining garment, and you may be sure he did not spare Lady Oxford in the comparison. On the contrary, he came very near to hinting that it was the Parson jilted Lady Oxford, who therefore fell back upon Colonel Montague to cover her discomfiture. At all events that was the story which soon got about, and Mr. Wogan never said a word to correct it, and in due time, of course, and in a way not very agreeable, it came to her Ladyship's ears.

The Parson arrived in London on a Wednesday, the 13th of April. The weather had been terrible on the sea, and the unhappy dog Harlequin had contrived to slip his leg by a fall on deck. However, he soon recovered of his injury, thanks to the care of Mrs. Barnes, and Mr. Kelly carried him to the Bishop's house at Bromley, where his lady lay a-dying. There, too, as he had good cause afterwards to remember, he wrote certain letters for the Bishop, to the King, the Duke of Mar, and General Dillon, and put them in the common post. They did but carry common news, and excuses for delay. The Bishop's lady died on the 26th of April, and on that very day Harlequin's hurt broke out again, and the poor creature went whining lugubriously about the gloomy house, as though it was mourning for its mistress. This fact should be mentioned, because the Duke of Mar had made an inquiry in a letter as to how Harlequin fared, and whether *Mr. Illington*, as the Bishop was called, had as yet received the dog. Kelly replied that '*Illington* is in great tribulation for poor Harlequin, who is in a bad way, having slipped his leg again,' which was true, for since the dog by his tricks greatly lightened his lady's sickness, the Bishop grew very fond of him, though at the Bishop's trial, when these things were brought up to prove that *Illington* and he were the same man, it was said 'he never loved a dog.' So much for Mr. Kelly.

Rose and her father reached London a fortnight or more after the Parson. Wogan had no knowledge of her arrival, for since he left Avignon he had not so much as clapped his eyes upon the Parson, who, what with the Bishop's grief for his wife, and what with the Bishop's gout, was much occupied at Bromley. It was not until that calamitous day, the 19th of May, that the two friends met again. Events moved very quickly upon that same day. It seemed they had been hatching this long while out of sight, like thunderclouds gathering on a clear day under the rim of the sea. Seven breathless hours saw the beginning and the end. For it was not until six o'clock of the afternoon that Mr. Wogan chanced upon the ballad, that was our ruin, and by three of the morning all was over.

Now, on the 19th of May, in the morning, Mr. Wogan found himself far enough from London, at the seat of Sir Harry Goring, a gentleman of Sussex, and a very loud friend of the Cause.

This noisy Sir Harry drove Mr. Wogan back to town, in very great state and splendour, and drew up before Burton's coffee-house, at an hour when the streets had lost the high sun of the day. Mr. Wogan alighted, thinking to seek his letters at Burton's, and the baronet's carriage rolled off to his town house. Wogan entered the coffee-house; the great room was extraordinary full, and there was an eager buzz of talkers, who dropped their voices, and looked oddly at Mr. Wogan as he passed through, and so upstairs to a little chamber kept private for himself and his friends.

As he went he heard roars of laughter, and a voice chanting in the deplorable, lamenting tone of the street ballad-singer. Mr. Wogan caught a name he knew in this ditty, and knocking hastily in the manner usual and arranged, was admitted. The room was thick with tobacco smoke, and half-a dozen empty bottles made mantraps on the floor. Through the Virginia haze Wogan saw two men; one was Tyrell, a friend of the Cause, the other was a tall man, very black, in whom he recognised his friend Talbot, of his own country and politics, nicknamed the Crow from his appearance. The Crow was swaying on his legs as he steadied himself by the table, and he sang:--

Let Weapons yield them to the Gown,
The Latin Singers say:
Ye Squires and Ladies of renown,
The tune is changed to-day!
A Lady loved a Parson good,
And vowed she'd still be true,
Alas, the Sword goes o'er the Hood,
The Sword of Montague!

'What ribaldry have you got now?' said Wogan, but the Crow hastily embraced him in the French manner, holding the paper of the ballad over his shoulder, and still chanting.

'The little Parson is made immortal,' quoth he. 'Here is the newest ballad, all the story of his late amorous misfortune. Why do you look so glum?'

For Wogan had gently disengaged himself from Mr. Talbot's embrace, who exhaled a perfume of wine and strong waters.

'Crow, you fool, be quiet,' said Wogan; 'this is miching mallecho! Who wrote that rant?'

'We think it is Lady Mary Montagu, from the Latin tags; it is headed *Cedat Armis Toga*.'

But Lady Mary was not the writer, though she got the credit of the mischievous nonsense, as was intended, and 'hence these tears,' as the Parson said.

Mr. Wogan had snatched the ballad into his hands by this time, where he intended to keep it.

'Gentlemen,' he asked, 'are you entirely sober?'

'Does my speech betray me?' said Tyrell, who, to do him justice, was wholly in his right mind.

'That is no answer; but, if it were, and if you don't care for a lady's name--'

'She jilted the Parson!' cried the Crow.

'Have you no thought of the reputation of--Mr. Farmer?'

'Mr. Farmer?' exclaimed Tyrell. Mr. Farmer was the cant name for the Chevalier, and Tyrell scratched his head, wondering what on earth the Chevalier had to do in the same galley with the Parson's love affairs.

'Mr. Farmer!' replied the Crow, blinking his eyes reproachfully. 'Indeed, it is yourself has been drinking, Nick. What has the ballad of poor George's misfortune to do with Mr. Farmer, a gentleman of unbleb--upblem--I repeat, sir,' said the Crow with solemnity, 'a gentleman of unblemished reputation?'

'Mark how a long word trips you up, and the evening so young!'

'Mr. Farmer's health! I buzz the bottle!' cried the Crow, putting out his hand to the bottle, that was nearly empty.

Mr. Wogan stopped his hand.

'I tell you, Crow, the Affair hangs on your nonsense. We may all hang for it,' he said in a certain tone of voice, which made Tyrell open his mouth.

Wogan read through the ballad, which was full of insults enough to drive any woman mad, let alone Lady Oxford. He knew what a woman wild with anger can do, and blessed his stars that for so many months her Ladyship had not met Kelly, and could know nothing of the inner plot for an immediate rising. Still, she knew enough to do a power of mischief. The ballad was written in a feigned hand, which Wogan did not know.

'James,' he said to Talbot, 'where did you get this thing? You are not haunting the fine ladies who pass these wares about? Where did you get it?' he said, shaking the Crow, who had fallen half asleep, as he spoke.

'Got it from my friend Mr. Pope,' answered the Crow drowsily.

'You got it from Mr. Pope! *You!* Where did you meet Mr. Pope?'

'At the Little Fox under the Hill, down by the water.'

This tavern was precisely the shyest meeting-place of the party, where the smugglers came to arrange crossings and receive letters.

'Mr. Alexander Pope at the Fox under the Hill! Crow, you are raving! What kind of man is your friend Mr. Pope?'

'Who's Mr. Pope? Don't know the gentleman. Hear he's poet.'

'The gentleman who gave you the ballad.'

'Didn't say Pope, said Scrotton,' answered the Crow. 'Very honest man, my friend Mr. Scrotton. Met him often. Exshlent judge of wine, Mr. Scrotton. Exshlent judge of plots. Mr. Scrotton applauded our scheme.'

'You told him about it? What plot did you tell him of? Not of the rising? Not of this immediate Blow? Crow, you should be shot!'

'I told him! You inshult me, sir. Very good plot, very good wine. Mr. Scrotton told me about plot. Often talked it over a bottle. I'm a most cautious man. I don't drink except with very honest men. Dangerous!' murmured the Crow.

'You are sure his name is Scrotton?'

'Quite certain. Said "Pope" because of poetry. Soshiation of ideas. Mr. Pope's poet. You'd know that, but you are drunk, Mr. Wogan.'

There was nothing more to be got out of the Crow. Invited to give a personal description of Mr. Scrotton, he fell back on his moral character as 'a very honest man.' He might be, or, again, he might be a spy. In any case, here was the ballad, and there was the furious woman ready for any revenge.

'Go home; go to bed! Tyrell and I will walk with you to your rooms,' said Mr. Wogan, who, stepping to the letter-rack, picked up an epistle for Mr. Hilton. The handwriting of the superscription made him look so blank that the others noticed his face and were silent. The letter was in Lady Oxford's hand. He put it in his pocket.

They led the Crow to his door in Germain Street. He behaved pretty well on the whole, only insisting that his fortune would be made if Wogan would but give him the ballad and let him sing it at the corner of St. James's.

'Affluence would be mine,' he said, and dropped a tear. 'Oh, Wilton--Hogan, I would say--'tis a golden opportunity!'

But if the opportunity was golden, Wogan was of iron, and they did not leave the debased Crow till he slept in the sheets, which on the night before it was probable that his limbs had never pressed.

When the Crow was slumbering like a babe, Mr. Wogan and Tyrell stepped out, turning the key of his chamber on the outside and entrusting it to his landlady.

'Mr. Talbot has a fever,' Wogan told her, 'and will see nobody. He must on no account see anyone except Mr. Tyrell, nor must he be disturbed before his physician calls.'

Accompanied by the gift of a crown, the key was pocketed by the woman of the house, who expressed anxiety for the health and repose of so quiet a gentleman as Mr. Talbot.

'And now, what is all this pother about?' Tyrell asked when they were got into the street.

'Come towards the Park and I will instruct you. I need quiet for thought, and sylvan repose. What have you been doing all day?'

'Watching the Crow play the fool at Burton's.'

'You have no news?'

'I have seen nobody.'

They walked for a hundred yards or so in silence, Wogan frowning, and Tyrell much perturbed with Wogan's perturbation.

'The new ballad is a true ballad,' said Wogan after a pause.

'Devil a doubt of it; but what then?'

'The greater the truth, the greater the libel.'

'*Et après?*'

'And the greater is the rage of the libelled. This ballad must have run through all the boudoirs before it reached the Crow.'

'And yet I do not smoke you. Where does this touch the affair?'

'The lady that's libelled knew George very well.'

Tyrell nodded his head.

'George knew everything,' continued Wogan.

Tyrell stopped and caught Wogan by the elbow.

'Then, what George knew the lady knows?'

'No. Thank God, she knows nothing of what is immediately intended. It is a year and more since George and she have spoken. She knows nothing of the Blow. But she knows the men who are directing it.'

'May be she's staunch,' said Tyrell.

Wogan quoted Lady Mary:

'Politics are nothing more to her than pawns in the game of love.'

The two men stood looking at each other for a moment. The matter was too serious for them even to swear. Then they walked on again.

'Do you think,' asked Nick, 'she will be in the best of tempers when she hears she is sung about in coffee-houses? Do you think she will blame anybody but Kelly for blabbing? She will give the ballad to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and isn't Kelly of Lady Mary's friends? No, he did not blab, but never mind. She will think he did. And do you know that she is a kinswoman of the minister, Mr. Walpole? Let her say a word, and she *will* say it, and where is Mr. Farmer's affair?'

'Where the Elector's hat and wig often are--in the fire,' answered Tyrell, looking serious enough.

'That letter which I took up was from her; I know her hand. She is stirring.'

Wogan opened the scented letter as he walked. It was but to say that Lady Oxford had heard that Mr. Hilton was in town, and begged the favour of his company at her rout that night.

He told Tyrell what there was to tell, both of them looking very unlike a May sunset as they walked under the trees. Since he left Brampton Bryan, Mr. Wogan had not been favoured with any compliments from Lady Oxford. Why did she begin her favours to-day?

'She is stirring,' he said again.

By this time they were got within the Park.

There much was stirring. Carts were streaming in and out with soldiers driving, soldiers lounging among the burdens of planks, tents, picks, and spades. Beside the Walnut Walk soldiers in their shirt sleeves were digging, trenching, measuring; a child could see what was toward--they were meting out a camp.

Mr. Wogan looked at Mr. Tyrell, Mr. Tyrell looked at Mr. Wogan.

'The lady *has* stirred,' said Tyrell in dismay. 'And what is more she knows of the Blow.'

'Or Mr. Scotton is not a very honest man,' said Wogan, and whistled "Lilliburlero." He was disposed on the whole to agree with Tyrell. Somehow Lady Oxford had got news of the inner plot; perhaps through this mysterious Mr. Scotton.

The Walnut Walk was all astir and agape with evening loungers; it hummed with gossip. The two gentlemen went to the Cake House, sat down, and called for glasses of ratafia. Studying the face of Mr. Tyrell, of which his own was no doubt the very likeness, Mr. Wogan inferred that they needed this refreshment.

They listened, with conscious grins of innocence, to the talk at the tables, being a little comforted to hear many questions, but no certain answers. The soldiers, it seems, being asked, could or would give no answer but that they had orders to make a camp. Fair ladies, smiling on

private men, could get no other reply. It might be only for practice. It might be that the French were expected. Mr. Wogan heartily wished that they were, but nobody was expected, so far as he knew, save these same ragged regiments of his countrymen with the Duke. And, lo! a welcome was being got ready for them. As for the regiment that had been tampered with in the Tower, they were pitching tents in the Park. The two gentlemen, who had been conversing on faro and Newmarket, and laying each other fantastic odds, arose and walked eastwards.

'I think the air of the waterside would be wholesome,' remarked Mr. Tyrell.

'I have to see a friend,' said Mr. Wogan, and they shook hands and parted.

'You will warn the Crow to be on the wing?' said Wogan over his shoulder, and the other nodded. Mr. Wogan could not but smile to think of the Crow winging an unsteady flight across the Channel. He managed to steer across, after all, thanks to Tyrell. Then Wogan read Lady Oxford's *billet* again, and he walked to Bury Street.

He knocked, and the door was opened by Mrs. Barnes.

'Mr. Johnson at home?'

'It would appear, Mr. Hilton, that I did not give satisfaction,' said Mrs. Barnes, whose aspect was of a severity.

'Give satisfaction?'

'Mr. Kelly has thought to better himself, and if he prefers bed-fellows such as shall be nameless, and the coals disappearing, and his letters pryed into, and if he thinks that I ever mention my gentlemen's affairs...!'

Here Mrs. Barnes threw her apron over her head, but gulps of lamentation escaped aloud, though her emotion was veiled like that of the Greek gentleman in the picture.

Mr. Wogan was not unpractised in the art of consoling Mrs. Barnes. He led her within, she was slowly induced to unshroud her pleasing features, and, at last, revealed the strange circumstance that Kelly had left her rooms two days before without giving in any sound justifying plea for this treason. Mr. Wogan, who was well aware of Mrs. Barnes's curiosity and the fluency of her tongue, was in no doubt as to the cause which had led the Parson to leave her, and thought the step in this posture of their affairs altogether prudent.

'But he will return,' he reassured her. 'What!--you know Mr. Johnson, he will never desert you.'

'So he said. He would come back in a month, and paid in advance to reserve the rooms, but it would seem that I do not give satisfaction. And here's all his letters to all manner of names. Look at them! Look at them! And how many of them are signed Ugus? Oh, I know what that will end in, and I'm just going to send the girl round with them--'

'I'll carry them myself, Mrs. Barnes,' said Wogan, interrupting her. He picked up the letters from the table, and glanced about the room, if by chance Mr. Kelly had left anything inconvenient behind him. But, except the letters, there was not so much as a scrap of paper about to show that ever he had lodged there. Wogan looked at the scrutoire on which the strong-box he had given to his friend at Paris was used to rest. It had held Lady Oxford's letters in the old days, but of late it had lain unused, and the dust had gathered thick upon the lid, so that in his haste the Parson might well have forgotten it. But he had carried it away, and with it his big Bible, which had stood beside it in such an incongruous juxtaposition.

'I'll carry them myself,' said Wogan, and putting the letters in his pocket he went down the steps. He marched some twenty yards down the street and then came to a stop. He looked round. Mrs. Barnes was watching him from the doorway with as grim a smile as her cheery face could compass.

'But, my dear woman, where will I carry them to?' asks Wogan, coming back.

'That's it,' cried she with a triumphant toss of her head. 'One minute Mrs. Barnes is a tattling, troublesome woman, and, if you please, we'll not take so much trouble as to say good-bye to her, and the next it's Mrs. Barnes that must help us, and tell us where we are to go. Mr. Johnson lodges at Mrs. Kilburne's in Ryder Street.'

'Mrs. Kilburne's! Why, she's your bosom friend, Mrs. Barnes.'

Mr. Wogan was a trifle surprised that the Parson should leave Mrs. Barnes because of her curiosity and take a lodging with Mrs. Barnes's bosom friend, who, to tell the truth, was no less of a gossip.

'Well,' said Mrs. Barnes, firing up. 'D'ye think I would let him go to those I know nothing of, who would rob him and starve him of his last crust of bread. No, for all that he scorns and despises me! No, he asked me where he should go and I told him to Mrs. Kilburne.'

'Oh, he asked you,' said Wogan. 'Well, it is a very Irish proceeding. I'll go to Mrs. Kilburne's'

and find him.'

'You may go to Mrs. Kilburne,' said she as Wogan turned away, 'but as to finding him,' and she shrugged her shoulders.

'Why, what do you mean?'

'A man in that moppet's livery, for moppet she is, my Lady or not my Lady, brought a note yesterday and he that had been hiding from her, like the honest man he used to be before she came trapesing after him.'

'A note? Was it anything like this?' asked Wogan, pulling from his pocket his own invitation to Lady Oxford's rout.

'It was very like that,' said Mrs. Barnes. 'I sent the fellow on with the scented thing.'

A note from Lady Oxford to George, an heroic epistle from Ariadne to Theseus! An invitation too! Ariadne invites Theseus to her rout, and for something more, conjectured Wogan, than the pleasure of winning his money at cards. Wogan's anxiety concerning Lady Oxford's attitude was much increased. There was the ballad, the camp in Hyde Park, there were the letters of invitation. Mr. Wogan thought it high time to see Theseus, and leaving Mrs. Barnes with a becoming blush on her features that laughed through their tears, he walked to Ryder Street.

Mr. Wogan knocked at the door in the deepening dusk. The landlady opened. She knew Wogan, who, indeed, had occupied her chambers at one time. She smiled all over her jolly face:

'Mr. Hilton! Taller than ever, and welcome as ever.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Kilburne, I shall soon rival the Monument, but I can still get under your lintel by stooping. Where is Mr. Johnson?'

'Mr. Johnson? Oh, sir, what a life that poor gentleman lives. Out all night, home in the morning with mud or dust on him to the shoulder, and so to bed all day.'

'Then Mr. Johnson must be wakened. I can do it, were he one of the seven sleepers. George!' cried Mr. Wogan, lifting up his voice.

'Oh, sir, be quiet! A very dainty gentleman has my first floor, and he will be complaining of the noise. You always were that noisy, Mr. Hilton!' She walked down the passage as she spoke and threw open a door upon the right. 'Mr. Johnson, he has my ground floor, but you can't waken him, loud as you are, nor any man, so be quiet, Mr. Hilton.'

'Have I to weep for my poor friend's decease?' asked Wogan, as he entered the room.

'No, sir, or I would not be laughing at your nonsense.'

There was no doubt this was the Parson's lodging. For as Wogan stood just within the door, he saw by the window Mr. Kelly's scrutoire. It was the first thing indeed on which his eyes fell. He stepped across the room and threw open the lid. He saw a dispatch-box, and from the lock he knew it to be that in which Kelly kept safe the papers of the Bishop's plot.

'So there's another lodger in the house,' said Nick thoughtfully. He took up the box and tried the lid. It was locked. But Mr. Wogan would have preferred that the Parson should have kept the papers in the box which he had given him at Paris, of which the lock was stouter. That box he saw further back in the scrutoire, half hidden in news-sheets. But that too he found to be locked, and shaking it in his hand, was aware that, like the other, it held papers. The lid of the box was covered with dust, as though it had not been touched for months. Lady Oxford's letters had been locked up there. No doubt they were there still. Mr. Wogan wondered for a little at the strange sentiment which makes a man keep such dead tokens of a dead passion. He put the box back amongst the news-sheets, and turning to Mrs. Kilburne,

'But where is the man?' he cried. 'George!' and he rapped on the table with his cane.

'You can't waken Mr. Johnson,' said Mrs. Kilburne 'because he awoke an hour ago, and dressed in a hurry, but braver than common, with his silver-hilted sword, Alençon ruffles, black coat and satin lining, silver shoulder-knots, and best buckles, and out he goes. He was summoned by a man in the livery of my Lord, the good Bishop of Rochester.'

'Will you tell him, when he returns, that Mr. Hilton waited on him, and greatly desires to see him in his best before he goes to bed?' Wogan pulled the letters from his pocket and laid them on the table which stood in the centre of the room.

'I will, sir, but, if you call again, pray, sir, be very quiet. My first floor gentleman is such a dainty gentleman.'

'A mouse shall be noisy in comparison. I have a great tenderness, Mrs. Kilburne, for the nerves of fine gentlemen.'

Mrs. Kilburne grinned in a sceptical sort.

'But,' Wogan added suddenly, 'it is very like I shall fall in with Mr. Johnson before then.' He took some half-a-dozen of the letters again into his hand and looked them over. They were inscribed to such cant names as Illington, Hatfield, Johnson, Andrews, and were evidently dangerous merchandise. Mr. Wogan thought they would be safer in his pocket than on Mr. Kelly's table. He picked up the rest, but as he put them back into his pocket, one fell on to the floor. Wogan caught sight of the handwriting as it fell. Then it stared up at him from the floor. The letter was written in a woman's hand, which Mr. Wogan was well enough acquainted with, although it was neither Lady Oxford's nor the hand of Rose. It was in the handwriting of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. Wogan stooped down and picked it up. For a letter, it was extraordinary light. Wogan weighed it in his hand for a second, wondering what it might be. However, there was no answer to be got that way, and Mr. Wogan had weightier matter to engage his thoughts. He put it into his pocket and marched to his own lodgings, which were hard by in the same street.

Several problems, a swarm of skirmishing doubts, trooped through his mind.

'What did my Lady Oxford mean by writing to Kelly?'

To this Wogan answered that she meant the same thing by Kelly as by himself, and for some reason had bidden him to her rout. As to her motive for that act of unexpected hospitality, Wogan had his own thoughts, which he afterwards confided to his friend. 'But who,' he pondered, 'can answer for a woman's motives when the devil of perversity sits at her elbow?'

Next, why had Kelly made himself such a beau? It could not be merely to do honour to a mourning prelate who would never glance at his secretary's satin and point d'Alençon.

Mr. Wogan inferred that his first guess was right, that Lady Oxford had bidden Kelly to her rout, and that, by the token of his raiment, Mr. Kelly meant to accept the invitation.

Kelly knew nothing of the camp, and the discovery which it seemed to speak of, when he left the lodgings where he had slept all day. Of the ballad, too, it was like that Kelly knew nothing, and, in Wogan's opinion, the ballad was the cause of the military stir. Lady Oxford, inflamed with anger, blaming Lady Mary for the ballad, and blaming Kelly for blabbing her fault to her enemy, Lady Mary; had doubtless visited Mr. Walpole. The innocent Kelly, innocent of all these things, would be going to Lady Oxford's to fathom the causes of her renewed friendship.

Mr. Wogan puzzled his brains over these matters while he supped in solitude at his lodgings. His friends have hinted that his mental furnishing is not in a concatenation with his bodily stature. He has answered that, if it were so, he would be Shakespeare and the Duke of Marlborough rolled into one. Though refreshed with Burgundy, his head felt weary enough when he turned to the question, 'What was he, Wogan, to do next?' In his opinion, the boldest plan is ever the best; moreover, he had a notion that there was no safer place in London for him, that night, and perhaps for Mr. Kelly, than Queen's Square in Westminster which Lady Oxford had taken for a permanence. For if Lady Oxford had blabbed, the last place in London where the Messengers would be like to look for the Parson was her ladyship's withdrawing-room. Unless of course she was laying a trap, which did not seem likely. In the face of this new ballad, Lady Oxford would not dare to have the Parson arrested within, or even near her house. It would provoke too great a scandal. He decided, therefore, first to go to the Dean's house, at Westminster, where the Bishop of Rochester stayed, see Mr. Kelly, if he could, and unfold his parcel of black news. Next, he would take Kelly to Lady Oxford's, if Kelly would come, for Wogan not only deemed this step the safest of his dangers, but expected to enjoy a certain novelty of the emotions, in which he was not disappointed. He therefore, imitating the clerical example, began to decorate himself in his most seductive shoulder knots to do honour to Lady Oxford.

It may be that Wogan's mind, already crowded by a number of occurrences and dubitations, had exhausted its logical powers, for there was one idea which should have occurred to him earliest, and which only visited him while he was shaving. Who was the first person he was likely to encounter at Lady Oxford's? Why, the very last person whom at this juncture it was convenient for him to meet--namely, Colonel Montague. Wogan heartily wished he had left the Colonel between two fires at Preston barricade. But now there was no help for it, go he must. The Colonel, like other people, might not remember the boy in the man and under a new name, or, if he did--and then a fresh idea occurred to Wogan which made him smile.

'I was born,' he said, 'to be a lightning conductor!'

CHAPTER XV

AT THE DEANERY OF WESTMINSTER

Wogan finished the work of adorning his person, and stepped into the street. The night was serene, with a full moon, the air still, the pavements were clean as the deck of his ketch. He thought that he would walk from his rooms to the Dean's by way of St. James's Park, and consequently he passed through Ryder St. and in front of Mr. Kelly's new lodgings. Just as he came to Mr. Kelly's lodgings, the door opened. A gentleman came forth; the moonlight was full on his face. Mr. Wogan muffled his face in his cloak, and stepped stealthily back.

The gentleman was Colonel Montague. He bade the chairmen carry him to Queen's Square; Mr. Wogan heard the word of command with an inexpressible confusion of dismay. He had hardened his heart to encounter the enemy whose life, in a youthful indiscretion, he had saved at the risk of his own, but what was the Colonel doing in Kelly's lodgings?

By this time the warrior and his chair had turned the corner, and Mr. Wogan abandoned himself to meditation. Up and down Ryder Street he paced, puzzling over the Colonel's visit to Kelly, whom, at all events, he could not have found at home. Was he carrying a cartel to his predecessor in Lady Oxford's heart? In that case it was all the more necessary to meet him and play the part of Dr. Franklin's kite, which had not at that time been flown, but is now making talk enough for the learned. On this point Mr. Wogan's mind was constant. Should he question Mrs. Kilburne, he asked himself? Mr. Wogan crossed the road. But the Colonel was little likely to have told her a word of his business. Mr. Wogan stopped.

There was another point: for whatever reason the Colonel had called at George's lodgings, George must be told of the visit. Here was something which pressed, without question. Mr. Wogan marched towards the Dean's house in Westminster, where the Bishop of Rochester lay. He knew the road very well, being himself an old Westminster boy. It was but seven years since he had run away to join his brother Charles and raise the North for King James. He could not tell, at this moment, whether he had deserted his studies for King James's sake, or to escape his dull task of writing out my Lord Clarendon's weary history in a fair hand.

As he entered the precincts, Wogan felt much like a truant boy, and it was as if Time had stood still while *he* ran. Nothing was changed, except that the new dormitory, which Bishop Atterbury had just built, shone white among the black old stones. There were lights in the windows that suddenly went out: the lads were abed. Wogan looked up at the blank windows, and thought of seven years ago, and of his life since then, an unprofitable contemplation, which his mind gladly deserted. He marched up under the arch, through the darkling cloister, and tapped, gently but firmly, at the Dean's door. He must see Mr. Kelly. As it chanced, and by the merest accident in the world, Wogan timed his taps thus: 1--2, 3, 4, 5, 6--7.

There were stealthy steps within, with a movement of yellow light, and then a voice that Mr. Wogan knew very well came through a judas.

'Is it my father's knock?'

'Is it your granny's knock, Sam?' asked Wogan through the judas. The voice was that of Sam Wesley, a young usher in Wogan's time, one whom he had always liked and tormented.

The steps moved away, and the light.

'Sam!' whispered Mr. Wogan, very loud for a whisper, through the judas. 'Sam, you remember me. Nick Wogan.'

The steps were silent.

'Sam, remember Lord Clarendon! Remember Nick, who kicked the bully for beating your little brother Jack.'

The steps shuffled back to the door.

'You have not the password,' said the voice through the judas.

'Damn the password,' whispered Wogan. 'I want George Kelly. I must see him in the name of the Blackbird. Hawks are abroad.'

'It is clean against all rules,' came the voice from within.

'Open, in the name of the cobbler's wax I once put on your chair, or I'll break the windows. You know me, Sam!'

Mr. Wesley knew Mr. Wogan. He undid the lock, Mr. Wogan smuggled himself within, and nearly choked Mr. Wesley in his embrace.

'It is a giant!' said Mr. Wesley, putting up his candle to Wogan's face. The wind blew on the light that flickered in the absolute darkness, all the house being hung with black for Mrs.

Atterbury's death.

'A son of Anak, Sam, who would have battered down your old door in a minute.'

'I verily believe you would, Nick,' said Sam, leading the way up the black stairs to a den of his own, where he was within call of the Bishop. On tiptoe he marched, placing his finger on his lips.

When they were got among Sam's books and papers of the boys' exercises, the usher said, 'It is a very extraordinary thing, purely a Providence.'

'I deserve one; the purity of my life deserves one,' said Mr. Wogan. 'But wherein do you see the marvel?'

'You did not know it, but you gave my father's knock,' said Sam in a voice of awe. 'It is Old Jeffrey's doing--directed, of course--directed.'

'Old Jeffrey? Is it a cant name for an honest man?'

'For a very honest spirit,' said the usher, and explained to Mr. Wogan that the particular knock and the passwords to follow (which Mr. Wogan did not know) were his own invention. His father's house at Epworth, in the year 1716, had been troubled, it seems, by an honest goblin that always thumped and routed with a particular malevolence when the Elector was prayed for as 'the King.' Old Mr. Wesley's pet knock, though, the sprite could not deliver. Mr. Wesley had a conceit that the goblin might be the ghost of some good fellow who died at Preston.

'He keeps his politics in the next world,' said Mr. Wogan.

'Wit might say much on that head, wisdom little,' whispered the usher, wagging his kind head. 'You have special business with Mr. Johnson?' he asked. 'He is with my Lord, hard by. The Bishop's voice was raised when Mr. Johnson entered. I caught angry words, but now for long they have been quiet.'

'Mr. Johnson has a way with him,' said Wogan, who had learned from Goring that the reverend Father in God was of a hasty temper. 'How doth his Lordship?'

'Very badly. I never saw him in a less apostolic humour. I know not what ill news he has had from France, or elsewhere, but he has been much troubled about Mr. Johnson's dog, Harlequin. The poodle has been conveyed out of town as craftily as if he were the Chevalier, I know not why, and is now skulking in the country, I know not where.'

It was, indeed, Mr. Wesley's part to know nothing. He was the Bishop's man, and as honest as the day, but had no more enterprise than another usher.

Wogan, he has said, knew Harlequin, second of that name, and had seen him coddled by Mrs. Barnes. He was cudgelling his brains for Harlequin's part in the Great Affair, when a silver whistle sounded, thin and clear.

Mr. Wesley beckoned to Wogan to be still, crept out of the room, and returned on tiptoe with Kelly. The Parson's elegant dress was a trifle disarranged; his face and hands were somewhat stained and blackened as with smoke, but the careful man had tucked up his Alençon ruffles beneath his sleeves. On seeing Wogan George opened his eyes and his mouth, but spoke never a word. He carried a soft bundle wrapped in a tablecloth, and when the door was shut he handed this to Mr. Wesley.

'You have the key of the Dean's garden?' he whispered.

'Yes; but wherefore?' answered Sam.

'His Lordship bids me ask you to have the kindness to bury the contents of this--'

'I know not what is in the bundle,' said Mr. Wesley, with an air of alarm.

'And you need not be told,' said George. 'But can you let me and my friend Mr. Hilton--'

'Mr. Hilton?' gasped Sam, as Kelly put his hand out to Wogan.

'I must present you to Mr. Hilton,' George said, and Wogan bowed and grinned.

'I was about to entreat you, Mr. Wesley, while you are playing the sexton, to permit me and Mr. Hilton the convenience of a few moments of privacy in your chamber.'

'With all my heart,' said the puzzled Sam, hospitably opening a cupboard in his bookcase, whence he lugged out glasses and a bottle of Florence. Then he put list shoes over his own, and stole forth on his errand like a clerical cat.

All this while Wogan had said not one word to Kelly, nor Kelly to Wogan.

Mr. Wogan had sat down to sample the bottle, and Kelly stared at him.

'How did you make your way in here?' he asked at length.

'Old Jeffrey,' said Wogan airily. 'I drink Old Jeffrey's health, wherever he is.'

'I believe you are the devil himself. That password is known to no mortal but Mr. Wesley and me. The Bishop does not know it. His servants never see me come or go--only Sam. Whence got you the word?'

Mr. Wogan very gently tapped 1--2, 3, 4, 5, 6--7 on the table.

'I know many things,' he said. 'But, George, what do *you* know?'

'I know you should be aboard, Nick, and down to the waterside you step from this house.'

'I am already promised,' said Mr. Wogan with an air of fashion. 'I sup with Lady Oxford.'

'You are mad.'

'Nay, *you* are mad. I know many things. When you were carried hither in your chair, you knew nothing. George, what did the Bishop tell you? Why was he wroth with you? In brief, George, what do you know?'

'The Bishop angry with me! Nick, you know too much. You are the devil.'

'I want to know a great deal more. Come, unpack, and then it is my turn. But first step into Mr. Wesley's bedchamber and wash these hands, which go very ill with silver shoulder-knots; and pour the blackened water out of window. Any man or messenger could see that you have been burning a mort of papers.'

Mr. Kelly hastily adopted Mr. Wogan's precautions. When he entered the room again the conspirator had vanished, the clerical beau remained.

'Now,' said Wogan, 'you are fit to carry out your worldly design of pleasure, and I shall not be ashamed to sup in your company at Lady Oxford's.'

'I have changed my mind; I shall not go. But, Nick, how did you know my mind? 'Twas the last of minds you expected to take me in.'

'I am the devil. Have you not guessed it yourself?' replied Mr. Wogan, who was enjoying himself hugely. Perhaps it was the Florence, coming a-top of the Burgundy. He was quite easy about the discovery. 'But unpack,' he said. 'What befell you with the Bishop?'

'He received me oddly. The room was as dark as a wolf's mouth, being hung with black bombazine. There was a low fire in a brazier, that shone red on his Lordship's polished poll, for he wore no perruque. His eyes blazed, his teeth grinned white. I was put in mind of a fierce old black panther in the French King's gardens.'

'Remote from the apostolic,' said Mr. Wogan.

'So were his first words,' said Kelly:

""You Irish dog, come here!" quoth the Bishop.

'I offered a conjecture that, in the mournful light, his Lordship did not precisely see whom he was addressing. On that the little old man sprang out at me, seized me by the collar, and then fell back on his couch with a groan that was a curse. I put a cordial that stood by him to his lips, and was about to call Mr. Wesley, when he forbade me with his eyebrows, and cried:

""Answer me this question before we part for ever. Did you despatch my letters of April 20 to the King and the others?"

""My Lord," I said, "my duty to you ended with that episcopal laying on of hands, and with that expression which you were pleased to use when I entered."

'He groaned, and said:

""I apologise. I am mad with pain" (which was plainly true), "and grief, and treachery. I beg your pardon, Mr. Kelly, as a Christian and a sick old man."

""My Lord, you honour me. I enclosed the letters, as you directed, in a packet addressed to Mr. Gordon, the banker in Boulogne, and I sent them by the common post, your Lordship not having forbidden the ordinary course."

""Then, damn it, sir, you have ruined us!" said the sick old Christian. "Did I not bid you write to Dillon that nothing of importance should go by the post?"

""But your Lordship did not seem to reckon these letters of importance, for you did not discharge me from sending them in the common course."

'The Bishop groaned again more than once, and there was a whole Communion Service in the sounds. You know Harlequin, Wogan?'

Mr. Wogan nodded and wondered.

"'Tis Harlequin has ruined us,' said Kelly; 'Harlequin and the Duke of Mar.'

'I am devilish glad to hear it,' said Mr. Wogan.

'Glad to hear it!' exclaimed Kelly, rising from his chair. 'You are told of the discovery of the Great Affair, and the probable ruin of the Cause, and the danger of your friends and yourself, and you are glad to hear it!'

'Faith, I am,' replied Wogan easily, 'for I knew of the discovery before you told me, but I put it down to a lady of your acquaintance.'

The Parson very slowly sat himself down again on his chair.

'In Heaven's name, why?' he asked, with a certain suspense.

'Tell your tale first, then I'll tell mine. This is very excellent Florence.'

'The tale is too long, but the short of it is this: The Bishop had by him a letter of Mar's, dated May 11, in which Mar, addressing the Bishop as Illington, denounced him as plainly to anyone who read the piece as if he had used the Bishop's own style and title. He condoled on Mrs. Illington's recent death, he referred to Mr. Illington's high place in the Church, and to his gout. The three circumstances combined left no doubt as to who Illington is. There was no need such a letter of pure compliment should be written at all, except for the purpose of being opened in the post, and fixing the Bishop as Illington. Then,' Kelly went on, 'I remembered a letter of Mar to myself, of last week, in which he spoke of the dog Harlequin as Mrs. Illington's. If these letters were opened in the post,--and the Bishop knows for certain that they were opened,--a blind man could see that Rochester and Illington are the same man, and own the same dog. The beast saved my life, but he has lost the Cause,' said Kelly with a sigh. 'Mar has sold us. It is known he holds a pension from the Elector. The Bishop knows it in a roundabout way, through Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and so the Bishop and I have burned his papers in the brazier. Sam is interring their ashes in the garden.'

Mr. Wogan poured out another glass of Florence.

'Was there anything very pressing in these same letters of April 20, George? Was there anything to put fear on the Elector's Ministers? Did they say, for instance, that the Blow was to be dealt, you and I know when?'

'Not a word of that,' replied Kelly, and his face lightened. On the other hand, Wogan's fell, which Kelly no doubt remarked, for he continued eagerly, 'D'ye see, there is a chance still, for the Cause, for us, if the Blow be struck quickly. We must strike quickly. So may we retrieve Mar's treachery. The Bishop in his letter made excuses to the King for the delay of any blow. He is not in favour of anything immediate, and in the letters he made his disposition plain. The letters only compromised his Lordship in general, they did not reveal--the Blow.'

Mr. Wogan, however, only shook his head.

'Faith, now, I'm sorry to hear that,' said he.

'You are glad and sorry on very strange occasions,' said Kelly, sourly. 'First you are pleased that Mar sold us, and then you are displeased that he did not sell the last secret.'

Mr. Wogan leaned his elbows on the table, and bent across towards his friend.

'I am sorry because the last secret has been sold, and it was not Mar that sold it. Therefore somebody else sold it; therefore I am at the pain of being obliged to suspect a lady who probably knows her late lover's cypher.'

Mr. Kelly blanched.

'And how do you know that the last secret is sold?'

'As any man would know who had not lain abed all the day. George, the Park is full of soldiers. The Tower regiment that we thought Layer had bought is there with the rest under canvas. Ministers would not make an encampment in the Park because they knew that the Bishop had advised the King that nothing was to be done. Therefore Mar is not the only traitor.'

'And why should my Lady Oxford be the Judas?'

'Mainly to punish a certain nonjuring clergyman, for whose sake she is the burden of a ballad, and sung of in coffee-houses.'

'A ballad? Of what sort?'

'Of the sort that makes a good whipping-post for a fine lady. Ridicule is the whip, and, by the Lord, it is laid on unsparingly. Perhaps you would like to hear it,' and Mr. Wogan recited, in a whisper, so much of the poem as he judged proper. It closed thus:--

'Oh, happy to my rhymes,
Consoled for all his woes,
The Parson flies to foreign climes,
And dwells--beneath the Rose!'

Mr. Kelly swore an oath and took a turn across the room. He came to a stop in front of Sam's bookcase. 'Rose,' said he, in a voice of tenderness, 'sure they might have left the little girl out of it.'

'The barb was venomed, you see,' said Mr. Wogan. 'It was not enough to make a scoff of the lady. She must be stripped of that last consolation, the belief that the discarded Parson wastes in despair. Now she knows that the Parson is consoled. There was spark to powder. The Parson may be putting on flesh. There's an insult to her beauty. Faith, but she must feel it in her marrow, since she risks her Lord's neck for the pleasure of requiting it.'

'No,' said Kelly, 'she could do what she would, for her Lord's neck is not in this noose. Oxford had withdrawn before.'

This was news to Mr. Wogan, who had been concerned only with the actual plan of attack, and sufficiently concerned to have no mind for other matters.

'Oxford withdrawn,' he cried rising and coming across to the Parson. 'Damn him, 'twas pure folly to trust him. Do you remember what Law said that night in Paris? He would trust him no further than he would trust a Norfolk attorney.'

Kelly was silent for a moment, thoughtfully drawing a finger to and fro across the backs of Sam's books.

'I have good reason to remember that night,' he said very sadly. 'Have you forgotten what I said? "May nothing come between the Cause and me!" Why, it seems the Cause goes down because of me, and with the Cause my friends, and with my friends, Rose.'

Mr. Wogan had no word to say. Whatever excuses rose to his tongue seemed too trivial for utterance.

Kelly's finger stopped on one particular book, travelled away and came back to it. Wogan saw that the book was a Bible. The Parson took it from the shelf and turning over the leaves read a line here and there. Wogan knew very well what was passing through his mind. His thoughts had gone back to the little country parsonage and the quiet life with no weightier matter to disturb it than the trifling squabbles of his parish.

'You warned me, Nick,' he said, 'you warned me. But I was a fool and would not heed. Read that!' and with a bitter sort of laugh he handed the open Bible to Mr. Wogan, pointing to a verse. 'There's a text for the preacher.'

The Bible was open at the Book of Proverbs, and Mr. Wogan read. 'The lips of a strange woman drop as a honey-comb and her mouth is smoother than oil. But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death. Her steps take hold on hell.'

Mr. Wogan read the text aloud.

'The strange woman, Nick,' said Kelly, 'the strange woman,' and then in a fierce outburst, 'If I live the man who wrote that ballad shall rue it.'

'They give it to Lady Mary.'

'She never wrote it. Nick, who wrote the ballad? How did you get hold of it?'

'I found the Crow, quite tipsy, singing it to Tyrell, at Burton's, in the little room upstairs.'

'And where did the Crow get the ballad?'

'That is another uncomfortable circumstance. You know Talbot?'

'An honest man, and a good officer, at Preston or in Spain, but a sponge for drink. A pity he was ever let into the plot!'

'Well, he got the ballad from someone with whom he had been drinking at the Little Fox under the Hill, not a fashionable resort.'

'Did he name his friend?'

'He was drunk enough to begin by calling him Mr. Pope.'

'Mr. Pope, the poet?'

'He took that back; and said the poetry put Mr. Pope into his head. The man's real name, he remembered, was Scrotton. I can't guess who he was, friend or spy, but we may take it that he knows what the Crow knows.'

'Thank God for that!' cried Kelly.

'You rejoice on very singular occasions, and are grateful for very small mercies,' said Mr. Wogan, who found it his turn to be surprised. 'What are you so thankful for?'

'Thankful that a woman need not have done this thing, and that my folly may not be the cause of this disaster. Another knew everything--Pope--Scrotton--the ballad! Who wrote the ballad? Who of our enemies knew a word about Rose? Are you blind? Who was at Avignon, spying on me, when I first met Rose? Who hates Lady Oxford no less than he hates me? Whose name was the unhappy tippler trying to remember? Scrotton? Pope?'

'Scrope!' cried Wogan, cursing his own stupidity. 'Scrope it must have been, and the Crow swore that the man told him about the plot, and often talked it over.'

'That means, of course, that Scrope made him talk. The old curse of the Cause, that lost us Edinburgh Castle in the Fifteen, when the Scots stopped at the tavern to powder their hair. Our curse, Nicholas. Wine!'

'And Woman,' Mr. Wogan thought, but George ran on,

'Scrope it was who wrote the ballad, for no enemy but Scrope knew what the writer knew. Lady Mary is a friend. Lady Oxford is innocent, thank God--I say it with a humble heart--and I am not the cause of the ruin.'

George's eyes shone like those of a man reprieved. Wogan shook his friend's hand; his own eyes were opened.

'Tis you are the devil,' he said. 'Scrope has hit everyone he hates, and blown up the plot.'

'His time will come,' said Kelly; 'but I hear Sam on the stair.'

Mr. Wesley, tapping lightly, entered his room.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'the outer door is open.'

Mr. Wesley's anxiety was plainly to be read in his face.

The two gentlemen bade him farewell, with many thanks for his hospitality. He accompanied them to the door, and they heard the bolt shot behind them as they stood in the cloister.

'Whither should they go?' both men reflected, silent.

Mr. Wogan has remarked on a certain gaiety and easiness of mind caused on this occasion, he considers, by Mr. Wesley's Florence coming after his own Burgundy at supper. He was also elated by George's elation, for to find innocence in one whom he had suspected elevated Mr. Kelly's disposition. They were betrayed, true, but the bitterness of a betrayal by the woman he had loved left him the lighter when the apprehension of it had passed.

One little point rankled in Mr. Wogan's mind in spite of all. Why had Lady Oxford bidden both of them to her rout?

He came at an answer by a roundabout road.

'I must hurry home and burn my papers,' said Kelly, as soon as they were out in the cloister, with the door of the Dean's house shut behind them.

Mr. Wogan, who had other notions, gripped his arm.

'By the way, did you burn my lady's invitation to her rout to-night? What did she say, George? Why did she invite you? And did you burn the note?'

Mr. Kelly smote his hand on his brow. 'My wits were wool-gathering.'

'On Cupid's hedges,' said Wogan.

'But I locked the note up.'

'With the rest of the lady's letters in my dispatch box?'

'Faith, Nick, you are the devil. How did you know that?'

'Oh, I have divined your amorous use of my box.'

'But you are wrong. I had the box with the dangerous papers of the plot open on the table when I was reading the letter. Mrs. Kilburne knocked at the door. I did not know who it might be. I slipped the letter in on the top of the papers of the Plot, and locked the box before I opened the door.'

'There it remains then? Well, her Ladyship's note is in the better company. But what did she say? Did she give a reason for your meeting?'

'The chief thing, after the usual compliments, was that she had most important news, that might not be written, to give me about Mr. Farmer's affairs. Probably she may have had an inkling of the discovery and wished to warn me.'

'We must see her,' said Wogan, whose curiosity was on edge from the first about this party of pleasure.

'But my papers--I must burn my papers.'

'George, you are set, or you are not set. If you had been set the messengers would have been at your lodgings before I went thither; in fact, before you were out of bed. Therefore, either you have the whole night safe or, going home now, you go into a mousetrap, as the French say, and your papers are the cheese to lure you there. Now, they cannot know of my lady's invitations, and if they by any accident did know, a Minister would hardly take a man at a lady's house. That were an ill use for the hostess.'

'That's true,' said Mr. Kelly, after reflecting. 'Nicholas, I knew not that you had so much of the syllogism in your composition.'

'Another thing, and an odd thing enough,' added Wogan. 'Perhaps nothing is laid against *you* at all. Did Scrope lay information when he found us at Brampton Bryan?'

'No!' cried Kelly. 'And at Avignon, when a proper spy would have stopped the Duke's gold, he was content with the sword in his own hand.'

'Precisely,' said Wogan; 'Scrope has blown the plot, that's business; but he deals with you himself, that's pleasure. He tried to meet you at Brampton Bryan--he did not have us laid by the heels. He nearly did for you at Avignon, while he let the Duke's business alone, quite content. Now you are alive and he wants a meeting, 'tis clear he did not inform on you, otherwise the messengers would have been with you when the soldiers began the camp in the morning. 'Faith, you may meet Mr. Scrope tonight in St. James's Park. He is a kind of gentleman, Mr. Scrope! But we must see her ladyship first; sure, nothing's safer.'

'Nicholas, thou reasonest well,' said the Parson.

Mr. Wogan towed off his prize, and the pair moved out of the dark, musty cloister into the moonlight.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. WOGAN ACTS AS LIGHTNING-CONDUCTOR AT LADY OXFORD'S ROUT

Mr. Wogan steered his captive through Petty France. It was about ten of the clock, a night of moonlight and young spring, a night for poets to praise and lovers to enjoy. Mr. Wogan was not, at the moment, a lover, and poetry was out of his mind.

'One trifle I forgot to mention,' he said. 'I saw Montague come out of your new lodgings this evening. He bade his chairmen go to Queen's Square.'

'Montague? How could he know where to look for me? What can he want with me?'

'I misdoubt he was not very well pleased with the ballad, and would have you explain it.'

'Montague,' sneered Mr. Kelly, with a touch of temper; 'I am grieved I missed him.'

'You need not grieve, for you will see him to-night. So there's balm for your grief, and another reason why you should sup with Lady Oxford.'

The Parson stepped out more briskly after that, and Wogan could not refrain from remarking upon his new alacrity.

'It is after all a very human sort of a world, as worlds go,' said he. 'Here's a man with all his hopes crumbling to grave-dust about him, and the mere prospect of a quarrel with another man whom he has never spoken to, on account of a woman he has a great contempt for, will make all his blood flow quicker.' For it was evident that, though the Parson no longer cared a straw for Smilinda's favours, he had not forgiven the man who had supplanted him in them.

At the further end of the street along which they walked, one house threw out into the night a great blaze of light, and a noise of many voices. As Wogan perceived it, a certain improvement upon his plan came into his head.

'George,' said he, as he directed his captive towards the house, 'will you resolve me a theological quandary? Do the doctors of your sect consider as binding a promise given to a person of a different faith?'

'Assuredly they do,' cried Kelly. 'Dr. Hooker plainly writes--'

'I shall take your word for it, without Hooker's bond. Next, does your Reverence reckon it immoral to shake an elbow on occasion?'

'Even the very Puritans, at the height of their power, doubted if they could proceed against dicers by way of the greater excommunication. We read that the Chosen People themselves cast lots--whence I argue for a permitted latitude.'

'Well, then, we are opposite the doors of Le Queux's Temple of Hazard; you may hear through the windows how the devout are calling the main. Now I must take your promise, as you say it is binding, to wait here in obedience to your commanding officer. A wise leader will ever send out scouts to inspect a dangerous pass. I shall reconnoitre at Lady Oxford's: proper precautions should never be neglected, even in a friendly country. If I do not return, or send, in forty minutes by your watch, you must follow. All will seem safe.'

'But, Nick, what if they take you? Sure we had best go together.'

'They will not arrest me alone. You don't loose your gun at a rabbit when you are stalking a deer. I am not the keeper of secrets, but the King's mere servant, to give knocks and to take them. I write no letters, and none write them to me. It is Mr. Johnson they will be stalking, if anyone at all, never fear, and they will not shoot at the rabbit whilst Mr. Johnson is out of gunshot. In the meantime, have you any money?'

'Just enough to pay my chairmen.'

Mr. Wogan turned his pockets inside out.

'Then here are ten guineas. In my belief our luck must be somewhere, if a man would look for it, and it may very well be lurking in the cavern of a dice-box. Lose or win, if you hear nothing of me, you march forwards and occupy Queen's Square in forty minutes. It is ten o'clock now. And if you do not join me in forty minutes I walk straight to your lodgings and take my chance.'

'So be it,' said Kelly, pocketing Mr. Wogan's gold, and stepping reluctantly into the house of Le Queux. Mr. Wogan waited until the door closed upon him, and then went on his way alone to Queen's Square.

He had not displayed the whole face of his purpose to the Parson. It was not merely to reconnoitre that he pushed forward. The Parson might desire an occasion with the Colonel, but Wogan, for Miss Townley's sake, meant to meet the Colonel first. Betrothed men should not be brawlers, and George was hardly a match for the Colonel.

The Colonel was not, in the nature of things, likely to feel well-disposed towards the Parson. The ballad would have turned that ill-disposition into a genuine hostility. So here was one of the reasons, besides the wish to reconnoitre, why Wogan left his friend behind him in Le Queux's gaming-rooms. He would be the lightning-conductor; he would pick a quarrel with the Colonel before Mr. Kelly arrived, if by any means that could be brought about.

Mr. Wogan stopped in the shadow a few yards from Lady Oxford's house, and watched. It was a night of triumph for Lady Oxford. A score or so of link-boys yelled and flashed their torches about the portico; carriages and chairs pressed towards the door. Gentlemen with stars upon their velvet coats, and ladies altogether swaddled in lace and hoops thronged up the steps. But of the possible messengers for whom Mr. Wogan looked, not one was to be seen in any corner. Timidity itself might have slept secure. Only a few ragged loiterers stood about in the roadway on the look-out for a lace handkerchief or a convenient pocket. Wogan crossed the road and joined the throng upon the stairs.

He had carried it off boldly enough at the Deanery, and in the street with Kelly, but, as he walked on alone, the fumes of the Florence wine escaped from the seat of his reasoning faculties. His logic did not seem so conclusive, and he felt an ugly double-edge on some of his arguments.

Thus, the plot had certainly been discovered, yet Kelly had not been pounced upon. This might be a generosity of Mr. Scrope's (who had behaved as handsomely before), but again, what if Mr. Kelly's first suspicions were true? What if Lady Oxford had learned something? What if this rout were intended to enable her to savour her revenge for the ballad? The thing was not beyond Wogan's power of belief, and the more he gazed on this perspective, the less he enjoyed it. Under her roof, however, for the sake of her own credit, Kelly and he must be safe from arrest. Besides it might be that her Ladyship was ignorant of the ballad. Reflecting on these doubts, and thankful for this tender mercy, Wogan's heart was ill at ease, though he put on a face of brass. The chatter which buzzed at his inattentive ears seemed the most impertinent thing in the world. At each step a flowered petticoat swung against his legs, or a fan, held by a hand in a perfumed glove, knocked against his elbow, and somehow the fine gentlemen and ladies in their fine clothes seemed to him at that moment as incongruous as a nightmare. Scraps of gossip of which he took no note at the time, for no reason whatever stuck in his mind, and he remembered them quite clearly afterwards; how that Lady Holderness was sunk in all the joys of love, notwithstanding she wanted the use of her two hands by a rheumatism; and Mrs. Hervey, *revenue* from such bagatelles as honour and reputation, had taken to herself two most fascinating lovers, and all the envy of her sex. A shrill lady behind Mr. Wogan's shoulder was proposing a general act for divorcing all the people of England, so that those who pleased might marry again, whereby many reputations which stood in dire peril would be saved from exposure. Mr. Wogan had much ado not to shout 'Hold your tongues, will you? Here, maybe, is life and death in the balance.'

He had got about half-way up the stairs when the shrill voice changed its tune, and now Mr. Wogan pricked up his ears.

'You have heard the new ballad? Oh, the sweetest, most malicious thing. You must certainly hear it. Smilinda, the Parson, and the Colonel. You know who Smilinda is? The Parson and the Colonel make a guess easy.' She quoted a line or two. 'It appears that the Parson has consoled himself with Rose, and snaps his fingers at Smilinda. Who wrote it? No one but Smilinda's dear friend, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, that I will wager. 'Tis the most ingenious thing; and most ingeniously given to the town just at the time when it will sting most. Poor Smilinda.' The voice went off into a giggle, in the midst of which Mr. Wogan distinguished a name--Lord Sidney Beauclerk's. Mr. Wogan would hardly have heeded the name had he not heard it again twice before he reached the stairhead, and each time in that same conjunction with the Parson and the Colonel, and the malicious aptness of the ballad. Even then he gave but scanty heed to Lord Sidney Beauclerk, for the knowledge that the ballad was indeed become the common talk occupied his thoughts, and so thoroughly, that it was the nearest thing imaginable but he gave his name as Mr. Wogan to the lackey who announced him.

Mr. Hilton, however, was announced, and Mr. Hilton stepped through the great doorway into the room, and made his bow. At the first he was sensible only of a great blaze of light spotted here and there with the flames of candles; of a floor polished like a mirror, of a throng of misty faces, a hubbub of voices, and a gorgeous motley of colours like the Turkish bazaars Lady Mary was used to describe. Then the faces grew distinct. Mr. Wogan noticed one or two of the *honest* party, who, knowing his incognito, threw a startled glance at him, and like the rats from the sinking ship, scuttled away as soon as his eyes met theirs.

He looked around him for Lady Oxford. He could not see her in the crowd which ebbed and flowed about the floor. There were card tables set against the walls; doubtless she would be seated at one of them. He glanced down the line of tables to his left. He did not see Lady Oxford, but his attention was seized by one particular table. It stood empty; a few packs of cards waited upon it for the players to handle, but by some strange chance it stood empty. It was the one vacant table in the room.

Mr. Wogan was an Irishman, and now and again had his visionary moments, though he said little about them. As he looked at that one empty table a queer sort of fancy crept into his head, and, to be frank, struck something of a chill into his veins. It came upon him slowly that the table was not in truth empty at all; that in the midst of this velvet company, all jewels and compliments, there sat at this table a grey shrouded figure which silently awaited its player.

Mr. Wogan was roused by a touch on his elbow.

'Mr. Hilton?'

Mr. Hilton saw a dapper, young gentleman at his side who looked like nothing so much as a tangle of ribbons swept up from a milliner's shop.

'To be sure,' said Wogan.

'Her ladyship sits yonder.'

Mr. Wogan looked. Her ladyship sat with her back towards him at the table nearest to that which stood empty. She had been screened from his sight by the young gentleman now at his elbow. As Wogan looked, Lady Oxford turned with an anxious smile and a glance beyond his shoulder. The smile, the glance braced Mr. Wogan. For doubtless her ladyship looked to discover whether the Parson followed in his steps.

He approached Lady Oxford. By her side sat Colonel Montague, black as thunder, and with a certain uneasy air of humiliation, like a man that finds himself ridiculously placed, and yet has not the courage to move. Mr. Wogan was encouraged; he could have wished the Colonel in no other mood. Mr. Wogan suddenly understood that it was himself who was cast to play with the shrouded figure, and the stake was the privilege of crossing swords with Montague.

From the Colonel his eye strayed to a youth who stood by Lady Oxford's chair, and the sight of him clean took Wogan's breath away. It was not merely his face, though even in that bright company he shone a planet among stars. Nature, indeed, thought Wogan, must have robbed a good many women of their due share of looks before she compounded so much beauty in the making of one man. But even more remarkable than his beauty was his extraordinary likeness to Wogan's King. At the first glance Wogan would have sworn that this youth was the King, grown younger, but that he knew his Majesty was at Antwerp waiting for the Blow to fall. At the second, however, he remarked a difference. The youth had the haunting eyes of the Stuarts, only they were lit with gaiety and sparkled with success; he had the clear delicate features of the Stuarts, only they were rounded out of their rueful length, and in place of a sad gravity, were bright with a sunny contentment. Misfortune had cast no shadows upon the face, had dug no hollows about the eyes.

Lady Oxford spoke to this paragon, smiled at him, drooped towards him. The Colonel shifted a foot, set his lips tight and frowned.

Wogan placed a hand upon his guide's sleeve.

'Will you tell me, if you please, the name of her ladyship's new friend?'

The young gentleman stared at Wogan.

'Let me perish, Mr. Hilton, but you are strangely out of the fashion. Or is it wit thus to affect an ignorance of our new conqueror, for whom women pine with love and men grow sour with envy? But indeed it is wit--the most engaging pleasantry. 'Twill make your reputation, Mr. Hilton.'

'It is pure ignorance,' interrupted Wogan curtly.

'Indeed? But I cannot bring myself to believe it.' He stared at Wogan as though he was gazing at one of Dr. Swift's Yahoos. 'Slit my weazand if I can. Sir, he is the gold leaf upon the pill of the world. For his sake dowagers mince in white and silver, and at times he has to take to his bed to protect himself from their assiduities.'

'He has a dangerous face for these times,' again Mr. Wogan broke in.

'Blame his grandmother for that, Mr. Hilton; he is of the royal blood. Nell Gwynn of pious memory gave his father birth. Our last Charles was his grandsire; he hath Queen Mary's eyes. It is Lord Sidney Beauclerk.'

'I thought as much. He is a very intimate friend of her ladyship's?'

'Mr. Hilton, the world is very *grossier*,' remarked his guide, with a smirk.

Mr. Wogan could have laughed. He understood why the Colonel looked so black, why the ballad was so maliciously apt, why my Lord Sidney Beauclerk was coupled with the Parson and the Colonel in the common talk. Her ladyship was taking a new lover. Colonel Montague was the crumpled ribbon that has done good service but is tossed into the cupboard to make way for fresher colours. The ballad was apt indeed. Mr. Wogan's spirits rose with a bound. Sure here was an occasion for picking a quarrel with the Colonel ready to his hand. He bowed very low to her ladyship. Her ladyship went on punting.

Colonel Montague looked at him, and then looked at him again with the same perplexity which Mr. Wogan had found so distasteful one evening in St. James's Street three years before; but he said nothing. Her ladyship laid down a card and gave Mr. Wogan a hand, which he kissed with proper ceremony.

'You have come late, Mr. Hilton,' she said; 'and you have come, it seems--alone?'

'Madam,' replied Wogan, with a glance of great sympathy towards the Colonel, and in his softest brogue, 'men are born to loneliness as the sparks fly upward.'

The Colonel took his meaning, and his face flushed. Wogan's spirits rose higher. If only Montague was strung to the same pitch of exasperation and injury as the Parson had been in the like circumstances! The supposition seemed probable. Mr. Wogan could have rubbed his hands in sheer content. The Colonel, however, made no rejoinder, and Mr. Wogan had to amuse himself by watching the play.

It was little amusement, however, that Mr. Wogan got; on the contrary, as he watched, his fears returned to him. Her ladyship was evidently in something of a flutter. She did not show her usual severe attention to the game. Now she called her black boy Sambo to bring her fan; now she would pat her spaniel; now she would gaze through the crowd of perruques and laces

towards the door. Her smile was fixed even when she paid her losses, and that was not her way, she being a bad loser. She was watching for someone, and that someone without a doubt was Mr. Kelly. Wogan could not but ask himself with what intention she watched. Her ladyship was taking a new lover, and for that reason the ballad struck her hard--if she knew of it. Smilinda was not the woman to forgive the blow. She would assuredly blame Kelly for the ballad--if she knew of it. Had she lured him here to strike back? She turned once more to Mr. Wogan, as though she would put some question to him; but, before she could open her lips, a name was bawled up the stairs, and a sudden hush fell upon the room. The throng in the doorway dissolved as if by magic, and between the doorway and Lady Oxford's chair a clear path was drawn. The name was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's. Everyone then knew of the ballad and laid it at Lady Mary's door. Everyone? Mr. Wogan asked himself. Did Lady Oxford know?

Montague frowned and drummed with his knuckles on the table; it was the only sound heard in the room. Then Lord Sidney noisily thrust back his chair, and, stepping past Lady Oxford, stood in the open space between her and the door with a frank boyish championship for which Mr. Wogan at once pitied and liked him.

The name was passed up the stairs from lackey to lackey, growing louder with each repetition. The silence was followed by a quick movement which ran through the room like a ripple across a pool, as each head was turned towards Lady Oxford to note how she would bear herself. She rose, the radiant goddess of hospitality.

'There is no striving, Colonel Montague, against this run of luck,' she said, with the most natural ease; 'but my dear Lady Mary is come to save me from ruin. Mrs. Hewett,' she turned to her opposite, 'will you be tallier to our table? The bank is open to a bidder. No? Ah!' and she took a step forwards to where her champion was standing apart, his hand on his hip, his face raised, ready to encounter even so dangerous an antagonist as Lady Mary, 'my Lord Sidney Beauclerk, you are not afraid?' He looked at her, from her to the door. 'I am your servant,' said she, with her eyelids half-closed over her eyes, 'your grateful servant,' and she motioned him to the table; 'for, being a woman, I positively die to hear what new scandal dear Lady Mary has set on foot.'

She spoke with an affectionate compassion for Lady Mary's foible and an air of innocence which quite took aback the most part of her guests. Mr. Wogan, however, was better acquainted with her ladyship's resources, and, wishing to know for certain whether Lady Oxford knew of the ballad;

'I can satisfy your ladyship's curiosity,' he said bluntly; and with that the noise of the room sank to silence again. He was still standing by the card-table. Lady Oxford turned about to him something quickly. It may be she was disconcerted, or that anger got the upper hand with her. At all events, for an instant she dropped the mask. She gave Wogan one look; he never remembers, in all the strange incidents of his life, to have seen eyes so hard, so cold, and so cruel, or a face so venomous. In a second the look was gone, and the prettiest smile of inquiry was softening about her mouth. 'There is a new poem, is there not, from Lady Mary's kind muse?' said Wogan.

'A new poem!' cried she. 'Let us hear it, I pray. It would be the worst of ill-breeding had I not knowledge enough to congratulate my friend. The happy subject of the poem, Mr. Hilton?'

Lady Oxford took a step towards him. She was all courtesy and politeness, but Mr. Wogan, while he recognised her bravery, had her look of a second ago very distinct before his eyes, and was in no mood for pity. He bowed with no less courtesy.

'It is thought to be an allegory,' he said, 'wherein the arm of flesh is preferred before a spiritual--Blade.

The rejoinder, as it seemed, was approved, for the ladies whispered behind their fans, and here and there a man checked a laugh. Lady Oxford met the thrust with all the appearances of unconcern.

'And tagged with Latin, Mr. Hilton?' she asked. That was enough for Mr. Wogan. Lady Oxford knew the ballad, and gave it to Lady Mary. Without a doubt she must believe Mr. Kelly supplied Lady Mary with the matter of it. 'Of a truth the ballad will' be tagged with Latin. Sure Lady Mary has scholars enough among her friends who would not let her wit go naked when a scrap of Latin could cover it decently--indeed, too decently at times, for, though we always see the Latin, one is hard put to it now and then to discover the wit. Do you not think so, Mr.--Hilton?' She paused ever so slightly before the name, and ever so slightly drawled it, with just a hint of menace in her accent. Mr. Hilton, none the less, got a clear enough knowledge of the dangerous game he was playing. Lady Oxford had but to say 'Mr. Wogan,' and it would not be Mr. Wogan who would have the chance of playing a hand with the figure at the empty table.

Lady Mary's name was now called out from the doorway, and Mr. Wogan was glad enough to leave the encounter to her worthier hands. Lady Mary sailed into the room; Lady Oxford swam forwards to meet her. The two ladies dissolved almost in smiles and courtesies.

'We were in despair, dearest Lady Mary; we feared you would baulk us of your company. France, they said, was happy in your sunshine.'

'France, madam?' asked Lady Mary.

'It was your dear friend, Mr. Pope, who said you had withdrawn thither--la, in the strangest hurry!'

'Indeed, very like! I denied Mr. Pope my door two days ago, and his vanity could only conceive I was gone abroad.'

'Your ladyship was wise. A poet's tongue wags most indiscreetly. Not that anyone believes those fanciful creatures. A romance of a--a M. Rémond for whom you should have placed money in the sinking South Sea; the Frenchman arriving in London in a hurry; Lady Mary in a hurry arriving in France; a kind of country dance figure of partners crossing. A story indubitably false, to the knowledge of all your ladyship's friends, as I took occasion to say at more than one house where the rumour was put about.'

Lady Oxford had scored the first point in the game, as Wogan reckoned and marked 'Fifteen--love' with chagrin. However, he took some comfort from Lady Mary's face, which was grown dangerously sweet and good-natured. Nor was his confidence vain, for Lady Mary did more than hold her ground.

'Your ladyship's good will,' said she, 'is my sufficient defence. My Lord Oxford is here? It is long since I paid him my respects.'

'Alas, my dear Lord has lain these last six weeks at Brampton Bryan,' sighed Lady Oxford, 'with a monstrous big toe all swathed in flannel. Your ladyship, I fear, can only greet my husband by proxy.'

There was just a sparkle of triumph in Lady Mary's eyes.

'By proxy!' she said; 'with all the willingness in the world;' and she swept a courtesy to Colonel Montague, who was coming forward to join them.

Lady Oxford flirted her fan before her face.

A murmur almost of applause ran from group to group of the company.

Mr. Wogan, who loved the game of tennis, marked 'Fifteen--all.'

At that moment a clock upon the mantelshelf chimed the half-hour. In fifteen minutes the Parson would arrive, and Mr. Wogan had not played his hand. He moved a few yards from the table at which Lord Sidney Beauclerk, with his eyes upon Lady Oxford, was dealing the cards, and stood apart by the empty table, wondering how he should do. He picked up a pack of cards idly, and Lady Mary spoke again to Lady Oxford:

'I interrupted your ladyship's game.'

'Nay, your coming was the most welcome diversion. Colonel Montague,' said Lady Oxford, as she was gliding back to her table, 'shared my bank, and played with the worst of luck. I declare the Colonel has ruined me;' and so retired out of range of Lady Mary's guns.

The Colonel followed Lady Oxford. Lady Mary turned to Mr. Wogan, and in a voice loud enough for others than Mr. Wogan to hear:

'What!' said she, 'was Lady Oxford ruined by Colonel Montague? I did not think their acquaintance was of so old a standing.'

'Thirty--fifteen,' said Mr. Wogan in an abstraction.

Lady Mary stared.

'I was but marking the game and scoring points to your ladyship,' Wogan said.

Colonel Montague had heard Lady Mary's sally, for he stopped. Lord Sidney Beauclerk had heard it, for he rose as though to mark his disbelief, and handed Lady Oxford to her chair with a sort of air of protection very pretty in the boy. It seemed, indeed, as though even Lady Oxford was touched, for her face was half turned towards Mr. Wogan, and he saw it soften with something like pity and her eyes swam for an instant in tears. It was new, no doubt, for the spider to feel compassion for the fly, but Mr. Wogan was not altogether surprised, for he began to find the fly very much to his own taste. It was a clean-limbed, generous lad, that looked mighty handsome in the bravery of his pink satin coat, and without one foppish affectation from his top-knot to his shoe-buckles.

Mr. Wogan was still holding the pack of cards in his hands.

'You have a mind to play?' asked Lady Mary.

Wogan looked at the clock. He had only fifteen minutes for his business as lightning conductor. In fifteen minutes the Parson would be here.

'If you will present me to the player I have a mind to play with,' said he, dropping the pack on

the table.

'With all my heart,' said she; 'name him.'

'Colonel Montague.'

Her ladyship looked at Wogan doubtfully, and beckoned the Colonel with her fan. The Colonel, who had his own feud with Lady Mary over the supposed authorship of the ballad, made as though he had not seen her summons. Lady Mary repeated it with no better result, and finally took a step or two towards him. Montague could no longer affect to misunderstand.

'I wish to present you to a friend,' she said, as Colonel Montague joined her.

'If your ladyship will excuse me,' said the Colonel coldly, 'I have no taste for the acquaintance of Irish adventurers.'

Mr. Wogan was not out of earshot, and laughed gleefully as he caught the insult. Here was his opportunity, come in the nick of time.

'Did anyone mention me?' he said pleasantly, as he came round the card-table. But before the Colonel could answer, or Lady Mary interfere, the servant at the door announced:

'Dr. and Miss Townley!'

Wogan's heart gave a leap. He swore beneath his breath.

'Miss Townley?' asked her ladyship, who had caught his oath.

'Is Rose, *the* Rose,' replied Wogan.

Lady Mary knew the ballad, knew who Rose was, and looked perplexed as to why Lady Oxford had asked the girl. Mr. Wogan, on the other hand, was no longer perplexed at all. His doubt was now a certainty. Lady Oxford had prepared a scenic revenge, a *coup de theater*. To this end, and to prove her ignorance of the ballad, she had invited Kelly, Montague, and Rose.

Of the *coup de theater* her ladyship had got more than she bargained for. On her bosom Miss Townley wore diamonds that caught the eye even in that Aladdin's treasure house of shining stones, and among the diamonds the portrait of Lady Oxford. Her ladyship saw it, and grew white as marble. Miss Townley saw Lady Oxford, knew the face of the miniature that she had thought was the Queen's, and blushed like the dawn. Her hand flew to her neck as she courtesied deep to Lady Oxford's courtesy; when she rose, by some miracle of female skill, the miniature and the diamonds had vanished. Rising at the same moment, Lady Oxford looked herself again. But the women understood each other now, and, as they purred forth their *politesses*, Wogan knew that the buttons were off the foils.

He had his own game to play, that would brook no waiting, and he played it without pause. Lady Mary had moved towards the door. Colonel Montague was gliding back to his old position near Lord Sidney. Wogan followed Colonel Montague and stopped him.

'Sir,' said he, in a low brogue, 'I fancied that I caught a little word of yours that reflected on me country and me honour.'

'For your country, sir,' replied the Colonel politely, 'your speech bewrayeth you, but the habitation of your honour is less discernible.'

'Faith, Colonel,' said Wogan, who found his plan answering to his highest expectations, 'you are so ready with your tongue that you might be qualifying for an Irishman. Doubtless you are as ready to take a quiet little walk, in which case I shall be most happy to show you where my honour inhabits. But, to speak the plain truth, it is somewhat too near the point of my sword to make Lady Oxford's drawing-room a convenient place for the exhibition.'

Colonel Montague smiled at the pleasantry in an agreeable way which quite went to Wogan's heart.

'With all the goodwill imaginable,' said he, 'I will take that walk with you to-morrow,' and he made a bow and turned away.

'But Colonel,' said Wogan in some disappointment, 'why not to-night?'

'There are certain formalities. For instance, I was not fortunate enough to catch your name.'

'Tis as ancient as any in Ireland,' cried Wogan, in a heat, quite forgetting his incognito. 'My forefathers--'

'Ah, sir, they were kings, no doubt,' interrupted Montague with the gravest politeness.

'No, sir, viceroys only,' answered Wogan with indifference, 'up to Edward I.'

'Your Highness,' said the Colonel, and he bowed to the ground, 'I reckon to-morrow a more

suitable time.'

Mr. Wogan was tickled out of his ill-humour, and began to warm to the man.

'Sure, Colonel, you and I will be the best of good friends after I have killed you, and for the love of mercy let that be to-night. Look!' and stepping to the window he drew aside the curtain. 'Look,' said he, peering out, 'it is the sweetest moonlight that ever kissed a sword-blade! Oh, to-night, Colonel!' Then he dropped the curtain something suddenly. He had seen a face in the street. 'You prefer sunlight? Very well, sir. But you will acknowledge that to-morrow I have the *earliest* claims on your leisure.'

Colonel Montague bowed.

'The word, you will remember, was an Irish adventurer.' Wogan impressed it upon him.

'Sir, I am wedded to the phrase. You will send your friend to my lodgings at Mrs. Kilburne's, in Ryder Street.'

'Mrs. Kilburne's!' exclaimed Wogan.

Wogan might have guessed as much had he used his brains. It was at the corner of Ryder Street that he had plumped upon Montague when he came down to London from Glenshiel. It was under a portico in Ryder Street that the Parson and he had seen Montague on the night they had driven out on the first journey to Brampton Bryan. It was at Mrs. Kilburne's door that Wogan had seen Montague that afternoon. The Colonel was her fine gentleman upon the first floor. Sure, the Parson had the worst luck in the world. At all events, the Colonel was a gentleman. Wogan consoled himself with that reflection as he thought of Mr. Kelly's despatch box in the scrutoire of his parlour below the Colonel's rooms.

That thought led Wogan's eyes again to the clock. It was half an hour past ten. The Parson was due in ten minutes.

'Good-bye t'ye, Colonel,' he said hastily to Montague, as he turned towards the door. He almost knocked against Rose, who was standing close by his elbow. She made an effort to detain him; he breathed a word of apology. It did not occur to him then that she might have overheard his conversation with the Colonel. He hurried past Lady Oxford and Dr. Townley, who was talking of his schooldays, when he knew Lord Oxford.

'Mr. Hilton,' cried her ladyship. Mr. Hilton was deaf as a bed-post. For when he had looked out of the window at the moonlight he had seen a face in the roadway of which the Parson should have knowledge before he reached the house. It was that face which had made him drop the curtain so quickly and fall in so quickly with the Colonel's objections. A link-boy's torch had flashed for a second upon a man on the other side of the road, and his face was Scrope's. Scrope was watching the house.

Wogan pressed through the throng towards the door, but before he could reach it a firm hand closed upon his arm. He looked round. Lord Sidney Beauclerk was standing by his side with a flushed, angry face.

'A word with you, Mr. Hilton!'

'A hundred, my lord, in half an hour,' said Wogan, and shook himself free. He must warn the Parson and turn him back from the house. But he was too late. In the doorway of the house he met Mr. Kelly, whose face wore a singular air of content. And on the other side of the road stood Scrope with his head turned towards the doorway. Scrope knew that the Parson had come.

Mr. Wogan took Kelly's arm, and led him to the shady side of the street, out of the noisy crowd of lackeys and link-boys.

'Those divines err,' said Kelly, 'who condemn the occasional casting of lots. It is not an ill game.'

'Then you found our lurking luck?'

'Six rouleaux of gold,' said Mr. Kelly, tenderly caressing his pocket.

'The sinews of war, and we are like to need them.'

'Then the coast is not clear?'

'Clear!' said Wogan, 'there is every sign of thunder, wind, and earthquake. First, Montague is here!'

'And here is his Capulet!' said Kelly smiling.

Wogan smiled too, having secured his duel with the Colonel.

'Then Miss Townley is here, and, George, she was wearing my lady's miniature. The women

know each other.'

George's mouth opened, and his utterance was stayed. Then,

'It is a trap. I go home,' he said. Despair spoke in his voice.

'No!' Mr. Wogan's plans had changed.

'Why not? I have no more to lose, and my duty to do.'

'You do not go home, for Scrope is watching the house. He has seen you come. He is behind us now.' Mr. Kelly's hand went to his sword, but Wogan checked him. 'Don't let him think you know. We must leave the house together, and your duty is to be just now where Miss Townley is. Be quick!'

The argument had weight with Mr. Kelly. Wogan had his reasons for advancing it. If they went away together, later, Wogan could engage Mr. Scrope's attentions while the Parson went safely on to Ryder Street. The two passed out of the shade, but not before George had placed his hand in Wogan's. His hand was cold as ice.

CHAPTER XVII

LADY OXFORD'S 'COUP DE THÉÂTRE.'

The Parson, when the two friends had climbed the crowded stairs, began making his way towards his fate and Lady Oxford's table, with a smile on his face. He did not see Rose, who was a little apart, hidden from him by a group of strangers. Wogan was about joining her, when a woman's voice whispered in his ear:

'You are mad!'

The voice was Lady Mary's.

'You are mad, both of you! He should be halfway to the coast by now. What brings him here? I wrote, or rather I sent to him.'

'True,' said Wogan, remembering the letter which he had picked up in the Parson's lodging, and slipped into his pocket. It had been thrust clean out of his mind at the Deanery by those more pressing questions as to how the Blow had been discovered, and how they were to escape from the consequences of the discovery. He drew it out, still sealed up.

'He has not opened it?' she asked.

'He has not seen it,' replied Wogan, who began to fear from her ladyship's discomposure that the letter held news of an urgent importance. She took the letter from his hands, and broke the seal.

'This was my message,' she said. There was no scrap of writing in the letter, but a feather from a bird's wing: it meant "Fly!"

'The feather is white,' said Wogan. He could not have mounted it.'

'He loses his life.'

'Perhaps, but he keeps his honour. There is something that he must do in London if by any means he can. He must burn the papers at his lodgings and the best hope lies in audacity.'

Mr. Wogan tore up the sheet on which her ladyship had written Mr. Johnson's name into fragments too minute for anyone to piece them together again.

'This proof of your good will,' said he, 'shall not rise in judgment against you.'

'But you?' said Lady Mary. 'Why do you stay?'

Wogan laughed.

'For one thing, I have a little business of my own to settle, and--well--'

'And,' said she, 'your friend's in danger.'

She spoke with so much kindness that Mr. Wogan felt a trifle awkward, and turned his eyes from her face. He saw that Rose still stood alone, though many of the gallants eyed her through their quizzing-glasses.

'Lady Mary,' he said, 'you have the kindest heart!'

'Hush! Whisper it,' she replied, 'or you will destroy my reputation. What service would you have me do now?'

'You see Miss Rose? You have read a certain ballad which the ignorant give to your ladyship? And you know Lady Oxford. It is Miss Rose Townley's first visit to this house, and one cannot believe that Lady Oxford asked her with any amiable intention.'

'And I am to be Lady Oxford's spoil-sport?'

'It has gone beyond sport. At this moment her ladyship has murder in her mind. The girl entered the room wearing our hostess's portrait in diamonds,' and he told her shortly how she came to wear it.

Lady Mary looked her horror.

'She has hidden it, but you will not leave the girl?'

Lady Mary nodded, her lips tight closed.

Wogan presented the girl. Lady Mary made room for her at her side, and Wogan only heard her say, 'My dear, be brave, you tremble.'

What else passed, Wogan did not desire to hear. Lady Mary had faults, they say, as a woman, but she was of a manlike courage, and her's was the friendship of a man. Never did woman need it more than Miss Townley, and never, sure, was counsel and comfort wiser and kinder than that which, Wogan knew later, Lady Mary gave to the angry, frightened, and bewildered girl.

Lady Mary's credentials were Wogan's name; the girl could not suspect them. How had she come hither? Lady Oxford had invited her father, Rose said, as a schoolfellow of my lord's, and had asked, too, for the daughter's company. Then the young lady was lured, her new friend said, by a wicked woman for a cruel purpose. That purpose, whatever it was, and neither Wogan nor Kelly nor Lady Mary could do more than guess, must be defeated at any cost--at all costs. Lady Mary glanced at the guilt and guilelessness of our sex. Kelly, too, had been entrapped, before he knew Rose, but that was ended. Lady Mary certainly knew it was ended, however things appeared. According to men's notions, he was compelled to lie to Rose about the miniature. Now Miss Townley might, if she chose, give Kelly his *congé* to-morrow. To-night she must know nothing, see nothing, bear no grudge, be staunch; she owed it to her honour, to the honour of her sex, to Kelly's very life, and to her revenge, if she craved for one, on the false enchantress. That was Lady Mary's sermon. And the lesson was needed. She reported it later to Wogan who, at this moment, was following the Parson with all his eyes.

Lady Oxford at the card-table was greeting Kelly with a conspicuous kindness. Her smile was one wide welcome.

'My dear Mr. Johnson,' she said, 'you are grateful as flowers worked on the very finest Alençon. Sure you bring me those laces for which I gave you a commission in Paris, and the lutestring from my Lady Mar.'

Mr. Kelly murmured a word that the laces were below, and he hoped her ladyship would be satisfied. But his eyes searched the room all the time for Rose, whom he could not see.

'You shall show me them!' cried Lady Oxford; 'but first you must bring me luck. Mr. Johnson and I were always lucky before he went abroad.' She spoke with a provoking smile at Colonel Montague, and then shot a quick glance at Lord Sidney Beauclerk, who was now risen from the table, and stood in a window watching her.

The glance said plain as writing, 'You understand. I have to face out the ballad. I can trust you.' Wogan's blood boiled as he noticed and read the look, for it was just that tender appeal to her lover's faith which always brought about the lover's undoing. Lord Sidney's young face flushed with pride at the trust she reposed in him, and she continued to Kelly:

'Look over my hand, Mr. Johnson; you must not leave me. What card shall I choose? You, Colonel Montague, I discard you. I appoint you to the Commissariat, run and see that Lady Rich does not starve. She is leaving her party with the air of a loser, and needs the comforts of chicken and champagne. But first let me make you better acquainted with the gentleman who supersedes you. Mr. Johnson, the right-hand man of my dear Bishop of Rochester.' There she stopped short in a pretty confusion, as though the words had slipped from her lips against her will.

'Who should be thrown to the lions,' growled the Colonel to himself, and added gruffly, 'Mr. Johnson and I have met before.'

The Colonel turned his broad scarlet back with the ghost of a bow, and went reluctantly to Lady Rich, a mature matron, dressed to kill, in virginal white. Wogan watched them out of the door, and was again turning back to the card-table, when again Lord Sidney Beauclerk's hand was laid on his sleeve.

'A word with you, Mr. Hilton,' said he in a hard voice.

'When the half-hour is past, my lord,' said Wogan, looking at his watch. 'There are still eight minutes and a few seconds.'

'I will set my watch by yours,' said the lad with great dignity; which he did, and went back to his corner.

Mr. Johnson's welcome, meanwhile, was as that of the prodigal swain. He made more than one effort to slip from her side and go in search of Rose, but Lady Oxford would not let him go. She had eyes only for him, eyes to caress. Many curious people watched the scene as at a play. All the town knew the ballad, and here was Lady Oxford's reply. Mr. Johnson and Lady Oxford were to all seeming the best of friends, and no more than friends, for was not Miss Townley in the room to testify the limits of their friendship?

A shifting of the groups gave Wogan suddenly a view of Rose Townley. She was still talking with Lady Mary, or rather she was still listening to her, and threw in now and again a short reply. But she spoke with an occupied air, and her eyes were drawn ever towards the card-table at which Lady Oxford was practising her blandishments on the Parson. Then to Wogan's relief a few ladies and gentlemen stepped between, and the living screen hid him from her view.

At this moment Lady Oxford lost heavily.

'An ace? Sonica! I am bankrupt!' she cried, and rising from the table she addressed the Parson. 'Mr. Johnson, you bring me no better luck than did the Colonel. I must console myself with private talk, and news of lace and lutestring. What have you brought me? Come, I positively die to see,' and so, with her sweetest smile, she carried off the Parson.

It was thus she had wrought on that first night when Kelly met the Colonel, but there was a mighty difference in Kelly's demeanour. Then he had given her his arm with the proudest gallantry. Now her ladyship went out of her way to lead him past Rose, where she sat with Lady Mary. He threw an imploring glance at the girl, and followed in Lady Oxford's wake, the very figure of discomfort.

Fine smiles rippled silently round the company as the pair made their way to the door. Rose watched them, her face grown very hard and white, but she said no word until they had gone. She stood motionless, except that her bosom rose and fell quickly. Then she turned to Lady Mary.

'I must bid your ladyship good-night,' she said; 'I have stayed too long.'

Pride kept her voice clear, her words steady, but it could not mask the pain of her face.

'What ails you, child? You must smile. Smile!' whispered Lady Mary. But Rose was struck too hard. She lowered her eyes and fixed them on the floor to hide the humiliation they expressed, but she could not smile. She tried, but no more came of it than a quiver at the corners of her lips, and then she set her mouth firmly, as though she could not trust herself.

'I thought I had persuaded you,' whispered Lady Mary. 'It is for honour, it is for life, his life. Appearances are nothing. You *must* stay.'

'I thank your ladyship, who is most kind. I will stay,' said the girl. Her face flushed purely with a delicate, proud anger.

Lady Mary presented her to some of her friends, with whom Rose bore herself bravely. Wogan saw that she had taken her part, and blessed Lady Mary.

He had followed Lady Oxford and the Parson out of the room, and leaned over the balusters while they descended the stairs. It was an ominous business, this summons of Lady Oxford. Why must she carry him off alone with her? What blow had she to strike? Mr. Wogan was not surprised that Kelly had turned pale, and though he held his head erect, had none the less the air of one led to the sacrifice. To make the matter yet more ominous, Lady Oxford herself seemed in a flutter of excitement; her colour was heightened; she sparkled with even more than her usual beauty; her tongue rattled with even more than its usual liveliness.

Half-way down the stairs she met Lady Rich and Colonel Montague mounting. Lady Oxford stopped and spoke to the Colonel. Mr. Wogan caught a word or two, such as 'Miss Townley--the poor girl knows no one.' Kelly started a little; the Colonel sullenly bowed. Lady Oxford, leaning upon Mr. Kelly's arm in order to provoke the Colonel, must needs in pity bid the Colonel wait upon Rose in order to provoke Mr. Kelly. There Wogan recognised her ladyship's refinements.

The pair passed down to the foot of the stairs. To the right of the staircase a door gave on to that little room into which Kelly had led Lady Oxford on the night of the Masquerade. Lady

Oxford left his arm and went towards it.

Kelly remained standing by the stairs, very still. It was in this room that Lady Oxford had discovered the Chevalier's likeness in the lid of the snuff-box, and had deceived George into the belief that she was, heart and soul, as deep in the Cause as he. It was that room which had witnessed the beginnings of the history. Now it seemed it was like to see the end.

Kelly looked up the stairs and saw Wogan's face. He smiled, in a quiet, hopeless way, and then Lady Oxford threw open the door. She turned back to Kelly, a languorous smile upon her lips, a tender light in her eyes. Neither the smile nor the look had power to beguile the two men any longer. Kelly stepped forwards to her like a man that is tired. Wogan had again the queer sense of incongruity. Behind him voices laughed and chattered, in some room to his left music sounded; and here at the foot of the stairs was a woman all smiles and graces playing with Life and Death as a child with toys.

The pair passed into the room. The door shut behind them. The click of the latch is one of the things Wogan never will forget.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHEREIN A NEW FLY DISCOURSES ON THE INNOCENCE OF THE SPIDER'S WEB

Wogan was still leaning on the rail of the balustrade when a watch was held beneath his nose.

'The half-hour is gone, Mr. Hilton,' said Lord Sidney Beauclerk.

'True,' said Wogan, 'it is now a quarter past eleven.' His eyes moved from the watch to the closed door. 'Half an hour, my lord,' he mused, 'a small trifle of minutes. You may measure it by grains of sand, but, if you will, for each grain of sand you may count a life.'

'You hit my sentiments to a nicety.'

Lord Sidney spoke with a grave significance which roused Wogan from his reflections. The lad's face was hard; his eyes gloomy and fierce. Wogan remembered that, when Lord Sidney had spoken before, he had not seemed in the best of good humour.

'My lord,' he said, 'we can hardly talk with comfort here in the doorway.' He led the way back into the inner withdrawing-room and across the room to the recess of a window.

'Here we shall be private,' he said.

'Mr. Hilton, you spoke a little while ago of a ballad, wherein, to use your words, the arm of flesh was preferred to a spiritual Blade. That may have been wit, of which I do not profess to be the judge. But you aimed an insult at a woman, and any man may claim to be the judge of that.'

'My lord,' answered Wogan gently, 'you do not know the woman. I could wish you never will.'

Lord Sidney laughed with a sharp scorn which brought the blood into Wogan's face. It was plain the remark was counted an evasion.

'At all events I know an insult when I hear it. Let us keep to the insult, Mr. Hilton. It reaped its reward, for here and there a coward smirked his applause.' Lord Sidney's voice began to tremble with passion. 'But it has yet to be paid for. You must pay for it to me,' and, since Wogan kept silence, his passion of a sudden got the upper hand, and in a low quick voice--there was as much pain as anger in it--'It hurts me,' he said, clenching his hands, 'it positively hurts me. Here is a woman'--he stopped in full flight, and blushed with a youthful sort of shame at his eloquence--'a woman, sir, in a word, and you must torture her with your brave sneers and she must wear a smiling face while her heart bleeds! Mr. Hilton, are you a man? Why, then, so am I, and it humiliates me that we should both be men. The humiliation will not pass even after,' and he drew a breath in through his shut teeth, 'after I have killed you.'

Mr. Wogan had listened to the outburst with all the respect he thought due to a boy's frank faith. A boy--Wogan's years were not many more than his, but he had seen mankind, and marvelled how they will trust a woman who, they know, has fooled one man, if but a husband. But, at Lord Sidney's talk of killing him, Wogan sank the philosopher and could not repress a grin.

'Kill me, my young friend; *ne fait ce tour qui veut*,' he said; 'but sure you may try if you will. You will not be the first who has tried.'

'I have no doubt of that,' said Lord Sidney gravely, 'and you will oblige me by using another word. I may be young, Mr. Hilton, but I thank God I am not your friend.'

There was a dignity, a sincerity in his manner which to Mr. Wogan's ears robbed the speech of all impertinence. Wogan simply bowed and said:

'If you will send your friend to Burton's Coffee House in the morning----'

'To Burton's Coffee House.'

Lord Sidney turned away. Mr. Wogan drew aside the curtain of the window and stared out into the night with an unusual discontent. Across the road Mr. Scrope was still lurking in the shadow--a hired spy. Very like, he had once been just such another honest lad, with just the same chivalry, before my lady cast her covetous eyes on him. Downstairs in the little room the Parson was fighting, for the Cause, for his sweetheart, for his liberty, and maybe for his life, with little prospect of a safe issue. It seemed a pity that Lord Sidney Beauclerk should be wasted too.

'My lord,' said Wogan, calling after Lord Sidney. And Lord Sidney came back. Wogan was still holding the curtain aside; he had some vague thought of relating Scrope's history, but his first glance at Lord Sidney's face showed to him it would not avail. Lord Sidney would disbelieve it utterly. Wogan dropped the curtain.

'How old is your lordship?' he asked.

Lord Sidney looked surprised, as well he might, and then blushed for his youth.

'I am twenty,' he said, 'and some months,' with considerable emphasis on the months as though they made a world of difference.

'Ah,' replied Wogan, 'I am of the century's age, twenty-two and some more months. You are astonished, my lord. But when I was fifteen I fought in battles.'

'Was it to tell me this you called me back?'

'No,' said Wogan solemnly, 'but you meet me tomorrow. I am not sure that I could do you better service than by taking care that you meet no one afterwards. It was that I had to tell you,' and he added with a smile, 'but I do not think I shall bring myself to do you that service.'

Lord Sidney's face changed a little from its formal politeness. He eyed Mr. Wogan as though for a moment he doubted whether he had not mistaken his man. Then he said:

'In a duel, Mr. Hilton, there are two who fight.'

'Not always, my lord. Sometimes there is one who only defends,' and with that they parted. Clamorous dames took Lord Sidney captive. Wogan looked at his watch. Five minutes had passed since that latch had clicked. He strolled out of the room to the stairs. The door was still shut. He came back into the room and stood by Lady Mary, who was describing to Rose the characters of those who passed by. She looked anxiously at Wogan, who had no comforting news and shook his head, but she did not cease from her rattle.

'And here comes Colonel Montague with a yellow bundle of bones tied up in parchment,' she cried. Lady Rich was the bundle of bones in parchment. 'Colonel Montague--well, my dear, he is a gallant officer in the King's guards who fought at Preston, and he owes his life to a noisy Irish boy who has since grown out of all recognition.'

Here Rose suddenly looked up at Wogan.

'It was this Colonel Montague you saved!' said she.

'Hush,' whispered Wogan, who had his own reasons for wishing the Colonel should discover nothing upon that head. 'Remember, if you please, that my name is Hilton.'

Colonel Montague led Lady Rich to the sofa.

'Colonel, has fortune deserted you that you look so glum?' asked Lady Mary.

'I am on the losing hand indeed, your ladyship, to-night,' said Montague bitterly.

'Well, *malheureux en jeu*,' said her ladyship maliciously, 'you may take comfort from the rest of the proverb.'

Lady Rich shook her rose-coloured ribbons, a girlish simpleton of forty summers.

'I am vastly ashamed of being so prodigiously ignorant,' said she. 'I daresay I ask a mighty silly question, but what is the rest?'

'French, my dear, and it means that fifteen years is the properest age for a woman to continue at, but why need one be five?'

Colonel Montague smiled grimly. Mr. Wogan stifled a laugh. Lady Rich looked somewhat disconcerted.

'Oh, is that a proverb?' said she with a *minauderie*. 'I shall dote on proverbs,' and so she simpered out of range.

Lady Mary lifted up her hands.

'*Regardez cet animal!*' she cried; '*considérez ce néant*. There's a pretty soul to be immortal.'

'Your ladyship is cruel,' said Rose in remonstrance.

'Nay, my dear, it is the only way to keep her quiet. My Lady Rich is like a top that hums senselessly. You must whip it hard enough and then it goes to sleep and makes no noise. Mr. Hilton, are you struck dumb?'

Mr. Hilton's ears were on the stretch to catch the sound of a door, and making an excuse he moved away. Suspense kept him restless; it seemed every muscle in his body clamoured to be doing. He walked again to the window. Scrope was still fixed at his post. Wogan sauntered out of the room to the stairs, and down the stairs to the hall. The hall was empty. The door of the little room where Kelly and Lady Oxford were closeted was shut, and no sound came through it, either of word or movement. Wogan wished he had been born a housemaid, that he might lean his ear against the keyhole without any shame at the eavesdropping. He stood at the stair-foot gazing at the door as though his eyes would melt the oak by the ardour of their look. Above the voices laughed, the smooth music murmured of all soft pleasures. Here, in the quiet of the hall, Wogan began to think the door would never open; he had a foolish fancy that he was staring at the lid of a coffin sealed down until the Judgment Day, and indeed the room might prove a coffin. He looked at his watch; only a poor quarter of an hour had passed since the door had closed. Wogan could not believe it; he shook his watch in the belief that it had stopped, and then a hubbub arose in the street. The noise drew nearer and nearer, and Wogan could distinguish the shouts of newsboys crying their papers. What they cried as yet he could not hear. In the great room at the head of the stairs the voices of a sudden ceased; here and there a window was thrown open. The ominous din rang through the open windows and floated down the stairs, first the vague cries, then the sound of running feet, and last of all the words, clear as a knell:

'Bloody Popish Plot! A Plot discovered!'

So Lady Oxford had played her cards. The plot was out; Scrope was in the street; the Parson was trapped. Wogan determined to open that door. He took his hand from the balustrade, but before he had advanced a step, the door was opened from within. Her ladyship sailed forth upon Mr. Kelly's arm, radiant with smiles; and, to Wogan's astonishment, Kelly in the matter of good humour seemed in no wise behind her.

CHAPTER XIX

STROKE AND COUNTER-STROKE

Those fifteen minutes had none the less proved a *mauvais quart d'heure* for Mr. Kelly. As he entered the room, the memories of the grey morning when first he stood there were heavy upon his thoughts. A cheerful fire burnt upon the hearth now as then. There was the settee on which her ladyship had lain in her pretended swoon. The text which he had read in the Deanery recurred to him: 'Her ways are the ways of Death; her feet take hold on Hell.' Through the open door came the sound of music and the words jangled through Kelly's mind to the tune.

Lady Oxford closed the door; as the latch caught, Kelly lifted his head and faced her. On that first occasion her ladyship had worn a mask, and in truth she wore no mask now. A cruel smile played about her lips; a cruel light glittered in her eyes. She looked him over with triumph, as though he were her captive bound hand and foot. The look braced Mr. Kelly. He started from his memories as a man starts up from sleep; he lived alert and complete in the moments as they passed. Rose, the King's papers, his own liberty--this was his new text. Her ladyship could be trusted to give a sufficient exposition of the other.

She seated herself, and with her fan beckoned him to a chair.

'We have much to speak of, sir. I hear that I have to make you my congratulations, and to pay you my thanks. You may conceive with what sincerity.'

Mr. Kelly remained standing by the fireside.

'For what services does your ladyship thank me?'

'You have made me a tavern-jest. I have to thank you for a ballad.'

Mr. Kelly did not deny or argue the point. His pressing business was to know what Lady Oxford intended.

'And on what fortunate event does your ladyship congratulate me?'

'Are there so many fortunate events in the life of an Irish runagate and traitor? On your happy marriage, sir, with the starving apothecary's daughter.'

Mr. Kelly laughed pleasantly.

'Your ladyship is pleased to be facetious. Upon my honour, I know no such woman,' he said, thinking thus to provoke her to disclose her purposes.

Lady Oxford, to his surprise, rose up with a joyful air. 'I knew it,' she cried. 'I knew the story of the girl was the idle talk of the Cocoa Tree. And Lady Mary thought to stab me with the cruel news. Ah, if the honour of my Strephon be pledged, his Smilinda's anger vanishes.'

Here she threw her arms about Kelly's neck, in a very particular embrace, as if she would kiss him. But she refrained from such a caress. Her arms were clasped tighter and yet more tight till Kelly could scarcely breathe, and her cold whispering mouth touched his ear.

'There was, then, no starving apothecary?'

'None, madam. You have been misinformed.'

The embrace grew deadly tight. He could not have thought that a woman had such strength in her arms.

'No man named Townley? No daughter Rose? No wound? No nursing? No love-vows? No dog Harlequin? No betrothal? Liar!' she whispered in a strange voice, 'I see your miss's ring upon your finger. I saw my portrait upon her breast. Did she steal it? 'Tis like enough. But 'tis likelier that you lie!'

'Your ladyship misunderstands,' said Kelly. 'I denied that there was a starving apothecary's daughter. I did not deny that there was a man named Townley, who, by the way, is your ladyship's guest. I did not deny there was a daughter Rose----'

'Go!' she cried suddenly, releasing Kelly, and pushing him off. 'I know everything, everything. Go, traitor to your King and to your word! And when you are hanged, but *not till you are dead*, remember that you have made a toy and jest of *me*, babbling to your Lady Marys and your Wogans.'

She flung herself back on a settee panting and tearing her laced handkerchief into shreds. Kelly waited a little for her to recover her composure.

'Madam,' he said, 'in the fatal circumstances you mention with such relish, it is certainly not of you that I shall think, though in less painful moments I shall ever do so with honour and gratitude. As for what you say of my babbling, I protest my innocence before Heaven. Your ladyship forgets that you have an enemy from whom it was my good fortune once to defend you.'

Lady Oxford dropped her handkerchief and sat forward staring doubtfully at Kelly, who at once pressed his advantage.

'It was into this room that I then had the honour of escorting your ladyship. Upon that occasion, if I may be pardoned for reminding you, what appears now to be treachery in me, seemed more akin to loyalty. But though the sentiments of your ladyship have suffered a change since then, those of Mr. Scrope have not. It was he who had attacked you then; it is he who attacks you now, and, believe me, it is my regret that I was not again at hand to defend you.'

The Parson should have stopped before those last few words were spoken. He spoke them in all sincerity, but they lost him the advantage he had gained, for it was not in Lady Oxford's nature to believe them. She made her profit out of her lovers' sincerity, yet could not comprehend it. It seemed almost as though some instinct led her to choose them for that very quality, with which her judgment could not credit them.

'A fine story,' she exclaimed with a sneer, 'and no doubt the apothecary's daughter would be entirely content with it, but I know you lie.'

Kelly bowed in silence.

'Wait,' she said, mistaking the bow, for Mr. Kelly had a certain question to ask before he returned to the company; 'we must appear together.'

She took in her hand a box of lace which had been placed ready in the room.

'Your hand, if you please, Mr. Johnson, for the last time. You are going, sir, to your death by rope and knife, or by point of sword.'

Mr. Kelly gave Lady Oxford his hand, and put his question:

'Your Ladyship has no fear that I shall escape?'

Her ladyship had none whatever, as her smile clearly showed.

'Then perhaps your ladyship will inform me how much liberty I have still left to me.'

'You have to-night free,' she answered, and as he heard the words Kelly's heart gave a great leap within him. 'So much reprieve you have. But you must not go till I dismiss you. Enjoy yourself.' She took Kelly's hand with a low courtesy.

He had to-night free! At all events, the King's papers would be saved. If all else went down, the papers would be saved. So it came about that he met Wogan at the stair-foot with a smiling face.

In the withdrawing-room the clatter of tongues had begun again, so that neither Lady Oxford nor the Parson distinguished the shouts of the newsboys, as they mounted the stairs. To Mr. Wogan, indeed, who followed upon their heels, the words no longer rose clear and audible. But as they entered the room, it was plain something was stirring. The windows stood open, gentlemen leaned out, ladies asked questions; about each window there was a restless, noisy group. The candles guttered in the wind; the card-tables were deserted; and straight in front of him Mr. Wogan saw Rose, her hands clasped in an extremity of apprehension. Colonel Montague stood beside her chatting easily and making as though he remarked nothing of her uneasiness.

Then the hoarse cries again rang through the room.

'Bloody Popish Plot.' 'A Plot discovered.'

'What, yet another Plot?' said Mr. Wogan smiling to Lady Oxford.

'Mr. Walpole discovers plots by the dozen; he is the most active of our guardians,' said Kelly easily. He dared not look at Rose.

'We must hear more of it,' said Lady Oxford pleasantly, and calling her black boy: 'Run, Sambo, bring this late-flying night-bird of ill omen.'

The boy grinned, and ran away upon his errand. Lady Oxford came up to my Lady Mary Montagu.

'See, madam,' she cried, opening the box of lace with the air of a child that has a new toy.

'See what this kind obliger has brought me from the looms of the Fairy Queen. All point d'Alençon of the finest. Yes, you may well look envious. Here is meat for a Queen.'

The other ladies, deserting the windows when they heard that magical word 'lace,' crowded round, and Kelly was, where many a pretty fellow would have loved to be, in the centre of a perfumed world of fans and hoops, of sparkling eyes and patched faces. Kelly, however, had other business on hand, and, slipping through the group while Lady Oxford was praising her lace, he drew Wogan aside to a window now deserted. There he told him of his conversation with Lady Oxford.

'So you see, Nick, I have to-night free. I mean to run to my lodging, burn the papers, and then-why one has a night free. I may yet outwit my lady. Besides, the papers once burned, there's little proof to condemn me. Speak to Rose, Nick! She will believe *you*; you never lied to her. Tell her there's no need to despair. Then make speed to the coast. I must go to Ryder Street.'

As he turned, Nick caught him by the arm.

'You must not go yet.'

'Why?'

For answer Wogan turned to the window.

'Stand here in the shadow of the curtain. Across the street; there, in the corner.'

Kelly put his hands to his face to shut out the light of the room, and peered into the darkness.

'There is a man. Who is it?'

'I told you! Scrope. I saw him an hour ago. A link-boy's torch showed me his face. You have tonight free. An hour or so more will make little difference to you, and may tire out our friend there--or he may mean another bout with the sharps.'

'I hope so,' said Kelly.

At this moment Sambo returned with a little damp sheet of the *Flying Post*, and the laces were forgotten. Sambo carried the sheet to Lady Oxford.

'Faugh,' said she, 'I dare not touch the inky thing!'

Wogan came out from his window, where he left his friend, and took the sheet from the boy's black paw.

'Does your ladyship wish to alarm us all by reading out the news? These Papists are terrible fellows.'

'Read! Read!' said Lady Oxford, with a contented laugh.

Wogan ran his eyes over the print.

'It is scarce fit for ladies' ears,' he said meaningly. 'Some nonsense out of Grub Street. The wretch should be whipped from Temple Bar to Westminster,' and Wogan made as if he would tear the sheet.

Her ladyship hesitated. But she could not guess what the sheet contained, and she knew Mr. Wogan would try to screen his friend.

'Nay, read sir,' she said boldly, 'or must I imperil my own fingers with the foul thing?'

Wogan folded the paper, and with a bow held it out to her ladyship; again she hesitated; she did not take the sheet; she looked into Wogan's face as though she would read the news-sheet there. Curious smiles began to show upon the faces about her, heads to nod, lips to whisper.

'Shall I oblige your ladyship?' asked Mr. Methuen, who stood by.

'If you please,' replied Lady Oxford, but in a less certain tone than she had used before.

Mr. Methuen took the sheet from Wogan's hand, unfolded it, and glanced at it.

'It is indeed scarce fit for your ladyship's ears,' he said; and in his turn he folded it.

The smiles broadened, the whispers increased. Lady Oxford was altogether disconcerted.

'I will read it,' a young voice rang out. Lord Sidney Beauclerk stepped forward, took the sheet from Mr. Methuen, and at once read it aloud. He began defiantly, but towards the end his voice faltered. Mr. Kelly did not turn round, and seemed to pay no heed whatever.

'They write from Paris that a foul Plot against the Throne, and even the sacred Person of His Most Gracious Majesty hath been discovered. In Town, it is thought that a Lady of great Beauty who has a Tory Lord of advanced years and gouty Habit to her Husband, and a young Whig Officer of great Promise for her Friend, hath given the Intelligence to the Minister. Nobody has yet been taken, but the Gentry of the Silver Greyhound are thought to have their eyes on a certain Reverend Nonjuror. We say no more for the present.'

Lord Sidney crumpled up the sheet, and retiring from the circle, slowly tore it in pieces.

'To be sure, they say quite enough,' murmured Lady Mary, and no one else spoke, but all looked to Lady Oxford.

Lady Oxford was brave.

In the silence of the company who were gathered round she spoke.

'Too scurrilous to need a contradiction! Doubtless it is I and my kind lace-dealer who are aimed at. Now Mr. Johnson is here, and is my guest. The inference is plain.'

Mr. Johnson turned from the window and came up to the group.

'My confidence in her ladyship is as great as my certainty that there is no Plot in which I am concerned,' said Kelly, bowing to the lady, and letting his jolly laugh out of him to the comfort of the company who did not smoke his jest. Mr. Wogan admired his friend.

It was now become impossible for Kelly to leave the house. Should he go now, his going would wear all the appearances of a hasty flight, and who knew but what some of Mr. Walpole's spies might be within the room as well as in the street? Kelly must remain and brave it out, as he clearly recognised. For,

'There are ears to be cut for this,' he went on, 'but we had better be cutting the cards.'

'Mr. Johnson holds the bank with me!' cried Lady Oxford. 'After this terrible false alarm I am

ready to risk all, and brave everything. I must win enough to pay for my laces; I am much in Mr. Johnson's debt. Sambo, my money box.'

The black boy ran out of the room. Mr. Kelly walked towards the card-table, and as he went, a light hand was laid upon his arm, and Rose's trembling voice whispered in his ear:

'George, you will go. Yes, now, to-night. There may yet be time for you to cross to France.'

Mr. Kelly was comforted beyond words, beyond belief. Rose knew, and she forgave; he had not thought it was in woman's nature. But he was also tempted to fly; his papers unburned, the Cause deserted. The hand upon his sleeve had its fingers on his heart-strings, and was twanging them to a very pretty tune. A few strides would bring him to the doorway, a couple of leaps to the foot of the stairs, and outside was the night.

'You will go,' she repeated, seeing how her voice weakened him. 'Now--now.'

'Yes' trembled on his lips. It seemed to Rose in her great longing that she heard the word breathed upon the air. But he did not speak it; he spoke no word at all. He started, his mouth dropped, his blue eyes stared, the blood was drained from his cheeks. He stood amazed, like one that sees a ghost. Rose followed the direction of his eyes; she saw the guests, the tables, the candles, but nothing that should so startle her lover.

'What is it?' she asked, fearing any delay that checked the assent she had seen tremble on his lips. 'You will go! You will go!' But even as she spoke she knew that he would not go. His face kept its pallor, but grew resolute, ennobled. He had ceased to think of his own safety.

'I cannot go,' he said.

'Why?'

'Mr. Johnson,' Lady Oxford's voice broke in. Sambo had returned with a casket curiously enamelled. 'Mr. Johnson,' said she, looking into the casket: 'Some five hundred pounds.'

'And six rouleaux,' added Kelly, bringing out the spoils of Hazard with an air.

Rose turned away, her face of a sudden grown very white and hard. She had done her best to make Kelly seek safety, and he would not: could she do more?

The Parson crossed suddenly to Wogan, his face very pale, but with a wonderful bright light in his eyes.

'Nick, I have seen the King, here, in this room, young, happy. The shadow of the hundred years of sorrow of his race has lifted from his forehead.'

'The King is at Antwerp, George. You have not seen him.'

'Then it is his spirit, which has taken form to hearten us,' Kelly whispered in a voice of awe.

'George, you have seen Lord Sidney Beauclerk.' It needed no more than a word to make him understand. He had not seen the King nor the King's appearance, only the King's cousin, Lord Sidney. But now he could not forget any longer that the King's papers were in his lodgings; that at all costs he must reach his lodgings unfollowed; that at all costs those papers must be a little pile of ashes before the morning came.

'The bank is open,' said Lady Oxford. 'Colonel Montague, will you find a lady and be our opposite?'

The glum Colonel bowed in silence, and allied himself with silly smiling Lady Rich. The play was high. The luck had not deserted Kelly, while Lady Oxford paid him a hundred flattering compliments and bantered her military lover, who was not ready at repartee or was not ready then.

'*Malheureux en jeu,*' said Lady Oxford, repeating the proverb Lady Mary had already quoted that evening. 'How fortunate, Colonel, must be your affections!'

'It is only your ladyship who has all the luck and wins, or wins back if she loses,' answered the Colonel, looking at Mr. Kelly with an evil favour, and her ladyship laughed in pure delight.

There was another game besides Quadrille played at that table. Lady Oxford was setting Colonel Montague and the Parson by the ears. Did she wish to embroil them in a quarrel to make Kelly's ruin doubly sure? Wogan watched the Colonel; he had the first claim upon the Colonel's sword. Mr. Kelly kept smiling and raking in the rippling golden stakes. The company stood round; they had left their tables to see this great battle of Quadrille. At times Wogan caught a glimpse of Rose Townley through a gap in the circle. She could not know why her lover had not fled. She only knew that, in her despite, he stayed in the house of the woman of whom he had told her at Avignon, though his life was in peril; she only saw that woman fawning upon him, and him smiling back to the woman. Lady Mary had stolen her hand into the girl's, that no doubt was cold as marble, and in his heart Wogan blessed her kind ladyship. At last all the tide of gold had

turned to Lady Oxford's side of the table. The Colonel rose and confessed defeat.

People began to say their good-byes. Dr. Townley crossed the room to his daughter, who rose at once with a word of thanks to Lady Mary. Mr. Kelly remarked her movement, and with an imploring look bade her wait until Lady Oxford released him.

'Mr. Johnson,' said her ladyship, dividing the winnings, 'short accounts make long friends. I think when you reckon up the night you will find that all my great debt to you is fully paid.'

Mr. Kelly bowed, and took the money, his eyes on her flushed face and glittering serpent's eyes. Lady Oxford turned to Colonel Montague.

'Your revenge is waiting for you, Colonel, whenever you are pleased to claim it. To-morrow if you will.'

'Madam, I may claim my revenge to-night,' said the Colonel, and stepped back with his full weight upon Kelly's foot. There was no mistaking the deliberate movement. Lady Oxford made as though she had not seen it, but as she turned away her face had a look of pleasure, which Mr. Kelly remarked.

'Nay, Colonel,' said Wogan, 'you and I have a game to play, you remember. Le Queux's is still open and I claim the first call on your leisure at Hazard.'

Colonel Montague answered Mr. Wogan with a good-nature which the latter did not comprehend.

'I have indeed some words to say to you, sir.'

'But, Colonel,' said the Parson, 'you trod upon my foot. I shall be happy to consult you on the bruise to-morrow.'

'To-morrow?' said Montague, his face hardening instantly. 'I may inquire after it before then,' and so making his bow he got him from the room.

Lady Oxford gave her hand to Wogan and dismissed him with a friendly word. She was so occupied with the pleasure of her revenge that she had altogether forgotten his jest about the ballad. Wogan on his side made his leave-taking as short as could be, for out of the corner of his eye he saw Kelly offering his arm to Miss Townley, and Kelly must not leave the house without Wogan at his side. For, in the first place, Colonel Montague was for a sure thing standing sentinel within ten paces of the door, and after he had run the gauntlet of the Colonel, there was Scrope for him to make his account with, should Scrope attempt to follow in his tracks. Mr. Wogan had a mind to insist upon his first claim to Colonel Montague's attentions, and, once they were rid of him, it would not be difficult to come to a suitable understanding with Scrope should he attempt to follow them to Ryder Street.

Mr. Wogan was indeed already relishing in anticipation the half-hour that was to come, and hurried after the Parson, who was by this time close to the door with Rose upon his arm and Dr. Townley at his heels.

'Good night, Mr. Johnson,' said her ladyship in a lazy voice. 'Take care of yourself, for they tell me the streets are not too safe.'

Kelly dropped Rose Townley's arm and turned back towards Lady Oxford.

'But surely,' said he with some anxiety, 'tonight the streets are safe. Your ladyship assured me of their safety to-night.'

Lady Oxford made no reply for a few seconds, she stood watching Kelly with an indolent smile. A word of Lady Mary's came back to Wogan's mind--a word spoken two years since in Paris, 'She will play cat to any man's mouse.'

'To-night?' said Lady Oxford, lifting her eyebrows, and she glanced towards the clock. It was five minutes to one. Kelly stared at the clock, his mouth open and his eyes fixed. Then he drew his hand across his forehead, and, walking slowly to the mantelpiece, leaned his hands on it in a broken attitude and so stared at the clock again. Lady Oxford had struck her last blow, and the last was the heaviest. Kelly had the night free, but the night was gone--and the streets were not safe. Nothing could be saved now--not even the King's papers. Then Wogan saw a change come over his face. The despair died out of it and left it blank as a shuttered window. But very slowly the shutter opened. He was thinking; the thought became a hope, the hope a resolve. First his knees straightened, then the rounded shoulders rose stiff and strong. In his turn Kelly struck.

'Your ladyship,' he said, 'was kind enough some time ago to entrust me with your own *brocades*. Those brocades are in the strong box in my lodgings.'

Wogan understood. Brocades was the name for letters in the jargon of the Plot. Lady Oxford's love-letters were in that box which he had handled that very afternoon. If Kelly was seized in the street his rooms would be searched, the King's papers found, and, with the King's papers, Lady Oxford's love-letters. Lady Oxford understood too. Her ingenious stratagems of the evening to

discredit the ballad and save her fair fame would be of little avail if the world once got wind of those pretty outpourings of Smilinda's heart. Her face grew very white. She dropped her fan and stooped to recover it. It was noticeable, though unnoticed, that no one of those who were still present stepped forward to pick up the fan. Curiosity held them in chains, not for the first time that evening. It was as though they stood in a room and knew that behind locked doors two people were engaged in a duel. Now and then a clink of steel would assure them that a thrust was made; but how the duel went they could not tell.

When Lady Oxford rose her colour had returned.

'My brocades?' she said. 'Indeed, I had purely forgotten them. You have had them repaired in Paris?'

'Yes, madam,' answered Kelly deliberately. 'I do not think the streets are so unsafe as your ladyship supposes; but I should be sorry for them to fall into any hands but your own if by any chance footpads end my days to-night.'

He bowed and walked towards Rose Townley and her father, who stood in the doorway at a loss what to make of the scene. He had crossed half the distance before Lady Oxford moved. Then, it seemed with one swift step, she stood at Kelly's side.

'Mr. Johnson, you are my prisoner!' she exclaimed. 'My dear brocades! Mr. Johnson, you are surely the most attentive of men. You must tell me how they have been repaired; I shall not close my eyes unless you take pity on my impatience.'

Had Kelly been the man to care for triumphs wrested from a woman, he would have found his occasion now. A minute before, Lady Oxford's eyes glittered with menaces, her face was masterful; now, her eyes besought pity, her face was humbled.

'If your ladyship will permit me,' said Kelly, 'I will return when I have seen Miss Townley to her chair.'

It was a difficult moment for Miss Townley. For to those who looked on it seemed that by some means here was Mr. Johnson brought back into bondage before the very eyes of his betrothed. But Rose was patient of Lady Mary's lesson. 'Tomorrow give him his *congé* if you will; to-night be staunch! It is for life and honour!' She knew no more, but she was loyal. Wogan had seen men go, for the Cause, to a shameful death by torture. But he never saw courage so unfaltering, or loyalty so true, as this girl's. She was not herself in that hour; she had taken up a part as an actress does, and she played it clean, and played it through. To-morrow she might be a woman again, a woman wronged, deceived, insulted; to-night, with the astonishing valour and duplicity of her sex, she was all in her part, to see nothing, to know nothing, to be staunch.

To the smiles, the simpered sarcasms, the quizzing glances, she paid no heed. She said, with a simple dignity, to Lady Oxford:

'I will not keep Mr. Johnson long. It is but a few steps to your ladyship's door, where my chair waits for me,' and she held out her hand to Kelly. She had her reward. Kelly's face put on a look of pride which no one in the room could mistake. He took her hand with a laugh, and threw back his chest.

'I will return, your ladyship,' he said gaily, and with Rose passed out of the door. The whispers were stilled; the couple went down the stairs in a great silence. Rose bore herself bravely until she had stepped into her chair; showed a brave face then at the window.

'I shall hear of you from France,' she whispered. 'Good-night.'

The chair was carried off; Dr. Townley followed. The Parson returned slowly up the stairs. His heart was full; in Rose's eyes he had seen the tears gathering; no doubt in the darkness of her chair they were flowing now. She would hear of him from France! Well, he had his one weapon--Lady Oxford's letters. If he used that weapon aright, why should she not hear of him from France? By the time he reached the top of the stairs, he was already putting together the words of the letter he should write.

When he re-entered the withdrawing-room, the last few guests, of whom Wogan was one, were taking their departure. Wogan saw Kelly move towards the little card-table which had stood empty. Kelly sat down, and with the fingers of one hand he played with the cards, cutting them unwittingly as though for a deal. It was, after all, he and not Wogan who had to play the hand with the shrouded figure. Wogan had already made his adieux. As he passed out of the door Lady Oxford was standing in the middle of the room plucking at her fan. As he went down the stairs, the door was flung to with a bang. Lady Oxford and Kelly were left alone.

CHAPTER XX

MR. SCROPE BATHES BY MOONLIGHT AND IN HIS PERUKE

Wogan had heard two doors shut that evening, and with very different feelings. One had been latched gently, and the sound had filled him with apprehensions; one had been flung to with an angry violence, and the sound soothed him like the crooning of music. For Kelly, it seemed, after all held the trumps in his hand; he had but to play them aright and the game was his.

'The longer he takes to play them the better,' murmured Wogan, as he stood on the steps of Lady Oxford's house and looked briskly about him. For to his left, standing openly in the moonlight, he saw a tall martial figure wrapped in a cloak, and the end of a scabbard shining beneath the cloak, while across the road his eyes made out a hunched form blotted against the wall. The figure in the cloak was Colonel Montague; the skulker would no less certainly be Mr. Scrope. If the Parson would only take time enough to deploy his arguments like a careful general! Mr. Wogan would have liked to have run back and assured Kelly that there was no need whatever for hurry, since he himself had enough amusements on his hands to make the time pass pleasantly.

He advanced to the Colonel first.

'Sir, it is now to-morrow, the date at which you kindly promised me a few moments of your leisure. You may hear the chimes of the Abbey strike the half hour after one.'

'Mr. Wogan,' replied the Colonel, 'I reckon this yesterday--till after breakfast. At present I have an engagement with another person.'

'Colonel Montague, your reckoning of time is contrary to the almanac, and to a sound metaphysic, of which I am the ardent advocate. You will understand, sir, that such a difference of opinion between gentlemen admits of only one conclusion.'

Colonel Montague smiled, and to Wogan's chagrin and astonishment replied:

'You have grown a foot, or thereby, Mr. Wogan, since last we met, on an occasion which you will permit me to say that I can never forget. All our differences are sunk for ever in that one consideration. I implore you to leave me to the settlement of my pressing business.'

So the Colonel knew of that unfortunate rescue at Preston. Wogan, however, was not so easily put off.

'Grown a foot, sir!' he cried. 'I am not the same man! You speak of a boy, who died long ago; if he made a mistake in saving your life, overlook a pure accident, and oblige me.'

'The accident does not remove my obligation.'

'If you knew the truth, you would be sensible that there was no obligation in the matter. Come, take a stroll in the Park, and I'll tell the truth of the whole matter to whichever of us is alive to hear it.'

'I had the whole truth already, to-night, from the young lady.'

'The young lady?' Wogan had told Rose Townley of how he saved the life of a Colonel Montague, and to-night he had informed her that this Colonel was the man. She had been standing by his elbow when he had picked his quarrel with Montague. Sure she had overheard and had interfered to prevent it. 'The young lady!' he cried. 'All women are spoil-sports. But, Colonel, you must not believe her. I made a great deal of that story when I told it to Miss Townley. But you would find it a very simple affair if you had it from an eye-witness.'

The Colonel shook his head.

'Yet the story was very circumstantial, how you leaped from the barricades--'

'That were but two feet high.'

'And, through a cross fire of bullets, crossed the square to where I lay--'

'The fire was a half charge of duckshot that an old fellow let off by mismanagement from a rusty pistol. Both sides stopped firing the moment I jumped over--the politest thing. I might have been tripping down the Mall with a lady on my arm, for all the danger I ran.'

'But your wounds?'

'I slipped and cut my shin on the sharp cobbles, that's true.'

'Mr. Wogan, it will not do! Had I known your name this evening when Lady Mary made us acquainted, certain expressions properly distasteful to you would not have escaped my lips. But now I can make amends for them to the gallant gentleman who brought a wounded enemy out of a cross-fire. I apologise to you, but I cannot oblige you to the extent you wish, however you may attempt to make light of your courage, and of the obligation on my side.'

'Sure, Colonel, to be done with adornment of the real truth, I only saved such a fine man to have the pleasure of killing him myself.'

Here the Colonel broke into a laugh.

'Mr. Wogan, if I drew my sword and stood up before you without making a parry or a lunge, would you kill me?'

'No, indeed, there would be little diversion in that game,' said Wogan, who was now grown quite melancholic.

'Well, that is the utmost you will get from me, I am much pressed for time, and look to find another.'

'Another!' Wogan's failing hopes revived. 'Praise be to the Saints! I see your mistake, and you shall understand it in a twinkling. The other and myself are just one man for these purposes. George is my *alter ego*. We are the greatest friends, and have been taken for each other when we are talking. I'll talk all the time we fight, and you can fancy it is George whose ribs you are trying to tickle.'

The Colonel, however, was obdurate, and before Wogan could hit upon a likelier argument both gentlemen heard a cough.

Someone was standing on Lady Oxford's doorstep looking towards them.

The Colonel coughed in reply, and the figure--it was Mr. Kelly's--waved his hand, and marched, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, toward St. James's Park.

The Colonel followed, like Hamlet, and Mr. Wogan followed the Colonel. Would there be a fourth to follow Wogan? The three men marched in the moonlight, their footsteps rang boldly on the road. Was there a fourth behind them stealthily creeping in the shadow of the wall? As they turned a corner out of the square Wogan fell a little further to the rear. He kept his head screwed upon his shoulders, and he saw a shadow slink round the corner. He listened, and heard the stealthy steps. He stopped; the steps ceased. Wogan went on again. He knew that Scrope was dogging them.

The figure in front moved silently on till he reached a sweet spot for an occasion, a little *clairière* among the trees, the smoothest sward, moonlight on the grass, dark shadow all around. There he stopped, turned, and dropped his cloak. The moon shone silvery on the silver shoulder-knots of Mr. Kelly. The other two gentlemen advanced.

'Nick,' exclaimed Kelly, 'you should be on your road to the coast.'

'At last!' cried Colonel Montague, dropping his cloak.

'A moment, sir,' said Kelly; 'I must dismiss my friend.'

'And would you be so mad? Are you to have nobody to see fair and run for the surgeon while the other gentleman makes his escape? George, I never knew you were so selfish.'

Kelly drew his friend a little way aside.

'Nick, I have that to do which cannot be done before a witness.'

Mr. Wogan merely gaped at this extraordinary speech. He noticed that Kelly looked white and haggard even for a man in the full moonlight.

'When I tell you that my honour hangs on it, that a witness is mere ruin, when I pray you by our old friendship? Nick, you *must* go out of eye-shot and ear-shot.'

'I think you are crazed,' said Wogan.

'I have obeyed you all night. Things have taken the turn that you must obey me. There is no time for an explanation, the hour presses, and, Nick, my honour hangs on it. You must retire to where you can neither see nor hear us, or I am shamed--lost with the Cause.'

Mr. Kelly had been whispering, his voice trembled as the Cause was named. Wogan had only once seen him thus moved. Had he played his trumps amiss after all? It seemed he had not won the game.

'Very well,' said Wogan. 'Good-night. I will take care you are not troubled with witnesses.'

'No,' said Kelly suddenly, and then 'yes; goodnight.'

He stood looking at Wogan a moment and then hurried off to the Colonel, who seemed, to Wogan's judgment, a man apt to give the Parson his bellyful. Wogan twitched his cloak about him, and took his road down a path, bordered by bushes. It was the path by which they had come into the Park. Wogan was determined that the Parson should not be troubled by witnesses.

From his boyhood Mr. Wogan has had a singular passion for bird's-nesting. He idly scanned the bushes as he marched, for he had heard a twig snap, and in a thick bush he saw what at a first glance certainly resembled a very large brown bird's-nest. Looking more narrowly at this curiosity there were shining eyes under the nest, a circumstance rarely found in animated nature.

Mr. Wogan paused and contemplated this novelty. The bush was deep; the novelty was of difficult access because of the tangled boughs. Wogan reckoned it good to show a puzzled and bemused demeanour, as of one who has moored himself by the punch-bowl.

'It's a very fine bird,' he said aloud. 'I wonder what is the exact species this fine fowl may belong to?'

Then he wagged his head in a tipsy manner, and so lurched down the path singing:

'I heard a bird
Sing in a bush,
And on his head
Was a bowl of punch,
La-la-loodie!

But Wogan's eye was cocked back over his shoulder, for he hoped that the fowl, thinking the hunter gone, would save him trouble by breaking cover. The bush did not stir, however; all was deadly still.

Wogan lurched back to the bush, still singing, parted the branches, and peered in. His mind, in fact, was quite fixed as to the nature and name of this nocturnal fowl.

He spied into the bush. 'I have heard, in France, of a bird called "the cuckoo Kelly,"' he said, 'I wonder if this can be *le cocu* Scrope?'

Something glittered in the heart of the bush. Mr. Wogan leaped aside, his hat spun round on his head, he was near blinded by the flame and smoke of a pistol discharged almost *à bout portant*. A figure had scrambled out of the bush on the further side, and was running at a great pace towards St. James's.

Mr. Wogan gave a view halloo, and set off at the top of his own pace in pursuit. He was swift of foot when young, sound of wind, and long of stride.

At every step he gained on the flying figure, which, he happily remembered, might be armed with another pistol. These commodities usually go in pairs. Reflecting on this, and reckoning his distance to a mathematical nicety, Mr. Wogan applied his toe to that part of the flying gentleman's figure which he judged most accessible and most appropriate to his purpose. The flying gentleman soared softly into a parabola, coming down with a crash, while a pistol fell from his hand. As the priming was spilled, Mr. Wogan let the weapon lie, and courteously assisted the prostrate person to rise.

'I fear I stumbled over you, sir,' he said. 'I hope I was not so unfortunate as to hurt you. Why, 'tis Mr. Scrope, the celebrated critic and amateur of Virgil. Mr. Scrope, the writer of ballads.'

'You are a brutal Irish bully,' said Scrope, whose hands and face were bleeding, for he had the mischance to slip on a gravel path covered with sharp little flints at the top of the Canal.

'Nay, when last we met it was my poetry that you criticised, and now 'tis my manners that do not please you! How could I guess that it was Mr. Scrope who lay in a bush to watch an explanation between gentlemen? This time, sir, of your flight, you have not two horses to carry you off, and I am not barefoot. Suppose we take up our conversation where we left it when last you ran away? You have a sword I see.'

Scrope's sword was already out, and he made a desperate pass at Wogan, who broke ground and drew his own weapon. Scrope was no match for his reach and skill in fence.

'Why, sir, our positions are altered,' said Wogan. 'Now it is you who make errors, and I who play critic and instructor.'

Wogan made a parade in *contre de carte*.

'Look, sir, your blade was beaten a good half foot out of line. Had I chosen to riposte, my sword-hilt would have rung on your breast-bone. Ah, that was rather better,' he said, stepping a pace back, and offering his breast full like a fencing master with his pupil. 'But you did not really

extend yourself. Now, sir, *un, deux, doublez, dégagez, vite!* and Mr. Wogan passed his sword through the lappet of Scrope's coat, coming back on guard. 'That is how you ought to lunge. There is another thing that I would have you notice. Coming on rashly as you do, I could stop you at any moment with a time thrust. I have only to extend my long arm, and where are you?'

Scrope broke ground, sweating, and drew breath:

'You cowardly *maître d'armes!*' he exclaimed between two pants.

'Cowardly, sir? Am I a spy? Or a nameless, obscene rhymer? Do I carry pistols and try to use them? Fie, Mr. Scrope, you must see that a coward who meant to kill you would have done so long ago, and left you here--with an insult, and without a surgeon. You remember the little square at Avignon. You want another lesson.'

Wogan parried, riposted, and just grazed his opponent on the fore-arm.

'*Touché!*' he said. 'Now you see I do not mean to kill you: at least, not with the sword. To do so would be to oblige a lady whom I have no desire to please. Would you prefer to lay down your weapon and come frankly to my embrace? You remember our fond hugs at Brampton Bryan? By the way, Mr. Scrope,' asked Wogan, as an idea occurred to him, 'the night is warm and you seem heated, do you swim? The place is convenient for a bathe, and sheltered from coarse observation.'

With this remark Wogan switched Scrope's sword out of his hand by a turn of the wrist in *flanconade*. The blade flew up and fell flashing in the water of the Canal.

'Now, sir, your life is at my mercy. You have betrayed my Cause; you have nearly murdered my friend; you have insulted two ladies of my acquaintance; you have censured my poetry; and you have spoiled my hat with your pistol bullet. I repeat, do you swim? There are two places here mighty convenient for a ducking.'

Here Mr. Wogan caught his enemy by the collar.

'The Canal is shallow; Rosamond's Pool is deep. You have your choice; safety and prose, or poetry and peril?'

Scrope was squirming in Wogan's grip like a serpent. When Mr. Wogan had calmed him he carried Mr. Scrope like a babe to the edge of the Canal.

'One, two, three!' he said, heaving Mr. Scrope backward and forward, like children setting a swing in motion. 'And away!'

A heavy body flew through the air, flashed into the Canal, and did not at first arise to the surface.

'I hope he has not hit his head or broken his neck,' said Wogan with anxiety. 'It would be very disagreeable to have to wade for him.'

His fears were soon set at rest. Scrope scrambled to his feet, the water reaching nearly to his middle. In his dripping perruque he cut a figure odd enough, and sufficiently pitiable.

'A water god! A Triton!' cried Wogan. 'Have you a Virgil in your pocket? You might study the marine deities whom you resemble. You are sure you have again forgotten to bring the Virgil you desired for Mr. Kelly's use at Avignon.'

'D---n you, I shall see your bowels burned before your eyes for this, you Popish traitor,' cried Scrope, shaking his fist.

'That is as may be. You have done what you can to that end already. You have told all you know; as regards myself it is not very much, and I am not in Newgate yet. Moreover, I know a way out. But stop, I cannot possibly permit you to land, for Scrope was wading to the bank. 'Stay where you are and admire the moonshine! If you set foot on shore I will merely throw you in again! You might be hurt.'

Scrope turned and was beginning to wade to the other side of the Canal.

'It really is not safe in the middle if you do not swim,' cried Wogan. 'Moreover, I can easily be at the further bank before you.' Mr. Wogan suited the action to the word. He ran round the bank as Scrope waded across. He met his bedraggled victim at the water's edge. Mr. Wogan uttered a joyful whoop; there was a great splash and again Scrope sank beneath the surface. He regained his feet and rose spluttering. 'I do trust, Mr. Scrope, that you are not hectic, or subject to rheumatism,' said Wogan with sympathy.

Wogan walked to the centre of the path across the top of the Canal. He spread his cloak upon the grass and sat down, contemplating the moonlight on Buckingham House. There was a sweet odour of the budding may in the air.

'A more peaceful scene, Mr. Scrope,' he cried, 'I have rarely witnessed. All the poet whom you

tried to crush wakes in my bosom. I shall recite Mr. Pope's celebrated Night piece for your benefit.'

Mr. Wogan then arose from his seat on the grass, and, raising his hand towards the Moon, delivered Mr. Pope's lines in his best manner.

'As when the Moon, refulgent lamp of Night,
O'er Heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light.
When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
And not a cloud o'erspreads the solemn scene.'

'You are not listening, Mr. Scrope!'

Scrope was listening, but not to Wogan. Wogan ceased from reciting and listened also. He heard steps and voices of men approaching. Presently, to his great amazement, he recognised the tones of Kelly and Montague, whose mere existence had been banished from his mind. He was yet more surprised when they both came in view, walking very friendly together.

Wogan rose as they drew near him.

'What, both of you?' he exclaimed.

'You do not seem to be glad to see us again, sir?' said Colonel Montague.

'And devil a scratch between the pair of you!' cried Mr. Wogan. 'George, what does this mean? Am I to hear,' he asked with honest indignation, 'that one of you has debased himself to an apology?'

He looked from one to the other much perplexed in mind.

'It is too long a tale for the opportunity, Mr. Wogan,' said the Colonel laughing. 'But *what* does that mean?'

He pointed to the Water God in the perruque, whose shadow was reflected in the calm bosom of the lake.

'Colonel Montague,' cried Scrope, 'I appeal to you as a Protestant and an officer of his Majesty's for your protection against an Irish, Popish, Jacobite conspirator.'

'That gentleman,' said Wogan, 'whom I have been entertaining with Mr. Pope's poem, is an English Protestant, Whig, spy, and murderer, and even, I suspect, a writer in the newspapers. He persists in staying out in the water there, where I cannot get at him. He is one of the Maritime Powers. Egad! George, you know Mr. Scrope of Northumberland and Grub Street?'

George bowed to Mr. Scrope.

'The fourth time you see, sir, has been lucky, contrary to the proverb,' he said politely.

'The poor devil's teeth are chattering audibly,' said Colonel Montague. 'May I ask you to explain his situation, Mr. Wogan?'

'Faith, sir, the story, as you say, is too long for the occasion. And I want an explanation myself. After a gentleman has trod on another gentleman's foot, here you both are, well and smiling. I am betrayed,' cried Mr. Wogan, 'in the character of a friend. I could not have thought it of George.'

'What was the pistol shot we heard, Nick?' asked Mr. Kelly.

'That was Mr. Scrope firing at me.'

'And the view halloo that might have wakened the dead?'

'That was me remonstrating with Mr. Scrope. But I crave your pardon for my thoughtlessness. No doubt the noise brought up some ungentlemanly person who interrupted you in your explanation. You will begin it again? Mr. Scrope and I will be delighted to see fair play, but you will see it from the water, Mr. Scrope. You don't come out yet.'

'Our honours, about which you are so kindly concerned, Mr. Wogan, are as intact as our persons,' said the Colonel.

'Then you have been finding out that George saved your life, or you saved George's, some time in the dark ages, all to prevent you killing each other in a friendly way?'

'You are in an ingenious error, Mr. Wogan; but Mr. Johnson and I have important business together in the town, and we must bid you farewell. Pray allow that dripping gentleman to land and go to bed.'

'But I cannot take him with me, and it is purely inconvenient to let him follow me, for the

precise reason that he would not follow me at all, but my friend Mr. Johnson. I am like my countryman who caught a Tartar in the Muscovite wars. To be sure, I might tie him to a tree with his garters. Come out, Mr. Scrope, and be tied to a tree!

'No, no,' said the Colonel; 'your friend will die of a cold.'

'Then what am I to be doing?' asked Wogan. 'He is a very curious gentleman.'

'I must leave that for you and your friend to determine,' said Colonel Montague. He turned to Kelly. 'In ten minutes,' said he, moving off.

'In ten minutes, Corydon,' said Kelly, and Wogan thought he heard the Colonel mutter, 'Oh, damnation!'

It was all Greek to Wogan, and Kelly seemed in no mind to translate the Greek for his baser comprehension.

'Be off, Nick,' said he. 'I have ten minutes to wait here, and for ten minutes Mr. Scrope shall stand in the pond. You have that much law. It is time enough for your long legs.'

'And do you think I am leaving Mr. Scrope to follow you while I go quietly to bed?' asked Wogan, who was in truth hurt by the proposal. 'No. I shall take him with me. It is the best plan after all.'

'It will not matter, I think, whether he follows me or no; and, Nick, as to going to bed, I hope it will not be on this side of the Channel. Truth, I should be blaming you as it is for your delay, but I have no heart to it.' He had dropped into the Irish accent, a thing very rare with him. 'For the world topples about me to-night, and the sight of a friend is very pleasant to me. There! It is all I had to say to you. Good-night. Good-bye.'

He clapped his hand on Wogan's shoulder and then sat himself down on the grass. If Mr. Scrope had had his wits about him, he might have chosen this occasion to creep out of the water, for Wogan was paying little heed to him.

'George,' said he, 'it seems the game has gone against you. But I have the simplest plan imaginable to put matters straight. What if you give me the key to that pretty despatch-box? You see if I go to your lodging and am taken--'

'No!' cried Kelly.

'But yes,' said Wogan, seating himself on the grass beside Kelly. 'If I am taken, why, it's just Nick Wogan that's taken, and no one but Nick Wogan is a penny the worse. But if you go and are taken--well, there's the Doctor's daughter.'

Kelly would not listen to reason. It was not, he said, a mere matter of slipping into the house and burning the cyphers. But a man must pay for his own shortcomings, and the whole aspect of affairs had changed. And then he fell to thanking Wogan, which thanks Wogan cut short; and so they sat in the moonlight like a couple of owls, only they did not talk.

'You are very thoughtful,' said Kelly, with a tired sort of laugh, 'and you have thought most of your ten minutes away.'

'I was thinking,' said Wogan, 'of a word you used to say about a little parsonage in Ireland and your Latin books, and an acre or two of land, and how, like a fool, I laughed at you for speaking so.'

Kelly rose very quickly to his feet.

'Come, Nick,' said he almost sharply. 'My ten minutes are almost up. I cannot watch Scrope after that, and you may just as well save your life as lose it.'

'I mean to take him with me,' said Wogan. 'Come out, my friend. I'll give him the slip, never fear, when I want to.'

'And then you will start for France?'

Mr. Wogan did not mention a couple of obstacles which would at all events delay his departure. In the first place he had a little matter of business with Lord Sidney Beauclerk, and in the second it would be no more than politeness to inquire after Kelly's health before he went abroad. He kept silent upon this subject, and again summoned Scrope, who waded with his teeth chattering from the water. He drove Scrope before him along a bypath, leaving the Parson standing alone in the moonlight. Mr. Wogan had no expectation that he would ever see his friend's face again, and therefore he swore most heartily at Scrope.

'Come, my man,' said he, 'I am to see that you do not catch cold,' and he marched Scrope at a round pace eastwards as far as Temple Bar, and thence northwards to Soho, and from Soho westwards.

Scrope had been enjoined strictly not to open his lips; but, on the other hand, he heard a great deal about his own character, his merits as a poet, and the morals of his family, which was no doubt new to him. Some three hours later, when the moon had long since set, the pair came to the fields behind Holland House, and there Wogan took his leave of Scrope. The man could do no more harm for that night, and he had for the moment lost his taste for spying.

'You will stay here for five minutes,' said Wogan, who in five seconds was lost in the darkness. He knew a shy place in Westminster where he could pass the night undisturbed. As he laid his head on the pillow it seemed to him to be a good year since he had driven off from Sir Harry Goring's house in the morning. And what of the Parson, whom he had last seen, a sombre figure in the moonlight by the water of St. James's Park? Well, the night had only then begun for Kelly, who, to be sure, had lain abed all the day before.

CHAPTER XXI

IN WHICH MR. KELLY SURPRISES SMILINDA

The devil in all this affair, it was that Wogan could not be in two, or even three, places at once. While Kelly was shut in with Lady Oxford earlier, Mr. Wogan, as he has said, was on the wrong side of the door. There he was again, after the rout, while he conversed with Colonel Montague in the street. Again, while Wogan was busy with Mr. Scrope in St. James's Park, Kelly and the Colonel were exchanging their unknown explanations, of a kind not admired by Mr. Wogan, which ended in their walking, like a pair of brothers, towards George's rooms. In all these conjunctures Mr. Wogan's advice, could he have been present, might have been serviceable, or at least his curiosity must have been assuaged.

What did pass between Kelly and Lady Oxford when the rout was over, and what were the considerations which induced George and the Colonel to resist their natural and mutual desire for an honourable satisfaction?

These questions (that perplexed Wogan when he awoke, about noon, from the fatigue of the previous day) were answered later by Kelly, and the answer must be given before the later adventures and sorrows of George can be clearly narrated. Sure, no trifle could have turned sword and gown into friends that night.

When Lady Oxford and Kelly were left alone in the empty rooms, among the waning candles and scattered cards, Lady Oxford marched, like indignant royalty, to the end of the inner withdrawing-room, where they could not be heard or interrupted without warning.

Mr. Kelly followed with a mind made up. It was, after all, Lady Oxford that had betrayed him, but he had, by an accident of forgetfulness, kept her letters, and they now gave him the advantage. If those letters could be saved, the Chevalier's papers could and should be saved too, and himself rescued from peril and Rose from much unhappiness. Rose was at the bottom of his thoughts that night; her face was mirrored there bright, it seemed, with divinity. The Chevalier was there too, no doubt, but Rose peeped over his shoulder. Mr. Kelly, then, hardened his heart, and, for love and loyalty, meant to push his advantage over Lady Oxford to its limits. He approached her as she stood retired.

'Wretch,' cried Lady Oxford, 'you promised to burn my letters. Of all traitors you are the most abandoned and perfidious.'

The Parson thought that memory supplied him with a parallel, but he replied:

'It is a promise all men make and all men break.'

Lady Oxford struck her hand upon a table.

'You swore you had burned them.'

This time George was less ready with his answer, but her ladyship stood awaiting it.

'My passion must be my excuse, madam; I could not bear to part with these elegant testimonies of your esteem. It is as I have the honour to tell your ladyship; the brocades are in my strong box in my lodgings. To-morrow they shall be restored to your hands.'

'To-morrow!' she said, in a voice of despair. 'To-morrow! I am undone!'

'It is not so long to wait for the finery, and I do not think the streets are so purely unsafe as you suppose.'

'I am undone!' she repeated. 'The public will ring of my name. I shall become a byword, a thing of scorn for every scribbler to aim his wit at.'

She gnawed her fingers in an agony of fear and perplexity. Mr. Kelly had learned enough. There was plainly no chance within the lady's knowledge, as he had hoped, of saving her letters. Neither, then, could the King's papers be saved. He bowed, and took a step towards the door.

'Stop!'

Mr. Kelly turned with alacrity at the eager cry, but Lady Oxford had no words of hope for him.

'You must not leave this house to-night, or must leave it secretly by the garden.'

Kelly smiled grimly. Her ladyship was suddenly grown most tender of her reputation now that it was in peril.

'Your ladyship's care for me, and your hospitality overcome me, but I have, as you perhaps remarked, an assignation of honour with Colonel Montague which nothing must prevent me from keeping. He is longing for an instant revenge--at the Hazard Table. A while ago, you may pardon me for observing, your ladyship was remote from feeling this sudden and violent anxiety on my hand.'

Mr. Kelly's irony was poured out to deaf ears. Lady Oxford paced to and fro about the room, wringing her hands in her extremity. Then she stopped suddenly.

'I might drive to the Minister's.' She reached out a hand towards the bell. Kelly shook his head.

'That visit would be remarked upon unfavourably by the friends of my Lord Oxford, who are not in the Minister's interest. Mr. Walpole has no party to-night, and must have gone to bed--'tis verging on two o'clock--or else he is in his cups. Moreover, the *Dolliad*, the ballad on his sister, was credited to your pen. You know that Mr. Walpole loves a broad jest, and loves revenge. He will not protect you nor miss so fair an opportunity. Nay, I think I read in to-morrow's *Flying Post*, "In the papers of the prisoner Kelly, among other treasonable matter reserved for a later occasion, were found the following letters of a high curiosity, which we are graciously permitted to publish; one begins--*Oh, my Delicious Strephon.*"

Lady Oxford snapped her fan between her fingers and dashed the fragments in Kelly's face. He owns that he cannot well complain she served him ill, but he wanted to repay her in some sort for her innuendo about his fate at the hangman's hands, and similar favours. Beholding her passion, which was not unjust, he felt bitterly ashamed of his words.

'You coward!' she said. Her dark eyes glared at him from a face white as the ivory of her broken fan, and then, quite suddenly, she burst into a storm of tears. Kelly's shame was increased a thousandfold.

'I humbly crave your ladyship's pardon,' he said. 'I have spoken in terms unworthy of a chairman. But some remarks of your ladyship's on a future event, to me of painful interest, had left an unhappy impression.'

But Lady Oxford paid no heed to the stammered apology. As Mr. Kelly moved to her she waived him aside with her hands, and, dropping on to a sofa, pressed her weeping face into the cushions. Sobs shook her; she lay abandoned to distress.

Mr. Kelly stood apart and listened to the dolorous sound of her weeping. That was true which she had said; he had promised to burn those letters; he had sworn that he had burned them. His fine plan of using them as a weapon against her began to take quite another complexion. There were, no doubt, all manner of pious and respectable arguments to be discovered in favour of the plan, if only he pried about for them. But a saying of Mr. Scrope's was suddenly scrawled out in his recollections: 'Æneas was an army chaplain who invoked his religion when he was tired of the lady, and so sailed away with a clear conscience.' Kelly murmured 'Rose' to himself, and, again, 'Rose,' seeking to fortify himself with the mention of her name. But it had the contrary effect. Even as he heard his lips murmuring it, the struggle was over.

George had a number of pretty finical scruples, of which his conduct at this crisis of his fortunes was a particular example. He relates how it seemed to him that at the mention of her name Rose threw out a hand to him and drew him up out of a slough; how he understood that his fine plan was unworthy of any man, and entirely despicable in the man whom she, out of her great condescension, had stooped to love; how he became aware that he owed it to her, since she was a woman, that no woman's fame, whether a Smilinda's or no, should be smirched by any omission of his; how he suddenly felt in his very marrow that it would dishonour Rose to save her even from great misery by a *lâcheté* towards another of her sex. His duty was revealed to him in that moment, as clear as it was unexpected. He sets his revulsion of feeling wholly to Rose's account, as a man in love should, but very likely her ladyship's fan had something to do with it.

He spoke again to Lady Oxford, and very gently.

'Madam, it is true. I promised to burn your letters. I swore that I had burned them. My honour, I perceive, can only be saved by saving yours.'

Lady Oxford raised her head from the cushions and stared at him with wondering eyes.

'Let us play this game *cartes sur table*,' continued Kelly.

Her ladyship rose from her sofa and sat herself in a chair at a table, still wondering, still suspicious. George took the chair on the other side of the table, and spoke while Lady Oxford dried the tears upon her face. To help her at all he must know all that she knew. His first business was to remove her ladyship's suspicions.

'I understand that your ladyship, by some means of which I am as yet ignorant, has become aware of a certain Plot, and has carried the knowledge to Mr. Walpole.'

Lady Oxford neither agreed nor denied. She admitted the truth of Mr. Kelly's statement in her own way.

'You bragged and blabbed to my worst enemy, to Lady Mary, with her poisonous pen,' and her fine features writhed with hatred as she spoke Lady Mary's name.

'There your ladyship was misled,' returned Kelly. 'My lips have been sealed, as I already had the honour to inform you. My Lady Mary may not love you, but she is innocent of this offence. If she wrote those rhymes, she was, indeed, more my enemy than yours; and my enemy, as your ladyship is aware, she is not.'

Lady Oxford understood the strength of the argument.

'Ah, yes,' she said thoughtfully. 'The apothecary's daughter!'

The contemptuous phrase slipped from Lady Oxford by mistake, and was not at all uttered in a contemptuous voice. But she had no doubt fallen into a habit of so terming the girl in her thoughts. None the less, however, it stung Mr. Kelly, who was at some trouble to keep his voice gentle. He knew how much Smilinda owed at this moment to the apothecary's daughter.

'The young lady to whom I conceive you refer, Miss Townley, is of a family as ancient, loyal, and honourable as your ladyship's own, and you may have seen on what terms both ladies were this evening. Moreover, Lady Mary was purely ignorant of Miss Townley's very existence when that pasquinade was written.'

'Then who wrote it?'

'Mr. Scrope, as I have the honour to repeat.'

'Scrope?' she answered in a quick question, as though for the first time she understood that George might well be right. He gave the reasons for his belief as he had given them at the Deanery to Nicholas Wogan. They were to the last degree convincing. Lady Oxford was persuaded long before Mr. Kelly had come to an end. A look came into her face which Kelly could not understand, a look of bitter humiliation. 'Scrope,' she muttered, as her fingers played with the cards upon the table. She overturned a card which lay face downwards on the table, and it chanced to be the knave of hearts.

'Your ladyship now sees that you fell into a natural error,' continued Kelly, who was anxious to smooth Lady Oxford's path, 'in consequence of which you took a natural revenge. May I ask how you secured the means of revenge? How, in a word, you came to know of the hidden Plot within the Plot?'

Her ladyship's answer fairly startled Mr. Kelly. It was not given at once. She still played with the cards, and overturned another. It was the knave of clubs.

'The cards tell you,' she said with a bitter smile.

Mr. Kelly leaned back in his chair open-mouthed. 'Scrope?' he asked.

'Scrope,' replied her ladyship. 'I received a humble letter from him praying that I would forgive his odious ingratitude, and, by way of peace-offering, bidding me tell my Lord Oxford--'

'Who had already withdrawn,' said George. 'I think I understand,' Lady Oxford's look of humiliation had enlightened him, 'and I think your ladyship understands with me. Mr. Scrope is a sort of a gentleman, and would prefer to do his dirty work without appearing as a spy. He has made use of your ladyship. He sends you the Plot and spurs you to disclose it with his ballad. He would have disclosed it himself, I doubt not, had not your ladyship served his turn. But Mr. Scrope has his refinements, and, besides that he spares himself, would take a particular pleasure in compassing my ruin at the same time that he outwitted you.'

Little wonder that Lady Oxford broke in upon Mr. Kelly's reasonings. It must have been

sufficiently galling for her to reflect that in exacting her revenge she had been the mere instrument of a man she had tossed aside.

'It is both of us that he has ruined, not you alone,' she cried.

Certainly, Mr. Scrope was a person to reckon with, and had killed quite a covey of birds with one stone.

'Are you sure?' asked Kelly. 'Are you sure of that?'

She bent across the table eagerly, but she did not reply to the question.

'Will you kill Scrope,' she flashed out, 'and you and I part friends?'

Kelly, even in the midst of this tangle of misfortunes, could not but smile.

'I fear that I may have been anticipated. Mr. Scrope has been watching your ladyship's house to-night--and Mr. Wogan observed him, and, I conceive, has undertaken for him.'

Lady Oxford at that smiled too. 'Then he is a dead man,' she said, slowly savouring her words like wine.

'But his death, madam, will not save your letters,' said Kelly; and the fire died out of her face.

'He has betrayed us both,' she moaned. It seemed she had already forgotten how she herself had seized at the occasion of betraying Mr. Kelly. Kelly was in no mood to debate these subtleties.

'Are you sure?' he contented himself with asking for a second time. 'There is one thing Mr. Scrope has not done. He has taken no measures purposely to insure that your letters will be discovered, since he does not know of them; else, no doubt, he would have done his worst. We two are still engaged in a common cause--your ladyship's. Your intentions in my regard I were much less than a man if I did not forgive, granting (what I now know) your ladyship's erroneous interpretation of my ground of offence, the babbling to Lady Mary. Does your ladyship permit me, then, at the eleventh hour, to save you, if I can find a way, from the odious consequences of Mr. Scrope's unparalleled behaviour?'

'You?'

Lady Oxford's brows were drawn together in perplexity. The notion that Mr. Kelly was prepared to do this thing was still new and strange to her.

'You?' Her eyes searched his for the truth of his purpose, and found it. 'You?' she said again, but in a voice of gratitude and comprehension. And then, with a gesture of despair, she thrust her chair back and stood up. 'You cannot save yourself. I cannot save you.'

'No,' replied George, 'myself I cannot save; but it may not be too late to save my honour, which is now wrapped up in that of your ladyship's. My case is desperate; what can be done for yours? Be plain with me. How much does your ladyship know?'

Lady Oxford turned away from the table. In the face of Kelly's generosity no doubt she hesitated to disclose the whole truth of her treachery.

'I know no more than that you are in peril of arrest,' she said.

'Madam, surely you know more than that. You spoke earlier this evening of my arrest, and you spoke with the assurance of a more particular knowledge.'

Lady Oxford took a turn across the room.

'Oh, my God, what can I do?' she cried, lifting her hands to her head. 'I hear Lady Mary's laughter and the horrid things they will say!'

The whimsical inconsequence of Smilinda's appeal to her Maker did not fail to strike Kelly as ludicrous, but, as his own case was hopeless and abandoned, any thought of revenge or mockery had ceased to agitate him. His honour now stood in saving all that was left of hers from open and intolerable shame, and Rose beckoned him to the task.

'Surely you know more,' he persisted quietly.

Lady Oxford gave in and came back to the table.

'The Messengers should be waiting for you in Ryder Street.'

At last Kelly knew the worst. He would be taken before he reached his doorstep. There would be no chance of saving the cyphers in his strong box. Could he save Smilinda's letters?

He bent his forehead upon his hands, thinking. Smilinda watched him; her lips moved as though she was praying.

'I might be carried to your lodgings and claim what is mine,' she suggested.

'You would be carried to a trap--a *souricière*. Ten to one you would be arrested by the Messengers. At all events your visit would be remarked upon, and you would not obtain the letters.'

Lady Oxford had no other proposal at hand, and there was silence in the room. Mr. Kelly remained with his face buried in his hands; he took the air in long deep breaths. No other sound was audible except the faint ticking of the clock in the outer withdrawing-room. For Smilinda was holding her breath lest she should disturb the man whom she had betrayed, and who was now wholly occupied with the attempt to save her. Then she remarked that the sound of his breathing ceased. She bent forwards; he raised his face to hers. He did not seem to see her; his eyes kindled with hope.

'You have found a way?' she whispered; and he whispered back:

'A desperate chance, but it may serve.' He started to his feet. 'It must serve.'

A smile brightened over his face.

'It will serve.'

Sure he showed as much pleasure as if he had discovered an issue for himself.

'Quick!' said Smilinda, with a smile to answer his. 'Tell me!'

'Colonel Montague--'

'What of him? Why speak to me now of him?'

Lady Oxford's face had clouded at the name.

'He is your only salvation.'

'What can he do?'

'Everything we need. His loyalty to the present occupant of the Throne is entirely beyond a suspicion. He can act as he will without peril to his reputation. He can even rescue your papers, which are not in the same strong box as my own. The Colonel, if any man, can assist you if he will.'

'But he will not,' said her ladyship sullenly.

'He will,' answered Kelly confidently, 'if properly approached. He is a man of honour, I take it? You will pardon me for saying that your ladyship's flattering behaviour towards me, in his presence (for the nature of which you had, doubtless, your own particular reasons) can have left him in no doubt on certain heads; while it is equally plain that your ladyship hath no longer any very tender interest in keeping his esteem and regard. Nevertheless, being a gentleman, he will not abandon your ladyship's cause.'

Lady Oxford was in no way comforted.

'It may well be as you say,' she returned with a look at Mr. Kelly. She had already one example of how much a gentleman could forgive a woman when she stood in need of his help. 'But, Mr. Kelly, you cannot come at Colonel Montague.'

'Why not?'

'You know very well that he lodges in the same house as yourself. I sent a lackey with a note to you, yesterday. And your reply was dated from 13 Ryder Street.'

Mr. Kelly stepped back, he could hardly believe his ears.

'Colonel Montague--lodges--in the same house as myself?' he asked.

'Yes,' Lady Oxford replied in a dispirited fashion. She had lost heart altogether. Mr. Kelly, on the other hand, was quite lifted up by the unexpected news.

'This is a mere miracle in nature,' he cried. 'I only went into my present lodgings two days ago. I have been abroad for the greater part of the time, and asleep the rest, and have had no knowledge of the other tenants, even of their names. Faith, madam, your letters are as safe as though the ashes were now cold in your grate.'

'But the Colonel will have gone home, and you are to be taken in Ryder Street. You will not get speech with him.'

'Nay, madam, he has not gone home. He is waiting for me now.' Lady Oxford started. 'Ah, your ladyship remembers. He is waiting for me. Ten yards from your doorstep--ten yards at the farthest,' and Kelly actually chuckled. Carried away by his plan, he began to pace the room as he

unfolded it. 'I shall see the Colonel, and if I can by any means do so, I will acquaint him, as far as is necessary, with the embarrassing posture of your affairs. I shall give him the key of the box containing the--brocades, and, if the Messengers be not already in possession of them, the rest must be entrusted to his honour as a gentleman and a soldier. The unexpected accident of our being fellow-lodgers gives him, to this end, a great advantage, and can scarce have occurred without the providence of--some invisible power or another which watches over your ladyship.'

Kelly thought that Lady Oxford this night had enjoyed what is called the Devil's own luck.

'Have I your ladyship's leave to try my powers of persuasion with Colonel Montague?'

Very much to Kelly's surprise she moved towards him, like one walking in her sleep.

'You are bleeding,' she said, and stanching with her handkerchief some drops from his brow, where it had been cut by the broken edges of the ivory fan. Then she went again into a bitter fit of weeping, which Kelly could never bear to see in a woman. She may have remembered the snow upon the lawn, years ago, and a moment's vision of white honour. Then she stinted in her crying as suddenly as she had begun; in a time incredibly short you could not tell that she had wept.

'You must carry a token. I must write. Oh my shame!' she said, and sitting down to a scrutoire, wrote rapidly and briefly, sanded the paper, and offered it open to Kelly.

'I cannot see it; your ladyship must seal it,' he said, which she did with a head of Cicero.

George took the note, and said: 'Now time presses, madam. I must be gone. I trust that, if not now, at least later, you may forgive me.'

Her lips moved, but no words came forth. Kelly made his bow, and so took leave of Smilinda, she gnawing her lips, as she watched him with her inscrutable eyes, moodily pushing to and fro with her foot the broken pieces of the fan on the polished floor.

There came into Kelly's fancy his parting view of Rose at Avignon, her face framed among the vine leaves, in the open window; she leaning forth, with a forced smile on her dear lips and waving her kerchief in farewell. A light wind was stirring her soft hair at that time, and she crying '*Au revoir! Au revoir!*' There was a scent of lilacs from the garden in the air of April, George remembered, and now the candles were dying in the sconces with a stench.

With these contrasted pictures of two women and two farewells in his fancy, Kelly was descending the wide empty staircase, not knowing too well where he went. Something seemed to stir, he lifted his eyes and before him he saw again the appearance of his King: the King, young and happy, and as beautiful as the dawn that was stealing into the room and dimming the lustres on the stairs.

Then the appearance moved aside, and Kelly found himself gazing into a great empty mirror that hung on the wall, facing the gallery above.

Lord Sidney Beauclerk, in fact, had not left the house with the other guests, and Kelly, remembering, laughed aloud as he reached the fresh air without.

CHAPTER XXII

AN ECLOGUE WHICH DEMONSTRATES THE PASTORAL SIMPLICITY OF CORYDON AND STREPHON

Wogan has told already how Kelly came out of the house in Queen's Square, how he led the way to the glade, so convenient for the occasion, and how he dismissed his friend. George has since declared that he never was more tossed up and down in his mind than during that trifle of a promenade. Here was the Colonel that had insulted him, and wished nothing, more or less, than to cut his clerical throat. And here was Kelly, that must make friends with his enemy, if he was to save his honour, and the reputation, such as it was, of the woman whom he had once loved. It was a quandary. If Kelly began by showing a flag of truce, the Colonel, as like as not, would fire on it by way of a kick or cuff, and then a friendly turn to the conversation would be totally out of the possible. Had Kelly been six inches taller than he was and a perfect master of his weapon, he might have trusted to the chance of disarming the Colonel and then proposing a cartel, but unhappily it was the Elector's officer who possessed these advantages. Thus Kelly could think of

nothing except to get rid of Mr. Wogan's presence as a witness of the explanation. He succeeded in that, and then marched back to the Colonel, who had stood aside while George conversed with his friend.

Kelly waited, as the wiser part, till the Colonel should show his hand. But the Colonel also waited, and there the two gentlemen stood speechless, just out of thrust of each other, while every convenience in nature called on them to begin.

At last the Colonel cleared his throat and said, 'Reverend Mr. Lace-Merchant, I am somewhat at a loss as to how I should deal with you.'

'Faith, it is my own case,' thought George to himself, but all he uttered was, 'Gallant Mr. Drill-Sergeant, the case seems clear enough. You trod on my foot, and,' said George, as he let his cloak slip from his shoulders to the ground, 'you invited me to take a walk; what circumstance now befogs your intellects?'

Kelly's instincts, naturally good, though dimmed a trifle by a learned education and a clerical training, showed him but that one way out of the wood.

'Several circumstances combine, sir. Thus, I do not want to save the hangman a job. Again, my respect for your cloth forbids me to draw sword on you, and rather prompts to a public battooning tomorrow in St. James's. I therefore do but wait to favour you with this warning, which is more than a trafficker of your kidney deserves.'

'Truth, sir, if you wait to cane me till to-morrow, I have every reason to believe that you may wait a lifetime. As to cloth, mine is as honourable as ever a German usurper's livery.'

This did not promise a friendly conclusion, but George was ever honourably ready to support the honour of his gown, and he confesses that, at this moment, he somewhat lost sight of his main object.

The Colonel stepped forward with uplifted cane, a trifle of tortoise-shell and amber, in his hand.

George drew back one pace and folded his arms on his breast. His eyes, which are of an uncommon bright blue, were fixed on the Colonel's.

'You will find, sir, if you advance one foot, that I do not stand kick or cuff. You are dealing with one who knows his weapon' (no experience could cure George of this delusion), 'and who does not value his life at a straw. Moreover, you began a parley for which I did not ask, though I desired it, and I have to tell you that your honour is involved in continuing this conversation in quite another key.'

George stepped forward the pace he had withdrawn, and clasped his hands behind his back, watching the Colonel narrowly.

There was something in his voice, more in his eyes. The Colonel had seen fire, and knew a brave man when he met one. He threw down his cane and Kelly reckoned that the worst of his task was over.

'You may compel me to fight,' George went on, 'and I never went to a feast with a better stomach, but first I have certain words that must be spoken to you.'

'You cannot intend to escape by promising a discovery?'

'Sir, I do not take you for a Messenger or a Minister. One or both I can find without much seeking, and, for that sufficient reason, before they lay hands on me I absolutely demand to speak to you on a matter closely touching your own honour, which, as I have never heard it impeached, I therefore sincerely profess my desire to trust.'

'You are pleased to be complimentary, but I know not how my honour can be concerned with a Jacobite trafficker and his treasons.'

'I make you this promise, that, if you do thus utterly refuse to listen for five minutes, I will give you every satisfaction at the sword's point, or, by God! will compel you to take it, as you have been pleased to introduce battoons into a conversation between gentlemen. And if, when you have heard me, you remain dissatisfied, again I will give you a lesson with sharps. You see that we are not likely to be interrupted, and that I am perfectly cool. This is a matter to each of us of more than life or death.'

'I do see that you desire to pique my curiosity for the sake of some advantage which I am unable to perceive. Perhaps you expect your friends on the scene?'

'You may observe that I began by dismissing the only friend I have in this town. Do you, perhaps, suspect that Mr. Nicholas Wogan needs, or has gone to procure, assistance?'

'I confess that I know that gentleman too well for any such suspicions.'

'Then, sir, remember that the Roman says *noscitur a sociis*, and reflect that I am a friend of Mr. Wogan's, who must stand sponsor, as you do not know me, for my honesty. Moreover,' said George, working round by a risky way to his point, 'had I wished to escape I could, instead of socking you, have sneaked off t'other way. You observed that I remained some minutes with a lady to-night after you and the rest of her company had withdrawn?'

'It is very like your impudence to remind me of that among other provocations! I am not concerned in your merchant's business of brocades.'

'But, indeed, with your pardon, you are concerned in the highest degree, and that is just the point I would bring you to consider.'

'I tire of your mysteries, sir,' he said, shrugging his shoulders. 'Speak on, and be brief.'

'On these brocades turns the question whether the honour of a lady, which you are bound to cherish, shall be the laughing-stock of the town. Sir, in a word, you, and you only, can save that person; need I say more?'

'Did she send you with this message to save your own skin?'

'That is past saving, except by a miracle, which I am in no situation to expect will be wrought for me. Understand me, sir, I am out of hope of earthly salvation. I have nothing to gain, nothing to look for from man. I make you freely acquainted with that position of my affairs, which are purely desperate. And the person of whom we speak looks to you as her sole hope in the world. She sends you this, take it, I know not the contents, the seal, as you perceive, being unbroken.'

'This looks more serious,' said the Colonel, taking the sealed note which Kelly handed to him.

He pored over the letter, holding it up to the moonlight. 'Do as the bearer bids you, if you would have me live,' he read; then, with a bitter laugh, he tore the note into the smallest shreds, and was about to dash them down on the grass.

'Hold, sir,' Kelly said; 'preserve them till you can burn them. Or--I have myself swallowed the like before now.'

The Colonel stared, and put the fragments into his pocket-book.

'Well,' he said, 'I am hearing you.'

'I thank you, sir; you will grant that I did not wrong you in trusting your generosity. If I am a free man to-morrow, or even to-night after this business is done, I shall have the honour of meeting you, wherever you are pleased to appoint. For my cloth have no scruple, I never was more than half a parson.'

'Sir, I shall treat you as you may merit. And now for your commands, which, it seems, I am in a manner under the necessity to obey.'

'You see this key, sir,' said Kelly, offering that of one of his strong boxes, 'take it, go to my lodgings, which, by a miracle, are in the same house as your own. Enter my parlour, 'tis on the ground floor; open the small iron strong box which this key fits, and burn all the--brocades which you find there.'

'This is a most ingenious stroke of the theatre! I am to burn, I perceive, all the papers, or brocades as you call them, which damn you for a Jacobite plotter! It is not badly contrived, sir, but you have come to the wrong agent I am acquainted with the ingenious works of the French playwrights.'

'Sir, you compel me, against my will, to be more plain with you than I desire. It is your own fault if I give you concern. On opening the coffer you may satisfy yourself of the hand of the writer, which cannot but be familiar to you. Moreover, the letters of the person for whom we are concerned are addressed (that you may not make the error which you apprehend) to one Strephon--not a cant name of a political plot.'

'She called you--Strephon?'

'She was so kind.'

'And I was Corydon,' groaned the Colonel between his teeth.

'*Arcades ambo!*' said George. 'But now 'tis the hour of a third shepherd! Lycidas, perhaps, *le plus heureux des trois*. Oh, Colonel, be easy, we are both yesterday's roses, or, rather, I am the rose of the day before yesterday.'

'And it is for this woman--'

'Ay, it is just for this woman that you are to risk your commission, for a risk there may be, and I my life, for I could get away from this place. You perceive that we have no alternative?'

'What must be, must,' he said, after some moments of thought; 'but what if I find the Messengers already in possession of your effects?'

'In that case I must depend solely on your own management and invention. But I may say that gold will do much, nay, everything with such fellows, and your position, moreover, as a trusted officer of your King's, will enable you to satisfy men not very eminent for scruples.'

'Gold! I have not a guinea, thanks to the cards, not a stiver in my rooms to-night. The cards took all.'

'Here, at least,' cried George, 'I can offer some kind of proof of my honesty, and even be of service. I am poor, Heaven knows, but there are my winnings, easily enough to corrupt four Messengers. Use the money; I have friends who will not let me starve in the Tower. Nay, delicacy is purely foolish. I insist that you take it.'

'Mr. Johnson,' the Colonel said, 'you are a very extraordinary man.'

'Sir, I am an Irishman,' said George.

'I will not say that I never met one like you, but I hope, after all accounts are settled between us, to have the advantage of your acquaintance. Sir, *au revoir*.'

'I shall be with you, sir, in ten minutes after your arrival in your lodgings, whether the coast be clear or not. But let me attend you across the Park, as far as the corner of Pall Mall Street.'

If Kelly was an Irishman, Montague was an Englishman, and Kelly was well enough acquainted with that nation to know that the last proof given of his disinterestedness was by much the most powerful he could have used. He reflected again on the Devil's own luck of Smilinda that night, for if the cards had gone contrary to her and George he could not have produced this demonstration of his loyalty, nor could he very well have invited the Colonel to pay the piper out of his own pocket.

The Colonel also walked silently, turning about in his mind all the aspects of this affair.

'I understand,' he said, 'that you are upon honour not to involve me in tampering with anything disaffected? You will take no advantage whatever that may give *me* the air of being concerned, to shelter yourself or your party?'

'You have my word for it, sir. Your honour, next to that in which we are equally concerned, is now my foremost consideration.'

He nodded, then sighed, as one not very well satisfied.

'Things may come to wear a very suspicious complexion, but I must risk a little; the worse the luck. Mr. Johnson, neither of us has been very wise in the beginnings of this business.'

'I came to that conclusion rather earlier than you, sir, and on very good evidence.'

'No doubt,' growled Montague, and he muttered once or twice, 'Strephon, Corydon--Corydon, Strephon.' Then he turned unexpectedly to Kelly. 'You mentioned these letters as I was leaving the room, and I noticed that her ladyship grew white. She kept you, she knew then of the danger you were in and has just informed you of it. Now, how came she to have so particular a knowledge of your danger?'

Mr. Kelly did not answer a question which boded no good for Lady Oxford. 'She had grounds of resentment against you in a certain ballad.'

Kelly seized at the chance of diverting Montague from his suspicions, and showed how the ballad was aimed at him no less than at her ladyship, and, without giving the Colonel time to interrupt,

'Here I must bid you *au revoir*, sir,' he said, 'for some ten minutes, time enough for you to do what is needed, if, as I hope, you are not disturbed. The Messengers, I conceive, will be lurking for me in Ryder Street outside our common door; they will not think of preventing you from entering, and before I arrive, whatever befalls *me*, our common interest will be secured.'

'You are determined to follow?'

'What else can I do? I must know the end of this affair of the brocades. It is not wholly impossible that the Messengers have wearied of waiting, and think to take me abed to-morrow. When you have done what you know, you will leave my room, and I, if I am not taken, have some arrangements of my own to make. That, I presume, is not a breach of my engagement with you?'

'Certainly not, sir. When I have left your room I am in no sense responsible for your actions. I wish you good fortune.'

While they thus walked and were sad enough, they came within ear-shot of Wogan, who, at that moment, was declaiming Mr. Pope's Night piece to Mr. Scrope, who was in the Canal.

What conversation passed between the four gentlemen Wogan has already told, and he has mentioned how the Colonel went away, and how, after using pains to prevent Mr. Scrope from catching a cold, he himself withdrew to court slumber, and left Mr. Kelly alone in the moonlight.

Mr. Kelly did not remain in the open, but lay *perdu* on the shadowy side of the grove. Concealing himself from any chance of a rencounter, he allotted a space of twelve minutes by his watch, and time never paced more tardy with him in all his life. There was in his favour but the one chance that the Messengers might choose to take him abed in the early morning, when the streets would be empty. At this moment St. James's Street was full of chairs and noises; night-rakers were abroad, and the Messengers, who are not very popular, might fear a rescue by the rabble. On this chance Kelly fixed his hopes, for if he could but be alone for ten minutes in his lodgings, he and his friends would have little to fear from any evidence in his possession.

If the Colonel succeeded, Lady Oxford, and, with her ladyship, George's honour, were safe. If, by an especial miracle of heaven, George could have a few minutes alone in his room, the Cause and the faithful of the Cause would be safe. The Colonel, Kelly hoped, could hardly fail to do his part of the work; he would enter his own rooms unchallenged, his uniform and well-known face must secure him as much as that, and the Epistles of Smilinda would lie in ashes.

So he hoped, but nothing occurred as he anticipated.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW THE MESSENGERS CAPTURED THE WRONG GENTLEMAN; AND OF WHAT LETTERS THE COLONEL BURNED.

For Colonel Montague was taken in Mr. Kelly's place, as you may see with your own eyes in his Grace of Dorset's Report to the Lords' Committees, where the informations of John Hutchins and Daniel Chandler, described as 'two of his Majesty's Messengers in Ordinary,' are printed. These did not chance to be men of a very high degree of intelligence, as their own confessions bear testimony, in itself a fortunate circumstance.

Colonel Montague, when he parted from the Parson at the grove in St. James's Park, walked into Pall Mall Street by the path at the corner of St. James's House and up to St. James's Street to the corner of Ryder Street, where he turned. Ryder Street, what with gentlemen walking home on the footpaths and chairs carried in the road, was a busy thoroughfare at this time of the night, and he remarked nothing extraordinary until he was close to his own doorstep. Then he distinguished, or rather seemed to distinguish--for in the doubtful light he could not be certain--at a little distance on the opposite side of the road a man in the blue and silver livery of Lady Oxford. The man was loitering at the edge of the path, taking a few steps now this way now that. He was tall, and not unlike Mr. Wogan in his girth. Now, Colonel Montague was aware that her ladyship possessed a lackey of just such a conspicuous figure.

'For once in a while,' he thought, 'the news-sheet spoke truth to-night. It seems it was Lady Oxford that set the reverend non-juror, for here is her lackey to point him out to the Messengers.'

With this thought urging him to get his business done quickly, Montague walked up to his door and knocked. On the instant, three men ran across the road and collared him. The capture was observed by one or two gentlemen, who stopped, and immediately a small crowd began to gather about them.

Montague was prudent enough to waste no time in a useless struggle with the Messengers, and asked them quietly who they were and what they intended. At this moment the door was opened by Mrs. Kilburne's maid, and the Messengers, lifting the Colonel up, carried him into the house. Hutchins, a short, stoutish fellow, who was the chief of the three men, told the Colonel who they were.

'And we hold a warrant for your apprehension under Lord Townshend's seal,' he said, and showed his scutcheon and the warrant.

'Not for my apprehension,' replied Montague. 'There is one without there who can speak for me.' For the door was still open to the street, and amongst the people who thronged the entrance, he now saw very clearly the blue and silver livery of her ladyship. The lackey, however, pushed backwards out of range, and since those who were foremost of the crowd turned about to see who it was that Montague pointed to, Hutchins took the occasion to close the door in their faces.

'You are George Kelly, *alias* James Johnson, *alias* Joseph Andrews,' said he, turning again to Colonel Montague, and reading out from the warrant a number of names by which the Parson was known to the honest party.

'It is the first I have heard of it,' replied Montague, and he invited the Messengers up to his rooms on the first floor, where he would be happy to satisfy them of their mistake. Mrs. Kilburne had now joined her maid in the passage, and she followed the Messengers up the stairs, wringing her hands over the disgrace which, through no fault of hers, had fallen upon her house. When they were come within the room, Montague threw open his cloak, which he wore wrapped about his shoulders, and discovered his scarlet coat beneath it.

'I am Colonel Montague,' he said, 'and an officer under the King as well as you. If there is work to be done for the King, I shall be very happy to assist you. I fought for the King at Preston,' and he made a great flourish of his services and valorous acts, not being sure that the Messengers had reinforcements without, and hoping that Mr. Kelly might enter meanwhile and do what was needful. Mrs. Kilburne's tongue and care for the Parson seemed likely to forward this plan, for, with many unnecessary words, she declared how the Colonel had lodged with her for years.

'And as for Mr. Johnson,' she said, 'there was such a man who came and went, but he lodged with Mrs. Barnes in Bury Street, and there you should go if you seek for news of him.'

But the ten minutes were not yet gone. The maid remained downstairs in the passage. She was a perfectly honest poor wench, who would have risked herself for the Parson or for any gentleman in distress. But Montague, however closely he listened, could not hear that she opened the door, or any noise in the room below.

Hutchins made his apologies with a great many 'your honours,' and the Colonel was no less polite in his compliments upon Hutchins's zeal, which he would be sure to make known in the proper quarters. But still the Parson did not come, and Montague could hold the Messengers in talk no longer, though that would have been of little use, as he now discovered.

For Hutchins turned about to Chandler,--

'Go down into the street and tell Lyng and Randall,' he said, 'that our man is not come. Bid them watch for him at the corner of Ryder Street and St. James's.' And as he spoke he gave Chandler the warrant. Chandler slipped it into his pocket, and ran downstairs to join the others of his worshipful calling in the street. Hutchins followed him, but remained within, in the passage, to watch the maid of the house, and see that she did not go out to warn the Parson.

The Colonel and Mrs. Kilburne were thus left alone.

'Mrs. Kilburne,' said Montague. 'You must take my word for it, I am Mr. Kelly's friend, and without any argument, if you please.' For he saw that she was on the point of interrupting him. 'There is but one thing you can do for him. Send someone you can trust, or go yourself to lure the Messengers off to Mrs. Barnes's house. But you must be quick, and here's money to help you.'

He filled her hands with the Parson's gold, and she, in her turn, went downstairs and out of the house by a door at the back. Montague, for his part, had it in mind to try whether the like means might not over-persuade Hutchins's zeal. With that design he descended to Hutchins, whom he found lighting a candle in Mr. Kelly's room with the door open so that he might command a view of the maid who was still waiting in the passage.

The Colonel stepped into the room, casting his eyes about for the strong-box with Smilinda's letters, which he could not see. He saw the scrutoire, however, which stood in the window with the lid closed. Hutchins held the candle above his head and remarked it at the same time.

'I will search the rooms,' he said with an air of consequence. Colonel Montague was in a quandary. Hutchins had only to throw back the lid and the Parson's strong-box would be in his hands. He had only then to break open the lock, and all Smilinda's dainty sentiments about the union of souls would be splotched over by the dirty thumbs of a constable. And the Colonel could not prevent the sacrilege unless the money did it for him.

'Mr. Hutchins,' he said, and jingled the gold in his pockets. But he got no further in his persuasions. For the name was scarce off his lips when a hubbub arose without. It was a confusion of noise at the first as though it came from the end of the street.

'They have taken him,' said Hutchins, setting down the candle and flinging aside the curtains of the window.

The noise was louder, and Kelly's voice was heard, bawling, 'A rescue! An arrest! an arrest! A rescue!' that the rabble might think he was taken for debt. Those who were gathered in front of the house did indeed turn themselves about, but they were for the most part of the better class, and the night-rakers and such-like who might have attempted a rescue, only came up behind at Mr. Kelly's bawling, from St. James's Street, where they were likely to find more profit than in Ryder Street. This friendly mob was running together indeed, but came too late.

'Yes, they have taken him,' said Montague. Mrs. Kilburne had not drawn the Messengers off. On the other hand, Hutchins had not opened Mr. Kelly's scrutoire. 'They have taken him,' and the Parson was already under the window. His sword was gleaming in his hand but the Messengers dragged upon his arms and he could not use it.

Hutchins threw up the window.

'Bring him in,' and he rushed to the street door and unlocked it. Kelly was hustled up the steps, shouting all the while. He was forced into the passage just as the rabble came up at his heels.

'A rescue!' they cried.

Lyng and Chandler turned about and drove them back. Randall sprang in after Kelly and slammed the door.

The posture of affairs then was this:

Colonel Montague and Hutchins were standing in Mr. Kelly's room close to the scrutoire and the open window.

Mr. Kelly, Lyng, who was a big lout, designed by Providence for this office and no other, and the maid, were in the passage. Randall and Chandler were outside in the street and at their wits' ends to keep back the mob, which was now grown very clamorous.

Mr. Kelly was the first to make any movement. He sheathed his sword, carefully dusted the sleeves of his coat where the Messengers had held him and arranged his cravat.

'These are ill times for a peaceful man to live in,' he said. 'It seems a gentleman cannot walk home of an evening but he must be set upon and cuffed.'

With a shrug of the shoulders, as though the whole matter was a mystery, he sauntered into his parlour. His eyes carelessly took in the room. It seemed that nothing had been disturbed. The scrutoire was shut, but were Smilinda's letters still hidden there or were they safe in Montague's pockets? His eyes rested on the Colonel's face and put the question. But the Colonel gave no sign; Hutchins stood at his elbow. Kelly's eyes travelled from the Colonel's face to his red coat.

'One of the King's officers,' he said with a smile. 'In the presence of one of the King's officers, gentlemen,' he said politely with a bow to Hutchins, 'I take it that you will forgo your ingenious attempt to rob me and we may all go quietly to bed.'

He moved as he spoke towards the scrutoire, and again looked at the Colonel. The Colonel's face was still a blank.

'We hold a warrant for the arrest of George Kelly, alias James Johnson,' began Hutchins.

'Indeed?' replied George with an effort of attention, as though fatigue put a strain upon his good manners. 'And why should George Kelly prefer to call himself James Johnson? I cannot think it is the better name. Mr. George Kelly lacks taste, I am afraid,' and he stifled a yawn with his hand.

'Colonel Montague,' said Hutchins, who was in some perplexity as to what to make of Kelly's present indifference, 'your honour promised to assist me.'

Colonel Montague being appealed to, nodded his head.

'Though you will not need my assistance,' he said, 'for here is another of your fellows.'

Chandler had come within the house, and pushing into the room said that the curtains were drawn apart so that the rabble could see clearly all that happened in the room and were on that account the less inclined to disperse. As he spoke he hitched the curtains to and a volley of curses went up from the disappointed crowd.

Hutchins immediately turned to Kelly.

'Give me your sword.'

Kelly, who knew not what to make of the Colonel's manner, but thought it likely he had taken his measures, took his sword by the hanger and handed it sheath and all to Hutchins, who in his turn passed it to Montague. Montague stood in the corner by the window.

'There is some stupid blunder,' said Kelly, 'which I cannot take it upon me to understand. You talk to me a great deal about a warrant, but I have not seen it. It is a new thing to come taking off gentlemen to the round-house in the middle of the night without a warrant, but we live in ill times.' All this he said with an admirable air of resignation, though his eyes kept glancing towards Montague, who still dared give no sign. The Colonel waited upon occasion; his present aim was to hinder the Messengers from any suspicion that the Parson and he were in one purpose or indeed were acquainted.

In answer to Kelly, Chandler took the warrant from his pocket and handed it to Colonel Montague, who read it through.

'It is a very sufficient warrant,' he said, 'and this gentleman may be satisfied if he is rightly named, of which of course I have no assurance,' and folding the paper he handed it back to Chandler. Whereupon Chandler went out again into the street to guard the door from the rabble.

Hutchins then took Kelly's hat, placed it on the table, and searching his pockets, pulled out some papers which he had about him, things of no moment; and these papers he laid in the hat. But to search Kelly's pockets Hutchins must needs stoop. Here was the Colonel's chance. Over Hutchins' shoulder, Kelly's eyes again put their question. The Colonel now answered with a shake of the head. Smilinda's letters had not been saved, a great surprise and disappointment to the Parson, who of course knew nothing of Montague's mistaken arrest.

Kelly, however, wasted no precious moments in regrets. As Hutchins turned to place the papers in the hat, Kelly thrust Lyng aside, and, springing to the window, tore aside the curtains and again bawled at the top of his voice. 'A rescue! An arrest!'

Shouts of encouragement greeted him; the hubbub filled the street again. Hutchins and Lyng at once sprang upon Kelly, tore him back from the window, and sent him staggering across the room.

'Tie his hands!' cried Hutchins, as he pulled down the sash. 'Knock him down! Gag him!' and he turned to help Lyng.

The maid in the passage began to cry; the Colonel stood irresolute; the Parson drew himself up against the wall as the two men approached him. His Irish blood bubbled in his veins at the prospect of so fine a tumble. He clenched his hands. He forgot Smilinda's letter, the Cause, even Rose. His face became one broad grin and in an accent as broad as the grin.

'And what'll I be doin' while you're tyin' my hands?' he asked. 'Why, just this,' and his fist shot out like a battering-ram and took the worthy Lyng on the tip of the chin. Mr. Lyng was clean lifted off both his feet and so sat down on the floor with some violence, where he felt his neck in a dazed sort of way to make sure that it was not broken.

'Oh, why isn't Nick here?' cried Kelly, and indeed Nicholas Wogan bewails his absence at that festivity to this day. 'Come, Mr. Hutchins, I have the other fist for you,' and he began to dance towards Hutchins, who called on the Colonel to mark the murderous look in the prisoner's eyes and save him from immediate destruction.

'Is it destruction you want?' asked Kelly with a chuckle. 'I'll gratify you with all the destruction imaginable.' And no doubt he would have been as good as his word. But Hutchins, while shutting the window had not drawn the curtains, and the rabble in the street had thus enjoyed a full view of the Parson's prowess. They had roared their applause when Lyng went down, and as Hutchins drew back before the Parson's fisticuffs, they hooted the Messenger for a coward and made a rush at the door. A stone or two shattered the window and a voice was yelling, 'Murder! murder!' in tones of unmistakable sincerity. Chandler then rushed in, his face bleeding, and said that Randall was being mobbed, and, if they did not come to help him, would be knocked on the head. At this, Lyng, who was now got to his feet, ran out into the street with Chandler. Hutchins remained in the room, but cried out to Chandler that he should go or send for a file of musquets.

Now Chandler, when he rushed into the room, was holding the warrant in his hand, he still held it when he ran out again, as the Parson remarked, and instantly thought of a plan by which, after all, Smilinda's letters might be secured, and her name kept wholly out of the business. Accordingly he ceased from his warlike posture and sat down in a chair. Hutchins took the occasion to draw the curtains and shut out the mob from a view of the room. Mr. Kelly smiled, for he was just wondering what excuse he could discover to do that very thing himself. Mr. Hutchins was helping him very well.

'It is a pity,' said the Parson in a plaintive voice, sucking his knuckles, which were bleeding, 'that a peaceful, law-abiding citizen must put himself to so much discomfort because a couple of rascally Messengers will not show him their warrant.'

'It is under Lord Townshend's seal,' began Hutchins.

'It may be, or it may not be. I have not seen it. I cannot really surrender unless the proper formalities are observed.'

Hutchins, who was no doubt well pleased to see the peaceful turn things were taking and had not the wits to suspect it, replied with an oafish grin that the prisoner was wise to submit himself to his lawful captors.

'And as for the warrant, Chandler has it safe enough in the street.'

'In the street!' cried Kelly, suddenly flying into a passion. 'And what's the warrant doing in the street? How dare the warrant be in the street when it is intended for a gentleman in the house? Upon my word it would take very little to persuade me that there's no warrant at all,' and he

began to stamp and fume about the room.

'Colonel Montague has read it,' said Hutchins.

'I certainly read a warrant,' agreed the Colonel with an impartial air.

'A warrant, yes,' said Kelly in a testy voice. 'But how can the Colonel know whether it is intended for me? How can he know whether it is a real warrant at all? You come here with a scutcheon, Mr. Hutchins. But you might have stolen the scutcheon, as you have certainly forged the warrant.' He stopped in front of Hutchins and wagged his head at him. 'Mr. Hutchins, I begin to suspect you are one of a gang of cheats come here to rob me. But I will not be your gull,' he cried out as though his fury overmastered him. 'No, nor his worship the Colonel either,' and he called to the maid to lock the street door.

'Lock it,' said he. 'Lock the door' and Mr. Hutchins and I will get to the bottom of the matter quietly.'

That very thing now happened which Mr. Kelly most desired. The maid ran down the passage to the street door: Hutchins ran out of the room after her to prevent her locking it. Kelly flung to the door of the parlour: Mr. Hutchins was outside, the Colonel and Kelly were alone within the room.

'My sword,' said the Parson in a quick whisper. Montague held it out to him without a word: he had no right to refuse it to a free man. Kelly snatched the hilt; the blade rattled out of the scabbard; he stood on guard with his naked blade.

Meanwhile Hutchins and the maid were quarrelling in the passage over the door key, as Kelly could distinguish from their voices.

He made a quick step towards the window, threw open the scrutoire, and returned to his station at the door. But he had not so much as glanced at the scrutoire; he had kept his eyes fixed upon the door. Still keeping his eyes so fixed, he pointed towards the strong boxes.

'Be quick,' he whispered. 'In the strong box! Take the candle and have done. You know the hand, and you have the key.'

Montague pulled the key from his pocket, and fumbled at the lock.

'It will not fit,' he said under his breath and swore.

'Be quick,' repeated Kelly.

The key rattled in the lock as the Colonel turned it this way and that. Mr. Kelly was about to throw a glance over his shoulder when he saw the handle of the door turn. It was turned cautiously without any noise. The next moment the door flew open. Fortunately it opened upwards towards the window and the scrutoire. Kelly stopped it with his foot when it was but half open, so that Montague was entirely hidden behind the panels from the eyes of any one on the threshold or in the passage. Hutchins was on the threshold peering into the room. But he did not peer long, for at the same moment that Kelly stopped the door with his foot he made at Hutchins, with his sword, a pass so vigorous that the hulking fellow leaped back a good yard, crying out to Montague:

'Will your honour let a poor man be killed in his duty?'

The Colonel made no answer to the pathetic question. He was occupied with business of another complexion. Mr. Kelly heard a crack.

'What is the matter?' he asked, in a low voice.

'The key is filled with dust, or the lock is jammed,' Montague whispered back. 'I have broken open the box with the guard of my sword.'

'Be quick,' said Kelly. 'Make sure you have Smilinda's letters.'

All this while he had not looked towards the scrutoire. The most that he saw was the shadow of the Colonel thrown on the wall of the room by the single candle, a shadow monstrous big that held the shadow of a paper to its eyes. It is to be said in Mr. Kelly's defence that he dared not look about him. The door of the room was half open; the Messenger who had retreated into the passage was plainly hardening his heart for a rush. Mr. Kelly's attention was entirely distracted from Colonel Montague's proceedings at this important moment.

'Yes,' whispered Montague. 'This is her hand, this is the blue-edged paper she affects of late. "My own Strephon," and dated two days back. It bids you to her rout.'

The words passed in and out of Mr. Kelly's ears. His eyes were occupied with Hutchins, and with his eyes his mind. He did not remember that he had thrust this letter of her ladyship's, as he had told to Wogan, into the wrong box, the box holding the papers of the Bishop and the King. Then a little flame shot up and illumined the room, which was at once filled with a smell of

burning paper. Montague had burned Smilinda's letter, inviting Kelly to her rout.

It seemed that Hutchins had after all no stomach for Mr. Kelly's sword, which to be sure must have glittered ominously in the dismal light of the solitary candle. He ran back again down the passage and pulled open the street door.

'Chandler,' he shouted, calling his fellow to assist him. A yell of laughter answered him, and a voice from the street cried out that Chandler was gone for a file of soldiers. Kelly could hear Hutchins swearing and cursing, though it was himself that had sent Chandler on the errand.

A second flame spirted up and died away. Montague had burned a second letter.

'Lyng! Randall!' cried Hutchins at the street-door, but again he was answered with jeers, and again the voice called to him mockingly that they were gone to Bury Street, where they were told they would be sure to snare the right man.

Montague, who heard everything clearly, blessed Mrs. Kilburne aloud, and burned a third paper. Kelly kicked the door to.

'We are safe, then, it seems,' he said. 'Smilinda's safe.'

He took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his face, leaning his back against the panels of the door. He could hear Hutchins bawling up the street for his partners, and his voice sounded as though he had moved from the door in search of them. So for the first time Kelly looked at Montague and the scrutoire.

Colonel Montague had turned the strong-box upside down and emptied the papers on the scrutoire, so that they lay face downwards. By a scruple of delicacy, having read the topmost letter to make sure it was Lady Oxford's hand, he looked at them no more. He took them up one by one, face downwards, and so burned them separately, knowing no doubt that, lighted in a single heap, only those on the outside and the edges of the letters in the middle, would catch fire. One by one he burnt them face downwards at the candle, the secret letters of the Cause. He had burned three, and he now held the fourth in his hand. He approached it to the candle; he did not so much as look at it. But had he merely glanced once at Mr. Kelly leaning there against the panels of the door, that glance would have surely told him what papers he was burning.

Kelly did not speak a word, or stir a muscle. He had wiped the sweat from his face a second ago, but his forehead was wet now: his eyes stared greedily at the papers: a slow smile, of a knavish kind, that went very ill with his face, curved his lips. An extreme temptation chained him; the Devil whispered in his ear, 'Be silent,' and the Parson held his peace.

The blue-edged letter bidding him to the rout he had slipped on the top of the Chevalier's papers, as he had told Mr. Wogan. Colonel Montague was merrily burning the papers of the Plot. Kelly had but to hold his tongue, and in a few minutes he was safe. The Cause was saved so far as the papers went, and Lady Oxford, her letters unburned, was lost. No wonder the key did not fit; it was the wrong key! Kelly could see the corner of Wogan's strong-box peeping out from beneath a thatch of papers in the corner of the scrutoire.

All this the Parson saw and understood in the one short moment during which Montague approached the paper to the candle. His mind was tossed up and down in a tempest; the winds of temptation blew hard against the tides of his nature. On one side was safety and the King's interest, and Rose, who to be sure need never know of the treachery by which the Parson had won her; on the other, a broken pledge that he had given to the Colonel, and the ruin of Smilinda, who had betrayed him.

Montague lit the sheet of paper and held it up. Kelly saw the blue flame creep down from the edge, the writing turn brown, the paper curl over black and tattered, with a multitude of red sparks; and still he kept his peace.

Montague dropped the ashes on the scrutoire, and took a fifth paper from the pile. The Parson turned away, and laid his ear to the panel, making a pretence that he heard Hutchins stirring in the passage.

'Be quick!' he said first, and then, moistening his dry lips with his tongue: 'Make quite sure you have Smilinda's letters.'

'Smilinda?' asked Montague.

Kelly forced a laugh.

'No doubt she called herself something equally pretty to you.'

'Phylissa,' growled Montague.

'She has a pretty conceit in names. Make sure those are her letters,' and again he spoke with an effort.

'Not I. I have had my fill of the lady's handwriting.'

Montague was already holding the paper to the flame, when Kelly's good angel got the upper hand with him. He is happy now to think that no chance accident, such as the return of Hutchins or the coming of the soldiers, hurried him into the better choice with a mind half made up. Here was the very occasion of which he had dreamed when he stayed behind in Lady Oxford's withdrawing room. He could use the weapon which her letters put into his hand to save the Chevalier's papers and himself and Rose. But he put the weapon aside. He turned about from the door: Montague was holding the paper to the flame, and a corner of it had taken fire. Kelly sprang to the scrutoire, snatched the paper out of Montague's hand, and crushed the fire out in the palm of his hand.

'I gave you the right key,' he whispered. 'You chose the wrong box.'

Montague snatched up the pile of papers and turned them over.

'Good God! Cyphers!' he exclaimed, and dropped them as though they were, in truth, burning.

'The other box; the other box,' said Kelly, pointing to it. He fancied that he heard Hutchins moving cautiously just outside the door, and was now in a fever lest the delay brought about by his incertitude might balk his intentions. At any moment the Messenger might come back from Bury Street, or the file of the musquets march tramping up the stairs.

All this indeed takes a long time to tell, and seemed no less long to Mr. Kelly in the happening; but the whole of the occurrences, the movements of the Messengers, the tidings cried to him from the street, the burning of the papers, with Kelly's own thoughts and doubts and unlooked-for temptations, passed with momentary speed.

Montague found Wogan's strong box, the box of the love-letters, unlocked it, tore out all the contents, and glanced at a few at the top, middle and bottom.

'Smilinda--Smilinda--Smilinda,' he said, reading the signatures. 'And it's for this woman,' he cried, striking the letters with his fist, 'Smilinda, Phylissa, and the Lord knows what else to the Lord knows what other men, that---'

But the Parson was in no mood to listen to Montague's reflections.

'Put the other papers back into that box, the box with the unbroken lock, lock it and give me the key,' he said. Montague crammed her ladyship's letters into the inner pocket of his coat. But before he could move the door opened with a crash, and Hutchins flew in, Kelly made a furious pass, and Hutchins, leaping back, 'parried the thrust with the door,' as he truly said in his evidence before the Lords' Committee. Had he not used that novel parade Kelly would infallibly have run him through, and, as it was, George could scarcely drag his point out of the wood of the door, which Hutchins in leaping back had shut. Being now sufficiently terrified, for indeed no man ever had a narrower escape of his life, Hutchins contented himself with a plaintive expostulation from the safety of the passage.

'Sure, I would serve Lord Townshend himself in the same way,' Kelly shouted back, 'if he tried to enter my room against my will without a warrant,' and lowering his voice so that only Montague might hear, 'Lock the box, and throw me the key.' If only for Montague's sake the papers of the Plot must not be found lying open upon Kelly's scrutoire, and the box which held them broken among a litter of ashes. Mr. Kelly could not but remember with what care, earlier in the evening, he had burned and buried the ashes of his Grace of Rochester's letters, and reflect with some sadness what little good had come of it. Montague locked up the papers of the Plot in the box which had held Smilinda's letters, and tossed the key to Kelly, who caught it.

'There is no more to do?' said Montague.

'Nothing,' and Kelly handed him back his sword and sat him down on a sofa. He seized the occasion to make Montague acquainted with the accident through which Smilinda's last letter had been laid on the top of those in the box that contained very different wares, adding apologies for his brief delay to inform him. The Colonel then sat down over against Kelly and laid the flat of Kelly's sword across his knees. He looked at the sword for a little. Then,

'You had a chance to let me destroy your own papers,' he said.

'Yes, and to be a liar to a loyal gentleman, and a traitor to a more sacred cause than even my King's.'

'Smilinda's?' Montague looked up in perplexity.

'No,' said Kelly, and he stared for a little at the floor, then he said very slowly, 'A long while ago I made a prayer that nothing might ever come between the Cause and me except it be death. Even while I made the prayer I was summoned to visit Lady Oxford, who was then unknown to me. Well, something has come between the Cause and me--honour. A more sacred Cause than even my King's. Himself would say it.'

Colonel Montague fancied that he heard a distant regular tramp of feet like soldiers. But Mr. Kelly was clean lost in his thoughts.

'I could meet the King with a clear face and this story on my lips,' he continued, 'even though it were over there in Rome, and in his old lodging. The very approach to him was secret, his antechamber a cellar underground. You went by night, you crossed the cellar in the dark, you climbed a little winding stair, and above, in a mean crazy chamber which overhangs the Tiber, there was my King looking towards England. A man like me, with a man's longings and a man's despair, but, unlike me, robbed of a nation. Day by day delay shadowed his eyes and wrote upon his face until the face became an open book of sorrows. Yet himself would say, "Perish the Cause, perish all but honour," and, suddenly throwing up his arms, Mr. Kelly cried out in a voice of great passion and longing, 'The King! The King!'

Colonel Montague very likely had his own opinions as to how the King would take it, but he was careful to keep them to himself, and in the silence which followed upon Kelly's outburst the tread of soldiers was heard very distinct, and Hutchins's voice at the door bidding them hurry.

Mr. Kelly raised his head. He too had heard the sound, and, drawing a ring from his finger,

'Take my seal ring, when you are alone seal up the brocades in a packet. You know the person whom they concern.'

Montague took the ring and slipped it on his finger.

'Mr. Johnson, or Kelly, or whoever you are,' he said cordially, 'we must needs be public enemies, but I wish my King had many as loving servants as your King has in you.'

The rattle of the butts of musquets could now be heard in the passage.

'And, damme,' said Montague, bending forward suddenly; he had all this while maintained in word and carriage the reserve of the Englishman, but now he showed a decent warmth of blood, 'had you been in my place and I in yours, Smilinda or no Smilinda, I should have let you burn the cyphers.'

On those words he was pleased to say, which Mr. Kelly merely counted a politeness, the door was driven open by the butts of several fusils, a sergeant with a file of musqueteers entered; behind them came Chandler with the warrant, Lyng with a broken head, Hutchins with a white, scared face, and Randall whose coat was in tatters.

They were surprised enough, you may be sure, to see the Colonel on one side of the fireplace and their redoubtable prisoner as quiet upon the other.

'Oh,' said Mr. Kelly, with an admirable air of astonishment, 'it seems you have a warrant after all.'

Hutchins then read the warrant through, and Mr. Kelly surrendered. But the Messenger had not done; he picked up presently the impudence to question the Colonel.

'Your worship let the prisoner take his sword?'

The dignified Montague stared at Hutchins with a strong amazement until the fellow was quite abashed.

'What's the world coming to?' he said. 'Here is your prisoner's sword, if he is your prisoner.' and, lifting Mr. Kelly's sword from his knees, he handed it to Hutchins. Hutchins then made haste to secure Mr. Kelly's effects. He went over to the scrutoire, and the first things he clapped his eyes upon were a pile of black ashes and a great many splotches of hot grease from the candle.

Hutchins looked at the Colonel with a question upon his lips; the Colonel looked stonily at Hutchins. Hutchins raised his nose and sniffed the air.

'Will your worship tell me whether the prisoner meddled with any papers?' he asked, but with less impertinence than before.

'Yes, sir, the gentleman did.'

'What was done with them?'

'Sir, they were burned, as you may perceive.'

'And how came you, sir, to let them be burned?'

'I am not to answer to you, sir, for my conduct, of which I can give a sufficient account to persons who have the right to question me. I have, for your satisfaction, no knowledge of this gentleman's name, nor as to whether he is correctly described in a warrant which was not in the house while we were together. It appears to me that you are all very likely to lose your scutcheons for your doltish stupidity, whether you have hold of the right or the wrong gentleman. I wish you a good night, sir,' he said, bowing to Kelly, 'and speedy deliverance, if you deserve it, from your present company.'

He put his hat on his head and walked out of the room without another word. Hutchins

thereupon searched Mr. Kelly's scrutoire; he found one box broken open and empty, another box, its own fellow, locked. Mr. Kelly delivered the key to it, with a great show of reluctance. It held the papers of the Bishop's Plot and a key to the Bishop's cypher, which was used to convict him at his trial. As for the burned papers, it came out at George's trial that he had destroyed letters in the presence of a King's officer. But the Duke of Wharton, in his famous speech, argued that a man of Mr. Kelly's figure might very well have letters to burn which were not political.

That night the Parson was taken to the house of John Gardiner, living in Westminster Market, there to be kept in safe custody. He walked between the soldiers, and whistled a lively tune as he walked.

This was related in more than one inn-parlour the next day by the sergeant, who was mightily surprised that a man should bear so heavy a charge so easily, and so the story got about.

But Mr. Kelly was sensibly lightened by having saved Smilinda in the end after so many mischances, and when he thought of her letters safe in the Colonel's inner pocket, felt a private glow of pleasure which put all conjectures of his fate and doom clean out of his head. Moreover, he says that Rose was never nearer to him than on that night and during that walk. He speaks as though she walked by his side amongst his captors, and walked with a face that smiled.

CHAPTER XXIV

MR. WOGAN WEARS LADY OXFORD'S LIVERY, BUT DOES NOT REMAIN IN HER SERVICE.

The question with which Mr. Wogan lay down to sleep after Lady Oxford's rout, woke him at noon; he sent a boy whom he could trust to Ryder Street to desire Colonel Montague's attendance. Montague came back presently with the boy, and gave Wogan the news that the Parson was taken.

'There was no escape possible,' he said. 'I cannot tell you the innermost truth of the affair, because the secret is not mine to tell; but, Mr. Wogan, you will take my word for it, your friend was in the net.'

'The room was searched?'

'And his papers seized. One or two, I believe, were burned, but the greater part were seized,' and then he broke out with an oath. 'Damn these plots! What in the world made you meddle with such Tory nonsense?'

'Faith,' said Wogan, 'I have been wondering how ever you demeaned yourself to become a Whig.'

Wogan wondered very much more what strange mishap had brought Mr. Kelly to this pass at the moment when he seemed to have success beneath his hand. Something wholly unexpected must have happened during those few minutes when he and Smilinda were left alone. Something had happened, indeed, but it was something very much simpler than Mr. Wogan looked for, who had not the key to the Parson's thoughts. However, he forebore to inquire, and instead:

'Colonel,' said he, 'you professed last night that you were under some trifling obligation to me.'

'I trust to-day to make the profession good.'

'Faith, then you can, Colonel. There's a little matter of a quarrel.'

At this the Colonel broke in with a laugh.

'With whom?'

'With a lad I have taken a great liking for,' and the Colonel laughed again. 'Therefore I would not put a slight on him by missing a certain appointment. It is Lord Sidney Beauclerk.'

Colonel Montague's face clouded as he heard the name.

'And the reason of the quarrel?'

'He took objection to a few words I spoke last night.'

'About a ballad? I heard the words.'

'I told him that he would find a friend of mine waiting at Burton's Coffee-house this morning, and I doubt if many friends of mine will be seen abroad to-day.'

Montague rose from the bed.

'I will not deny,' he said, 'that there are services I should have preferred to render you. But I will go to Burton's, on one condition, Mr. Wogan--that you do not stir from this house until I come back to you. There's an ill wind blowing which might occasion you discomfort if you went abroad.'

This he said with some significance.

'It catches at one's throat, I dare say,' replied Wogan, taking his meaning. 'I have a tender sort of delicate throat in some weathers.'

Colonel Montague walked to Burton's, at the corner of King Street in St. James's. The coffeehouse buzzed with the news of Mr. Kelly's arrest, and Colonel Montague saw many curious faces look up from their news-sheets and whisper together as he entered. In a corner of the room sat Lord Sidney Beauclerk, with a man whom Montague had remarked at Lady Oxford's rout the night before.

Lord Sidney arose as Montague approached and bowed stiffly.

'I come on behalf of a gentleman, whom, perhaps, we need not name,' said Montague.

'Indeed?' said Lord Sidney, with a start of surprise.

'I can understand that your lordship did not expect me, but I am his friend.'

'To be frank, I expected no one.'

'Your lordship, then, hardly knows the gentleman?'

'On the contrary,' said Lord Sidney, and he took up from the table the *Flying Post* of that morning. He handed the paper to Montague, and pointed to a sentence which came at the end of a description of Mr. Kelly's arrest.

'It is said that Mr. Nicholas Wogan is also in London, hiding under the *incognito* of Hilton, and that he will be taken to-day.'

'You see, my lord,' said Montague, 'that there are certain difficulties which threaten to interfere with our arrangements.'

'My friend is aware of them,' said Lord Sidney, and presented his friend.

'Before making any arrangements I should be glad if your lordship would favour me with a hearing in some private place. It is I who ask, not my friend, Mr. Hilton.'

Lord Sidney reluctantly consented, and the two men walked out of the coffee-house.

'There are to be no apologies, I trust,' said Lord Sidney.

Montague laughed.

'Your lordship need have no fears. What I propose is entirely unknown to Mr. Wogan. But it seems to me that the conditions of the duel have changed. If Mr. Wogan shows his face in London he will be taken. If he fights you, it matters not whether you pink him or no, for if he escapes your sword he will be taken by the Messengers. On the other hand, he will not go from London until he has met you; unless--'

'Unless--?'

'Unless your lordship insists upon deferring the meeting until it can take place in France.'

'Yes, I will consent to that,' said Lord Sidney, after a moment's pause. 'It is common fairness.'

'Again I take the liberty to observe that your lordship does not know the gentleman. You must insist.'

Lord Sidney was brought without great difficulty to understand the justice of Colonel Montague's argument.

'Very well; I will insist,' he said; and, coming back to Burton's coffee-house, he wrote a polite letter, which the Colonel put in his pocket.

Montague, however, did not immediately carry it to Mr. Wogan. He stood on the pavement of King Street for a little, biting his thumb in a profundity of thought; then he hurried to the stable where he kept his horses, and gave a strict order to his groom. From the stable he set out for

Queen's Square, but on the way he bought a *Flying Post*, and stopped in St. James's Park to see what sort of account it gave of Mr. Kelly's arrest.

'The Plot concerning which they write from Paris,' it began, 'hath brought the Guards into the Park, and a reverend and gallant non-juror within danger of the Law. The Messengers that were essaying to take Mr. Kelly needed reinforcement by a file of musquets before his reverence's lodgings could be stormed. It is said that a loyal Colonel of the Guards who lodges in the same house in Ryder Street was discovered with Mr. Kelly when the soldiers forced their way in, and that by his interference many valuable papers have been saved, which would otherwise have been destroyed. It appears that Kelly was intent upon burning certain cyphers and letters, and had, indeed, burnt two or three of them before the loyal Colonel interrupted him.'

The loyal Colonel took off his hat to Grub Street for this charitable interpretation of his conduct. Lady Oxford, he reflected, must be in a fine flutter, for assuredly she would have sent for the news-sheet the first thing.

Montague tapped the pocket in which were her ladyship's letters, and smiled. Her anxieties would be very suitable to a certain plan of his own.

He walked straight to Queen's Square and knocked at the door. It seemed to him purely providential that the man who opened the door was the big lackey whom he had seen in Ryder Street the night before. Montague looked him over again and said, 'I think that I saw you last night in Ryder Street.'

He had some further conversation with the lackey, and money passed between them. But the conversation was of the shortest, for her ladyship, in a fever of impatience, and bearing every mark of a sleepless night, ran down the stairs almost before Colonel Montague had finished. She gave her hand to him with a pretty negligence, and the Colonel bent a wooden face over it, but did not touch the fingers with his lips. Then she led the way into the little parlour, and her negligence vanished in a second. She was all on fire to know whether her letters had been seized or no; yet even at that moment it was not in her nature to put a frank question when a devious piece of cajolery might serve.

'Corydon!' she said in a whisper of longing, as though Montague was the one man her heart was set upon, as though she had never brought Mr. Kelly into this very room on a morning of summer two years ago. 'My Corydon!' she said, and sighed.

'Madam,' said Montague, in a most sudden enthusiasm, 'I think there is no poetry in the world like a nursery rhyme.'

Her ladyship could make nothing of the remark.

'A nursery rhyme?' she repeated.

'A nursery rhyme,' repeated the Colonel. "'Will you walk into my parlour, said the spider to the fly.'"

Lady Oxford looked at him quite gravely.

'I do not in the least understand,' she said. She had a wonderful knack of burying her head in the sand and believing that no one spied her, as travellers tell of the ostrich. 'But you have a message for me, have you not?'

She put the question frankly now, since coquetry had failed.

'I have a packet to deliver to your ladyship,' replied Montague.

Lady Oxford drew a breath and dropped into a chair. 'Thank you! How shall I thank you?' she cried; and seeing that Montague made no answer whatever, but stood stiff as a ramrod, she became at once all weak woman. 'You are very good to me,' she murmured in a very pathetic voice.

'Your ladyship owes me no thanks,' replied Montague. 'Your ladyship has need of all your gratitude for a gentleman who gave up all that he held dear to save your good name.'

He had it on the tip of his tongue to add, 'which was not worth saving,' and barely refrained from the words.

Lady Oxford was not abashed by the rebuke. She turned upon the Colonel eyes that swam with pity for Mr. Kelly's misfortunes.

'I read that he was taken,' she said sadly. 'Poor gentleman! But he should have burnt my letters long ago. They were letters written, as we women write, with a careless pen and ill-considered words which malice might misconstrue. He should have burnt them, as he swore to do; but he broke his word, and so, alas! pays most dearly for his fault. Indeed, it grieves me to the heart, and all the more because he brought his own sufferings about. So unreasonable we poor women are,' and she shook her head, and smiled with a sort of pity for women's frail readiness to forgive.

'Madam,' said Montague, growing yet colder, 'it is not for me either to construe or to misconstrue the packet which I am to give you, nor am I at all concerned to defend a gentleman whom I am proud to name my friend.'

The indifference of the speech no doubt stung her ladyship.

'Friend!' she said with a sneer. 'This friendship is surely something of the suddenest. I did not even so late as last night notice any great cordiality between you.'

'Very likely not,' said Montague. 'Last night there was a trivial cause for disagreement upon which to-day we are of one mind.'

Lady Oxford flushed and took another tone.

'You are cruel,' she said. She was not so much insulted as hurt. 'You are ungenerous. You are cruel.'

But Colonel Montague was not in a melting mood, and so, 'Give me the packet,' she said sullenly.

Montague pressed his hand over his pocket and smiled.

Lady Oxford rose from her chair with a startled face.

'You mean to keep it? To use it?'

'Not to your ladyship's hurt.'

Lady Oxford looked at him with eyes mournful in their reproach.

'Mr. Kelly bade you give these letters back to me at once,' she said; and then, with a great fervour of admiration, 'Mr. Kelly would have given them back to me at once.' It seemed as though the thought of the noble Mr. Kelly was the one thing which now enabled her to keep her faith in men.

'Very likely,' replied Montague coolly, who was not at all moved by the disparaging comparison of himself with the Parson. 'Mr. Kelly would have given them back to you at once had not your ladyship taken good care that a few locks and bars should hinder him. But I am not Mr. Kelly, and indeed it is well for your ladyship I am not. Had your ladyship betrayed *me*, why, when that pretty news-sheet was read out last night, I would have stood up before the whole company, and told boldly out how your ladyship came by the knowledge which gave you the power to betray me.'

The words and the stern voice in which they were spoken stung Lady Oxford into a passion. She forgot to deny that she had betrayed Mr. Kelly.

'It would have been an infamy!' she cried.

'A harsh critic might say that it would have matched an infamy.'

Her ladyship saw her mistake.

'There was nothing which Mr. Kelly could have said. Mr. Kelly was my friend, as I have told you frankly; but I did not betray him.'

'Your ladyship's livery is blue and silver, I think--a pretty notable livery even at night, as I had occasion to remark in Ryder Street.'

Lady Oxford was put out of countenance.

'What am I to do to earn the packet which is mine?' she asked bitterly.

'The simplest thing imaginable. Your ladyship, I fear me, has not slept well. What say you to a little country air, with your humble servant for a companion? If your ladyship would order your carriage to be at your door in an hour's time we might take the air for a while together. On our return your ladyship will be refreshed for this evening's diversions, and I shall be the lighter by a packet of letters.'

Lady Oxford did not know what to make of the Colonel's proposal, but she perforce consented to it.

'I obey your orders,' said she bitterly; and Montague went back to Wogan, whom he found sitting on the edge of the bed and disconsolately swinging his legs.

'I have a letter for you from Lord Sidney Beauclerk,' said Montague.

It was a very polite letter, and assured Mr. Wogan that he would on no account fight with him in England; but would cut his throat somewhere in France with the greatest friendliness possible.

'Very well,' said Wogan, 'but I have to reach France first.'

'You will start in an hour's time,' said Montague.

'In broad daylight?' asked Wogan. 'And what of the ill wind and the sore throat that's like to come of it?'

'I have got a fine coat to protect the throat.'

Montague went outside and cried down the stairs to know whether a parcel had been brought into the house. The parcel was carried upstairs into Mr. Wogan's room. The Colonel unwrapped it, and spread out on the bed a blue and silver livery.

'A most distasteful garb,' said Wogan.

'It is indeed not what we would choose for the descendant of kings,' murmured Montague gently as he smoothed out the coat.

'Viceroys, Colonel, viceroys.'

'Viceroys, then, Mr. Wogan; but no doubt they murdered, and robbed, and burned, and ravished, just like kings. Besides, you have an example. For I seem to have heard of another Wogan, who went to Innspruck as a shopkeeper.'

'To be sure,' cried Nick. 'That is the finest story in the world. It was my brother Charles--'

'You shall tell me that story another time,' said Montague, and Wogan stripped off his clothes.

'Will you tell me what I am to do when I am dressed?'

'You will go to a certain house.'

'Yes,' said Wogan, and pulled on the lackey's breeches.

'At the house you will find a carriage.'

'I shall find a carriage.' Wogan drew on a stocking.

'You will mount behind as though you were a footman from the house.'

'A footman from the house,' repeated Wogan, and he pulled on the other stocking.

'I shall get into the carriage with a companion. You won't know me. The carriage will drive off. You won't speak a word for fear your brogue should betray you.'

'I will whisper my opinions to you in English, Colonel,' said Wogan as he fastened his garters.

'I don't think you could,' said Montague, 'and certainly you will not try. We shall drive to the almshouses at Dulwich. When we get there, I will make an excuse to stop the carriage.'

'You won't be alone, then?'

'No. Let me see. It is a fine sunny day. I will say that my watch is stopped, and I will send you to see the time by the sundial in the court.'

Wogan buttoned his waistcoat.

'I will bring you the exact minute.'

'No you won't. You will cross the court to the chapel, by the chapel you will find a path, and the path will lead you out through an arch into another road, bordered with chestnut trees.'

'And when I am in the road?' Wogan tied his cravat.

'You will find my groom with a horse. The horse will be saddled. There will be pistols in the holsters, and then your patron saint or the devil must help you to get out of the country.'

'I have a friend or two on the coast of Sussex who will do as well,' said Wogan, and he drew the coat over his shoulders, 'and I am very grateful to you. But sure, Colonel, what if a constable pulls me off the carriage by the leg before we are out of London? You will be dipped yourself.'

'There's no fear of that if you hold your tongue.'

Wogan took up his hat.

'And who is to be your companion?'

Montague hesitated.

'My companion will be a lady.'

'Oh! And where's the house with the carriage waiting at the door?'

'In Queen's Square, Westminster.

Wogan looked at his clothes.

'I am wearing her damned livery,' he cried. 'No, I will stay and be hanged like a gentleman, but I take no favours at Lady Oxford's hand,' and in a passion he began to tear off the clothes.

'She offers none,' said Montague. 'She knows nothing of what I intend. I would not trust her. If you have to stand behind, I have to drive by her side; and upon my word I would sooner be in your place. Her ladyship's footman for an hour! Man, are you so proud that your life cannot make up for the humiliation? Why, I have been her lapdog for a year.'

Wogan stopped, with one arm out of the sleeve of his coat. The notion that her ladyship was not helping him, but that, on the contrary, he was tricking her, gave the business a quite different complexion.

'D'ye see? The one place in London where the King's Messengers will not look to find you is the footboard of Lady Oxford's carriage,' urged Montague.

There was reason in the argument: it was the same argument which Mr. Wogan had used to persuade Mr. Kelly to go to Queen's Square the evening before, and now he suffered it to persuade himself.

Wogan drew on the coat again, pulled his peruke about his face, and drew his hat forward on his forehead.

'Now follow me. It is a fortunate thing we are close to her ladyship's house.'

Montague walked quickly to Queen's Square. Wogan followed ten yards behind. As they turned into the square they saw Lady Oxford's carriage waiting at the door.

'Does the coachman know?' asked Wogan, lounging up to the Colonel and touching his hat with his forefinger.

'The lackey whose place you took has primed him.'

At the door Mr. Wogan climbed up to the footboard while Montague entered the house. In a minute Lady Oxford came out, and was handed into the carriage by the Colonel. She did not look at her new lackey, but gave an order to the coachman and the carriage drove off. Mr. Wogan began to discover a certain humour in the manner of his escape which tickled him mightily. He noticed more than one of his acquaintances who would have been ready to lay him by the heels, and once Lady Oxford made a little jump in her seat and would have stopped the coachman had not Colonel Montague prevented her. For Lord Sidney Beauclerk stood on the path gazing at her ladyship and the Colonel with a perplexed and glowing countenance. Mr. Wogan winked and shook a friendly foot at him from the back of the carriage, and his lordship was fairly staggered at the impertinence of her ladyship's footman. So they drove out past the houses and between the fields.

Colonel Montague was plainly in a great concern lest Lady Oxford should turn round and discover who rode behind her. He talked with volubility about the beauty of spring and the blue skies and the green fields, and uttered a number of irreproachable sentiments about them. Lady Oxford, however, it seemed, had lost her devotion to a country life, and was wholly occupied with the Colonel's indifference to herself. Her vanity put her to a great many shifts, which kept her restless and Mr. Wogan in a pucker lest she should turn round. Now it was her cloak that, with an ingenious jerk, she slipped off her shoulders, and the Colonel must hoist it on again; now it was her glove that was too small, and the Colonel must deny the imputation and admire her Liliputian hand, which he failed to do; now his advice was asked upon the proper shape of a patch at the corner of the mouth, and a winsome, smiling face was bent to him that he might judge without any prejudice. The Colonel, however, remained cold, and Wogan was sorely persuaded to lean over and whisper in his ear:

'Flatter her, soften your face and adore her, and she will be quiet as a cat purring in front of a fire.'

For it was solely his indifference that pricked her. Had he pretended a little affection, she would have whistled him off without any regret, but she could not endure that he should discard her of his own free will. This, however, Colonel Montague did not know; he had not Mr. Wogan's experience of the sex, and so Lady Oxford restlessly practised her charms upon him until they came to the gates of the almshouses at Dulwich.

Then Colonel Montague cried to the coachman to halt.

'Or would your ladyship go further?' he asked, and pulled his watch out of his fob to see the time. But his watch had unaccountably stopped. 'Nay, there's a sundial in the court there,' he said, and over his shoulder bade the lackey go and look at it. The lackey climbed down from the

footboard. At the same moment Colonel Montague bade the coachman turn, and since the lackey kept at the back of the carriage as it turned, Lady Oxford did not catch a glimpse of him. The lackey walked through the gates, crossed the grass to the chapel without troubling his head about the sundial, ran down the passage and under the archway into a quiet road shaded with chestnut trees and laburnums. Colonel Montague's groom was walking a horse up and down the road. Wogan mounted the horse, thrust his feet into the stirrups, and took the air into his chest with incomparable contentment.

The afternoon sunlight shone through the avenue and glistened on the laburnum flowers. But there is another sort of yellow flower that blooms from the mouth of a pistol barrel with which Mr. Wogan was at that moment more concerned, and he unstrapped the holsters and looked to the priming to see whether the buds were ready to burst. Then he drove his heels into his horse's flanks and so rode down between the chestnut trees. 'Your ladyship, we need wait no longer,' said Montague to Lady Oxford. 'Your footman will not come back, and I have the honour to return you your packet of letters.'

With that he drew the letters from his pocket, sealed up in a parcel with Mr. Kelly's ring. Lady Oxford clutched them tight to her bosom, and lay back in the carriage, her eyes closed. The coachman drove back to London.

They had gone almost half the way before Lady Oxford recovered sufficiently from her joy to have a thought for anything but the letters. Then she looked at Montague, and her eyes widened.

'The footman!' she said. 'Ah! I have saved Mr. Kelly after all. I have saved him!'

The Colonel might have pointed out that whatever saving had been done, Lady Oxford had taken but an involuntary hand in it. But he merely shrugged his shoulders; he imagined her anxiety on Mr. Kelly's account to be all counterfeit, although, may be, she was sincere.

'Mr. Kelly,' he said, 'is most likely in the Tower. Your footman was Mr. Nicholas Wogan.'

Lady Oxford was silent for some little time. Then in a low, broken voice she said:

'There was no need you should have so distrusted me.'

Montague glanced at her curiously. Her face had a new look to him. It was thoughtful, but with a certain simplicity in the thoughtfulness; compunction saddened it, and it seemed there was no artifice in the compunction.

'Madam,' he answered gently, 'if I had told you, and the manner of Mr. Wogan's escape became known, you might fall under the imputation of favouring Mr. Wogan's cause.'

Lady Oxford thanked him with a shy look, and they drove back among the streets. Neither of them spoke until they reached Queen's Square, but Colonel Montague was again very gentle as he handed her from the carriage and bade her good-bye. Lady Oxford's discretion was to seek. The Colonel seemed to be in a relenting mood; she could not resist the temptation.

'My Corydon!' she whispered under her breath.

Montague's face hardened in an instant.

'My Phylinda!' he replied. 'No, I should say my Smilissa. Madam, there is, in truth, some family likeness between the names, and perhaps it would be better if I said simply "Lady Oxford."''

So the Colonel got his foot out of the net. Her ladyship made no answer to his sneer, but bowed her head and passed slowly into her house. Montague had struck harder than he had intended, and would gladly have recalled the words. But the door was closed, and the strange woman out of sight and hearing. He walked away to his lodging in Ryder Street, very well content with his day's work, and opening the door of his parlour on the first floor was at once incommoded by a thick fog of tobacco-smoke. But through the fog he saw, comfortably stretched in his best armchair, with his peruke pushed back and his waistcoat unbuttoned, a lackey in Lady Oxford's livery. Montague lifted up his voice and swore.

CHAPTER XXV

HOW THE MINIATURE OF LADY OXFORD CAME BY A MISCHANCE.

'I lent you the swiftest horse I have,' said Montague.

'It is just for that reason I am back before you,' replied Wogan.

Colonel Montague at once became punctilious to the last degree. He stood correct in the stiffest attitude of military deportment. A formal politeness froze the humanity out of his face.

'This makes me very ridiculous, Mr. Wogan,' he said in a tone of distaste. 'If you will pardon the remark, I was at some pains and perhaps a little risk to get you safe out of London. You accepted my services, as it seemed, and yet here you are back in London! Indeed this makes me very ridiculous.'

Mr. Wogan had quite forgotten that Colonel Montague was an Englishman, and so hated ridicule worse than the devil. He was briskly reminded of the fact, and having ruffled the gentleman's feelings, must now set to work to soothe them.

'It is very true, Colonel. My behaviour looks uncommonly like a breach of good taste. But it was not for the purpose of playing a trick on you that I came back into danger, when I was safe upon the back of your beautiful horse. Sure, never have I ridden a nobler beast. A mouth of velvet, a leg tapered like a fine lady's finger, a coat--sir, I have seen the wonderful manufactures of Lyons. There never was silk so smooth or of so bright a gloss, as the noble creature's coat. He spurned the earth, at each moment he threatened to float among the clouds. Sure, that horse was the original of Pegasus in a direct descent. A true horse, and more than a horse, a copy of all that is best in England, an example of what is most English and therefore most admired, the true English military gentleman.'

'Mr. Wogan,' interrupted Montague, with a grim sort of smile, 'you are likely to learn a little more particularly about the velvet mouth of the English military gentleman if you continue to praise his horse at the expense of his sense. Will you tell me why you have come back?'

'You have a right to ask that, Colonel, but I have no right to answer you. It is a private affair wherein others are concerned. I should have remembered it before, but I did not. It only came into my mind when I was riding between the chestnut trees, and leaving my friend behind me.'

Colonel Montague was silent for a little.

'In another man, Mr. Wogan, I should suspect an intention to meddle with these plots. But I have no need to remind you that such a proceeding would not be fair to me. And if Mr. Kelly's concerns have brought you back I cannot complain. Meanwhile how are you to lie hidden? I cannot keep you here.'

'There are one or two earths, Colonel, which are not yet stopped, I have no doubt. I did but take the liberty to use your lodging until it grew dark.'

The evening was falling while Wogan and Montague thus talked together. Wogan wrote a letter which he put into his pocket, and holding the ends of his wig in his mouth, without any fear ran the hazard of the streets.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was that evening adorning herself for a masquerade in her house, when word was carried to her that Lady Oxford's big lackey was below and had brought a letter. Lady Mary had no sooner glanced at the superscription than she sent her maid downstairs to bring the lackey immediately to her boudoir. Thither he came without awaking suspicion in the servants, and found Lady Mary sitting in front of her toilette, which was all lighted up with candles, and the rest of the room dark.

Mr. Wogan remained in a dark corner by the door.

'You have a message from Lady Oxford,' said she, carelessly holding out a hand as though to take a letter.

'By word of mouth, your ladyship,' replied Wogan in a disguised voice.

Lady Mary dismissed her maid and spoke in considerable heat:

'Colonel Montague told me you had escaped.'

'I have come back,' replied Wogan coolly, who had no reason to think he had justly incurred Lady Mary's anger, and so made no account of it.

'It is sheer madness,' she exclaimed, 'and yet no more mad than it is for your friends to take precautions for your safety,' and she dabbed a patch on her cheek viciously. 'Why have you come back?'

'Your ladyship has not forgotten how some while ago Lady Oxford paid her losses at cards.'

Lady Mary raised her head from her mirror and looked at Wogan.

'With Mr. Kelly's winnings from the South Sea,' said she.

'Your ladyship was kind enough then to say that you would not count the money yours.'

'I remember.'

'But would keep it, since you could not return it to George, until such time as it could be used on his behalf.'

Lady Mary took a key from a drawer in her toilette and, unlocking a cabinet in a corner of the room, showed Wogan a parcel of bills of exchange lying amongst a heap of guineas.

'The moment for using it has come,' said Wogan.

'Take it, then,' said Lady Mary, who now asked for no explanations.

'No. It is only of use if your ladyship uses it.'

'How?'

Lady Mary went back to her toilette and busied herself with a number of little silver pots and boxes, while Wogan disclosed his plan.

'George was taken last night in his lodging, as your ladyship is no doubt aware. It is a large sum that Lady Oxford lost at cards, and a large sum might perhaps bail George, if a trusted Whig were the surety. He would have some few weeks of liberty, at all events.'

'Some few weeks that are like to cost you your life,' said Lady Mary, who was now grown friendly. 'It was to tell me this you came back. I should have guessed.'

'Madam, I shall never believe my life's in danger until I am dead,' replied Wogan, with a laugh.

'I will see what the money can do to-morrow,' said Lady Mary. 'Where shall I have news of you? Or very likely I am to meet you at Ranelagh?'

Wogan disclaimed any such bravado, and told her ladyship of a house where she might hear of him if she sent by night and if her messenger knocked in a particular way. To that house he now bent his steps, and stayed there that night and the next day. It was already dark when the particular knock sounded on the door, and Mr. Wogan lifted a corner of the blind and peered down into the street. What he saw brought him down the stairs in a single bound; he opened the door cautiously, and who should slip in but the Parson.

'Nick!' said he, in a warm voice. His hand clasped Wogan's in the dark. 'Thanks, thanks!'

It appeared that Lady Mary, after seeing that George was bailed out, had told him that the notion of bailing him was none of hers. Moreover, in order to make sure Smilinda's letters were safe, Kelly had gone as soon as he was released to Colonel Montague, who told him of Wogan's return to London and other matters of no importance, so that he now wasted a great deal of time in superfluous compliments. 'But you shall not lose your life on my account, Nick. Montague's horse, which it seems you have taken a liking to,' he said, with a smile, 'will be waiting for you at twelve o'clock to-night at Dulwich, and in the same road; but, Nick, this time you will have to walk to Dulwich. There is a warrant out for you. You can slip away with a better chance on foot; and, Nick, this time you will not come back. Promise me that.'

Wogan promised readily enough.

'I brought the Colonel into some danger of suspicion by returning before,' he said. 'It is a strange thing, George, that, while our friends have left us in the lurch, we should owe, I my escape, you your few weeks of liberty, to perfectly inveterate Whigs, though how you came to an understanding with the Colonel is quite beyond me to imagine.'

'I will tell you that now, Nick, since you have an hour to spare;' and, going up to Wogan's room, Mr. Kelly related to him the story of his meeting with the Colonel in the Park, of the disturbance with the Messengers in his rooms, and of the saving of Smilinda, and how his love for Rose urged him to it. It was eight o'clock when he had come to an end. Mr. Wogan heard the clocks striking the hour.

'It will take me an hour to get to Dulwich,' he said, 'so I have three hours to spare. George, have you seen Rose?'

'No; but she knows that I am free, for Lady Mary sent the news to her.'

'That's a pity,' said Wogan, pursing his lips.

'On the contrary, it was not the least kind of Lady Mary's many kindnesses,' said George, who was astonished at Mr. Wogan's cruelty, that would have left the girl in her anxieties a moment longer than was necessary. 'Had she not heard the news till it was stale, she would never have forgiven me--she that has forgiven me so much,' said he, with more sentiment than logic.

'Oh,' said Wogan, 'she has forgiven you so much? My young friend, you are very certain upon a

very uncertain point. There's that little matter of her ladyship's miniature.'

Mr. Kelly looked anxiously at Wogan.

'True,' said he; 'I told her a lie about it at Avignon, and made out it was the likeness of Queen Clementina.'

'The lie is the smallest part of the difficulty. She wore the miniature, and wore it in Lady Oxford's withdrawing-room. There's the trouble, for there's the humiliation.'

'But, Nick,' said Kelly, 'she forgave it. Didn't I escort her to her chair? Didn't I feel her hand upon the sleeve of my coat?'

'Oh! she carried herself very bravely, never a doubt of that. For one thing, you were in peril; and, to be sure, she will have kept a liking for you at the worst of it. For another, Lady Oxford was there, and Lady Oxford was not to win the day. My little friend Rose is a girl of an uncommon spirit, and would hold her own against any woman, for all her modest ways. But, just because she has spirit, she will not meekly forgive you. If you expect her to droop humbly on to your bosom, you are entirely in the wrong of it. 'Oons! but it must have been a hard blow to her pride when she found she was in Lady Oxford's house, and knew who Lady Oxford was, and had that miniature about her throat. Will she forgive you at all? The best you have to hope is that she will be content with making your head sing. That she will do for a sure thing; and I think--'

'What?' asked the Parson. The danger of life, the Messengers, the angry Colonel, had only raised his blood; the fear of Rose drove it to his heart. He was now plainly scared.

'I think it was the greatest pity imaginable that Lady Mary sent word to her you were free. For, d'ye see, if you had dropped upon Rose suddenly, and she thinking you locked up in a dark prison and your head already loose upon your shoulders, why, you might have surprised her into a forgetfulness of her pride; but now she will be prepared for your coming. I think, George, I will walk along with you as far as Soho, since I have three hours to kick my heels in.'

'Will you, Nick?' cried George eagerly; and then, with his nose in the air, 'But I have no fears whatever. She is a woman in a thousand.' He was, none the less, evidently relieved when Wogan clapped his hat on his head. The night was dark, and Wogan in his livery had no fears of detection.

The two men walked through by-streets until they came to Piccadilly. The Parson was nerving himself for the meeting, but would not allow that he was in the least degree afraid. 'A trivial woman would think of nothing but her humiliation and her slight, but Rose is, as you say, of an uncommon spirit, Nick,' he argued.

Nick, however, preserved a majestic silence, which daunted the Parson, who desired arguments to confute. They were by this time come into Bond Street, and Mr. Kelly, who must be talking, declared with a great fervour, 'There are no limits to a woman's leniencies. Black errors she will pardon; charity is her father and her mother; she has an infinity of forgiveness, wherefore with truth we place her among the angels.' Upon that text he preached most eloquently all the way up Bond Street, past the New Building, until he came to the corner of Frith Street in Soho. In Frith Street, all at once the Parson's assurance was shown to be counterfeit. He caught at his friend's arm.

'Nick,' said he, in a quavering, humble voice, 'it is in Frith Street she lives. What am I to do at all? I am the most ignorant man, and a coward into the bargain. Nick, I have done the unpardonable thing. What am I to do now?'

Thus the Parson twittered in a most deplorable agitation. Mr. Wogan, on the contrary, was very calm. It was just in these little difficulties, which require an intimate knowledge of the sex, that he felt himself most at home. He stroked his chin thoughtfully.

'Nick,' and George shook the arm he held, 'sure you can advise me. You have told me so often of your great comprehension of women. Sure, you know all there is to be known about them, at all.'

'No, not quite all,' said Wogan, with a proper modesty. 'But here I think I can help you. Which is the house?'

Kelly pointed it out. A couple of windows shone very bright upon the dark street, a few feet above their heads. Looking upwards they could see the ceiling of the room and the globe of a lamp reflected on the ceiling, but no more.

'It is in that room she will be sitting,' whispered the Parson.

'And waiting for you,' added Mr. Wogan grimly.

'And waiting for me,' repeated the Parson with a shiver.

They both stared for a little at the ceiling and the shadow of the lamp.

'Now, if the ceiling would only tell us something of her face,' said Kelly.

'It would be as well to have a look at her,' said Wogan. The street was quite deserted. 'Will you give me a back?'

The house was separated from the path by an iron railing a couple of feet from the wall. The Parson set his legs apart and steadied himself by the railing, while Wogan climbed up and knelt on to his shoulders. In that position he was able to lean forward and catch hold of the sill. His forehead was on a level with the sill. By craning his neck he could just look into the room.

'Is she there?' asked the Parson.

'Yes, and alone.'

'How does she look? Not in tears? Nick, don't tell me she's in tears.' The Parson's legs became unsteady at the mere supposition of such a calamity.

'Make yourself easy upon that point,' said Wogan, clinging for dear life to the sill, 'there's never a trace of a tear about her at all. For your sake, George, I could wish that there was. Her eyes are as dry as a campaigner's biscuits. Oh, George, I am in despair for you.'

'Nick, you are the most consoling friend,' groaned the Parson, who now wished for tears more than anything else in the world. 'What is she doing?'

'Nothing at all. She is sitting at the table. George, have you ever noticed her chin? It is a sort of decisive chin, and upon my word, George, it has the ugliest jilting look that ever I saw. She has just the same look in her big grey eyes, which are staring at nothing at all. Keep still, George, or you will throw me.'

For the Parson was become as uneasy as a restive horse.

'But, Nick, is she doing nothing at all? Is she reading?'

'No, she is doing nothing but expect you. But she is expecting you. Steady, for if I tumble off your shoulders the noise will bring her to the windows.'

The menace had its effect. Mr. Kelly's limbs became pillars of marble, and Wogan again looked into the room.

'Wait a moment,' he said, 'I see what she is doing. She is staring at something she holds in her hands.'

'My likeness?' cried the Parson hopefully. 'To be sure it will be that.'

'I will tell you in a moment. Hold on to the railings, George.'

George did as he was bid, and Wogan, still holding to the window-sill very cautiously, stood up on his friend's shoulders. George, however, seemed quite insensible to Mr. Wogan's weight.

'It will be my likeness,' he repeated to himself. 'I had it done for her by Mr. Zincke. I was right, Nick; she has forgiven me altogether.'

Mr. Wogan's head was now well above the window-sill, and he looked downwards upon Rose, who sat at the table.

'Yes, it's a likeness,' said Nick.

'I told you. I told you,' said the Parson. The man began to wriggle with satisfaction. 'You are wrong, Nick. You know nothing at all about women, after all. Come down, you vainglorious boaster.' It seemed he was about to cut capers with Mr. Wogan on his shoulders.

'Wait,' said Nick suddenly, and hitched himself higher.

'Nick, she will see you.'

'No, she's occupied. George!'

'What is it?'

'It's Lady Oxford's miniature she is staring at, and not yours at all.'

The Parson grew quite stiff and rigid.

'Are you sure?' he whispered, in an awe-stricken voice.

'I can see the diamonds flashing. Faith my friend, but I had done better to have let you throw them into the sea at Genoa.'

A groan broke from the Parson.

'Why didn't you, Nick? What am I to do now?'

'I can see the face. 'Tis the miniature of her ladyship that you gave out to be Queen Clementina's. Did you ever meet Gaydon, George?' he asked curiously.

'Gaydon?' asked Kelly. 'What in the world has Gaydon to do with Rose?'

'Listen, and I'll inform you. He told my brother Charles a very pretty story of the Princess Clementina. It seems that when she escaped out of her perils and came to Bologna to marry the Chevalier, who had, just at the moment when he expected his bride, unaccountably retired into Spain, she stayed at Bologna, and so, picking up the gossip of the town, expressed a great desire to visit the Caprara Palace. 'Twas there the lady lived who had consoled the Chevalier in his anxieties. No doubt he never expected the Princess to get out of the Emperor's prison. But Charles got her out, and here was she at Bologna. To be sure, the Princess was a most natural woman, eh? And when she came to the Caprara Palace she asked to be shown the portrait of the Princess de la Caprara. That was more natural still. Gaydon describes how she looked at the portrait, and describes very well. For sure Rose is looking at Lady Oxford's in just the same way.'

'That's good news, Nick,' said Kelly, grasping at a straw of comfort. 'For the Princess Clementina forgave.'

'Ah, but there's a difference I did not remark at the first. I remember Gaydon said the Princess turned very red, while your little friend Rose, on the contrary, is white to the edge of her lips. Sure, red forgives, when white will not. George,' and Mr. Wogan ducked his head beneath the window-ledge, 'she is coming to the window! For the love of mercy don't move, or she will hear!'

George pressed himself close to the railings. Wogan hunched himself against the wall in the most precarious attitude. Would she open the window? Would she see them? Both men quaked as they asked themselves the question, though they had come thither for no other purpose but to see her and be seen of her. Wogan threw a glance over his shoulder to where the light of the window fell upon the road. But no shadow obscured it.

'Sure, she's not coming to the window at all,' said Nick.

'Oh, Nick,' whispered the Parson, 'you made my heart jump into my throat.'

Wogan drew his head up level with the window again, and again ducked.

'She is standing looking towards the window with the likeness in her hand,' and he scrambled to the ground, where the pair of them stood looking at one another, and then to the house, and from the house down the street. Wogan was the first to find his tongue.

'It is a monstrous thing,' said he, and he thumped his chest, 'that a mere slip of a girl should frighten two grown men to death.'

Mr. Kelly thumped his chest too, but without any assurance.

'Nick, I must look for myself,' he said.

Footsteps sounded a little distance down the street, and sounded louder the next moment. A man was approaching; they waited until he had passed, and then Mr. Kelly climbed on to Wogan's shoulders, and in his turn looked into the room.

'Nick!' he whispered in a voice of awe.

'What is she doing?'

'She has thrown Smilinda's likeness on the ground. She is stamping on it with her heel. She is grinding it all in pieces.'

'And the beautiful diamonds? Look if she picks them up, George!'

'No; she pays no heed to the stones. It is the likeness she thinks of. It was in pieces a moment ago; it is all powder now,' and he groaned.

'George, it is an ill business. When a woman spurns diamonds you may be sure she is in a mortal fluster. It's a Gorgon you have to meet--a veritable Gorgon.'

Mr. Kelly slid from Wogan's shoulders to the ground.

'What will I do, Nick?'

Nick bit his thumb, then threw his shoulders back.

'I am not afraid of her,' said he. 'No, I am not. I have done nothing to anger or humiliate her. I am not afraid of her at all--not the least in the world. I will go in myself. I will beard her just to show you I am not at all afraid of her.'

'Will you do that? Nick, you *are* a friend,' cried Kelly, who was most reasonably startled by his

friend's heroism.

'To be sure I will,' said Nick, looking up at the window. 'I am not afraid of her. A little slip of a girl! Why should we fear her at all? Haven't we killed men more than once? Do you wait here, George. If I hold my hand up at the window with my fingers open--so, you may come in. But if I hold up a clenched fist, you had best go home as fast as your legs can carry you. You see, the case is different with you. I have no reason whatever to be frightened at her.'

He knocked at the door, and in a little the door was opened. 'Not the least bit in the world!' he stopped to say to Mr. Kelly in the street. Then he stepped into the passage.

CHAPTER XXVI

MR. WOGAN TRADUCES HIS FRIEND, WITH THE HAPPIEST CONSEQUENCES

Mr. Wogan's title of Hilton was now, thanks to the *Flying Post*, as familiar as his name; he refused both the one and the other to the servant, and was admitted to Rose Townley without any formalities. Her eyes flashed as they remarked his livery, but she was not in any concern about Mr. Wogan, and asked him no questions. She rose with the utmost coldness, did not give him her hand, and only the bare mockery of a bow, as though her indignation against Mr. Kelly was so complete that it must needs embrace his friend.

'I thought that he would have plucked up enough courage to come himself,' said she, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders.

'He is a man of the meanest spirit,' replied Wogan, in a sullen agreement. 'It is a strange thing how easily one may be misled. Here have I been going up and down the world with him for years, and I never knew him until now, never knew the black heart of him, and his abominable perfidies.'

Rose was taken aback by Wogan's speech. No doubt she expected a hotch-potch of excuses and arguments on Mr. Kelly's behalf, which would but have confirmed her in her own opinion; but falling in with her views, he took the words out of her mouth.

'So,' she said doubtfully, 'he has lost your friendship too?'

'To be sure,' cried Wogan in a heat, 'would you have me keep friends with a vile wretch whose thoughts writhe at the bottom of his soul like a poisonous nest of vipers?'

Rose neither answered the question nor expressed any approval of Wogan's elegant figure describing Mr. Kelly's mind.

'Oh,' said she, 'then he did not send you to make his peace with me?'

Wogan answered with all the appearances of reluctance.

'No. In fact the man was coming himself, and with a light heart. He made a great to-do about the infinite fairness and charity of women, which place them equal to the angels, and how you excelled all women in that and other womanly qualities. But I told him, on the contrary, that I knew your spirit, and that you were of too noble a pride to shut your eyes to a slight, and would certainly dismiss him. However, he would not be persuaded, so I slipped away from him and ran here, so that I might warn you against him.'

Rose forgot to thank Mr. Wogan for his zeal on her behalf. Indeed her face, in spite of herself, had lightened for a second; in spite of herself her eyes had sparkled when Wogan spoke of the great faith Mr. Kelly had in her charity.

'It was more than a slight,' she said, 'I could forgive a slight--He would have come himself had not you prevented him.'

'But he is coming. He would have been here already, but that he paid a visit on the way to Colonel Montague to discover whether Lady Oxford's letters had been restored to her.'

'Lady Oxford's letters!' exclaimed Rose, her face flushing again with anger.

'To be sure,' said Wogan, 'you would know nothing of them. It is a fine story--the story of Lady

Oxford's love-letters.'

'I have no wish to hear it,' cried Rose sharply, and she turned towards the window. Mr. Wogan took a quick step towards her. If she looked out of the window she could hardly fail to observe the Parson.

'Nor is it a story that you should hear,' said Wogan in a soothing voice, 'though indeed to hear it from Mr. Kelly's lips would surely make you aware of his devilish sophistries. For he declares that, but for you, Lady Oxford's love-letters would never have been restored to her, nor would he have gone to prison and put his neck in the noose.'

Rose shivered at those last words and drew in her breath. She turned quickly back to Wogan.

'But for me?' she asked. 'What have I to do with Lady Oxford's love-letters, or with his danger?' and her voice softened towards the end of the sentence.

'Why, Lady Oxford, who knew very well Mr. Kelly's trade, betrayed him in revenge for a certain ballad wherein your name was mentioned.'

'Yes,' interrupted Rose, 'Lady Mary told me of the ballad.'

'Well, you heard Mr. Kelly perhaps assure Lady Oxford that he had her brocades in his lodging, and perhaps you remarked her ladyship's confusion.'

'Yes. I guessed what the brocades were.'

'Very well. Mr. Kelly remained with her Ladyship, who informed him that he would be taken outside his door, and his rooms searched. There were papers in his rooms of a kind to bring him into great danger. But there were also Lady Oxford's letters. The story he will tell you is this, that he meant to use Lady Oxford's letters as a weapon by which he might save his papers and so himself; but a complete revolution took place in his thoughts. He suddenly understood that he owed it to you that no woman's name should be smirched by his fault, and that thus he was bound, at the peril of his life, to rescue Lady Oxford's letters, as he did. A strange chance put it into his hands to burn his own papers, and leave Lady Oxford's to be seized, in which case he would have been saved, and she lost. But he saved his honour instead, and his love for you helped him to it. He rescued her Ladyship's letters, his own are in the hands of the Minister.'

Mr. Wogan, who had now secured a most attentive listener, disclosed all that Mr. Kelly had told him of what took place in Ryder Street.

'This is the story he will tell you. And to be sure, he adds a pretty touch to the pretence. For he went whistling to prison and he says that he whistled because he felt as if you were walking by his side.'

'But what if it were no pretence at all?'

Mr. Wogan sagely shook his head, though the story had the stamp of truth on it to those who knew the Parson.

'If he had held you in such respect would he have sent you Lady Oxford's miniature to wear at Lady Oxford's rout?'

'But he did not send it to me for that purpose,' she cried, 'he did not even know that I was going to the rout. He gave me the miniature a long time ago, when it would have been very difficult for him to tell me whose it was.'

'But he told you it was Queen Clementina's.'

'No. It was I who guessed at that, and he--did not deny it.'

Here at all events was sophistry, but Mr. Wogan was less indignant at it than his anger with the Parson's subtleties would lead one to expect.

'Well,' said Wogan, 'I have told you what it was my plain duty to disclose to you.'

At this moment Wogan chanced to look towards the window. He beheld Mr. Kelly's face pressed against the glass. The man had grown impatient and so had climbed on to the railings. Mr. Wogan broke off with an exclamation he could not repress.

'What is it?' said Rose, turning about.

'Some most beautiful diamonds,' said Wogan, spreading out his hand to the window. He then dropped on to the floor and began picking up the diamonds which Rose had scattered when she set her foot on the miniature. Rose bit her lips, and flushed, as he held them in his palm. Then he said carelessly:

'That fine miniature had diamonds set about it. D'ye know, Miss Townley, that miniature would have been at the bottom of the sea long before Mr. Kelly came to Avignon, but for the diamonds

about it. 'Twas I held his arm when, having done with her Ladyship, he would also have done with her Ladyship's present, and I bade him keep it for the value of the jewels.'

There was a loud knocking at the door, which came not a moment earlier than was necessary to prevent Mr. Wogan revealing himself as still the Parson's friend.

'There's the fellow come to importune you,' said Wogan.

'Then he would have thrown it away but for you,' said Miss Townley thoughtfully. 'He did not keep it out of any--'

But Wogan heard the servant pass down to the door, and thought it would be as well if he had a private word with the Parson.

'You will excuse me,' he said with dignity, 'but I have no heart for the man's company. Besides, I have stayed too long in London as it is. Delays would be dangerous.'

But Rose had no ears for any dangers of Mr. Wogan, as he was indescribably glad to remark. For her eyes looked past him to the door; from head to foot she seemed to listen for the sound of the Parson's voice. Mr. Wogan bowed, and opened the door. Though she followed him to the door, and held it open as he passed out, she did not notice that he was going, she had no word of farewell. She did not even notice that Mr. Wogan put the diamonds in his pocket. For Mr. Wogan had his wits about him. Diamonds were diamonds, and the carpet no place for them. Some day they might be of use to the Parson. The door of the street was opened as Wogan stepped into the passage. But Rose did not shut the door of the parlour and so Wogan, as he met Kelly, could only whisper hurriedly, 'Remember, I am your worst enemy,' and so left him to his own resources.

It appeared, however, that they were sufficient. The Parson made no excuses whatever; he carried the day by the modesty of his omissions. Both with regard to the miniature and to the saving of Smilinda he disclosed to her no more than a bald array of facts. He made no parade of the part which the thought of Rose had played in the revulsion of his feelings, bringing him to see that he was bound in honour to save Smilinda's honour; he did not tell her why he went whistling to prison. But Rose knew from Wogan of these evidences of his love, and no doubt thought of them the more because he would not use them to soften her just resentments.

Mr. Wogan left them together, and, walking out to Dulwich, found the Colonel's horse waiting in the road between the chestnut trees. He came to the coast of Sussex in the morning, where he had friends among the smugglers, and lay all that day in a hut within sound of the waves. It was a black, melancholy day for Nicholas Wogan, who was leaving his friends behind him to face their perils alone, and who felt very solitary; not even the memory of the noble deeds of his illustrious forefathers had any power to cheer him, until he heard the grating noise of the boat's keel as it was dragged down the beach to the sea, and saw the sail like a great wing waft up between him and the stars.

He got safe to Paris, where he heard of the strange use to which the Parson put his few weeks of liberty, for the Parson married Rose Townley three weeks later at St. James's Church in Piccadilly, and wrote to Mr. Wogan a very warm, human sort of letter which had not one single classical allusion to disfigure it. In that letter he gave the reasons which had induced him to the marriage.

'I am told,' he wrote, 'that a man so dangerously circumstanced must be selfish in the extreme to marry a woman who, in a short while, may, at the worst, be widowed; and at the best must be separated from her husband in his gaol. I do not fear that you will have so mean an opinion of my inclinations, but I would not have you think me careless upon this point neither. Dr. Townley is old, and his health breaks. He will leave his daughter, when he dies, but little money, and that moment cannot be very far off. It is true that Rose has beauty, and no doubt she might make a rich marriage if she had only beauty. But she has frankness, truth, and constancy as well, qualities which are not marketable wares, since those who possess them will not bring them into the market. Now, if I suffer death for the Cause, Rose will be no poorer than she was before; if, on the other hand, I live, there are the booksellers, and from the silence of my prison I can make shift to earn for her a decent livelihood.'

As all the world knows, Mr. Kelly lived, and even gained much credit by his speech at his trial. He made it plain, to all but prejudiced Whigs, that there was no Plot, nor he concerned in any, if there were. But what is Whig justice? He was sentenced to prison for life. The papers in his strong box were enough to help a foolish fellow, Counsellor Layer, on his way to Tyburn, enough to send Lord Orrery to the Tower, and Lord North and Grey into exile. The Plot was ruined for that time; the Bishop of Rochester was banished, for Mar's traitorous mention of the dog Harlequin fixed the guilt on that holy man. Mr. Kelly came off with loss of fourteen years of his life, which years he passed in the Tower.

It was not, after all, so silent a prison as he imagined it would be. For though during the first months his confinement was severe, and he never drew air except from between the bars, afterwards this rigour was relaxed. He was placed in a room of which one window took the morning sun, and the other commanded the river, and the ships going up and down with the tide; he was allowed the use of his books, and to receive what visitors he would. His visitors were not

few, and amongst them Colonel Montague was the most frequent. His gaolers, the officers who were stationed in the Tower, and their wives, became his familiar friends, and it is said that when, after fourteen years, he escaped, not a woman in the precincts could make up her mind whether to clap her hands for joy, or weep at the loss of his society. Moreover, Rose came and went at her pleasure.

The first years of his imprisonment were thus not wholly unhappy years. He sat amongst his books translating Cicero, and if at times his limbs ached for the stress and activity of his youth, and he began to dream of hours in the saddle and starry nights at sea, it was not perhaps for very long. He had friends enough to divert his leisure moments, and Rose to keep him busy at his work. For what he had foreseen came to pass. Two years after Mr. Kelly came to the Tower, Dr. Townley died, and left Rose but poorly circumstanced. She came to lodge close by the Tower Gates, and the Parson set his pen to his paper and wrote essays and translations till the whole Tower of London buzzed with his learning, and no doubt a friendly Jacobite here and there bought one of his books. Mr. Wogan, indeed, bought them all. He has them ranged upon a bookshelf in his lodging at Paris, all bound in leather and most dignified; the very print has a sonorous look. 'Mr. Kelly's *Opera*' he calls them, and always speaks of the books as 'tomes' with prodigious respect and perhaps a sigh. For--

'He lacks one quality,' Mr. Wogan was heard to say, 'to set him on the pinnacle of fame. He cannot write poetry. It is a trick, no doubt, a poor sort of trick; but George had it not, and so when there was poetry to be written, he had to come to his friends.'

Thus ten years passed, and then came the black day, when Rose fell sick of a fever and must keep her bed. She sent word to George daily that he should expect her on the morrow, until a delirium took her, and the doctor, who had been charged by Rose to make light of her suffering, was now forced to tell Mr. Kelly the truth. She lay at death's door, calling on her husband, who could not come to her, and talking ever of that little garden at Avignon above the Rhone, in which she fancied that he and she now walked.

Mr. Kelly took the news in silence as a dog takes pain, and never slept and barely moved while the fever ran its course. Rose was at the Tower Gates, George was in his prison; a few yards only were between them, but those few yards were built upon with stones. In the daytime messages were brought to him often enough, but at night, when the mists rose from the river and the gates were closed, and the Parson had the dark loitering hours wherein to picture the sick room with its dim light and the tired figure tossing from this side to that of the bed, then indeed Smilinda had her revenge.

CHAPTER XXVII

HOW, BY KEEPING PAROLE, MR. KELLY BROKE PRISON

Every morning Mr. Kelly looked for the doctor to come to him with word that in the little house without the Tower Gate the blinds were drawn. But that message was not brought to him, and Colonel Montague, making a visit to the prison, three weeks after Rose fell ill, found the Parson sitting very quiet in his chair with a face strangely illumined.

'Last night she slept,' said George, 'and waked only at midday. The fever has left her, and she will live. It is wonderful.'

The Colonel said what was fitting to the occasion, and the Parson replied to him absently, with his eyes upon the river and the boats swinging on the tide; and after a while Father Myles Macdonnell, whom the Colonel had neither seen nor heard of, was ushered into the room.

The Reverend Father was a kinsman of Parson Kelly, and though their acquaintance had been of the slightest, the Parson now turned to him with a great welcome. For his thoughts were now entirely bent upon an escape from his captivity. He dared not survey the possibility that some time Rose might again fall ill, and that again he must sit behind the bars and only hear news of how she fared.

The Reverend Myles, who was of the honest party, but not as yet blown upon by suspicion, seemed to him his only help and instrument. For a long while, when the Colonel had gone, the pair debated the means of escape, but found no issue; and Rose brought her white face back to the Tower, and the Parson's spirits drooped, so that at last his health began to fail. He was therefore allowed to drive out in a coach to any place within ten miles of London in the custody of a warder, and on his parole to return before dark. Of this favour he made frequent use, and no

doubt the sight of the busy faces in the streets urged him yet more to make a bid for his freedom.

Now these journeys of the Parson to take the air set Father Myles Macdonnell upon a pretty plan, which he imparted to Rose and to George.

'You drive one afternoon up into Highgate Woods--d'ye follow that? I have half-a-dozen well-disposed persons hiding in a clump of trees who will take care of your warder--d'ye see? There will be a stout horse tethered to a branch close by, and a lugger waiting off the coast of Essex--but the Parson would hear no more of the scheme.

'I have given my parole to come back to the Tower before dark,' said he, and glanced at Rose, who was looking away, to strengthen him in his objection. 'I cannot break it, can I, Rose? I have given my parole. I am not one of the Butcher Cumberland's officers. We must keep troth.'

Rose made an effort and agreed.

'Yes,' said she, 'he has given his parole, and he cannot break it.'

'Not so long as he's a lost Protestant,' said the Reverend Father. He tapped George on the knee, and continued in a wheedling voice: 'It is a matter of religion, d'ye see? Just let me convert you. I can do it in a twinkling, and so I shall save your body and your soul in one glorious moment.'

'How so?' asked the Parson with a laugh, for he was by this time well used to his kinsman's efforts to convert him. 'How shall a Catholic creep out of the Tower more easily than a Protestant?'

'Because a Catholic can break his parole. It's a great sin, to be sure, but I can absolve him for it afterwards.'

To Mr. Kelly's thinking (and, indeed, to Mr. Wogan's) this was no sterling theology, and he would not be persuaded. Another device had to be invented, and when at last a satisfactory plan was resolved upon, the plotters must wait for the quick nightfalls of autumn.

It was on Guy Fawkes day, the fifth of November, 1736, that Mr. Kelly made his escape. On the morning of that day he drove out to Epsom in the custody of his warder and upon his parole to return before dark. At four o'clock, when the light was just beginning to fall, Father Myles Macdonnell came into the Tower by the Sally Port Stairs opposite the Mint. He was told that the Parson was taking the air, and replied that he would go to the Parson's room and wait. Thereupon he crossed the precincts of the Tower, and coming over the green and down the steps of the main-guard, he inquired of the porter at Traitor's Gate whether or no Mr. Kelly had returned.

The porter answered 'Not yet.'

'It is a great pity,' said the Reverend Myles, who seemed much flustered. 'I am in a great hurry, and would you tell him, if you please, the moment he comes, to run with all haste to his room?'

Upon that he turned off under the archway of the Bloody Tower, and again mounted the steps of the main-guard.

About half-an-hour afterwards, in the deepening twilight, Mr. Kelly was set down within the Traitor's Gate; he had kept his parole. The porter gave him Father Myles's message; and the warder, since it appeared that he could only proceed as usual to his lodging, took his leave of him.

The Parson accordingly ran up the steps of the main-guard on to the green, which was by this time very obscure. Three minutes afterwards Father Myles Macdonnell hurried past the sentry at the Sally Port Stairs opposite the Mint, grumbling that he would wait no longer, and so came out upon Tower Hill. Just at that time to a moment another Father Myles Macdonnell accosted the porter at Traitor's Gate and requested him to let him out, seeing that he was, as he had already said, in a great hurry. The porter let him out with no more ado.

The second Father Myles was the real Father Myles; the first one who went grumbling out by the Sally Port Stairs was Parson Kelly. He had met Father Myles in the dark corner by Beauchamp Tower, had slipped over his head a cassock which the Father had brought with him, and had run across to the entrance over against the Mint, and so into freedom.

The carriage which had driven him to Epsom, after putting him down again at the Tower, had driven to Tower Hill, where it waited for the Parson close by the Sally Port Stairs. It did not wait long; and the Parson was hurried at a gallop out of London amidst the crackling of fireworks and the burning of effigies of Guy Fawkes. It seemed the town was illuminated to celebrate his escape.

At the Tower his evasion was not discovered until half-past seven of the evening, when the two porters, being relieved from their separate stations at the Traitor's Gate and the Sally Port Stairs,

each vowed that he had let out Father Myles Macdonnell. This seemed so miraculous an occurrence that the warder ran to Mr. Kelly's chamber. It was empty, and then the clamour began. The Parson had thus three hours' start, and, though a reward of 300*l.* was offered for his recapture, no more was heard of him for a week.

Then, however, two fishermen coming into an alehouse at Broadstairs saw the reward for Kelly proclaimed in print upon the wall, and fell into a great fury and passion, saying that they had only received five pounds when they might have had three hundred. For a fee of five pounds they had put a man over from Broadstairs to Calais, who, when once he was landed in France, had said to them:

'If anyone inquires for George Kelly, you may say that he is safely landed in France.'

And indeed at the very moment when the fishermen were lamenting their mistake in the alehouse, George Kelly and Rose were taking their dinner in Mr. Wogan's lodging at Paris. Rose had travelled into France the day before the Parson escaped, and so, after fourteen years, they were united. It was a merry sort of a party, and no doubt Wogan made a great deal of unnecessary noise. He drew the Parson aside into a window before the evening was over.

'You are not very rich, I suppose?' said he.

'I want for nothing,' said the Parson with a foolish eye on Rose, like a boy of eighteen.

Wogan fumbled in his fob and brought out a packet which he unfolded.

'Diamonds!' cried Kelly.

'They are yours,' said Wogan. 'I picked them up off the floor of a room in Soho on an occasion which you may remember. A miniature frame had come by a mischance.'

'Smilinda's?' asked Kelly with a frightened glance over his shoulder to Rose, who had the discretion not to meddle in this private conversation.

'Yes,' says Wogan; 'Smilinda's. She gave the stones to you. Very likely they are worth a trifle.'

'We'll slip out and sell them to-morrow,' answered the Parson in a whisper.

They slipped out, but they did not sell them. The diamonds were paste, and Mr. Wogan at last understood why Lady Oxford, when she gave her miniature set with brilliants to the Parson, had been so anxious that he should never part with it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MR. WOGAN AGAIN INVADES ENGLAND, MEETS THE ELECT LADY, AND BEARS WITNESS TO HER PERFECTIONS

It seemed to Wogan that this particular story of the Parson's fortunes, which began in Paris so long ago, had now ended in Paris. But he was wrong, and it was not till ten years after Mr. Kelly's escape from the Tower that Wogan witnessed the last circumstance in England, and himself spoke the closing word.

Retiring soon from Paris, which ill suited a slender purse, Mr. Kelly lived, with his fair wife, at Avignon, where he played secretary to the Duke of Ormond. The Parson was a *gêne* on the amours of the aged Duke, who posted him off, in the year Forty-Five, to, escort the Prince of Wales to the Scottish islands. Wogan himself, earlier in the same year of grace, lost an arm at the battle of Fontenoy, but got a leaf of the laurels, being dubbed Chevalier of the Order of St. Louis.

His arm amputated and the wound healed, Wogan must needs join the Prince of Wales, then residing in his palace of Holyrood, near Edinburgh. Wogan came too late for that pretty onfall at Prestonpans, but he marched south with the Prince's forces, riding again the old roads from Carlisle to Lancaster and Preston. The buxom maids of the inns were broad-blown landladies now; some of them remembered Wogan; and the ale was as good as ever.

It chanced that at Preston, where he tarried for a couple of days, Mr. Wogan was billeted on a cobbler, a worthy man, but besotted with a new religion, which then caused many popular tumults. To England it had been brought over from America by two brothers of Wogan's old friend, Sam Wesley, the usher at Westminster School, and familiar of Bishop Atterbury.

Wogan's host could talk of nothing but this creed, whose devotees cried out (it seemed), laughed, fell down in fits, barked, and made confession in public.

'Ah, sir,' he said to Wogan, 'if you could but hear the Brothers Wesley, Charles and John, in the pulpit or singing hymns! Charles sings like an angel, and to hear John exhort the unaroused might waken those who have lain for a score of years in the arms of the Devil.'

'John Wesley, little Jack Wesley?' cried Wogan. 'Why, I have saved him from many a beating at Westminster School!'

'Do you know that saint, sir?' asked the cobbler, in an enthusiasm.

'Know him, I know nobody else, if he is the brother of honest Sam Wesley, that once let me into the Deanery on a night in May. Assuredly I knew little Jack.'

The cobbler came near kneeling to Wogan. 'Here, indeed, is the finger of Providence,' he exclaimed. 'Dear sir, you may yet cast off the swathings of the Scarlet Woman.'

'Easy, be easy, Mr. Crispin!' quoth Wogan. 'But tell me, is Jack to preach and is Charles to sing in this town of yours to-night?'

'Unhappily no, but we are promised the joy of hearing that famed disciple, Mr. Bunton, discourse, and the Elect Lady, as the Brethren style her, will also speak.'

'Do the women preach in your new Church?'

'No, but they are permitted to tell the story of their call, and to-night we shall hear the Elect Lady--'

'Confess before the congregation? Faith, the discourse may be improving. Is the Elect Lady handsome?'

'She hath been one of the most renowned beauties of her age, and there are some who say that she is little altered by time. Ah, sir, she will make you embrace the truth.'

'My embraces were ever at the mercy of feminine persuasion,' said Wogan. 'Is this Elect Lady of these parts?'

'No, sir, she comes from the South, travelling with holy Mr. Bunton. You will oblige me infinitely, sir, if you will take pity on your own poor soul and join our love-feast. We meet in the warehouse of Mr. Brown, our most eminent grocer, in Scotch Lane, behind the "Jackdaw and Bagpipes."'

'I thank you for your solicitude,' Wogan said; 'and as to the love-feast, I'll think of it.'

Consequently he thought no more of it till the bottle had gone round half-a-dozen times at the Prince's mess in the 'Bull Tavern.' Lord Elcho, who had certainly drunk his dose, began telling, as a good thing, of his conversation with a *bourgeois* of Preston.

"What is your Prince's religion?" asked the *bourgeois*.

"That is still to seek, my good man, still to seek," I answered him,' cried Elcho, laughing.

The Prince laughed also; the free-thinking philosophers had been at him already, first in Rome, then in Paris.

'Good for you, Elcho,' he cried; then, musing, "'Tis a very awkward business, this of religion. We have given three crowns for a mass, and there's the difficulty, there it is, as black as ever. I wish some one would invent a new creed, and the rest agree about it, d---n them, and then what is still to seek, my religion, would be found.'

A thought came into Wogan's head; the bottle had made rounds enough, and more; next morning they were to march early.

'Sir,' he said, 'there *is* a new religion, and a handsome lady to preach it.' Then he repeated what his host, the cobbler, had chanted to him, 'The meeting is at night in the warehouse of Mr. Brown, the eminent grocer.'

'A handsome woman!--a new belief! By St. Andrew, I'll go,' cried Charles. 'You'll come, Nick, you and--' he looked at the faces looming through the tobacco smoke round the wine-stained table. The blue reek of pipes clouded and clung to men's faces; to the red rough beard of Lochgarry, the smart, clean-shaven Ker of Graden and Maxwell of Kirkconnell, the hardy gaze of brave Balmerino, the fated Duke of Perth. Wogan thought of the Highland belief in the shroud of mist that is seen swathing men doomed soon to die, as were so many of them. The Prince stood and stared, his pipe in his hand. 'Nick, you will come, you and Ker of Graden; he's sober! *Allons!*'

'Sir,' whispered Mr. Murray of Broughton, 'think of the danger! The Elector has his assassins everywhere; they are taken; your Royal Highness laughs and lets them go, and the troops

murmur.'

'Danger! Will they look for me at a tub-thumping match?'

The Prince picked up a cork from the floor; he set it to the flame of a candle; he touched with it his eyebrows and upper lip; he tucked his brown hair under his wig, standing before the mirror on the chimney-piece. Then he flung a horseman's cloak over his shoulders, stooped, and limped a little in his walk.

'A miracle,' everyone called out, for scarce a man of them could have known him.

He tossed his hand in the air; '*Allons, en avant!*' he cried, with a laugh; and Wogan, with Ker of Graden, did what all might have better done at Derby--followed their leader.

The night was wintry, and a cold north wind blew about the rare flickering oil lamps in the street. All three men buttoned themselves up in their cloaks. The Prince, still stooping and limping, took an arm of each of his aides-de-camp; indeed, he somewhat needed their support.

'I am like that Sultan in Monsieur Galland's Eastern tales,' he said, 'visiting my subjects incognito. Nick, you are Mesrou, the Chief of the--no, you're Giaffar. Graden is--I forget the Eastern minister's name. I am the Caliph. But what are the rabble about?'

The three pilgrims had entered the lane that led to the warehouse of the devout grocer. There was a mob around the door waving torches and shouting insults at a few decent tradesmen and their wives who were bent on the same pious errand as Wogan and his friends.

'Away, swaddlers!' 'Down with the Methodists!' they cried; and a burly fellow brushed against Wogan's shoulder in the least gentlemanly style. He reeled off and fell flat in the lane, while the other ragamuffins laughed at him.

The three devotees stepped briskly through the grinning crowd that cried to Graden, 'Come to buy brimstone, Scotch Sandy?'

'Come to escape it, my dear friend,' quoth Wogan's host, the cobbler, who stood at the door, and kept it, too, against the mob with a great show of spirit.

'You *have* thought of us, sir?' asked the cobbler.

'Ay, and brought two other inquiring spirits,' said Wogan.

They were conducted into a long half-empty warehouse, smelling of cheese and festooned with cobwebs. A light or two burned dimly in horn lanterns; a low platform of new planks had been set up at the top of the room; a table with seven candles made an illumination there; a big black Bible, and a jug of water with a glass flanked the Bible. The preacher sat on a chair (most of the congregation stood, or reposed on barrels and benches), and on another chair, beside the preacher, was a lady, veiled, her fine figure obscured by widow's weeds.

'Is that your beauty?' whispered the Prince.

'The Elect Lady, sir,' murmured the cobbler devoutly.

'*Mon Dieu!* she has a very pretty foot!'

And Wogan, too, noticed the blaze of a diamond buckle that nearly covered the little arched instep. Tap, tap! went the Elect Lady's foot, thrust out in front of her heavy petticoat of crape.

'The lady is travelling everywhere, for the good of souls, gentlemen, with Mr. Wesley's friend and choice disciple, the preacher, Mr. Bunton.'

'L'heureux Monsieur Bunton! Quelle chance!' quoth his Highness.

Mr. Bunton, the preacher, was indeed a fine, handsome young fellow as any widow could wish to look upon. He wore lay dress, not being a priest ordained of the Church of England. As for the congregation, they were small trading people, not rabble; indeed, the mob outside broke most of the windows during the sermon, that was interrupted, not only by the pebbles of the ragamuffins, but by the antics of the congregation.

Mr. Bunton, after a hymn had been sung without any music, began his preaching. He assured the audience that none of them could be a gayer dog than he had been, that was now a shining light. He obliged the congregation with a history of his early life and adventures, which Wogan now tells in few words, that people may know what manner of men were certain of these saints, or had been. Mr. Bunton was reared in sin, he said, as a land-surveyor. A broth of a boy he was, and nine times his parents sent him from Reading to London to bind him to a trade. Nine times his masters returned him on their hands.

Here the audience groaned aloud, and one went off in a fit. Mr. Bunton then told how he was awakened to sin as he walked in Cheapside. At this many, and the cobbler among them, cried 'Hallelujah!' but some went off into uncontrollable fits of laughter, which did not disturb the

gravity of the rest of the assembly.

The preacher's confession was, indeed, of such a nature that Wogan let a laugh out of himself, while Graden and the Prince rolled in extreme convulsions.

'Go on, gentlemen; you are in the right path,' said the cobbler. 'Our converts are generally taken in this way first. It is reckoned a very favourable sign of grace. Some laugh for a week without stopping to sleep, eat, or drink.'

'I'll try to stop to drink,' hooted his Highness, his face as red as a lobster; and then off he went again, the bench shaking beneath him, while Wogan and Graden laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks in their dark corner. The sympathetic cobbler murmured texts of an appropriate character. Indeed, now he thinks of it all, and sees Mr. Bunton sawing the air while he tells the story of his early wicked days, Mr. Wogan laughs as he writes. The man was greasy and radiant with satisfied vanity. His narrative of what he did and thought after he awoke to sin in Cheapside was a marvel.

'I felt that beef and mutton were sinful things.'

Here came a groan from an inquiring butcher.

'I wished to put away all that was of the flesh fleshy. My desire was to dwell alone, in a cave, far from the sight of woman.'

The Elect Lady groaned, and all the wenches in the congregation followed suit.

'Abstaining from feasts of fat things, my mind was set on a simple diet of acorns, grass, and crabs.'

'Les glands, les écrevisses, et l'herbe des champs!' hooted the Prince. 'Mon Dieu, quel souper, et quelle digestion il doit avoir, cet homme-là!'

'But, sisters and brethren,' Mr. Bunton went on, 'did I yield to these popish temptations? Did I live, like one of their self-righteous so-called saints, on crabs, acorns, and grass? Did I retire to a cave? No, dear sisters and brethren. My motive for abstaining was bad; it was a suggestion of the Old Man--'

'Qui donc est-il, ce vieillard bien pensant?' whispered the Prince.

'The devil, sir,' answered Graden, who knew the doctrine of the Scotch ministers.

'My motive for not living on crabs in a cave was bad, I confess, but it was over-ruled for the best. Dear friends, I kept myself far from these temptations, because, indeed, I was afraid of ghosts that haunt caves and such places.'

'Il ne mangeait pas les écrevisses, parce qu'il avait peur des revenants! O c'est trop!' said the Prince, in a voice choked with emotion, while more advanced disciples cried 'Glory!' and 'Hallelujah!'

'But next,' the preacher went on, much gratified and encouraged by these demonstrations, 'I was happily brought acquainted with that precious sister, that incomparable disciple of Mr. Wesley, whom we call the Elect Lady. Then I awoke to light, and saw that it was laid upon me to preach, continually and unceasingly, making in every town confession of my offences. That dear lady, friends, promises for this once (she is as modest as she is generous and good) to tell us the moving story of her own early dangers, while she was a dweller in the tents of--of Shem, I think.'

The congregation cheered and stamped with their feet, all but a few who were rolling on the floor in fits and foaming at the mouth. Mr. Bunton sat down very warm, and applied himself to the mug of water.

The Elect Lady rose up to her full height, and tossed back her veil over her shoulders.

'Ah, nous sommes trompés,' said the Prince. 'C'est une femme de quarante ans, bien sonnés!'

But Wogan, between the shoulders of the congregation, stared from his dim corner as he had never stared at mortal woman before. The delicate features were thickened, alas, the lips had fallen in, the gold threads had been unwoven out of the dark brown hair. There were two dabs of red on a powdered face, where in time past the natural roses and lilies had bloomed; but the voice and the little Andalusian foot that beat the time with the Elect Lady's periods were the voice and the foot of the once incomparable Smilinda! Nay, when she turned and looked at the converted land-surveyor beside her, Mr. Wogan knew in her gaze the ghost of the glance that had bewitched Scrope, and Kelly, and Colonel Montague, and Lord Sidney Beauclerk, and who knows how many other gallants? In that odd place Wogan felt a black fit of the spleen. A woman's loss of beauty,--Wogan can never think of it unmoved. What tragedy that we men endure or enact is like this?

But her ladyship spoke, and she spoke very well. The congregation, all of them that were not in fits or in laughing hysterics, listened as if to an angel. Heavens! what a story she told of her

youth! What dangers encountered! What plots prepared against her virtue, ay, by splendid soldiers, beautiful young lords, and even clergymen; above all, by one monster whom she had discovered to be, not only a monster, but a traitor to the King, and an agent of the Pretender. She was a young thing then, married to an old lord, all unprotected, on every side beset by flattery.

The congregation groaned and swayed at the picture of man's depravity, but Wogan, his spleen quite forgotten, was chuckling with delight.

Yet, all unawakened as she was, said this penitent, an unknown influence had ever shielded her. She remembered how one of these evil ones, the clergyman, after kneeling vainly at her feet, had cried, 'Sure, some invisible power protects your ladyship.'

Here the groans gave place to cries of praise, arms were lifted, the simple, good people wept. Wogan listened with a less devotional air, bending forward on his bench, and rubbing his hands for joy. In truth it had just come upon him that it was his duty to stand up when the Elect Lady sat down, and bear his witness to the truth of her narrative.

'Not to her be the triumph,' she went on, 'all unawakened as she then was, and remained, till she heard Mr. Wesley preach,' and thereafter went through the world with Brother Bunton, converting land-surveyors, colliers, and others.

Wogan does not care to remember or quote any more of this lady's pieties. They had a kind of warmth and ease of familiarity which, in sacred things, are not to his liking. However, when she ceased, Mr. Wogan stood up, a tall figure of a French officer with an empty sleeve in his dim corner.

'Good people,' he said; 'in my heedless youth I had the honour to be of the acquaintance of this lady who has just spoken to you.'

The Elect Lady glanced at Wogan; she gave a strange, short cry, and the black veil swept over her face again.

'I was,' Wogan went on, 'the eye-witness of these trials to which her Ladyship's virtue was exposed by the wicked ones of whose company I was a careless partaker. I have heard that wicked minister say that some invisible power protected her Ladyship. If any testimony to the truth of her ladyship's moving tale were needed I could bear that evidence, as could my friend the Rev. Mr. Kelly, now in France with despatches, and also General Montague, at present serving with Field-Marshal Wade, in the neighbourhood of Newcastle.'

Wogan sat down.

'That was providential indeed,' said the cobbler; and all the congregation bawled 'Miracle.' But the Elect Lady sat still, her face in her hands, like a Niobe in black bombazine.

In the confusion, the three inquirers from the Prince's army slipped modestly out. A heavy shower of snow had swept the rabble out of the lane. All was dark and cold, after the reek of the crowded warehouse.

'Nick,' said the Prince, 'was that story all true? Was the Elect Lady a prude?'

'It is Mr. Kelly's story, sir,' said Wogan. Your Royal Highness can ask him.'

'George was her adorer? Then George shall tell me the tale over a bottle. How the cold strikes! Hey, for a bowl of punch!' cried the Prince.

'I am at your commands, sir, but may I say that it is one of the morning, and the pipes play the reveillé at four?'

'To quarters, then! What is the word, damme? What is the word?'

'*Slaint an Righ*, sir.'

'Slaint an Righ? I never can get my tongue about it. Oh, if our subjects had but one language and one religion! But it shall not be the religion of Mr. Bunton. *Bon soir!*'

'You have taken every trick, Wogan!' said Graden, as the Prince entered his inn. 'A sober night, for once, before a long day's march.'

* * * * *

Next morning the army went south, to Derby, and then (by no fault of the Irish officers or of their Prince) came back again. Wogan was at Falkirk, Culloden, and Ruthven, woe worth the day! How he reached France when all was over, is between him and a very beautiful young lady of Badenoch; she said she bore a king's name--Miss Helen Macwilliam. Of King Macwilliam Wogan hath never heard, but the young lady (whose brothers had taken to the heather) protected Wogan in his distress, tended his wound, hid him from the red-coat soldiers, and at last secured for him a

passage in a vessel from Montrose.

And for all souvenir, she kept the kerchief with which she had first bound up the bayonet-stab that Wogan came by, when he, with the Stewarts, broke through Barrel's regiment at Culloden. He writes this at Avignon, where George and his wife also dwell, in the old house with the garden, the roses, and the noisy, pretty children that haunted Mr. Kelly's dreams when he was young.

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): Sophia, a nickname of the *Duke* of Wharton.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PARSON KELLY ***

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