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An Historic Romance, Vol. 1 of 3, by Anonymous**

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HILDEBRAND.

NEW WORK, BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Preparing for Publication, in 3 vols. 8vo.,

THE OLD TEMPLE:

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "HILDEBRAND,"
&c. &c.

"Within the Temple hall we were too loud,
The garden here is more convenient."

SHAKSPEARE.

LONDON:
JOHN MORTIMER, ADELAIDE STREET,
TRAFALGAR SQUARE.

HILDEBRAND:

OR,

THE DAYS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE KING'S SON."

Frugal and wise, a Walsingham is thine;
A Drake, who made thee mistress of the sea,
And bore thy name in thunder round the world.

Then flamed thy spirit high; but who can speak
The numerous worthies of the maiden reign?
In Raleigh mark their every glory mix'd;
Raleigh, the scourge of Spain!

THOMSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HILDEBRAND;

[1]

&c. &c.

CHAPTER I.

The last rays of a July sun were extending themselves over the western sky, and that sweetest period of a summer's day—the cool evening—had just opened, when a horseman made his appearance on the high-road between Exeter and London, in the midland section of Devonshire. He looked a young man; and his years were not so many even, as one would, at first sight, have inferred from his looks. Care and travel, and probably privation, had given a stamp of experience to his features, and an air of reflection to his face, that savoured more of a man of thirty, than one of four or five and twenty years, which was more likely his age. Yet, to judge from his appearance, he was not one of those who would let the cares of life press upon him heavily, or of a constitution that, from any imperfectness or defect, would suffer greatly under the infliction of privation or hardship. His countenance was almost an oval, and sorted well with his light-brown beard and moustache, which, though they were no way scanty, he wore thin and pointed. His complexion was of that red and white which, in men, is so peculiarly English, and would have been fair to effeminacy, only that it bore evidence of having been exposed, no very long time previous, to a more glowing sun than that of England, which had given it a more manly tone, and rendered its beauty more lively and animated. His blue eyes were not large, but they were finely coloured and penetrating, and harmonized well with his fair forehead, which, though not lofty, was unruffled and expansive. His other features were turned with accuracy, and the tone of each was such as, in most instances, marks a sanguine temperament and a generous disposition. Nevertheless, the *ensemble* of his face was not without a touch of melancholy, though it was probably more the indication and effect of a pensive turn of mind, nursed by vicissitude, or kept

[2]

[3]

in constant exercise by his daily avocations, than the vestige of any past sorrow or present care. Indeed, in the life and animation of every feature, this small trace of gloom beneath the eyes, though it was ever present, was almost lost; and there was no point in his face but manifested, in a greater or a less degree, the spirit of frankness, buoyancy, and good-nature.

The horseman was of a tall person, which was the more in his favour as, from early exercise, the muscles of his fine broad chest were fully developed, and all his well-turned limbs denoted unity and power. He was attired in grave habits, cut in the fashion of the age, which was that of Elizabeth; yet his erect and soldier-like bearing, more conspicuous from his being mounted, betokened that he had not always worn the garments of peace, but had at some time followed the noble profession of arms. A long basket-hilted sword, of the kind called cut-and-thrust, hung at his left side; and a small valise (seemingly made to hold a change of raiment, and probably the appurtenances of his toilet), which was fastened to the back of his saddle, completed his equipment. [4]

He sat his horse with much grace, and with that union of ease and dignity, joined to flexity of limb, which denoted no less the perfect horseman, than the true and polished gentleman.

A slight breeze had risen with the evening, and as he had probably ridden some distance, and the day had been warm, the horseman rode along at a gentle pace, in order that he might enjoy more fully, and with greater ease, the fresh free air that played around him. As he passed along, his eye glanced wistfully over the country on either side, seeming to take in, every now and then, some well-known and agreeable object, that called a brighter lustre to his eye, and often a smile to his lip. Occasionally the notes of a blackbird, or some other feathered songster, would draw his attention to the bush that bordered the road, and which was now adorned with many a wreath of the wild dog-rose, and the varied greens of the hawthorn and blackberry. Then his feelings, responding to the cheering melody, would manifest a new and more sensible buoyancy, and spread over his manly face a glow of earnest pleasure. [5]

Thus he rode leisurely along, when, as he approached a secluded-looking by-road, his ear was saluted by the report of a pistol, followed by a shrill scream; and this incident induced him to bring his horse to a stand. But after a moment's hesitation he pushed forward again, and, clapping spurs to his horse, passed at a smart pace down the contiguous by-road, whence the sounds that had alarmed him seemed to have emanated. [6]

The road was, like all the cross-roads of the period, narrow and rugged, and in many parts overgrown with grass, or traversed by deep ruts, that rendered any kind of progress a matter of labour and difficulty. It was bounded on either side by the fence of the neighbouring fields—the common quickset, or field-hedge, which now had attained its full growth, and displayed all the luxuriance of maturity. Behind the hedge ran a row of elms, in irregular rank, and at no certain or fixed intervals, the boughs of which overhung the road, and frequently met about its centre. Indeed, the road was not unlike the avenue to a gentleman's house, only that its extreme ruggedness, joined to the fence of quickset aforementioned, and its occasional patches of vegetation, somewhat impaired the similarity, and were features that such a locality could not be expected to exhibit. [7]

At length our horseman came to an angle in the road, about a quarter of a mile from the highway, which, turning sharply round, opened to view a scene that inspired him with the deepest interest.

A few yards in his front stood one of the heavy carriages of the period, with its broad side-doors forced open, and its four horses brought to an abrupt halt. On the ground, at the side of the road, bleeding profusely from a cut on the forehead, lay a groaning postilion, who appeared to be on the eve of a longer journey than he had probably looked for. The corpse of another man-servant was stretched on the opposite side of the road, and his unsheathed rapier showed that, like the postilion, he had fallen unresisting. Startling as these particulars were, they hardly obtained from our horseman, after he had quite turned the angle, the ordinary notice of a glance. A group of five persons on the left of the arrested carriage immediately engaged his whole attention. Two of these were, to judge from their appearance, cavaliers of the road, or, in other words, highwaymen, and had probably just dismounted from two stout steeds hard by, which were quietly cropping the grass, or waste land, at the side of the road. A third was an elderly personage—perhaps (for his appearance bespoke him a man of rank) the proprietor of the adjacent carriage—who was combating the taller of these ruffians with his rapier. In this contest he was assisted by another person, apparently one of his domestics; but they were but indifferent swordsmen, and were hardly able to defend themselves, much less act offensively, against the experienced arm of the robber. This seemed to be clear to the accomplice of the latter; for, instead of affording him any succour, he was entirely engaged with the fifth, and, in the eyes of our horseman, most interesting person of the party—a young and beautiful female. His superior strength had already rendered her almost powerless, when he thrust his hand under the collar of her bodice, in search of some trinket, or, perhaps—for it was out of sight—some more precious valuable, which was suspended by a chain of gold from her neck. This outrage, exceeding any that she had hitherto sustained, drew from the unhappy lady a cry of utter terror, and nerved her for one last effort to break from his hold. She was still struggling, when the sound of a horse's feet broke on her ear, and, casting a despairing glance around, her eye fell on our young horseman, who, having turned the angle, had just come fully into view. Her strength was by this time exhausted: she saw that deliverance, which had appeared hopeless, was close at hand; and she sank senseless in her assailant's arms. [8] [9] [10]

The ruffian had not a moment to lose; for the horseman, he perceived at a glance, was no ordinary wayfarer, and he was approaching at a full gallop. Throwing down the insensible form of

the lady, he seemed to deliberate, under the first effects of the surprise, how he should meet him. His hesitation, however, was but momentary; for, as the horseman drew nearer, he snatched a pistol from his girdle, and discharged it at his breast. But the ball struck the horseman in the fleshy part of his left arm, and did not, according to his expectations, bring him to a halt. Seeing him still advance, the robber sought to meet his assault with his raised rapier; but whether it was that he had expected it would be less vigorous, and so was unprepared, or that he was an inexpert swordsman, his precaution was of no avail. The horseman beat down his guard directly; and with a terrific lunge, for which his long cut-and-thrust sword was excellently adapted, ran him through the body, pinning him to the pannel of the carriage at his back. [11]

It will readily be imagined that this new incident did not transpire without attracting the attention of those other characters in the passing scene whom it so eminently affected. The report of the pistol was the first intimation they had of the horseman's advent; and it was then that the senior cavalier, turning from the contest he was engaged in, perceived the melancholy situation of the young lady. This seemed to throw him off his guard; for, regardless of his position, he broke away from the conflict with the robber, and sprang to the lady's assistance. His servant was very unequal to the conflict single-handed; and the robber, seeing the fate of his comrade, and probably conceiving that no effort he could make would alter the fortune of the day, availed himself of this circumstance to retreat towards his steed, keeping the servant at bay, meanwhile, though seemingly with a desire to do him no hurt. [12]

At last he reached his horse, and with a dexterous lunge, he knocked his rapier out of the servant's hand, and sprang unmolested to his saddle. As he gained his seat, he clapped spurs to his horse, and galloped off.

Our young horseman was at this moment withdrawing his sword from the body of the fugitive's comrade. Hearing the clatter of the retreating horse, he turned round; but though the robber had only a slight start of him, and was no better armed than himself, he showed no disposition to give him chase. Seemingly satisfied with having driven him off, he proceeded to tender his assistance, in another character, to the still helpless lady.

The lady was reclining in the arms of the elderly individual before noticed. She was, as has been remarked, still insensible; but if her position was calculated to obscure and veil over the attributes of her mind, it was well adapted to display the exquisite graces of her person. Though she could hardly have arrived at her eighteenth summer, she had evidently attained her full height, and was progressing towards that development of *contour*, or general outline, which is the most glorious indication of female maturity. But it was more in promise—more in those shadowy lines which were yet hardly revealed, but which were still replete with grace and excellence—that the beauty of her person chiefly consisted. The hundred dazzling charms that marked the mould and perfectness of her limbs, though distinctly visible, were not of that character which can be defined; and they existed more as a whole than individually, and with a seeming hold and dependence on each other. There was, however, little of buoyancy in her most engaging countenance. Whether it was the effect of her swoon, or of some deeper cause, rooted in the past, her features wore a stamp of gravity beyond her years, but which might arise from a habit of reflection, as much as from any spring of disappointment or sorrow. Her complexion was dark, yet so beautifully shaded, that it seemed to comprehend a variety of tints, blended into one inseparable and harmonious whole; and this gave it a force of expression, and a sweetness of tone, truly charming. Her raven-black hair, disarranged by her recent struggle, had burst the restraints imposed upon it by her toilet, and fell loosely over her fair cheeks and neck, as if it sought, by this close and striking proximity, to be compared with the whiteness of her heaving bosom. [13]

The personage who supported her was, as was heretofore observed, considerably her senior. He was tall in stature, and, notwithstanding a slight stoop in his shoulders—probably the bend of age—dignified in his bearing. His countenance had once been handsome, and was still noble; and though there was an air of sternness, approaching to austerity, about his forehead, the general expression of his features was gentle and kindly. As he gazed in the lady's face, he betrayed the deepest emotion, and appeared, on a cursory glance, to have no sense of what was passing around, but to be engrossed solely by his fears for the unconscious being whom he supported. He was yet bending over her, anxiously watching for the first return of sensibility, when the cavalier by whom they had been so effectually succoured, having dismounted from his horse, and given it over to the care of the servant, came up with him. [14]

"Hath the lady sustained any hurt, Sir?" he inquired.

At this moment the young lady, as if aroused by his voice, opened her eyes, and looked up.

"Is it thou, father?" she said, addressing the personage who supported her. "Thou art not hurt, then?" [15]

"Not in the least, my dear child," replied her father.

"And are we free?" said the young lady, eagerly looking round.

"Quite, quite," answered the old man; "and, under Heaven, we owe our deliverance to this gentleman."

"We owe him a great debt, then," said the lady, raising herself up. "I hope, Sir," she added, speaking to the cavalier alluded to, "we may live long enough to show, by our future actions, that we shall ever remember it."

As she gained an erect position, she drew off her glove, and offered the cavalier her small hand. [16]

He seized it eagerly, and with a gentle inclination of his head, suitable to the occasion, raised it to his lips.

"'Twere but a poor compliment, Sir," observed the elderly cavalier, following up what had been said by his daughter, "to say thou hast my hearty thanks. Thou hast given me more than life; and what is there in its gift, much less in an old man's voice, that can balance such service as this?" [17]

"I'faith, fair Sir, thou ratest my help too high," replied the person addressed. "'Twas no more than any other honest stranger would have lent thee."

"'Tis very few would risk life and limb for absolute strangers, brave Sir," rejoined the previous speaker. "But we may be less strangers, if it so please thee, in time to come."

"If that be thy mind, fair Sir," said the other, "it will be a right welcome thing to me, though my stay in this land will not be for long."

"Thou art not a foreigner?" said the elderly cavalier, in a tone of half inquiry, half doubt. "But I should tell thee who I am. My name is Sir Edgar de Neville; and this fair lady, to whom thou hast given more than her life, is my only child." [18]

If Sir Edgar furnished this information with the view of ascertaining the name and rank of his deliverer, preparatory to entering more fully on those friendly relations which he had just opened, and had invited him to extend, the result must have disappointed him; for the cavalier, whatever was his motive, did not disclose these particulars, but rather answered him evasively.

"Mine is a happy fortune," he said, "that hath won two such friends. But this fair lady hath need of repose, Sir Edgar. I have some small matters to settle at the village of Lantwell; and will be your escort, if you will give me leave, as far as your lodge, which I can make to fall in my way."

"Thou knowest Neville Grange, then, Sir?" inquired Sir Edgar.

"'Tis many years since I was in this part afore," said the cavalier, slightly colouring; "but I once knew it right well."

"We will not claim thine escort only, then," returned Sir Edgar; "but, while thine affairs hold thee at Lantwell, thy fair company also, an' thou wilt give us leave." [19]

As the cavalier was about to reply, he caught a glance from the dark eyes of Miss de Neville, seeming, by the warmth and kindness of its expression, to second the invitation of her father; and, repressing the answer which he had been about to make, and which was probably of a negative character, he replied with a bow of acquiescence.

Preparations were therefore made for entering once more on their journey. The wounded postilion, who, it was now discovered, was but slightly hurt, had his forehead bound up, and was then able to mount his horse, and resume the duties of his post. The dead servant, with the corpse of the robber, was drawn to one side of the road, and there left till, on Sir Edgar's arrival home, a suitable means of removing them could be procured. Sir Edgar and his fair daughter took their places in the carriage; and their deliverer, and the old servant, who was entirely unhurt, mounted their horses, and rode slowly along on either side of that vehicle. [20]

While the party thus pursued their way, each individual was too busily occupied by his thoughts to seek to open a conversation. Indeed, the young cavalier, however his thoughts might have been engaged, was more seriously unfitted for the amenities of discourse. In the excitement of the rescue, the pistol-wound he had received in his arm, at his first appearance on the scene of action, had not been heeded; but now that he had ceased to be physically employed, and was, to a certain extent, left to himself, its violent throbs became most painfully sensible. The hæmorrhage appeared to be slight; for his murrey-coloured jerkin, except round the hole where the ball had entered, was hardly soiled; yet he could feel the ball burning in the middle of his arm. He tied his scarf tightly over it, thinking that, by its pressure on the part affected, this would mitigate the dreadful throes by which it was every moment convulsed. But the angry wound throbbed as before, and the blood in his arm, from his shoulder downward, seemed to rage and boil, and, as it gurgled round the wound, to burn like liquid fire. [21]

In this manner he rode along for about two miles, continually hoping, at every successive wind in the apparently interminable lane, to come up with some farm-house, or peasant's cottage, where he could procure a drink of water. But no prospect of relief presented itself, and he was about to avow his utter inability to proceed, when, looking round, he perceived that the road was approaching a gate, with a porter's lodge just visible over the fence, which he recalled to mind as the entrance to Neville Grange. The carriage came to a halt the next moment; and the mounted servant, who had been riding on the inner side of the carriage, nearest to the gate, spurred forward a few paces, and rang the lodge-bell. The young cavalier felt a dizziness come over him at this juncture; and drawing his horse up, within a pace or two of the carriage, he staggered in his saddle, and fell back against the carriage-door. [22]

CHAPTER II.

The estate called Neville Grange, the residence of Sir Edgar de Neville, embraced an extensive park, and a roomy and commodious mansion. This latter was evidently a recent erection, and had probably succeeded, since the accession of the present proprietor, to one of some antiquity. It [23]

was an unpretending structure, but was rendered important by its size, which, with its situation, marked it as the residence of a person of consequence. Its date was as clearly indicated by its material—the red brick then in use—as by its style, which was of that substantial yet stately caste called Elizabethan. It stood on the summit of a gentle acclivity, with its rear and sides, the least finished parts of the building, enclosed by umbrageous trees, and the front commanding a view of the whole extent of the park. [24]

Sir Edgar de Neville, the present proprietor, had become possessed of the Grange on the death of his father, towards the latter end of the reign of Mary. He had previously, while attending on the king-consort, Philip, in Spain, married a Spanish lady, who brought him little dower but her beauty, and, what he prized as highly, her affections. Even these possessions he was not destined to enjoy long; for shortly after his accession to the family estate, his lady died, leaving behind her an infant daughter, a sad memento, in the promise furnished by her scarcely dawning charms, of her own excellence and beauty.

About this time Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne; and Sir Edgar, being a Roman Catholic, and opposed to the new order of things, which disqualified Roman Catholics for any state office or employment, was obliged to relinquish his public pursuits, and retire into the contracted circle of private life. But this change of fortune did not shake his allegiance, or induce him to lend any countenance, however limited, to those treasonable conspiracies which the oppressive enactments of the new legislature occasionally excited among the Roman Catholics. So unexceptionable was his conduct, that none of the host of spies which the jealousy of Burleigh, the Lord-Treasurer, and chief minister of Elizabeth, maintained in every part of the country, had ever been able to discover therein the slightest cause for mistrust or suspicion. In his excessive caution, he even denied himself the full exercise of his religion; and many a year passed by, subsequent to the accession of Elizabeth to the throne, without seeing his threshold once marked with the forbidden step of a priest. [25]

Thus he lived secluded for a considerable period; but ultimately, after a lapse of some years, he was joined in his retirement by a Spanish gentleman, named Don Felix di Corva, to whom he was related, through his deceased wife, in the degree of cousin. With this gentleman and his daughter, the fair Evaline, he was residing at the epoch which opens this history. [26]

These particulars were yet unknown to the cavalier who, at great risk to himself, had just rendered Sir Edgar such signal service, and whom the conclusion of our last chapter represented to have fallen in a swoon. On recovering his senses, he found himself disposed in a comfortable bed, in an upper chamber of Sir Edgar's mansion. A skilful chirurgeon, whose residence was hard by, and whom a mounted servant had brought express to the mansion, stood by his bedside, and Sir Edgar himself was watching anxiously for his recovery. Directly this took place, the chirurgeon, with the promptitude of an alert practitioner, examined the wound in his arm, and, with little difficulty, succeeded in drawing forth the bullet. That effected, he carefully dressed the wound, and the cavalier, at his suggestion, was then left to repose. [27]

The pain of the wound, yielding to the soothing influence of the dressing, which met the heated blood with a refreshing coolness, had materially abated, but still the cavalier could not dispose himself to sleep. Relieved from bodily pain, his mind, which physical suffering had hitherto kept in subjection, began to bestir itself, and led him into such a conflict of thought, as amounted, in the end, almost to distraction. Hour succeeded hour, and yet his eyes, in spite of his utmost efforts to obtain rest, remained unsealed, and his senses alive to the finest perception. Thoughts arose unbidden, and almost against his will, from the deepest recesses of his heart, with recollections of the past, and fears of the future, in which he had to play a most perilous part, all mingled together. Yet this state of mind, if bodily suffering was not its actual source, did spring partly from his wound, and the peculiar excitement attending its infliction, though it was mainly caused by an untimely contemplation of his personal prospects. The same object continued to engage his attention, in every variety of shape, and under every possible aspect, till he was overtaken by exhaustion, and then—and not till then—did he fall asleep. [28]

It was yet early in the morning when he awoke. He was surprised to find, on becoming completely awake, that his wound now gave him no pain; and he was able to rise without inconvenience. A small handbell, which stood on a chair beside his bed, brought an aged domestic to his chamber, and, with the assistance of this individual, he entered on his toilet, and was soon fully attired. [29]

Learning that neither Sir Edgar nor his daughter had yet risen, he left word with the servant, for their information, that he should take a stroll in the park, and return to meet them at the breakfast-table. With this intimation, he descended to the hall, and thence, finding the hall-door open, passed into the park.

As he gazed inquisitively round, his eye fell on a walk that, from its being hedged in by tall shrubs, wore a more secluded look than the others; and, whether for this reason, or because it was the nearest, he bent his steps thitherwards.

He did not pass into the walk without being observed. He had taken but a few paces, when a man's head, shrouded in a slouched hat, was cautiously raised from the adjacent shrubs, and fixed so as to view him without discovering itself. Whether he was or was not alive to the objects around, this escaped his observation; and probably in an excess of self-confidence, not caring to be observed, or fearing to be molested, he passed along without contracting any suspicion that he was watched and followed. [30]

Thus he proceeded till the walk was crossed, at some little distance from the mansion, by a public

footpath, which opened to him on either side a view through the trees. But though the scene here presented had many points of attraction, only one object seemed, by its seizure of his attention, to inspire him with interest. This was the spire of a village church, which was just visible over a wood-crowned hill, or eminence, about a mile distant.

It was a pleasing feature in the landscape, and was calculated, by its upland situation, to attract the attention of any spectator; but the cavalier appeared to regard it with some emotion. As he continued to gaze upon it, his face assumed a graver aspect, and the thoughts which were passing through his mind, evidently with pain, partly found utterance. [31]

"Why not go there now?" he said. "'Tis but a short walk, and I shall be back, if I make no delay, before they come down to breakfast. I will even go."

With these words, he passed off the park-walk, and struck into the path that, with occasional curvatures, led across the park towards the point he had been viewing. He walked at a smart pace, and shortly arrived at the base of the hill, which presented a less steep ascent, and a more level road, every step. The road, taken from this point, wound through a small wood, now teeming with verdure, and apparently alive with the notes that, as the traveller passed along, broke through the foliage from a hundred birds. Towards the summit the wood broke abruptly off, leaving the country, which was spread around like a garden, open on one side, and revealing a prospect of great extent and variety. Of this, however, we have to deal with only one feature—the church, which stood on an area immediately in front of the wood, on the right-hand side of the road. It was surrounded, according to the immemorial custom, with a burial-ground, enclosed by a sunken wall, which escaped observation till one had almost approached its brink. An old culvert, mantled with moss, opened from the road to the churchyard gate, from which a path led past the church porch to a gate at the further end. Over this the cavalier bent his way, and, with an increased sadness of aspect, passed over the graves to the back of the church, and there came to a stand. [32]

He turned his eyes hastily over the graves around, but only one of the several before him fixed his attention. This was, like the others, covered with green turf; but, unlike the others, it was also marked by two white posts, one at the head, and the other at the foot, which were surmounted by a board, bearing this inscription:— [33]

***Hyldibrande Clyffurd,
Martyrre.***

The eyes of the cavalier filled with tears as they fell on this expressive memorial, yet there was mingled with his grief, in the contraction of his arched brow, more than a shade of anger. But it speedily subsided, and with a quick step, he passed by the two or three graves that intervened, and, advancing to the one indicated, he threw himself on the turf before the grave-post, and buried his face in his hands.

Several minutes transpired before he looked up; and his face, though still impressed with an air of dejection, was then more composed, and his eyes less clouded. Casting a glance around, he perceived that, though his impression had been otherwise, he was not the only inmate of the churchyard, as a man stood on the path before him who shared in the possession. He was of the middle degree of stature, stoutly built, and apparently, to judge from his already grizzled hair, about forty years of age. His countenance might in early life have been prepossessing; but either from care or dissipation, or perhaps from both, it was now haggard and stern, and calculated more to excite suspicion, than to command respect. There was, too, an unnatural brilliancy in his eye, which, taken in connection with his shaggy brows, and long and neglected locks, that peeped out from the brim of his slouched hat, imparted to his looks an excessive wildness, very far from being becoming. The impressions created by these causes were confirmed, to a certain extent, by his attire, which was slovenly and mean, and betokened no less an acquaintance with poverty, than a habit of neglecting and contemning the most essential duties of the toilet. [34]

Directly this person, on his turning round from the grave, incurred his notice, our young cavalier sprang to his feet, and, with some degree of chagrin, prepared to retire from the churchyard. Before he could carry his design into effect, however, or had even taken a single step towards its execution, the intruder interposed, and, by a few brief words, made him pause.

"What ho! Master Hildebrand, is it thou I have been dogging so close?" he said. [35]

The cavalier, though evidently taken somewhat aback, turned a glance of earnest inquiry on the speaker, and, after a moment's pause, replied—"Thou knowest me?"

"'Tis more than ten years since I last saw thee," answered the other, "and thou hadst then, if I mind me truly, scarcely seen thy fourteenth summer, and yet I remember thee right well." [36]

"By my troth, thy face strikes me familiarly," resumed the cavalier; "but I need hardly go back so far, methinks, to call it to my remembrance. Thou mayst thank thy horse that he showed me good heels last night, or thou wouldst now, mayhap, have been less at thine ease than thou seemest to be."

The robber—for he was one of the two robbers who had attacked Sir Edgar de Neville on the previous evening—faintly smiled as he replied,—“And does thy memory bear thee no further back, Master Hildebrand? What the good year! can such a brief time as this, which has barely made thee a man, efface the memories of a whole boyhood? Then, in good sooth, Master Hildebrand, I am not the man to claim thy acquaintance.”

"Hold!" exclaimed the cavalier, springing forward, and seizing the robber by the arm; "thou [37]

seemest to know me, and, by my conscience, now I behold thee nearer, thy face doth strike me like an old friend's; who art thou?"

"When thy poor old father," answered the robber, with some emotion, "had been burned for heresy, in the reign of scarlet Mary, it was my hands laid his ashes in yonder grave. When your mother was houseless, with shame on her brow, and the pang of sorrow in her heart, it was I gave her a refuge, and held her safe from the hellish Papists. When her saintly heart beat its last, it was my hands laid her there, by the side of your father. Nay, hear me out! I cherished thee, their offspring: such lore as I had knowledge of I taught thee, and would, in time, have had thee better taught; but—"

"You lost me, good Bernard," said the cavalier, seizing him by the hand.

"Nay, I'll not clasp thy hand," said the robber, though at the same time suffering the cavalier to take his hand up. "Thy hand has met the clasp of Papists; and by my sweet Saviour, whom they once made me deny, mine never shall." [38]

"Nay, good Bernard Gray, this is hardly honest," said the cavalier, in a tone of remonstrance. "By my faith, I did not seek the Nevilles; I was seeking thee, not them, when they fell unhappily in my way. I did but help the weaker side."

"Was it any concern of thine?" demanded the man called Bernard Gray, his eyes lighting up with the fiercest enthusiasm. "Am I to be thwarted in my revenges by thee?"

"'Twas not the Nevilles, Bernard, Papists though they be, that burned my father," said the cavalier.

"Be they not of the devil's flock?" returned Bernard. "But though it hath cost me my comrade's life, let it pass now; and tell me, if thou canst, what ill deed of mine led thee to run away from me." [39]

"Alas! Bernard, I never ran from thee," answered the cavalier; "I was forced away, and carried off, against my will, to the new plantations. Thence I finally escaped, and, getting on shipboard, became a mariner. I have prospered on the seas, and am now, I thank Heaven, well to do in the world."

"Forced away, saidst thou?" rejoined Bernard. "This must be honest Master Shedlock's work."

"He was secure of my patrimony," observed the cavalier, "yet would he have made me a slave."

"And a bastard," muttered Bernard.

"Even so," answered the cavalier.

"But he may be foiled yet," resumed Bernard. "Where art thou staying?"

"With the Nevilles," replied the cavalier, with some hesitation; "but 'tis only for a day or two. In a week, at furthest, I must be gone."

"I would rather thou didst not eat the salt of Papists," said Bernard; "but for a day or two let it be so. I shall be on the watch, and will see thee again, by some means or other, before long. Meanwhile, fare thee well!" [40]

"Farewell, Bernard!" answered the cavalier, extending his hand.

They shook hands, and parted. Bernard took his way towards the neighbouring wood; and the cavalier, without once looking behind, turned to the high-road, and walked leisurely homewards.

Though his recent conversation with Bernard had shown him to be cordially attached to that person, it must not be supposed that this reconciled him, in the least degree, to the unlawfulness and violence of Bernard's pursuits. What was the precise nature of those pursuits he did not know; but a sufficiency had been revealed to him, in the affair of the previous evening, to bespeak them unlawful, and even to stain them with the crying guilt of blood. This was a melancholy recollection, and, only that past obligations had taught him to look upon Bernard as his best friend, it would have been impossible for him, with the principles he entertained, to have maintained any correspondence with that individual, whatever prospect of ultimate good or advantage it might have held out to himself. But though his dependence on Bernard was almost unalienable, it was for the great debt which he already owed him, and which was bound up with the deepest feelings of his heart, that he continued to regard him as his truest friend. He knew, too, that Bernard had embarked in the enterprise against Sir Edgar Neville more from motives of revenge, which, however mistaken, had sprung originally from a cruel and overwhelming provocation, than from a desire of spoil; and this considerably lessened his detestation, if we may use such a strong term, of his recent outrage. [41]

On his arrival at Neville Grange, Hildebrand Clifford—for so the cavalier was named—found that Sir Edgar and his daughter had now descended to the breakfast-room. By them he was introduced to the third member of the family, Don Felix di Corva, who, as has before been set forth, was a Spaniard by birth, and related to Sir Edgar's deceased wife in the degree of cousin. [42]

Don Felix was a youthful-looking man, of a slight figure, and about the middle height. His complexion was dark, yet not of that sparkling darkness which we associate with the young faces of his country, but rather of a sallow tint, such as, in many instances, arises from long confinement, or from an uncertain and delicate state of health. His dark eyes, too, though brilliant, were rather subtle than deep, and more indicative of cunning, than denotive of penetration. On a first meeting, however, and to an individual who did not found impressions on the illusive and equivocal testimony of personal appearance, these unfavourable points in his

ensemble might have escaped notice; but Don Felix, by an unlucky fate, inherited a large share of the pride and coldness of several generations of ancestors, and these imparted to his manners a reserve and formality, that invited attention to his every defect. [43]

But though his disposition did not generally incline him to form new acquaintances, he received Hildebrand, on this occasion, with every mark of courtesy and respect. After the first interchange of compliments had been despatched, he inquired anxiously concerning the state of his wound, and expressed himself gratified, in common with his two relations, that it promised so fairly to be shortly healed. As the conversation passed to ordinary topics, he seemed, it is true, to shrink more into himself; but his reserve was less noticeable in the general animation, and thus escaped remark.

The meal over, Sir Edgar announced his intention of visiting a neighbouring magistrate, named Shedlock (to whom this history has before had occasion to allude), for the purpose of acquainting him with the particulars of the affair of the preceding evening. Don Felix accompanied him; and Hildebrand and the fair Evaline, who had already become fast friends, were left to entertain each other till their return. [44]

To two persons of their turn of mind this was an easy and most agreeable employment. Hildebrand could tell, not only of strange lands, but of a strange world—of the new hemisphere, which, by the perseverance of a few daring adventurers, had just been opened to the enterprise of Europe, and added to the limits of the earth. Evaline could listen, question, and smile her gratification: the relation of “the dangers he had passed,” both by flood and field, and under every variety of fortune, unfolded to her view a new picture of life and an enlarged idea of human character. On the other hand, Hildebrand, without being vain, or making himself the hero of his own tale, found pleasure in relating and describing those dangers, because, from the interest manifested in her countenance, he saw that “she did pity them.” And thus, with the liveliest sympathies of each engaged, the morning passed quickly by, and they were only admonished of its flight by the return of Sir Edgar and Don Felix. [45]

They now learned that the magistrate whom Sir Edgar had been to visit was not at home when he called. This, however, most unfortunately, was considered of little consequence; and as Sir Edgar and he were not on neighbourly terms, it was determined to send him a report of the late outrage in writing, and there, for the present, to let the matter drop. A report of this kind was accordingly drawn up, and transmitted, with a letter from Sir Edgar, without further delay.

The day wore on without interrupting, by any single incident, the harmonious relations that had begun to subsist between Hildebrand and Evaline. The novelty of first acquaintance subsided, but not its fresh and generous feelings; and they continually presented to each other, by some stray sentiment or expression, the trace of some new quality, or appeared personally to new advantage. Yet their mutual esteem grew upon them unconsciously, and they could not tell, with any accuracy, whence arose those pleasurable sensations with which they almost unwittingly regarded each other. [46]

The day passed lightly off, as did the next, and several succeeding days, and nothing happened to disturb the general harmony. But a few days served to show Hildebrand, on close observation, that at least one of the inmates of the mansion began to regard him with displeasure. The Spaniard, Don Felix, from whatever cause, evidently looked upon him with jealousy and dislike. In vain did Hildebrand, by a marked courtesy, endeavour to overcome this bad feeling; the Spaniard seemed desirous to avoid him, or, when he could not do this, to approach him with suspicion and reluctance. [47]

Several days had elapsed, when one evening, shortly after sunset, Hildebrand found a letter on the table of his bed-chamber, with the superscription of “Captain Hildebrand,” which drew his attention to other matters. The letter requested him to repair that evening to the bottom of the park-walk, where the public footpath, noticed in the early part of this chapter, struck across the park to the village of Lantwell. There, the letter set forth, he would find a friend, who was desirous to commune with him, pursuant to their previous understanding, on a matter of pressing moment.

Though there was little to guide him to such a conclusion, Hildebrand rightly conjectured, from the tenor and spirit of the letter, that his anonymous friend was no other than Bernard Gray; and, therefore, he determined, directly he had run the letter over, to set out for the spot appointed straightway. [48]

The evening was just opening as he entered the walk which led to the public footway. But he was so impatient to join his friend, in accordance with the request of the anonymous letter, that he walked at a smart pace, never thinking that he might arrive at the appointed spot before he would be expected. As he approached the scene of the appointment, one of Sir Edgar’s servants—the same that had assisted him to repel the attack of the robbers—met and passed him; but Hildebrand was so bound up in the enterprise he had in hand, and the thoughts and expectations connected with it, and to which he probably attached more importance than was their due, that he rendered no acknowledgment of the servant’s salute. Some half-dozen paces more brought him to the footway, and he turned out of the walk, and took a few steps into the open area adjoining. [49]

A cluster of shrubs grew by the side of the footway, whence they swept back, with diminished volume, to the park-walk, where they were arrested by the tall trees with which the walk was bounded. They were well adapted to afford any person who sought to avoid observation a secure hiding-place, but they might, nevertheless, have failed to incur the particular attention of

Hildebrand, only that a sound just now broke from them, like the tread of a man's foot on dead leaves, that led him to believe they were not untenanted. Regarding them more attentively, he distinguished the figure of a man, wrapped in a capacious cloak, crawling along between the shrubs; and the next moment Bernard Gray—for he it was—confronted him.

"How farest thou, Master Bernard?" said Hildebrand, extending his hand.

"Indifferently well," replied Bernard, accepting his proffered hand and clasping it cordially; "and how dost thou?" [50]

"I'faith, well enough in body, Bernard," answered Hildebrand, "but somewhat ill in mind. Thy note came duly to hand, and, to speak sooth, was but timely; for I must leave these parts to-morrow."

"Thou know'st my retreat," said Bernard, "in case thou hadst not heard from me. 'Tis still at the Angel."

"I should have sought thee there," replied Hildebrand.

"Dost leave here i' the morning?" asked Bernard. "I would thou couldst wait, if it be possible, till thou seest me again."

"I will wait till the even," answered Hildebrand; "but what is thy purpose?"

"I will tell thee, first, to be of a wary habit, and have a care that thou comest not in the way of Master Shedlock," returned Bernard. "I have it on good warranty that he knows thou art here." [51]

"I fear him not," rejoined Hildebrand. "But what wouldst thou have me stay for?"

"This hoary villain," said Bernard, "who keeps thee from thy birthright of Clifford Place, which he calls New Bethlehem, hath a wife, who, albeit she holds him in an idolatrous love, hath yet a spice of goodness in her temper; and I would have leave from her to bring thee and her to a parley."

"Wherefore wouldst thou this?" asked Hildebrand.

"She hath often told me," resumed Bernard, "when I have mourned thee dead, that she was assured thou wast yet living, and wouldst one day return. She hath told me, too, that thy mother did her a kindness years ago; and if so be that she lived to see thee, she would bear it well in mind. Nay, it is she that bade me warn thee now, in her name, to be upon thy guard."

"Well, I will be ruled in the matter by thee, Bernard," observed Hildebrand; "but I cannot stay, mind, longer than to-morrow even." [52]

"I will remember me so," answered Bernard.

"There is one thing more I would ask of thee," pursued Hildebrand. "Hast thou aught to prove that I was born in wedlock?"

"Nothing—not a scrap," replied Bernard. "There is no record of thy mother's marriage in the parish-book, though I could have been sworn, at one time, that 'twas duly writ there. The old vicar, Father Day, who wedded her, can only tell of it in heaven; for he and thy father were buried together. There is no living witness but myself."

"Then I am but a natural," said Hildebrand, bitterly.

"Despair not! despair not!" cried Bernard, seizing him by the hand. "Who shall quarrel with the ways of Heaven? Hath He not said, by the mouth of His holy prophet, that His ways are not our ways, or His thoughts as our thoughts." [53]

The passion apparent in the voice of the enthusiast, which was raised above its wonted tone, pervaded his whole frame, and his hand clasped Hildebrand's with the tightness of a vice.

"May His will be done!" said Hildebrand. "I will see thee again to-morrow, Bernard."

"At noon, on this spot," replied Bernard; "and meanwhile be thou on thy guard against Shedlock,—and fare thee well!"

"Farewell, and do thou be guarded also!" said Hildebrand.

The robber made no reply, but, silently waving his hand, turned sharply round, and bent his steps over the footpath towards Lantwell. Hildebrand watched him till he reached the boundary of the park, when he also turned away, intending, though in no mood for society, to return straight to the mansion.

But, looking up, he perceived that the outlet of the footway, where it opened into the park-walk, was occupied by two persons, who, from the animosity which was manifested in their looks, appeared to be disposed to dispute his passage. One of these was the servant whom he had encountered when on his way to meet Bernard; and the other, who appeared to be the more hostile, was his host's cousin, Don Felix di Corva. He immediately remembered that the servant had been in attendance on Sir Edgar at the time that the Knight had been attacked on the road, and he reflected, on a second thought, that he might now have seen him in correspondence with his friend Bernard, and have recognised the latter as one of the two individuals by whom the attack had been made. This accounted, at the very first view, for the apparent hostility of Don Felix, whom the servant, no doubt, in a moment of rage, had brought to witness the duplicity of the family's new acquaintance. [54]

Though taken by surprise, Hildebrand was not confounded by this occurrence; and after a brief pause, he advanced towards the two unfriendly observers with perfect confidence. [55]

"A good even to thee, *Senhor!*" he said, addressing Don Felix.

"Such deeds as thine," answered Don Felix, sneeringly, "give a savour of vileness to the sweetest even. Hast thou no shame, Sir, that thou canst thus meet mine eye unmoved?"

"I'faith, thou hast a foul tongue, Sir Spaniard," returned Hildebrand; "and only that thou art kinsman to good Sir Edgar, I would straight clean it with my rapier."

"Let not this spoil a good disposition," said Don Felix. "Draw forth thy wondrous rapier; for I denounce thee, in the presence of this menial, as a traitor and a spy!" [56]

A flash of anger mounted to Hildebrand's cheeks at these words, and his rapier, on which his grasp had already been fastened, leaped from its scabbard on the instant.

"Such terms would provoke an angel!" he said. "Stand on thy guard!"

But the Spaniard, expecting what was to follow, had already done this, and, consequently, he met Hildebrand's assault with perfect composure. Indeed, as Hildebrand had not expected to find him a skilful swordsman, and assailed him with some impetuosity, he at first had the advantage in the struggle. Directly Hildebrand perceived this, however, he became more collected, and a few moments served to show that, at the least, he was fully equal, if not superior, to his adversary. At length, the latter made a lunge at his side, and Hildebrand, by an adroit stroke, beat his sword out of his hand, and held him quite at his mercy.

"Take up thy weapon, Sir!" said Hildebrand. [57]

With this he turned away, and, thrusting his sword into his scabbard, passed down the walk towards the lower section of the park, which was, from its greater seclusion, more in keeping with the mood that he was disposed to indulge in. The Spaniard did not follow him, and, left to himself, he had leisure to dwell and ponder on the thoughts which his situation was so eminently calculated to inspire.

Reflect how he might, he could not allow that he had done anything wrong. He was disgraced, but undeservedly so; his conduct was free from dishonour, but, whatever he might say, he could not make this apparent. He had been seen in friendly communication with a most questionable character, and he could not explain, with any degree of safety, how his intercourse with him was justifiable. Indeed, if circumstances had even allowed him to render such an explanation, he could not give it any appearance of probability; and his character, instead of being cleared, would only be further degraded by the attempt to retrieve it. [58]

Such were the mortifying reflections that pressed upon the young cavalier, as he hurriedly paced the park-walk. The night drew nigh, and ultimately set in; but, insensible of the influences around, he still indulged his reverie, and continued to pace the same walk, maintaining the same smart step, without once halting.

But the night came on cold, and ultimately, falling into a slower pace, the chill air aroused him. He then turned away from his late walk, and passed leisurely towards the mansion.

It was a dark night, and the trees overhanging the walk made his way still more obscure. He passed freely on, however; and had just come within sight of the lights that now marked the mansion, near the end of the walk, when a blow from a bludgeon, inflicted by some person in his rear, knocked him down, and stretched him senseless on the ground. [59]

CHAPTER III. [60]

The following morning found Evaline de Neville, according to her usual custom, astir at an early hour. Early as it was, however, she was sensible that the other members of the household had been up for some time previous, and that a bustle prevailed in the mansion, which, to say the least of it, was not customary, and might indicate an event of some importance. She longed for the arrival of her waiting-woman, in order that she might draw from her, before she left her chamber, what it was that had so disturbed the general tranquillity of the Grange. But the gentle Martha Follet, as her attendant was named, was not at hand, and Evaline was obliged to restrain her impatience, and so to hurry her toilet, with her own unaided hands, that she might descend at once to the breakfast-room, and acquire the desired information from a more direct source. [61]

She had scarcely entered on her toilet, however, when the fair Martha made her appearance. She was a pretty and modest-looking girl, and, whether from nature, or merely from the habits of her office, of a bearing and presence superior to her station, and to which one might, without risk of contradiction, apply the explicit phrase of "genteel." She had, to all appearance, scarcely seen sixteen summers, yet her countenance was sad and mournful, and wore a look of anxiety that, if it had been permanent, would have sat ill on a much older person. But although she was now dejected, there was in her large blue eyes, under a dash of tears, a flow of radiance and animation that bespoke anything but melancholy, and, under a propitious influence, it could no doubt be expanded, with more charming effect, into that attractive expression denominated "archness." [62]

A smile rose to the maiden's lips as she approached her mistress, but it was a mournful one, and could not conceal the uneasiness, not to say anxiety, that was manifested by her other features. Evaline, surveying her earnestly, observed her dejection at a glance.

"Why, Martha, what is amiss?" she inquired, somewhat anxiously.

"I hope, nothing of moment, dear lady," replied Martha. "Master Shedlock, the sheriff, is here, and some other strangers; but they can do no hurt to Sir Edgar, I should ween."

As she spoke, a tear rose to her eyes, and, breaking over the long, silken lashes, trickled down her pale cheeks.

"Master Shedlock here?" cried Evaline, in a tone of mingled surprise and alarm. "What dost thou mean, Martha?" [63]

"Oh, my lady," answered Martha, fairly bursting into tears, "they have accused Sir Edgar of murder, and he is now a prisoner, in the dining-hall."

"This almost passes belief," said Evaline, turning very pale. "Art thou sure they have done this?"

"I heard Master Shedlock affirm it to Sir Edgar himself," answered Martha. "The crowner's quest, that sat on the body of the dead robber, have averred that he was murderously slain; and Master Shedlock hath seized Sir Edgar as the murderer."

"The malignant upstart!" exclaimed Evaline. "But his project, whatever it be, can be easily frustrated, and made to recoil upon himself. Quick, Martha! I must not be absent from my father when he is thus abused."

Martha, who only waited her mistress's directions to begin, readily entered on her duties, and Evaline was soon engaged in the various details of the toilet. These arranged, she sprang to her feet, and, bidding Martha attend her, quitted the chamber, and repaired to the dining-hall. [64]

She found the whole household collected in this apartment. These, however, were not the only inmates, nor was it on them that she bestowed her notice. At the head of the long dining-table, which passed down the centre of the room, stood a group of persons who first attracted her eye, and immediately engaged her undivided attention.

The group consisted of her father, her cousin, Don Felix di Corva, and three strangers. Of these last, the principal was one who, even while the spectator was ignorant of his name and worth, inspired respect by his mere presence. His height was full six feet, and thus, by its marked pre-eminence, distinguished him from those around at the very first glance. His manly and vigorous limbs, which his erect posture exhibited to advantage, corresponded with his stature, and were all fitted with exact proportion, and turned with the most perfect grace. But what most prepossessed the spectator in his favour was his countenance, which seemed to claim for him, through the medium of its various features, not only the respect which should be paid to the best qualities of the heart, but the veneration which is due to loftiness of intellect. He was attired in costly habits, fitted to his person with great care, and indicating, by the harmony of their colours, and the simple elegance of their design, the nicest and most refined taste. [65]

By his side stood a person who appeared to greater disadvantage, perhaps, from his proximity to so much excellence. He was a short, spare man; but, for his years—which were somewhat beyond fifty—looked hale and healthy. If the countenance of his companion, the cavalier just described, was his greatest recommendation, that of this individual embraced his most prominent defects. His forehead was low; and, from his wearing his scanty locks closely cropped, looked much lower than it really was: his eyes were small and piercing, and, when they were raised from the table (which was not often), were continually twisting about, like a ferret's; his nose was long, and sharp, and turned up at the end; and his mouth, especially when compressed, seemed to stretch right across his face, and to form a sort of pitfall, if one may so speak, beneath his high cheek-bones. Unlike his companion, he was attired in grave garments, which were cut with great formality; but, whether from haste, or from habit, had been put on in the most careless manner, and evidently by a hand, whatever actuated it, that deemed any labour of the toilet irksome and unprofitable. [66]

The third stranger was almost equal in stature to the one first described. In all other respects, however, he was decidedly singular, and bore no resemblance to any one person present. His figure was so lean, and, at the same time, so tall, that he looked like a shadow, and scarcely appeared to possess sufficient strength to maintain his own balance. His face was small, and emaciated, and was by no means improved, if it were not greatly disfigured, by the manner in which he wore his long red hair, which was combed down over his forehead, and made his face look little larger than a good-sized boy's. Like the cavalier before named, he was clad in grave habits, of a close and formal cut, and a fashion long defunct; but, to judge from their scanty dimensions, they were not his own, and he seemed to have been driven into them by main force. [67]

Evaline, after a first glance at his face, recognised this individual as the sheriff's clerk, and the short, puritanical person at his side, whom we have described at some length before, as Master Shedlock, the sheriff. Who the third person was, or whether he was associated with Shedlock, or was a friend of her father, she could not conceive. But she had not time to form many conjectures on this point; for, just as she gained the head of the table, a few words from Shedlock, addressed to the cavalier in question, made her understand his exact position. [68]

"I am right glad, Sir Walter," observed Shedlock, in a whining tone, "that thou didst happen to be present when this paper was brought to me. See here!" and he unrolled a scrap of paper which he had in his hand: "the poor murdered Samaritan, whom the sons of Belial call a robber, was held trustworthy by my Lord Treasurer, the light and horn of Israel. This paper was found in his pouch, and is a warranty, beyond all question, of his perfect honesty. Read it, sirrah!" and he handed the paper to his clerk.

The clerk, with a humble reverence, caught up the paper, and, in the same whining tone as his master, read from it these words:— [69]

“The bearer is in my employ.

“W. BURLEIGH.”

As Evaline heard this announcement, she turned her eyes on her father, and observed that, though strongly marked with indignation, his face betrayed considerable anxiety. She felt her own heart quake, but, in her concern for her parent, she suppressed her personal fears, and affected to appear composed. She then stepped forward to the side of Sir Edgar, and, laying her hand on his arm, made him aware of her presence and vicinity.

“Be under no fear, my child,” said Sir Edgar, perceiving her. “Our innocence, I thank Heaven, can be clearly established, and these worthy gentlemen will then depart satisfied.” [70]

“I hope it may so turn out, Sir,” observed the cavalier called Sir Walter. “But where is the person who, according to thy report, did this man to death?”

“Hast thou sought him, Adam?” demanded Sir Edgar of a servant who stood behind him.

The servant, with some savour of embarrassment, glanced anxiously at Don Felix di Corva, and made no reply. Don Felix, however, came to his rescue.

“He has not been seen since last even,” he said.

“’Tis strange,” remarked Sir Walter, “that he should thus absent himself, at a time when his evidence was sure to be called for, without communicating with his host. But who is he?”

“Thou wilt hardly believe, Sir, that I cannot tell thee,” answered Sir Edgar, with an appearance of confusion; “but I do not even know his name.”

The person called Sir Walter, who had hitherto seemed to regard the investigation with scarcely any concern, looked graver on receiving this answer, and apparently began to think the matter somewhat important. There was a brief pause before he spoke again. [71]

“I fear me,” he then said, addressing Sir Edgar, “we must issue our warrant for thine arrest.”

“Surely, this cannot be!” exclaimed Sir Edgar, indignantly. “The law, be it ever so cruel, durst not sanction such violence as this.”

“Forbear! forbear, malignant!” cried Shedlock. “Art thou not a murderer?”

“Peace, Sir Sheriff!” said Sir Walter. “’Tis not for us to decide on the gentleman’s guilt. He must to prison; but ’tis on mere suspicion.”

“To prison, Sir?” cried Sir Edgar. “This must be jest. An English justice, methinks, durst not commit such a stretch of authority.” [72]

“God forbid I should exceed the law,” answered Sir Walter; “but it bears on thee, as a Papist, with terrible severity. I speak not to offend; but the last bull of the Bishop of Rome, wherein our gracious Queen is termed a usurper, and her Popish subjects, to whom she hath been so gentle a mistress, urged to assail her sacred life, makes us view all Papists with notable jealousy. An emissary of my Lord Treasurer is found dead on the road, and, thou sayest, was slain in attacking thy litter; but even if thy tale be true, he may have attacked thee, not from a desire of spoil (which is anent to all reason and likelihood), but to seize thee in some act of treason. The very person who slew him, for aught we know, may have been a seminary priest, and so already condemned to the gibbet.”

“This is monstrous!” cried Sir Edgar, passionately.

“Peace, malignant!” exclaimed Shedlock.

“Peace thou, Sir Sheriff!” answered Sir Edgar; “and remember, though power may abet thee now, a day of reckoning will come, when thou shalt be called to account.” [73]

“Aha! dost thou threaten me?” replied Shedlock. “Thou thinkest to see the day, then, when the Papist faction shall hold the powers of the state? But surely the Lord will protect his people! O! my trust is in the Lord, and he is mighty to deliver his saints!”

“Enough, Master Shedlock,” observed Sir Walter, impatiently. “’Tis our duty, from what we have heard, to send this gentleman to prison; but we have no warrant to give him any offence.”

Evaline, who had listened anxiously to the whole of the preceding dialogue, heard these last words with a mingled sense of dejection and hope—dejection that her father should be dragged so ignominiously from his home; and hope, abetted by what had passed, that Sir Walter might still be their friend, and leave him at large. Though of a timorous temper, this hope emboldened her, in the pressure and excitement of the crisis, to step somewhat forward, and by a timely intercession, seek to secure Sir Walter’s good offices. [74]

“Is there no resource, Sir,” she said, in a tone of deep anguish, “but my father must go to prison? He is innocent—indeed, indeed, he is!”

Sir Walter looked on her so intently, that he seemed, for the first moment or two, to be reading her very heart; but the fair girl, whom such a gaze would have confounded at another time, was affected too deeply by her sorrow to be moved by his survey. Her dark eyes, which were wont to beam with tranquil joy, were still turned imploringly on his, and her face remained deadly pale, as if the mournful expression that hung over it braced and locked up every feature.

"I do believe thee, lady," answered Sir Walter, in a kind tone; "but there is, unhappily, no resource. Thy father must to prison, but, if it please thee, thou mayst bear him company to Exeter, and there, at thy convenience, have free access to his presence." [75]

There was little mitigation of the first sentence in this; but the assurance that she might bear her father company, and, whenever she felt inclined, share the discomforts of his prison, was not without a soothing influence. She thanked Sir Walter for his urbanity; and, Sir Edgar, seeing that he was not actuated by a spirit of persecution, but solely by a sense of duty, which the extraordinary circumstances of the times pressed with particular severity on Roman Catholics, also tendered him his acknowledgments. It was then arranged, that Sir Edgar should immediately repair, under an escort of two constables, to the county gaol, at Exeter; and that instructions should be forwarded to the gaoler, on the responsibility of Sir Walter, to allow him to be freely visited by his daughter and cousin, and to treat him with the utmost respect. This arrangement, so much more lenient than the accused party had been disposed to expect, was not effected with the concurrence of Shedlock; but Sir Walter overruled his opposition, and induced him, by a few peremptory words, to yield acquiescence. Matters having been thus settled, Sir Walter dropped a courteous bow to Sir Edgar and his family, and, breaking through the group around him, passed out of the mansion, followed reluctantly by Shedlock. [76]

Sir Walter did not address a word to his companion till they had mounted their horses, which, on emerging from the mansion, they found waiting them at the door. On setting forward, however, in their way down the avenue to the road, he broke the silence.

"This matter is somewhat serious," he remarked; "for, besides that Sir Edgar de Neville, by his own acknowledgment, is a Papist, I perceive that he hath some family connections with Spain. These will be greatly to his detriment, I fear me, in the mind of the Queen's Highness." [77]

"Ay, verily, her Highness is wise," answered Shedlock, "and righteous to judge the earth—even as Deborah, with whom was the sword of the Lord, and who was as a scourge to the Philistines."

"Even so," rejoined Sir Walter; "and her Highness hath good reason, since the beheading of the Queen of Scots, to regard all Papists with unsleeping jealousy. Nevertheless, I would wager a round sum, an' I had it idle, that this Sir Edgar will approve himself innocent."

"Fie on thee now, Sir Walter Raleigh!" exclaimed Shedlock. "Wouldst thou abet Amalek, and lend a buckler to the disturbers of Israel?"

Sir Walter Raleigh—for it was indeed that great man—smiled as he replied: "I'faith, thou art over-zealous, Sir Sheriff. But 'tis a good fault! 'tis a good fault!" [78]

"Over-zealous!" cried the Puritan, raising his small, piercing eyes till only the white was visible; "who can be over-zealous for the Lord? Shall the sword of Gideon, which hath scared the Antichrist in his den, be cast aside, and the ungodly sons of Belial yet muster for the battle?"

"No, no, not so," answered Sir Walter. "But let us speak of it no more. Thou knowest, Master Shedlock, I sought thee this morning on other business. The matter of the Popish knight was forced on me by thee."

"And thou hast therein thwarted me," remarked Shedlock, "to thy very utmost. The Lord forgive thee, Sir Walter Raleigh!"

"I did but put a drag on thy hot zeal," answered Sir Walter; "and who could do a less thing, Sir Sheriff, for so fair a lady? But I see thy skeleton clerk is coming up with us," he continued, as, casting a glance in his rear, he discovered the individual specified, mounted on a lean and Rosinante-looking steed, riding after them. "Let us put forward a space, and I will then tell thee, with my customed brevity, what is the project I would engage thee in." [79]

Shedlock silently complied with this request, and, without further words, he and Sir Walter clapped spurs to their steeds, and rode smartly on. They had now gained the high-road, and, as they passed along, Sir Walter unfolded to his companion, with his promised brevity, the project to which he had alluded, and in which he sought to engage his pecuniary support.

The project referred to was to send out two ships, which were now lying in Topsham harbour, to Sir Walter's plantations in Carolina, with some labourers and necessities for the colonists, and a few bales of merchandise, of various descriptions, to traffic with the Indians. On their homeward voyage, the two vessels were to endeavour, by a slight deviation from the direct track, to fall in with the homeward-bound Mexican galleons of Spain, and, in virtue of the letters of marque which they would carry, attack such of them as they could detach from the fleet, and strive to effect their capture. As one of these vessels would be an inestimable prize, Sir Walter had made great exertions to raise means to fit out the expedition, but a considerable sum was still wanting, after all his resources were exhausted, to render the outfit complete. In this dilemma, he proposed to Shedlock, who had advanced money on several of his past adventures, that he should have one half of the profits of the expedition, conditionally that he paid one fifth of the expense; and this was to be secured to him, whatever the profits might be, free of all charge or deduction. [80]

Shedlock did not hesitate long over this proposal.

"An' I were assured that thy cruizers would capture a galleon, thine offer were not amiss," he said; "but how know I, if they were to come to quarters, that these ungodly Popish Spaniards will not baffle thee?" [81]

"Have they baffled me aforetime?" demanded Sir Walter.

"No," replied the Puritan; "but thy cruizers, now left to a deputy, were then led by thyself; and,

like David, thy hast been a man of war from thy youth up. Howbeit, an' thou wilt secure me on thy two ships, by making them mine in case of failure, I will advance thee the money."

"I will secure thee on one ship," returned Sir Walter; "and the worth of that is more, in its bare outfit, than the whole sum I require."

After some bickering, Shedlock, with affected reluctance, but really with much inward satisfaction—for the proposal was more advantageous than he had expected—accepted the offer. He suggested that the conditions of their agreement, with the security agreed on, should at once be transferred to paper, and signed and sealed by each of them, in the presence of an attorney; and he promised, on this being done, that the sum Sir Walter wanted should be immediately forthcoming. [82]

By the time these particulars were arranged, the two horsemen had arrived at Bethlehem Hall, the Puritan sheriff's residence. On their drawing nigh the mansion, a short, squat woman, who had been aroused by the sound of the horses' feet, and had come forth from mere curiosity, made her appearance at the abutting porch, for the purpose of ascertaining, by a survey of their persons, who and what they were. Having satisfied her curiosity, she was about to turn into the house again, but Shedlock, happening to glance that way, discerned her retreating figure, and shouted to her to stop.

"Ho, Abigail!" he cried. [83]

"Who calls Abigail?" demanded the woman, turning sharply round.

"Hither, hussey, and see!" returned Shedlock, drawing up before the porch. "Verily thou art a stubborn stock, and stiff-necked, as was Israel of old. Thou must be bent to obedience, woman, by a strong hand, and an outstretched arm. Surely, the spirit shall make me strong to prove thee."

The woman to whom his rebuke was addressed, and whom the last moment had brought close up with them, was about fifty years of age, and had the appearance of an inferior domestic, or, to use a modern phrase, servant-of-all-work. She was, as has been remarked, a short, squat figure, which time appeared to have strengthened and braced up, rather than impaired. Her features were harsh and rigid, and marked, just below the mouth, on the ball of the chin, with distinct traces of a beard, partly sandy-colour, and partly grey. Her appearance was rendered doubly unprepossessing, on a closer survey, by her mean and slovenly attire; which, not only from its cut, but in its materials, was unsightly in the extreme, and was no way improved by its sundry varied patches of grease and grime. [84]

She did not make any reply to the reproof of Shedlock, but, raising her small brown eyes, she looked him full in the face, and thus waited whatever he might say further.

"Now I see in thee the iniquity of Jeroboam, which caused Israel to sin," cried Shedlock. "Wilt thou take these beasts, or not?"

The woman sulkily stepped forward, and, with some show of impatience, caught up the bridles of the two horses, and twisted them round her brawny arm. Sir Walter and Shedlock, without taking any notice of her demeanour, then alighted, and passed through the porch into the house.

Crossing the hall within, Shedlock led Sir Walter to another apartment, less capacious in its dimensions, at its further end. Here he invited him to be seated; and Sir Walter, who did not need a second invitation, threw himself into the only chair in the chamber, and prepared to make himself at home. [85]

"Hast thou ever a draught of water in thy reach, Master Shedlock?" he inquired, on thus disposing himself. "By my lady's hand, I could now look pleasantly on a flowing spring."

"'Tis well said, Sir Walter," observed Shedlock. "Water is a good drink; and Jehonidab, the son of Rechab, who drank no wine, shall not want a man before the Lord for ever. I will straight send thee some water, and, if thou wilt wait my return here, I will ride off for Master Hardscrew, the attorney, and have him despatch our business at once."

"Be it so," answered Sir Walter. "But I brought a small leather box here this morning, hoping to bear away with me, an' we came to a settlement, the money thou art to furnish me withal. I would I had it here now." [86]

"'Tis there," replied Shedlock, pointing to a leather case, that lay in one corner of the chamber. [87]

Having thus pointed it out, he passed into the hall, and Sir Walter, left to himself, proceeded to possess himself of the leather case. Raising it from the floor, he drew a small key from his vest, and, with a steady hand, applied it to a padlock, which, with the aid of a bolt and small staple, fastened the cover to the body of the case, and unlocked it. The fastenings removed, he opened the case, and drew forth a small pipe, made of cherry-stick, with a bowl at the end, or, rather, at one end, made of burned clay. A little bag, that had been lying under the pipe, in the bottom of the case, furnished him with some tobacco, which he first loosened well with his fingers, and then placed in the bowl of his pipe. This done, he drew a small tinder-box from the case, and, with the aid of its accompanying flint and steel, quickly procured a light. Having ignited his pipe, he shut up the leather case, and returned to his seat.

Meantime, his puritanical host, wholly bent on business, passed quickly across the hall, intending to set off straightway for lawyer Hardscrew. As he drew near the porch, he encountered his clerk, who, having ridden at the utmost speed of his horse, had, at last, after several stumbles, got safe home again.

"Zedekiah," said Shedlock, looking at him steadfastly, "hie to Abigail for a flagon, and take a [88]

draught of water to Sir Walter Raleigh, in the blue room yonder. Shall we not give the stranger a cup of water, that he may gladden his heart withal?"

Zedekiah Truman—for such was the name of the sheriff's clerk—heard this order with some degree of dismay, but he did not venture to render his hesitation manifest. He looked upon Sir Walter Raleigh, of whose great learning and wondrous ingenuity such wild stories were everywhere current, to be little better than a magician, who, by some unlawful and prohibited means, maintained an intercourse with the spirits of darkness; and as Zedekiah regarded the devil, if not all his works, with an unconquerable aversion, he naturally felt no way inclined to venture alone into his presence. Necessity, however, left him no alternative, and he reluctantly proceeded on the errand intrusted to him.

Having procured the water, he retraced his steps, full of grave reflections on the iniquity of magic, and the danger of holding any intercourse, of whatever nature, with the great source of evil. He was confirmed in this opinion on reaching the hall when a strong smell of burning, emitted by Sir Walter's pipe, assailed his nostrils. Still he pursued his way, and, though not without hesitation, passed on to Sir Walter's chamber, and threw open the door. [89]

He cast one glance at the centre of the room, and there, to his utter amazement, he beheld Sir Walter seated quietly in an easy-chair, emitting from his mouth volumes of flame and smoke. Not doubting that this was some devilish enchantment, the terrified Puritan, with a trembling grasp, raised up the large flagon which he had in his hands, and threw the whole of its contents right into Sir Walter's face. Then, with a cry of despair, he turned hastily about, and made off.

CHAPTER IV.

Besides Zedekiah Truman and the maiden Abigail (for Abigail had never been married), the establishment at Bethlehem Hall, of which we have been recently treating, embraced another individual, who, being Master Shedlock's wife, might with propriety be considered its mistress. But if Dame Shedlock was such in name, or, to take a higher ground, by right, a very limited acquaintance with the economy of the Hall, on occasions of a general nature, would show that she was not so in fact. So far, indeed, from governing others, she was scarcely mistress of herself, but was held responsible by her lord for whatever she did, and was continually being subjected, according to the turn of his capricious temper, to all those mortifications and trials, which too often form the portion of the uncomplaining wife. [91]

Few women could have borne this treatment with the meekness and patience that were manifested by Dame Shedlock. Her equanimity was, to all appearance, above the reach of those circumstances which influence most tempers, and was founded on qualities too sterling to be corrupted, and too solid to be undermined. She met insult, however gratuitous, with the most calm endurance; she submitted to degradation, without a murmur; and, what was stranger still, as opposed to the strongest principles of our nature, she repaid the tyranny of her husband with the deepest and most absolute love.

It is a difficult thing to tear the affections from one who, in times past, has been their stay and centre; and it may be doubted whether the heart can ever wholly alienate a once-cherished object; but that love, which comprehends the softest feelings of our nature, bound together by the most tender memories, should be proof to a continuous succession of outrageous assaults, and survive all fellowship and reciprocity, seems almost impossible. Yet Dame Shedlock, in her attachment to her husband, realised this seeming anomaly. After a life of ill-usage, she still clung to him as fondly, as devotedly, and even as passionately, as on the day that, glowing with maidenly confusion, she first surrendered to him her hand and heart. He might be a bad man; she might know that, in his dealings with the world, he often committed very unscrupulous acts; but yet her bosom found him an excuse, or awarded him a justification. Such a deed might appear evil in her eye, but it had, no doubt, a sanction in the practice of the world, or was called for and justified by the circumstances of the times. She would not acknowledge that the absolute possessor of her most precious sympathies, on whom she reposed her happiness here, and her wishes of hereafter, was stained and defiled with the hideous colours of guilt: even if he were so, it was not by her, the wife and partner of his bosom, that his actions were to be questioned, or his conduct condemned. In short, despite his ill-usage, and the groveling selfishness of his nature, which he seemed to pride himself in making apparent, she loved him; and this explains, in one word, every trait in her conduct that appears singular or unnatural. [92]

If Dame Shedlock had been a mother, her love for her husband might, from the division of her affections, have been less stable, and more alive to those slights and provocations, which fall on the heart with a depressing influence. Less possessed by her love, she would have viewed his character more closely: she would have deemed his affectation of sanctity, which she now considered pure and genuine, sheer hypocrisy, and his violations of right, oppressive and sinful. His selfishness, dissimulation, and avarice, however disguised, would have deprived him of her respect; and his tyrannical disposition would probably have provoked her contempt. But, secluded from all society, having no channel but him for the sweetest effusions of her amiable and gentle nature, her love was without restraint, and she could see in his heart no shade of evil, or trace of blemish. [93]

It is not always that an individual's temper, as far as regards its principal characteristics, may be seen in the face; but in Dame Shedlock's, it was written distinctly. Her complexion was dark, and, [94]

though she might be in her fiftieth year, her hair, where it was visible, was still dark also, yet not unmingled with grey. Her eyes were of a deep brown, and amply answered, by their quiet and subdued light, for the evenness of her disposition, and the docility of her nature. The impression they created was confirmed, on a closer survey, by her other features, which, though not of a classic mould, were regular and harmonious, and were more charming from their sweet melancholy, chastened by the soft light of resignation and endurance, than they would have been in the full glow of mere youth and beauty. [95]

Such was the person who, a few minutes previous to the period that closed our last chapter, while Shedlock and Sir Walter Raleigh were yet in the avenue, passed into the pleasure-ground that surrounded Bethlehem Hall, and proceeded down a secluded side-walk. For some few minutes she walked leisurely along, without sustaining any interruption, or, indeed, encountering or seeing a single individual. But after a while, she came to a spot where, pushed out by a small shrubbery, the path swept close up to the park-fence, in which there was a blind gate, communicating with the lane beyond. Though she was within a pace or two of the gate, she did not observe that it was slightly ajar; and it was not till she came abreast of it, and, thinking she heard a rustling noise in that quarter, turned an inquiring gaze thitherwards, that the fact incurred her notice. Her gaze was still turned on the door, when it was suddenly pushed open, and a man, whom it had served as a place of ambush, presented himself at the aperture. [96]

She gave a slight start as she glanced in the man's face, and then turned an anxious gaze around her, as if to ascertain, by this hasty survey, whether any other person was within sight. But the view was, from the curve in the walk, very limited, and in neither direction extended more than a dozen yards, when it was lost in the sweep of the adjacent shrubbery. So far as her glance reached, however, there was no person in view, and, satisfied of this, she turned her eye on the man again. [97]

"Bernard Gray, what wouldst thou?" she inquired.

"I knew thou wouldst come this way," answered the person addressed, and who, it will be inferred, was no other than our friend Bernard, "and I waited here to see thee. Since I was with thee last, I have been in talk with young Clifford, and warned him to be wary."

"And he has gone?" said Dame Shedlock.

"That has he not," replied Bernard, "though he is to go, an' no ill happen him, this even."

Dame Shedlock turned pale on hearing these words. "An' he be not gone already," she said, "he may not go at all. Thou shouldst have urged him to depart incontinently."

"He gave my warning no heed," returned Bernard. "He hath no fear of peril."

"Is he so valiant?" inquired the dame.

"Faith, there be none more so," answered Bernard. "'Twould do thy heart good, lady, to see what a brave cavalier is he now. I prithee, take pity upon him, and lend him thy countenance." [98]

"What wouldst thou have me do?" demanded Dame Shedlock.

"Though knowest, lady," replied Bernard, "that these broad lands, though they be vested in thy husband, be his rightfully; and——"

"'Tis false!" cried Dame Shedlock, with much passion. "But begone! begone! I'll no more with thee!"

"But one moment!" implored Bernard.

"Hush, for thy life!" said the dame: "some one comes, and the step, methinks, is his."

"I'll seek thee again to-morrow, then," said Bernard, in a low tone. [99]

Thus speaking, he stepped into the lane, closing the door behind him. Almost at the same moment, Shedlock—for the dame was right in her conjecture—made his appearance in the walk, within a few paces of where they had been conversing.

This was a dilemma of which the dame had had no expectation. Already disturbed by her conversation with Bernard, the sudden approach of her husband, who looked on Bernard as an enemy, took her perfectly aback, and her generally-serene face presented the most lively traces of embarrassment and confusion.

Shedlock observed her discomposure instantly, and its inconsistency with her usual demeanour, which was so uniformly placid, invoked in his mind the most singular suspicions.

"Who hath been here?" he demanded, on coming up with her.

Before the dame could reply, he turned to the contiguous gate, and, drawing it open, looked out on the lane. There was no one there, and, stepping back, he pushed the gate close again, and turned to the dame once more. [100]

The latter person had by this time recovered herself; but her present composure, though almost perfect, and quite relieved of every trace of confusion, did not lead him to forget her previous bearing. Indeed, it rather served, from the breadth and prominence of the contrast, to attach to his suspicions some shade of confirmation.

"Woman!" he cried, in a voice husky with rage, "what doth this mean? Who hath been here, I say?"

"Dost think I would wrong thee, then?" answered the dame. "No! no!—not for my life!"

"Who hath been here?" demanded Shedlock, seizing her by the collar of her bodice.

"Nay, never hurt me, husband!" replied the dame, shrinking a little. "Only say thou wilt forgive me—say thou wilt not be angered, and I will tell thee." [101]

"Woman! I have a mind to dash thee down," rejoined Shedlock, giving her a slight shake, "and to trample thee under foot, as the angels of darkness trample on Judas. But I will forbear, and the Spirit, through the mercy of the Lord, shall hold me back. Who hath been here?"

His small ferret-like eyes glared fearfully on her face, and there was a red flush on his brow, just beneath the brim of his hat, that made the dame tremble. Still she resolved to tell him the truth, though she knew that, in his present mood, it would draw down upon her head the full fury of his anger.

"Do me no harm, husband!" she said. "'Twas the man Bernard Gray."

"Ah!" cried Shedlock.

"Indeed, dear, I sought him not," said the dame, earnestly. "He was standing here, as I came up; and I gave him but a cold welcome."

"What sought he here?" demanded Shedlock.

"That know I not," answered the dame, "for, while he was yet speaking, we heard thy step approach, and he broke away." [102]

Shedlock's angry eyes ran quickly over her face, but there was nothing there to awake in him, by a want of harmony with the general expression, the least doubt of her sincerity. Her complexion, it is true, had undergone a change, and was very pale, and, moreover, there was a trace of hesitation about her lips; but Shedlock knew her too well to attribute this manifestation to conscious guilt, or aught but her terror. It was clear that she spoke the truth, and that she thought, in the confidence and simplicity of her nature, that he would believe her; for she had never uttered a falsehood yet.

"The Lord deliver me from thy snares," ejaculated Shedlock, devoutly, and, at the same time, releasing her from his grasp. "Verily, the Lord is strong to deliver me."

"Of a surety, is he," answered the dame. "Put thy trust in the Lord, and he shall deliver thee out of thy trouble." [103]

"Peace, thou Jezebel, and get thee hence!" returned Shedlock. "There is a malignant yonder, in the blue chamber, who will serve thee, mayhap, for this vagrant Bernard. Get thee to him, and hold him there till my return."

Dame Shedlock made no answer, but, turning silently away, proceeded to obey the injunction of her lord.

A few minutes of brisk walking brought her to the hall, which she entered, intending, though still somewhat agitated, to cross to the blue room without delay. Just as she passed under the porch, however, she was encountered by Zedekiah Truman, who, in his eagerness to retreat, had almost run her down, and now brought her to a stand.

"Zedekiah, what troubleth thee?" she asked, in amaze.

But the terrified Zedekiah, whether from fear, or from want of breath, was quite speechless, and, in reply to her inquiry, could only point to the open door of the blue room. Turning her eye thitherwards, she perceived a cavalier—who, indeed, was no other than Sir Walter Raleigh—standing in the middle of the chamber, and shaking from his locks and face a continuous stream of water. She was wondering what this could mean, when Zedekiah, whom she had seized by the wrist, sought to throw off her hold, and resume his interrupted flight. [104]

"The devil! the devil!" he cried, in tremulous accents. "I saw the devil talking with him."

Thus speaking, he wrenched his wrist from the dame's grasp, and, pushing past her, dashed through the hall-door. The dame, though her heart was not quite itself, maintained her ground, and, again glancing at Sir Walter, waited an explanation of this singular incident.

She was not kept in uncertainty long. Sir Walter, aroused by Zedekiah's exclamation, which revealed to him the spring and motive of that person's conduct, speedily recovered himself; and though, with all his vexation, he could hardly repress a hearty laugh, proceeded to inform her how he came to be placed in a plight so deplorable. [105]

He soon made the dame sensible, by his comprehensive explanation, that the simple Zedekiah was entirely mistaken, and that the report of his having been in correspondence with Satan was utterly unfounded. Satisfied of this, the dame supplied him with a napkin, in order that he might remove the water from his face and hair. She then hastened, at his request, to explain what had happened to her two domestics, as Sir Walter feared that they might otherwise alarm the neighbourhood, and so put them to great inconvenience.

During her absence, Sir Walter endeavoured, as far as circumstances would permit, to restore his disordered toilet. He accomplished his purpose with ease; for his ruff, or frill, which, according to the fashion of the day, he wore high, was but very slightly wet; and this was the only part of his dress that the water could damage. By the time that he had perfectly effaced all vestige of the water, the dame rejoined him; and the most polished courtier of an age which, by the testimony of both "tale and history," abounded in polished courtiers, entered on a *tête-à-tête* with a Puritan matron. [106]

Though far in advance of the prejudices and confined feelings of his era, Sir Walter was not, on the whole, over pleased with this situation. He was, however, of that felicitous disposition, that he made himself at his ease in whatever society he might happen to be mingled with; and at a time when, as now, he was on the brink of enterprises that involved the most gigantic interests, and were attended by the greatest risks, which no care or foresight could avoid, would bend his mind to the most trifling points of etiquette, and the least significant details of social harmony. Still, he hailed the return of Shedlock, after an interval of about an hour, with some degree of pleasure, and felt that the accession to the company relieved him of an irksome task. [107]

Shedlock was accompanied by the lawyer, Master Hardscrew, whom he had, conformably to his expectations, found at home, and easily induced to return with him to the Hall.

The arrival of these individuals afforded Dame Shedlock an excuse to retire, which, on a signal from her husband, she did forthwith. They were, as they desired, thus left to themselves, and, free from all obstruction, they entered on the business that had brought them together. The particulars of this being already settled, and only the written agreement, in which those particulars were to be embodied, remaining to be done, they shortly brought it to a close. [108]

Whatever might be its charms, Bethlehem Hall was not the sort of place, when the choice rested with himself, that Sir Walter Raleigh would find delight in; and therefore, after he had come to a settlement with Shedlock, he lost no time in taking his departure. But he did not carry away with him what had been the chief object of his repairing thither. Shedlock, though immensely wealthy, kept but little money in his house, the greater part of his rents being vested in a mercantile concern, at Exeter, in which he occupied the position of sleeping partner. It was arranged, therefore, on the agreement being signed, that the advance to be made by Shedlock should be paid over to Sir Walter the next morning, at the countinghouse of the aforesaid concern; and, with this appointment, the contracting parties separated.

The countinghouse of Shedlock and Craftall—for such was the designation of the concern alluded to—was situate in the High-street of Exeter; and, though the operations of the firm were by no means limited, was presided over by the individual who, from whatever reason, was named last. It was not, however, in the firm's designation only, but in everything he engaged in, that this person played second to Shedlock; and not to Shedlock alone, but to every one else. So excessive was his modesty, that he had never been known to act on an opinion of his own, and, if he did so act, he kept the matter a profound secret. To hear him speak, one would imagine, on a first acquaintance, that he was incapable of knowing anything from his own observation, or of doing anything at his own prompture. It was always "worthy Master This," by his account, that told him so-and-so, and "honest Master That" that suggested such a thing. He carried his modesty so far, in all outward appearance, that he would not exercise his own judgment on the most common occasions. Such a neighbour might pursue his trade unfairly; he could not say: it was true, indeed, that gentle Master Chatter, who was said to have good opportunities of knowing, had told him it was so; but he could form no opinion on the matter himself. Another neighbour was hanged for murder: the place of execution, over the city-gaol, was opposite to his window, and the gibbet and swinging corpse literally stared him in the face; but he only knew of the occurrence from honest Master Pry. He never interfered with any one; he could hardly be said, indeed, to understand his own business, much less be acquainted with that of others; and, by those who esteemed themselves shrewd and knowing, he was looked upon as a harmless but irreclaimable fool. [109]

Notwithstanding this, Master Craftall had raised himself, some way or other, from an obscure station, and very limited means, to be a partner in the chief firm in Exeter. His lean, ungainly figure, and hard features, though the last were hardly ever free from a quiet smile, affecting benevolence and equanimity, might have been a disadvantage to him in another walk of life; but, in that of commerce, they had formed no impediment to his progress, and he plodded his way to wealth unobserved, without exciting enmity, or awaking esteem. [110]

Such was the person who received Sir Walter Raleigh, with one of his blindest smiles, at the door of his countinghouse, on the morning after his visit to Bethlehem Hall. Stepping out from the door, he assisted the knight to dismount, and then, delivering his horse to the care of his groom, invited him to pass to the interior. There Sir Walter found Shedlock, and Hardscrew, the lawyer; and after a brief greeting, these persons proceeded, by paying him over the stipulated sum, to bring their transaction with him to a close. [111]

Their business effected, Sir Walter was about to take his leave, when Craftall, turning round from an adjacent desk, from which he could see and hear all that passed, interposed.

"Doth worthy Master Shedlock guess truly, good Sir Walter," he said, in a silvery tone, "that thou art sending out a ship to Carolina?"

"That does he, Master Craftall," answered Sir Walter. "I am sending two ships thither."

"Wherefore askest thou this?" inquired Shedlock.

"I have it from gentle Master Chatter," replied Craftall, in the same silvery tone, "that thou hast just apprehended an escaped felon, a runaway from the plantations; and sweet Master Pry, who was by when it was told me, thought the knave should be again sent to the plantations, if occasion should serve." [112]

"Verily, Master Pry thought well," observed Shedlock.

"If the man be truly a runaway," said Sir Walter, "and of an able body, he will be right welcome; for we have but few labourers."

"The harvest truly is great, but the labourers be few," remarked Shedlock.

"I know not if he be a runaway," said Craftall; "but worthy Master Chatter, who is reported to be well informed on such matters, so named him to me."

"Master Chatter named him aright," observed Shedlock. "Moreover, he is of an able body, and, in all things fitting, well endowed."

"We will have him aboard at once," said Sir Walter. "I purpose to despatch my own ship with the morrow, and she may tarry for the other, which is a hired one, at Carolina." [114]

Shedlock's small eyes, which hitherto had been bent on the table, were raised up at this moment, and emitted a gleam of intense satisfaction.

"Verily, 'tis the resolve of wisdom," he said, as if to himself.

"Well, I will leave it to thee, Master Shedlock," remarked Sir Walter, "to see that the knave be handed over to my captain. And let it be done this even, Sir Sheriff, an' it please thee."

"This even, or to-morrow, as thou wilt," answered Shedlock. "He is in Topsham Gaol, near the Quay; and thy two ships, methinks, lie in Topsham Harbour; so he may be moved at thy convenience."

"Be it this even, then," said Sir Walter.

"Verily, I will give thee a note to the gaoler," returned Shedlock, "directing him, on the receipt thereof, to deliver the knave into thy charge at once." [115]

Sir Walter, anxious to secure the reputed convict, expressed his approval of such an arrangement, and Shedlock hastened to carry it out. Having written the note, he handed it over to Sir Walter, and that individual, who had now no further business with him, and was heartily weary of his company, thereupon took his leave, and departed.

His groom waited without with his horse, and, quickly mounting, Sir Walter bade him attend him to Topsham.

Topsham, the port of Exeter, was a small straggling town, situate on the estuary of the Exe. It was only five miles distant, and though the road, owing to a recent copious rain, was somewhat heavy, and their horses had that morning been ridden many miles, they passed along at a quick pace, and soon entered the principal street.

At that point of their journey, Sir Walter espied a person approaching, in company with three sailors, whom he recognised as the lieutenant, or chief mariner, of his favourite ship; and he called to him to stop. [116]

"Ho, Master Halyard!" he cried, drawing up his horse.

The person addressed immediately came to a halt, and then, looking round, let his eye fall full on Sir Walter's face. After he had thus surveyed his features, he raised his hand to the brim of a very broad tarpaulin hat; and the three sailors who were with him, and who, on his coming to a halt, had ranged themselves in his rear, instantly performed the same evolution. Having caught a good hold of the brim of his hat, the lieutenant pulled his head forward, as if he intended to make a bow; and the three sailors, as in the first instance, followed his example.

"Ay, ay, Sir!" cried the lieutenant.

"Ay, ay, Sir!" cried the three sailors.

"Is your captain aboard?" asked Sir Walter, with a smile.

"I'faith, no, Sir," answered the lieutenant. "About a week ago, when we had set all taught aboard, he started on a cruise inland. He hath not shown his colours here since." [117]

"When doth he come back?" inquired Sir Walter, somewhat disappointed.

"That know I not, Sir," replied the lieutenant. "But he hath left a parcel aboard for your honour, and his bearings, no doubt, be therein set down."

"We will aboard together, then," said Sir Walter, "and see how we stand. But first, Master Halyard, an' it suit with thy convenience, we'll bear down on the town-gaol, and take in charge a prisoner I have there."

The lieutenant, though he had no wish to be brought in contact with a landsman, such as the prisoner would most probably prove, readily acquiesced in his proposal; and Sir Walter set forward, at a leisurely pace, for the specified locality, followed by his servant and the mariners. On arriving at the gaol, he drew up his horse, and, resigning the rein to his servant, leaped to the ground, and inflicted a loud knock on the gaol-door. [118]

Sir Walter was still knocking when the door was pulled open; and the gaoler, scowling like a thunder-cloud, presented himself in the doorway. Shedlock's note, and, what he regarded as much, Sir Walter's evident quality, seemed to propitiate his favour, and his countenance somewhat brightened as he invited the whole party to enter.

The prisoner was confined in an inner cell; and, therefore, it was necessary, before they could proceed thither, to procure a light. This, however, was speedily done, and the gaoler then led the way to the cell.

The door of the cell was low and narrow, and, consequently, they had to enter singly, bending their heads as they passed under the threshold. The gaoler entered first, and, stepping on one

side, turned round to the door again, and held up the light to Sir Walter. Thus aided, Sir Walter distinguished the floor of the cell, and ventured to enter.

[119]

As he alighted on the hard floor, he took the light from the gaoler, and, holding it out before him, glanced round in quest of the prisoner. The latter, undisturbed by their visit, was sitting on a heap of straw, in the furthest corner; but, from the gloom that hung around, Sir Walter was a full moment before he could make him out. When he did distinguish him, he gave a sudden start.

“What! no! yes!” he exclaimed; “’tis my trusty friend, Hildebrand Clifford.”

And, dropping the light, he made a spring forward, and seized the prisoner by both his hands.

CHAPTER IV.

[120]

Adversity is the only true touchstone of human worth and integrity. It may require some limited degree of excellence, on certain occasions, to deport ourselves becomingly in a time of prosperity, and the smiles of the highest good fortune sometimes distract and intoxicate. But adversity, with a relentless hand, and a determination that nothing can subdue, probes the heart to the quick, and develops every individual quality of which it is composed.

The apprehension of her father on a charge of murder fell like a thunderbolt on Evaline de Neville. She was, it was true, aware that he was innocent, and that malice only prompted the proceedings that had been taken against him; but, despite of this, she could not conceal from herself, on reflection, that he was in a situation of great peril, and that the very circumstances which would establish his innocence with an impartial person, uncorrupted by the party excitements of the time, would weigh most heavily against him with a jealous and prejudiced government.

[121]

Sir Edgar was a Roman Catholic; and that fact alone, though he were ever so orderly, was sufficient to render him an object of suspicion. But his matrimonial connexion with Spain, the great bulwark of the Roman Church, and a power with which Queen Elizabeth was constantly embroiled, made suspicion more active, and afforded a reasonable ground for regarding him with distrust. At a time when the members of the Roman Church were taught, by an authority their religion declared to be infallible, that the Queen of England was no more than an usurper, and that it would be no sin to remove her by assassination, and when the conspiracy which led to the execution of the Queen of Scots was still fresh in remembrance,—at this time, a Roman Catholic accused, however unjustly, of murdering an emissary of the Lord Treasurer, might well apprehend that the scales of justice would not be held very evenly, or his judge be entirely free from enmity or prejudice.

[122]

Evaline knew little of the world. Brought up in the seclusion of Neville Grange, the spirit of the time was known to her, in most of its bearings, only by report, and it was only from history that she was acquainted with the depravity of human nature. She knew that, because she was a Roman Catholic, her influence was circumscribed, and the sphere of her action restricted; but, beyond this, she had little personal knowledge of the policy of statesmen, or the injustice of governments. Still she had an idea, if an imperfect one, of the looseness and insecurity of her position, and it was this that now raised in her those fears for her father, which we have sought, in the foregoing remarks, clearly to explain.

[123]

But after the first shock of the unexpected calamity had subsided, the whole energies of the fair girl were braced up, in all outward appearance, to but one object—the comfort and support of her father. Within, the struggle continued; the heavy load of grief, with its thrilling apprehensions, which time amplified rather than reduced, still pressed upon her heart; but its rare qualities rallied under the weight, and inspired her with strength and fortitude commensurate with the occasion.

Only in her countenance, among all the inmates of the mansion, could there be seen anything that soothed fear, or excited hope; and though its aspect was but assumed, it soon began to have an effect on the demeanour of others. Her father, whose despondency was chiefly occasioned by his concern for her, seemed to acquire new vigour as he looked on her placid features, and saw that she did not bow before the emergency in despair, but nerved herself to meet, by his side, whatever evil was to befall. He now felt his child was a solace, instead of a source of anxiety; and found relief from sharing with her the burthen of adversity. In a word, he aroused himself from the moody fit which the decision of the two justices had brought upon him, and prepared to meet the issue, whatever it might be, with dignity and fortitude.

[124]

The example of their master and youthful mistress was not lost upon the servants, and the faces of the afflicted household, from the steward downwards, shortly wore a lighter appearance, though still a mournful one. Only the Spaniard, Don Felix di Corva, whether from the insensibility of his nature, or the stubbornness of his dejection, was unmoved by the carriage of the chief sufferers; and he became more sullen and reserved every moment. But in the bustle attending the preparations for Sir Edgar’s departure, in company with Evaline and himself, which now engaged the general attention, his demeanour was overlooked, and, consequently, had no influence on the temper or deportment of others.

[125]

Evaline herself superintended the arrangements for their journey. These were, through the example of her activity, speedily completed, and the moment of their departure at length arrived.

The vehicle mentioned in the first chapter of this history, in the account of the adventure with the robbers, was drawn up before the steps of the hall-door, and announced to be ready for their reception. Around it was collected a group of Sir Edgar's tenants, most of whom, besides being bound to him by many obligations, professed the same religion as he did, and, with the jealousy which persecution never fails to excite, considered that he was now suffering for that religion, and, therefore, regarded him with peculiar sympathy. Many of them, too, especially of the poorer sort, had experienced the good offices of Evaline; and the remembrance of distresses that her bounty had mitigated, or of hours of sickness that, either by her personal interposition, or by means less direct, but equally effective, her active sympathy had relieved, gave an additional and deeper interest to the scene that they had come to witness. [126]

Every head was uncovered, and many a blessing, "not loud, but deep," ejaculated in their behalf, as Sir Edgar and his daughter appeared at the hall-door. Neither of them spoke a word in acknowledgment—their hearts were too full to speak;—but they both looked round kindly on the crowd, and this, in their estimation, was acknowledgment sufficient. They passed hastily to the carriage, followed by Martha Follett; and, stepping in, at once took their seats in that vehicle, and closed the door. Don Felix di Corva, pursuant to a previous arrangement, mounted a saddle-horse, as did the two constables also; and, all being settled, the mournful cavalcade set forward for Exeter. [127]

This was a trying moment to the afflicted inmates of the carriage. It was the moment of separation—the parting from their native home—the crossing of the bourne, as it were, that divided them from the strife and troubles of the wide world. All the comforts and peace of that dear abode, which habit, no less than affection, associated with the blithest impulses of their nature, were now to be exchanged for a prison, and the tranquillity of their past lives for anxiety and sorrow. They were passing from retirement into the world—from security to peril; and their home had never seemed so dear to them, under any former trial or visitation, as at that moment. [128]

Nevertheless, they had a strong support in their mutual sympathy, and a high consolation in religion. The pang was acute at first, but, in the end, it was not without a happy effect; for the sweet feelings that it awakened, by the similarity and harmony of their tone, rendered the parent and his child more one being, and made the terrors of their position seem less hideous and repulsive.

It was not till they had gone some distance on the high-road that Evaline became any way composed. Her mind then turned on a matter which, in the hurry and excitement of the few past hours, she had hardly thought of, but which she now viewed with very serious concern. This was the singular disappearance of Hildebrand Clifford, which she felt, on reflection, had exercised a material influence on the position of her father. [129]

The disappearance of Hildebrand was so exceedingly mysterious, that she could not, by any stretch of conjecture, reasonably account for it. One moment, she thought that he had absented himself but for a few hours, as his horse, which her father had pronounced to be a valuable one, was still at the Grange, and his travelling-case had been found unlocked in his chamber. But would he, under any possible inducement, so far outrage all decorum, as to leave her father's residence without telling any one that such was his purpose? She was sure, he would not! Either, then, his absence was but temporary, and he would shortly join them again, or he had met with some accident, which, contrary to his inclination, detained him at a distance. Evaline did not entertain this conjecture without a great degree of uneasiness. Indeed, in the first instance, she strove to repel it; but as she felt certain that Hildebrand was incapable of rewarding their hospitality and courtesy with rudeness or contempt, and she could not think of any other excuse for his conduct, the conviction grew upon her, in spite of her earnest wishes for his safety, that he had met with some untoward mishap. [130]

After dwelling on the matter for some little time, she could not refrain from mentioning to her father, in rather a tremulous tone, what was passing in her mind.

"The cavalier who did us such good service, father, has absented himself somewhat mysteriously," she observed. "I much fear he has encountered some accident."

"We are hardly warranted, Evaline, in holding him in suspicion," answered Sir Edgar; "but, I confess, I cannot make his singular disappearance look honourable. But he may, for aught we know, be some paltry adventurer, who hath more knowledge of wars than courtesies, and is better acquainted with the customs of a soldier, which we have seen him fulfil manfully, than the habits of a gentleman." [131]

"Oh no, father!" cried Evaline, with some eagerness, "thou canst not—I am sure thou wilt not—deliberately say this of him. Whatever he may turn out, he hath always shown a very graceful behaviour, no less as a gentleman than a soldier."

"Well, I think he has," rejoined Sir Edgar. "And yet—But what can we think, Evaline?"

"Indeed, I know not," said Evaline, in an earnest tone.

As she spoke, she felt a trembling hand laid timidly on her arm, and, turning round, her eye fell on Martha Follett.

"If thou art speaking of the stranger-cavalier, my lady," said Martha, in an under tone, "I think Don Felix knows where he is." [132]

"What says the girl?" inquired Sir Edgar.

"'Tis nothing, Sir," answered Evaline. "She thought my good cousin, Don Felix, might know

where our missing guest had gone; but he hath no more knowledge of the matter than ourselves."

"Yet the girl may speak on some grounds," observed Sir Edgar. "What meanest thou, Martha?" he added.

"Indeed, Sir, the matter ought to be made known to thee," answered Martha; "and though I am loth to be thought a tale-bearer, I will even tell it thee myself. And 'tis only myself, I believe, that can tell thee all, though most of the servants know something hath happened."

"What dost thou mean?" demanded Sir Edgar, with some impatience.

Evaline spoke not; but her eyes, which previously had been turned the other way, were bent anxiously on Martha's face, and manifested the deepest interest.

"Yesterday, Sir," said Martha, "in the afternoon, as I was passing down the private walk of the park, I suddenly encountered a somewhat gay-looking cavalier, whom I had never, as far as I remember, seen any time before. I was passing on, when he seized my hand—I must own, not uncivilly—and begged me to take a letter which he gave me, and which was inscribed to Captain Hildebrand, to the cavalier who had rescued my master from the robbers. Before I could well give him any answer, he turned quickly away from me, and was out of sight in a moment." [133]

"Well," said Evaline, anxiously.

"When I had recovered myself, my lady," continued Martha, "I made all the haste I could home, and betook me to the cavalier's chamber. He was not there, but I had hardly time to lay the letter on the table, and hide me in a neighbouring closet, when his step was on the threshold. He espied the letter straight, and, snatching it up, he tore it open, and seemed to read it over, and over again. This done, he buckled on his sword, and passed out to the park." [134]

"What hath this to do with Don Felix?" said Sir Edgar.

"Old Adam Green, Sir," replied Martha, "who fought with thee against the robbers, met the cavalier in the park, and, it seems, observing something strange in his portance, had the curiosity to follow him a while. Presently, as he reports, he saw him come to a stand, when he was joined by a man that Adam took to be the robber who escaped."

"'Tis impossible!" exclaimed Sir Edgar.

"So I said, Sir," resumed Martha, "and Adam, now he is sober, says himself he thinks he was mistaken. But at that time, being amazed, he made all the haste he could towards the house, when who should he meet, at the end of the private walk, but Don Felix. He told his lordship what he had seen, or supposed he had seen; and they then turned back together, under Don Felix's direction, to the spot where the cavaliers had met. There they saw them in deep converse, and, parting presently, they took leave of each other in a most friendly sort, shaking hands cordially. Captain Hildebrand kept his eyes on his friend, according to Adam's report, till he had passed out of sight, when he turned round, and beheld Don Felix." [135]

"What then?" inquired Sir Edgar.

"Don Felix, Sir," continued Martha, "acting on the testimony of Adam, called the captain a spy. Some further words passed, and in the end they fought."

"Did Felix kill him?" cried Evaline, clasping her hands convulsively together.

"No, lady," answered Martha; "but the captain had nearly killed Don Felix. He disarmed him; and, giving him back his sword, told him he spared his life, and turned away. He has not been seen since." [136]

There was a moment's pause, when Evaline, in an under tone, asked her father if it would not be advisable to stop the carriage, and see if Don Felix really knew what had become of their missing guest. Sir Edgar, however, thought such a step would be extremely unwise, as he felt certain that Don Felix knew no more of the cavalier than was known to themselves, and, by stopping the carriage to confer with him, they would awaken suspicion in the minds of the two constables, who doubtless had directions to watch them closely, without serving or answering any reasonable purpose. But he expressed his determination, with some warmth, to investigate the matter thoroughly on their arrival at Exeter, and to make Don Felix account for his conduct in every individual particular.

This was but poor satisfaction to Evaline, whose generous nature, ever ready to sympathise with the oppressed or the unhappy, was in this case more than usually alive to tender emotions, the suffering party being, in her estimation, the preserver of her life and honour, and a person whom she knew to be possessed of many estimable qualities. Nevertheless, she did not press her proposal on her father, but contented herself, as well as she could, with what he had promised, being assured that he was better qualified to clear up the mystery than she was, and was, moreover, as warmly interested for Hildebrand as herself. [137]

It was dark by the time they arrived at Exeter. This made the prison, at all times a gloomy edifice, look more terrible and forbidding than it was; and hope seemed to pause before the grim and relentless frown of its portal.

A loud knock, inflicted by one of the constables, brought forth the gaoler, and caused him to open the well-secured gate. Sir Edgar and Evaline, leaving Martha in the carriage, then alighted, and, accompanied by Don Felix, and Adam Green, his valet, and attended by the two constables, passed to the interior of the prison. [138]

An apartment was quickly prepared for Sir Edgar's reception. Evaline could not repress a tear as

she surveyed it, yet the gaoler, no less from a respect which he had for Sir Edgar's rank, than from a conviction that he would be liberally remunerated for any kindness he might show him, had really taken some pains to set it in order, and had made it as comfortable as circumstances would permit.

The air struck coldly on the delicate frame of Sir Edgar, but he would not suffer Evaline, who saw its effect upon him, and sought to pass the night with him in the prison, to remain with him more than a few moments, but entreated her to leave him to himself till the morning, and endeavour to obtain some repose. A mounted servant had been despatched, immediately on their arrival in Exeter, to engage for her a suitable lodging, and this had been secured, and was now, by his report, ready for her reception. Evaline would fain have stayed with her father a short time further, but he so urged her to retire, that she was obliged, however reluctantly, to accede to his wishes. Before she retired, however, she reminded Sir Edgar of the promise he had made her, during their progress to Exeter, that he would strictly question Don Felix concerning the disappearance of Hildebrand Clifford; and begged that he would do so without delay. [139]

"Fear not but I will, dear," whispered her father in reply; "though I have no hope, from all we have heard, that he knows more of the cavalier than we do. But good night! and God, in his goodness, bless and protect you, my darling!"

Evaline would not trust herself to speak; but she pressed her pale lips, cold and trembling as they were, on her father's cheek, and broke hastily away. [140]

She had never parted from him this way before; and in the cold, dark night, to pass out of that gloomy prison, and leave him within, was a severe and terrible trial. As she took her seat in the carriage, it rose before her in its blackest colours, and, unable any longer to restrain her feelings, she buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

She continued to weep till the carriage drew up at the door of her hostel; for Martha, though sympathising with her most cordially, was too deeply moved herself to offer consolation to another, and could only show her sympathy by her tears. Nevertheless, she did not suffer her distress, deep as it was, to render her forgetful of her duty, or to make her neglect those little attentions which were called for by the occasion, no less than the custom of her office. As the carriage-door was opened, she assisted her mistress to alight, and, following her into the house, attended her to her chamber. Having helped her to undress, she bade her a sincere good-night, and retired. [141]

Hope has a powerful influence over young hearts, and, in the development of this influence, often manifests a more sterling excellence than we are apt to suppose. It is hope—often, indeed, founded on the dictates of piety, or the whispers of reason, but still hope—hope that we may yet, with all our afflictions, rely for aid on the presiding hand of Providence, or that we may find circumstances more supportable than we had thought—it is still hope, in whatever form, that lends the soothing balm to every sorrow, and the first breath of buoyancy to every sinking heart.

When her attendant had retired, and Evaline was left wholly to herself, she opened her heart to Him who could appreciate its excellence: and she rose from her knees with a humble reliance on His mercy, and submission to His will, that took from the blast of misfortune more than half its edge. As she pressed her fair cheek to her pillow, she thought of the many great blessings which, notwithstanding the sorrow of her present situation, she still owed to the bountiful hand of the Almighty; she remembered that she was yet possessed of health, station, perfectness of body and mind, and a liberal fortune; and out of the pious remembrance of the benefits she had received from Heaven, and which, though they might appear slight to some, really comprehended the chief objects of human desire, arose a hope of brighter days, and a promise of renewed enjoyment. The emotion awakened by her grateful sense of the favours of Providence, though of the very gentlest kind, called into action the best and noblest feelings of her heart, and these supported her under the affliction of the day, and nerved her with fortitude to meet the morrow. [142]

She rose early in the morning, after a sound and refreshing sleep; and having, with the aid of Martha, fulfilled a brief toilet, hastened to join her father. She found him alone, and, like herself, more cheerful than on the previous night. There was even a smile on his lip as he pressed her in his arms; and they sat down to their morning meal, which showed no lack of provision, with some savour of contentment.

But Evaline had something at heart that prevented her from eating. She forbore speaking for a time, hoping that her father would mention the subject: but at last, unable to restrain her impatience, or, to speak more correctly, her anxiety, she broke the silence.

"Didst thou put Felix to the question, father?" she inquired.

"I did," answered Sir Edgar, "but gleaned no more from him, in answer to my inquiries, than we knew before. He cannot even conjecture how the cavalier hath disappeared." [144]

"I do fear me, Sir, he is a revengeful man," said Evaline, hesitatingly.

"No, no, thou wrongest him," replied Sir Edgar. "'Tis true, he hath taken a dislike to the cavalier; but 'tis because he thinks, all things regarded together, that he is one of the Government spies. And thou knowest, Evaline, the country is overrun with these folk."

"I'll be sworn he is no spy, Sir," said Evaline, earnestly. "But where is Felix now?"

"At my desire, he has ridden over to the Grange," answered Sir Edgar, "with the view of making every possible inquiry for the cavalier, wherever there is any chance, from the little we know of him, of obtaining the least information. Old Adam was to have gone with him; but I have, on [145]

reflection, sent him on to London, to bear the tidings of my arrest to Master Gilbert, the attorney."

"The cavalier may have returned to the Grange, when Felix arrives there," remarked Evaline. "He cannot—I am sure, he cannot be a spy."

"Indeed, I think with thee, Evaline," said Sir Edgar. "I begin to fear he hath met with some mischance."

Though Evaline had feared the same thing over and over again, her father's utterance of these words, whether because they took her by surprise, or because of the confirmation which they afforded to her worst and least welcome expectations, shot a thrill of the keenest anguish through her anxious bosom. That one who, at the imminent risk of his own life, had preserved the lives of herself and her father, and afterwards so nobly spared that of her cousin—who was so courageous, so high-minded, and so engaging—so admirably endowed both in person and heart—should, as it were, under their roof, incur the least possible hurt, was certainly sufficient to stir and agitate the deepest springs of her nature. If it had been herself, or even her father, who was far dearer to her than herself, that had received some severe personal injury, she could not have been more concerned than she was for him. The longer she thought of it, and the more she perplexed herself with conjectures on his fate, the more deeply and painfully interesting did the subject become; and, for the first time in her life, she felt time a burthen, and wished to anticipate the morrow. [146]

The day passed heavily on, and the evening, like the darkness it foretokened, "drew its slow length along." Yet there were no tidings of Don Felix. The hour at which the parent and his child must separate, and which had all day appeared so remote and tardy, now seemed to approach too quickly: Martha and two male servants had already come to escort Evaline to her hostel; and still—still there was no intelligence from the Spaniard. Evaline felt her heart beat more anxiously, when the clatter of horses' feet, which the stillness of the night reverberated from the hard road without, struck distinctly on her ear. Before she could make any remark on the circumstance, the horses were drawn up beneath the chamber-window, and a loud knock was inflicted on the gaol-door. [147]

"'Tis Felix!" cried Evaline, starting up.

"Be patient, dear," said Sir Edgar, twining his arm round her slender waist. "Thou art too anxious. Thou tremblest like an aspen."

Evaline made no reply: she did not seek even to release her waist, by which her emotion had been betrayed, from her father's clasp; but, in this position, waited whatever intelligence might be about to be communicated.

She was not kept long in suspense. In a few minutes, the chamber-door was opened; and the gaoler, with a show of great deference, introduced two cavaliers. One of these, who was rather the taller of the two, Evaline recognised as the person who had been associated, in his capacity of magistrate, with the vindictive Shedlock, in the inquiry which had terminated in the committal of her father to prison; but the other was so closely muffled in a capacious riding-cloak, that she could not even conjecture, from any point in his appearance, who he could be. As the gaoler retired, however, and left them by their four selves, he threw back his cloak, and revealed the features of Hildebrand Clifford. [148]

Both Evaline and Sir Edgar gave a slight start; but their surprise, though greater than can well be imagined, was quickly lost in the excess of their joy. Evaline, who was the first to recover herself, could hardly place a check on her feelings, and was almost impelled to spring to Hildebrand's side, and reveal her pleasure in the warmth of her welcome. But she refrained from this procedure, though she could not repress a sweet and modest blush, bright as the feelings it expressed, which the excitement had called from her heart, and which secretly reproached her for her eagerness and impetuosity. [149]

But Hildebrand needed not words to assure him he was welcome. He saw at a glance, not only that he was welcome, but that his presence afforded his two friends the very highest pleasure. He paused but a moment, and then, with a smile on his lips, stepped gracefully forward, and presented his left hand to Sir Edgar, and his right to Evaline.

"We meet in a gloomy place," was all he said.

"God's will be done!" said Sir Edgar, bowing his head.

"Hadst thou but told this gentleman, my good and honoured friend, that the hand that brought thee to such a pass was Hildebrand Clifford's," resumed Hildebrand, "thou hadst been safe in Neville Grange, Sir Edgar. But, never care, Sir: all will go well now." [150]

"I knew neither his name, nor thine, my friend," answered Sir Edgar, pressing his hand.

"Mine I have told thee," said Hildebrand. "This worthy cavalier is Sir Walter Raleigh."

At these words, both Sir Edgar and Evaline, in spite of the conflicting feelings by which they were agitated, turned a glance of earnest curiosity on the face of Hildebrand's companion; and, by the respect manifested in their looks, showed that fame had truly reported to them, in common with the world at large, the honourable reputation of that distinguished name. And the man whom suspicion had regarded as a paltry adventurer, or insinuated to be a spy, with whom no person of character could safely associate, was the friend and companion of Sir Walter Raleigh—one of the chief luminaries of the age. A glow of pride suffused itself over Evaline's cheek, as if she had received a personal honour, apart from the share in the passing scene, in such a vindication of [151]

Hildebrand; and when Sir Walter advanced to accost her, she made a step forward to meet him, and presented him her hand unasked.

"Things cannot but go well," said Sir Walter, pressing her hand in his, "with so noble a lady, and so honourable a knight."

"Will there be much delay, Sir?" asked Evaline, anxiously.

"Will there be any?" said Sir Edgar.

"It may be all arranged to-morrow," answered Sir Walter. "Our friend here has, in the presence of two credible witnesses, made oath to a statement in my hands, which quite clears up the whole affair. But should there be any impediment in respect to Master Shedlock, who, I fear me, bears thee no good will, I will undertake to overrule it, and set thee at large on mine own responsibility. Furthermore, I will lay a true report of the matter before the Lord-Treasurer, and put a stop to all farther proceedings." [152]

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" murmured Evaline.

Sir Edgar, in more courtly terms, but with the same deep feeling, also expressed his grateful sense of Sir Walter's kindness, and his concurrence in his arrangements. But both his and Evaline's joy, in its full extent, was but short-lived; for they now found that their intercourse with Hildebrand had no sooner been re-established, than it was, by an unhappy necessity, to be again interrupted. They learned that he was to set out on the following morning for Carolina, with an expedition which, as was shown in the preceding chapter, had been fitted out by Sir Walter Raleigh, and only waited the presence of Hildebrand, who was its commander, to make sail. Evaline, in particular, was deeply affected by this intelligence, but she manifested her concern only in her looks; for her voice was too much agitated, and her heart too full, under the pressure of so great a trial, to give her feelings utterance. [153]

Nor was Sir Edgar unmoved by the information. To a man in his situation, the taking away of any support, however slender, left a vacuity, which could not but have a material and decided influence on his fortune. Still, as neither Hildebrand nor Sir Walter thought that there would be any difficulty in procuring his immediate enlargement, and it was stated that the expedition had, from a variety of causes, already been delayed so long, that only its immediate despatch could prevent its being utterly frustrated, he refrained from uttering all he really felt, and restricted his expressions of regret to the ordinary limits.

The cause of Hildebrand's mysterious disappearance, which had afforded ground for so much suspicion and conjecture, was explained to the knight and his daughter by Sir Walter. From that explanation, they learned that it was not his fault, as had seemed but too apparent, that he had quitted the Grange without the common ceremony of leave-taking, but rather his misfortune. A vindictive personal enemy, to whom he offered some legal obstruction, had hired two ruffians to kidnap him; and in the execution of this project, he had been waylaid on the evening of his disappearance, and carried off. The place in which he was detained, however, had accidentally been discovered by Sir Walter, and he had enabled him to effect his escape, and thus, for the time, to frustrate and overthrow the design of his enemy. [154]

By the time the explanation was fully rendered, the night was, almost without the perception of the four mutual friends, pretty far advanced, and it became necessary to resolve on parting. After taking leave of Sir Edgar, Sir Walter and Hildebrand proposed that they should not part with Evaline till they had seen her to her hostel; and their proposal, as the hour was very late, and she felt diffident of trusting herself abroad with only her two servants, was gratefully embraced by Evaline, and concurred in by Sir Edgar. All things being arranged, therefore, they set out, in company with Evaline's attendants, in this order. [155]

When the party reached the street, Sir Walter fell a pace or two in the rear, and left Hildebrand and Evaline, who were foremost, to walk on by themselves. This he did, no doubt, with the best possible intentions, but it had not the effect he looked for on his two young friends. It made Evaline uneasy, though she knew not why; and Hildebrand, who had the moment before wished for such an occasion, was confused, and knew not how to turn it to account. Thus several minutes elapsed; and it was not till they arrived in sight of the hostel, and Evaline had remarked that they must soon part, that he could any way collect himself. [156]

"Dear lady," he then said, taking up the hand that hung through his arm, "we part directly, and, it may be, for a long interval. May I think that thou wilt sometime bear me in remembrance?"

"I were ungrateful, Sir, ever to forget thee," said Evaline, with some emotion.

"No, no, but most generous to bear me in memory," answered Hildebrand. "Howbeit, we are to part. Sir Edgar, methinks, has now no cause to fear, and will be set at liberty to-morrow. But the course of human affairs is uneven, and cannot be relied on. If, therefore, thou hast ever occasion for a ready friend, who can do for thee more than thou wouldst be disposed to think, let this billet—" here he drew a sealed packet from his vest—"be conveyed to the direction on its cover, and such a one will be enlisted in thy service." [157]

Evaline, with the hand which she had at liberty, accepted the proffered packet, but did not make any observation. Hildebrand could not refrain from pressing her hand, which, led away by his feelings, he still held in his, and he fancied that the pressure was returned. But if it were, it was done so slightly, and with such excessive gentleness, that it could hardly be felt, and could not be regarded as any response.

At length they arrived at the hostel-door, and the light which hung in the hall, falling on Evaline's

face, showed Hildebrand that she was in tears. But, at this moment, they were joined by Sir Walter, and, in a few words they both took leave of Evaline, and turned to retire.

They passed to the end of the street in silence. There, as they were turning into the street beyond, they encountered a squadron of troopers, and they were obliged to press against the wall —for there was no causeway to the street—in order that they might have room to pass. The troopers were not long in passing, and our two friends, having the thoroughfare again open, then resumed their progress. [158]

Meantime, the troop of horse, headed by a person in the garb of a civilian, passed leisurely down the High-street, and proceeded towards the city-gaol. On arriving thither, they drew up in its front; and the civilian aforementioned, dismounting from his horse, inflicted a loud and authoritative knock on the gate.

Sir Edgar de Neville was at this moment preparing to retire to rest. Hearing a body of horse drawn up beneath his casement, however, and a knock that made the glass ring, as if it would leap out of its crazy leaden frame, inflicted on the gate, he came to a pause. As he did so, a foreboding that the incident was some way connected with himself, in reference to the crime he was charged with, insensibly stole over him, and he waited the issue with the most intense anxiety. [159]

At last he heard some heavy steps on the adjacent stairs. The next moment, the door of his chamber was pushed open, and a tall, sharp-visaged man, habited in a suit of deep brown, and attended by three soldiers, passed in. Advancing a few paces, he held out a folded paper to Sir Edgar; and the latter, making a step forward, took it from him, and drew it open. It was a warrant from Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State, ordering him to be removed to the gaol of Newgate, in London.

CHAPTER V.

A few boats' lengths from the quay of the corporation of Exeter, in the port of Topsham, on the morning posterior to the date of the last chapter, there lay several gallant-looking ships, of no ordinary size and burthen. [160]

There were, as has been observed, several of these ships, but only one of them has immediate reference to our history; and, therefore, it is to her alone, at the present moment, that we have to direct attention.

She was a large vessel, and, though fitted up for the purposes both of war and traffic, had evidently been constructed, in the first instance, chiefly with a view to making her a sailer. This was not only manifest in the rounding of her bows, which was, considering the practice of the time, rather sharply turned, but also in a certain slanting in her tall masts, giving her that look which, in nautical parlance, is termed "rakish." Her rig also, in the main, was adapted to develop her sailing qualities, and was of that hybridous character called "brigantine." But although her builder had so laboured to make her a fast vessel, she was still roomy, and presented a more extensive interior than one would have expected. Her fore-castle was lofty, as was also her after-deck, or poop, rising a good height above her deck; and though she was low midships, or in that part of her hull between the fore-castle and poop, this showed her dimensions to disadvantage. There were two brass guns mounted on her fore-castle, and two others, of rather a larger bore, on her poop, which was further defended by a long swivel-gun, peeping out on her stern. With this latter part of the ship, where his labours finished, the builder had taken considerable pains, having adorned its outline with a border of relieve flowers, enclosing, about the centre of the elevation, an ingenious representation of three casements. The two outer casements were represented to be open, and here the artist had found room to show his knowledge of details; the ideal aperture of the two casements, by the introduction of some white paint at the top, in contradistinction to the original ground of black, exhibiting the mingled effects of light and shade. Immediately beneath these casements, in large old English characters, was the ship's name, thus:— [161] [162]

ELIZA.

The day had yet hardly opened at the time we mark the position and general appearance of this goodly ship. Nevertheless, the deck was not vacant, and sounds arose from below, both fore and aft, that proclaimed the whole crew to be up and stirring. In the after part of the ship, in particular, one could distinguish sounds of mirth and festivity, and occasionally there would rise from the cabin a shout of laughter, that no human heart could have heard unmoved. It has been said that the deck was not vacant, and, indeed, it presented, in the fore part of the ship, a very varied picture of human feelings and passions. There might be seen, in the faces of the several persons scattered around, the indications of the most conflicting sentiments—the traces of hope, sorrow, love, eagerness, and expectation. There, among others, stood the father, whispering his parting injunctions to his child; the wife giving her farewell prayers to her husband; the lover pouring hope into the heart of his sobbing mistress; and the daring, thoughtless, and eager adventurer, free from care, and overflowing with buoyancy, caroling some light love-song, and looking forward with impatience to a time of peril and action. [163] [164]

On the after-deck there were but two persons. One of these, who wore the garb of a common seaman, was on the watch, or, rather, as the ship was not at sea, and so kept no regular watch, stood as a sort of sentry, to overlook and preserve the general order. The other person was walking to and fro; and was evidently, to judge from his dress and bearing, of a station superior to any on the deck. Indeed, he was no other than Master Halyard, the lieutenant, or, as he loved to be called for shortness, Master Benjamin Halyard, mariner.

In person Master Halyard afforded little ground for remark. He was of the middle size, and, though somewhat inclined to be over broad, well limbed, and fairly proportioned. His countenance, notwithstanding that it was somewhat weather-beaten, was good-looking—not only because its individual features were good, but because of the lightness, buoyancy, and goodnature that were visible in every line of its general expression. These few words are sufficient to give an idea of his appearance; and his character, so far as it need be mentioned here, may be treated as summarily. Nevertheless, it was not without singularity, or traits that insured it respect and attention. If his manners were rough, his heart was kind and compassionate; and though he was slow to plan, he was prompt to act, and never flinched in the hour of peril. Indeed, he always kept in view, for his guidance through the vicissitudes of life, a maxim that raised him above fear, by reminding him that troubles were but of brief duration, and that good and evil alike must ultimately come to an end. This maxim he had always at hand, and, whenever occasion served, he never failed to set forth, in his very loudest tone of voice, that “life is but short: let us live well on the road, says the gentle shepherd of Salisbury plain.” The spirit of his maxim he enforced, not only by constantly repeating it, but by the effect of his own example, on every one under his control, although his general disposition, to borrow a phrase of his own, was “no ways particular,” and rarely inclined him to interfere with others. [165]

Such was the man who, at the time already specified, walked to and fro on the quarter-deck of the “Eliza,” smoking a short pipe as he passed along. He had, however, taken but two or three turns of the deck, when the look-out man, coming right in his path, brought him to a stand.

“’Tis four of the clock, master,” said the look-out man.

“Ah, Tom Tarpaulin,” answered the lieutenant, quickly, for it was necessary to give his orders with promptitude; “life is but short: let us live well on the road, says the gentle shepherd of Salisbury plain. Strike eight bells!” [166]

“Ay, ay, Sir!” replied Tarpaulin.

Quick as thought, he skipped up the poop, and ran to a frame of wood-work, about three feet high, that stood in front of the compass-box. From this hung a large bell, which he seized round the top; and taking up a hammer that lay beneath, he struck on the inside of the bell eight distinct taps, thereby signifying to the crew, in the manner they best understood, that it was four o’clock.

Hardly had the bell given utterance to the eighth stroke, when Halyard, turning his face towards the fore-castle, desired the men forward to give a call for the boatswain. The boatswain, however, being within hearing, forestalled all further calls, and presented himself on the quarter-deck before any voice had been raised but the lieutenant’s.

“Ay, ay, Sir!” he cried. [167]

“Pipe all hands to heave up the anchor,” said the lieutenant.

“Ay, ay, Sir!” answered the boatswain.

And while the accents were yet on his lips, he drew forth an earthenware whistle, gaily trimmed with silver, from the waistband of his canvas trousers, and, raising it to his mouth, made the air ring with its shrill and ear-piercing notes.

All was now bustle throughout the ship. Not only forward, but aft, the summons of the boatswain was obeyed, and four persons came up the hatchway from the chief cabin who wore the garb of gentlemen. Among these were Hildebrand Clifford, the captain, and his friend Sir Walter Raleigh; but the others appeared to have no connection with the ship, and to have come there only as Sir Walter’s friends.

Just as they stepped on the deck, the boatswain brought his whistle to a close, and replaced the pipe, to call it by its nautical name, in the band of his trousers. [168]

“All hands heave up the anchor!” he cried.

Pursuant to this order, the crew all hurried to the quarter-deck, where, directly in front of the poop, at an elevation of about five feet from the deck, stood the capstan, by means of which the anchor was to be raised. This was quickly rigged with some half-dozen levers, about three feet apart, and the sailors planted themselves behind the levers, two or three abreast, and waited the signal to begin.

“Give way, my hearts!” cried Hildebrand, who now took the command: “Give way!”

There was no reply to this order, but the sailors, grasping a firmer hold of the several levers, at once obeyed, wheeling gaily round the capstan, and singing with one voice as they progressed:—

“Yo, ho, yo! merriman, hoy!
Yo, ho, hoy! merriman!”

Few of the various by-standers heard their stirring chorus without emotion. In many of them it raised the most bitter pang of tortured affection—it was the knell of separation—the first sad [169]

note of departure and parting. Still, after a few moments' interval, when the first thrills of affection had subsided, it had a cheering influence, and many a pale face around wore a smile, which, though tinged with sadness, plainly showed that the heart was full of hope and expectation.

At length, the cable was all hauled in, and the anchor heaved up to the bows, and there, with the aid of a stout chain, made secure. The goodly bark was at liberty, and all but her gallant crew were now to quit her deck.

In the gangway, preparing to descend into one of the boats that were alongside, stood Sir Walter Raleigh, and his two friends. The two latter had already bidden Hildebrand farewell, but Sir Walter, who was the foremost of the three, held him by the hand still.

"I will bear it in mind, worthy Master Clifford," he said, in an under tone. "Shedlock shall never know from me, or any but thyself, aught that hath passed, though, by my lady's hand, I could tear the knave's heart from his body, if 'twere but to see what 'tis made of." [171]

"Indeed, 'twould be to my disadvantage just now, noble Sir, that he should know I am thy poor friend," said Hildebrand.

"It might, it might!" observed Sir Walter. "Have no doubt of my secrecy. Farewell, and God keep thee, my friend!"

"Farewell! farewell!" said Hildebrand.

They shook hands again, and, this done, Sir Walter and his friends, without further observation, descended to their boat. All the other strangers had departed before, and none but her proper crew remained on board the "Eliza."

Once parted from his friends, Hildebrand stepped quickly across the deck, and mounted to the poop. Glancing forward, he perceived that the white sails were all loosened, and were beginning to expand to the wind: the men were scattered in groups, in different parts of the ship; and every eye, from Master Halyard's downwards, was turned wistfully on him. As he observed the general attention, Hildebrand doffed his plumed hat, and raised it gaily in the air. [172]

"One cheer for merry England!" he exclaimed.

There was a dead pause for a moment: then the welkin rang with a hearty hurrah!

CHAPTER VI.

[173]

Six weeks elapsed before the good ship "Eliza" again made the land. Then the heights of Maryland rose to the view, and on the following morning, at an early hour, she made Cape Fear. Passing Virginia, she sailed slowly along the coast of Carolina, and at last, after a very fair passage, came to an anchor at Roanoke.

Roanoke island, a little to the south of Albemarle Sound, and somewhat further south of Dismal Swamp, was Sir Walter Raleigh's plantation, and the first of the British settlements in North America. It had been established several years, but was, nevertheless, yet in its infancy, and the arrival of a ship from dear old England naturally excited in the colony the liveliest sensation. Long and long before she came to an anchor, and while she was yet far in the offing, every human creature in Roanoke had made her the subject of their every thought, and conjecture had deemed no point in her appearance too small for the exercise of its powers. Boats put off to meet her miles out, and, as she neared the island, a whole fleet of this craft, comprising every class of galley and canoe, hovered round her, and, though no one was allowed to come on board, all the news from England was known in every boat before the ship anchored. [174]

Once anchored, Hildebrand lost no time, after he had completed his arrangements, in communicating with the shore, and landing the supplies which Sir Walter had sent out. The process of unloading occupied him a whole week, and by the time that he had taken in his return cargo, and procured fresh provisions, two weeks more had elapsed. Nevertheless, the ship which Sir Walter Raleigh had promised to send him as a companion, that he might be better able to cope with the Spaniards, and which he knew to have been nearly ready when he sailed from England, had not made her appearance, and there became reason to suppose that she had incurred some mishap. Another week elapsed, and still there was no sign of her coming, and Hildebrand began to fear, from the information he had had previous to leaving England, that, if he delayed much longer, the Spanish fleet would escape him, and arrive at Cadiz before he could cross the Atlantic. This reflection determined him to make no further delay, and accordingly, amidst the hearty cheers of the colonists, he weighed anchor, and made all sail for the Atlantic. [175]

After three weeks' sail, the "Eliza" came in sight of the Azores, and, holding off the land, cruized in the offing for three weeks more; but saw no trace of the Spanish fleet. Anxious and disappointed, Hildebrand began to fear that it must have passed; and he resolved, after a little hesitation, and a conference with Master Halyard, who was of the same opinion as himself, to run for Cadiz, where he would be able to ascertain if his conjectures were well founded. [176]

A favourable wind soon brought him to Cadiz. On entering the harbour, he saw the fleet had not arrived, though there were, to his surprise, several large ships lying in-shore, evidently preparing for some expedition. Being only in search of the Mexican fleet, however, Hildebrand would have

put to sea again, but he was obliged, however it might assort with his design, to make some stay, lest he should excite suspicion, and so be prevented from departing at all.

But, though he came to an anchor, he kept a good distance from the shore, and made all ready against any visit from the authorities. From whatever cause, however, he did not receive such a visit, and on the following morning he ventured to go on shore. [177]

Leaving his boat at the mole, he passed up to the quay, and thence to the city. As he progressed, he found the whole city, from one end to the other, rife with those preparations which, previous to his landing, he had observed along the shore; and he became curious to know what could be the object of so formidable an armament. But whenever he was about to make it the subject of inquiry, he found that he was closely attended by two cavaliers, whose faces, from their wearing their cloaks in the Spanish fashion, and having their slouched hats pulled over their brows, he could not well distinguish. Their appearance, however, caused him to refrain from any inquiry, and ultimately drove him to the quay, and induced him to return to his ship. [178]

The next day Hildebrand again visited the city. He had not gone far, when, happening to look behind him, he found that the two vigilant cavaliers were on his heels once more. This brought him to a stand, and he resolved, since he could not shake them off, to let them pass him, and then return to his boat. They passed him without hesitation, and, having watched them a few yards, he turned quickly round, and made off. In his hurry, however, he took a wrong turning, and, instead of finding himself on the quay, he came to a halt in front of the cathedral.

There was no time for deliberation: to return, even if he could make out the way, would be but to seek the two persons who had been watching him; whereas, if he passed into the cathedral, he would find a covert for the moment, and, after a short interval, might return unobserved. This view of the matter no sooner occurred to him, than, with his accustomed decision, he resolved on the latter course; and straightway entered the cathedral. [179]

High mass was in course of celebration at the moment of his entrance. The chapel in which the service was performed, being dedicated to our Lady, was in high favour with the people of Cadiz, and, therefore, was well attended. But though a small structure, it was not so full but that some seats were unoccupied; and Hildebrand, directly they incurred his notice, took possession of one of these without ceremony.

As he sat down, his side adjoined the chapel-aisle, which divided him, by only a few paces, from another row of seats, placed longitudinally. Thus, the occupiers of these seats, so far as they were opposite to him, faced Hildebrand, and could make no one movement that did not incur his observation.

One of these seats, a little in his advance, was occupied by a young lady and her duenna, who, at his very first entry, attracted Hildebrand's whole attention. She was tall for a Spaniard, but this did not reduce, but rather augmented, the dignity of her mien, and gave a more bewitching grace to her exquisite proportions. From the manner in which she wore her mantilla, which, turned over the back of her head and shoulders, fell down over only one arm, these could be partly distinguished, and, certainly, the most fastidious taste could not but admire all that was visible. [180]

Her bust was rounded so accurately, in every turn of its outline, from her throat downwards, that the figure which painters call the line of beauty could be traced through all its proportions. But this incurred little notice, if one could gaze on the more attractive loveliness of her face. In her large eyes, indeed, there was a charm, dark and resistless as the frown of death, that fell on the eyes of others with a magnetic effect, and seemed to absorb all light in their own. Above, her arched eyebrows, though as black as night themselves, appeared to melt away into the full radiance of morning, which lent to her high forehead its most roseate colours, and most captivating sweetness. Then the light was again broken by her sparkling raven hair, which, parted in the middle, was turned in a profusion of curls behind her ears. It made itself visible, however, once more, on the side where her mantilla was raised, in its fall downwards, which brought a cluster of three or four ringlets on her neck and bosom. This rather added to, than weakened, the charm of her complexion, and its soft mellow tints derived from the contrast of light and shade a new fascination, and a more striking and bewitching beauty. Its general effect was, on a closer survey, also heightened by the warm blood that played in her cheeks, and by the more dazzling red of her lips, which [181]

—Grew together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted;
But yet a union in partition,—
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem. [182]

Hildebrand's were not the only eyes that the young lady had captivated. Whether, however, it was owing to his tall person being more remarkable, or to the fact of his being a stranger, or to both causes combined, he alone had the good fortune, if such it were, to receive from the fair maiden any degree of encouragement. The first time her eyes met his, her glance was not, it is true, free from some savour of disdain; but it brightened as it passed over his handsome features, and gradually assumed a softer and responsive sparkle. Several times afterwards, in the course of the tedious service, he met her glance, and each time it wore a more tender tone, and brought to her warm cheeks a livelier blush. At last, the service was concluded, and the lady, together with her duenna, rose to retire. Hildebrand followed her with his eyes till she reached the church-porch. As she was making her egress, she turned round, and again bent her eyes on his. [183]

Hildebrand was riveted to the spot: the next moment, the lady passed out; and, though he

hastened after her, she had gone out of sight when he reached the church-porch, and left no vestige behind.

Hildebrand returned to his boat with some sense of disappointment. This was lessened, however, on reflection, as it occurred to him that his visit to the cathedral had, at least, had the effect of misleading the two persons who had been watching him, and with whose attendance he could well dispense. But he did not remember, what must have removed all sense of disappointment, that his stay in Cadiz could not be prolonged above a day or two, and, therefore, that he would have no opportunity of pursuing the adventure which his visit to the cathedral had opened. A thought of Evaline de Neville, it is true, pierced his bosom with something like the sting of self-reproach, but the remembrance of the last parting look of the fair Spaniard counteracted its effect, and made her alone the subject of his reflections. [184]

The next day, he resolved to visit the cathedral again. He endeavoured to persuade himself, in answer to some scruples and reproofs of conscience, that he was actuated in this step by a higher motive than the pursuit of an intrigue, and that his real object was to ascertain, under the cloak of an intrigue, what was the destined purpose of that great and formidable armament, which, on his first arrival, he had observed to be in progress, and had since found to be employing the whole energies of Spain. And, though it was not his principal object, he really was desirous to acquire this information; for if, as he conjectured, the armament was designed to reinforce the Duke of Parma, in Flanders, it was highly advisable that the fact of its being on foot should be immediately communicated to the court of England. Still, it must be owned, it was more his admiration of the fair Spaniard, than his jealousy of Spanish armaments, that led him again to the cathedral. [185]

The service had begun when he entered the sacred edifice. Advancing to the seat he had occupied the previous morning, he perceived that the young lady and her duenna were already settled in their seats, and, so far as outward appearances testified, engaged in their devotions. But though he was gratified at their punctual attendance, his gratification was not without alloy; for the young lady, from whatever reason, wore a close veil over her face, and he did not receive one glance from her during the whole service. He was, however, unable to keep his eyes from her, and, on the service being concluded, they followed her, as on the day previous, to the church-porch. She would, he thought, at least give him a parting glance; she would at least raise her veil as she made her egress; but she passed out without so much as looking round. [186]

Hildebrand's cheeks glowed with resentment, not unmingled with shame, as his vanity received this mortifying blow. He was so taken aback, indeed, that he remained rooted to his seat, and it was not till the silence around warned him that he was almost the only person in the chapel, and, consequently, that it was high time to take his departure, that the first effects of his disappointment began to subside. Then, gathering his cloak about him, he sprang to his feet, and walked hastily forth.

As he was passing through the church-porch, he felt some one touch him behind. Turning round, his eye fell on an old woman, in whom, despite of her close veil, he immediately recognised the Spanish maiden's duenna.

"Senhor," said this person, "thou hast made me wait long: I have a billet for thee." [187]

And, drawing her hand from under her mantilla, she disclosed a sealed billet, which, without further speech, she placed in his eager hands.

"Thanks, thanks!" answered Hildebrand, slipping a ring from his finger, and dropping it into the withered palm of the duenna.

The latter person, quietly closing her hand over her costly guerdon, raised its forefinger to her lips, and, with this caution, broke away.

It may well be supposed, from his previous demeanour, that Hildebrand's impatience to view and peruse the welcome billet was excessive. Fearful that he might be watched, however, he restrained his curiosity, and held the billet close in his hand, under the fold of his cloak, till he reached a retired part of the city-quay. Then, drawing it forth, he tore it open and read these words:—

"If thy looks belie not thy heart, and thou canst love truly, be under the porch of the cathedral, at the southern entrance, this even, at ten of the clock." [188]

Hildebrand conned the billet over and over again, each time, as though he were really in love, viewing it more closely, and discerning in its fair penmanship a fresh grace. He did not hesitate a moment as to the propriety of accepting the invitation; indeed, in the excitement of the occasion, he did not give it a thought. He only wondered how the adventure would end—only thought how many hours, slow and tedious as days, must precede the appointed hour; and sought to overlook their weariness with the far-seeing eye of anticipation.

But the hour of the assignation arrived at last. Punctual to the moment, Hildebrand pushed across the cathedral-close, and presented himself at the southern porch.

It was a dark night, but still; and, in this retired quarter of the city, there was no person abroad. On taking his station in the porch, Hildebrand thought it probable, from the tenor of her note, that his unknown mistress might be led by these circumstances to venture out, and give him a meeting in the shadow of the porch. But he was not left long to conjecture. He had been in the porch but a few minutes, when an approaching footstep, followed by the rustling of drapery, saluted his ear. The next moment, a female appeared in sight: it was the old duenna. [189]

"Art thou here before me, Senhor?" she said, approaching him. "Now, I'll swear, from this impatience of thine, thy love is honest, and should win thee thy lady's favour. Nay, nay, be not so eager. Thou shalt see her anon, I warrant you."

"Let it be straightway, then, Senhora, I entreat thee," answered Hildebrand, slipping a broad piece into her hand.

"Ay, ay, I am overfond, and ye both bend me as ye will," answered the duenna. "St. Jago have mercy on me! I am afraid I do not right." [190]

"Nay, I'll warrant, in thy young days, thou hast had lovers thyself," observed Hildebrand; "so thou canst not, with any honesty,—and I'll swear thou art right honest,—deny them to thy fair young ward."

"Well, indeed, thou speakest sooth," returned the duenna; "for I have, in my younger days, had lovers enow; and though the time for such follies is almost past with me,"—she was full sixty years of age—"it is not so with Donna Inez. Be of good heart, then, and follow me to her presence."

Uttering these words, the old duenna turned away, and, with a quick step, passed out into the cathedral-close. Hildebrand followed her, a few paces in her rear, to a neighbouring street, which led them to the other end of the city. Here, turning into a by-street, they passed along the outside of a dead wall to a small doorway, inserted in the wall, some distance from any dwelling. The old woman came to a stand before the door, and, raising her hand over her eyes, looked narrowly round, on either side, to see that no one was about. It was very dark, and she could not see far; but she seemed, after one glance around, to be satisfied on this score, and turned to the door again. A key which she drew from her vest, and inserted in the lock, quickly opened the door, and she whispered Hildebrand to enter. [191]

Passing down two or three steps, Hildebrand found himself in a large garden, which spread round, on either side of the walk he was standing on, further than he could see. Having ascertained this, he was turning to look for his guide, when he descried the figure of another female, somewhat taller than the duenna, standing against a contiguous tree. A thought struck him that it was his mistress, and, without further pause, he sprang lightly to her side.

The lady's arms were folded in the fall of her mantilla, but Hildebrand, gently pushing that aside, easily possessed himself of her trembling hand. As he did so, he came before her, and turned his eyes on her face. [192]

Notwithstanding that he could not see very clearly, he readily distinguished the adorable features of his mistress, and the soft light that, in defiance of the darkness, beamed in her peerless eyes. He could not, perhaps, discern the warm glow of confusion, mingled with pleasure, that his presence had called to her cheek, but her feelings were sufficiently revealed to him by the trembling of her delicate hand. Love, whose refined sensibilities are entirely swayed by example, being so subject to impulse, and the action of passing influences, would have responded to this confusion; and the rapture of the moment would have been locked in silence, and only seen in the excess of feeling. But Hildebrand was only a gallant, not a lover; and he was at no loss for words—earnest and musical, too, though lacking in sincerity—in which he could address his mistress. [193]

Readiness of compliment is a characteristic trait, if one may so speak, of that passion which springs only from admiration, in contradistinction to that which flows, with a gentler wave, and a more constant and regular current, from the purer source of affection. In the one passion, all is but skin-deep; in the other, it is heart-deep: the first is, like the body, mortal; but the other is an emblem of the soul, and is quick, ethereal, and undying.

Clasping her hand in his, and drawing it under his arm, Hildebrand first proceeded to thank his mistress, in a few passionate words, for the distinguished favour which she had bestowed upon him, in the concession of an interview. They moved onward while he spoke, and presently, turning a sweep in the walk, came in view of the lady's dwelling. Here Hildebrand would have paused; but his mistress, though she had till now been almost a passive agent, and had hardly seemed to exercise volition, continued to move on, and, of course, drew him with her. [194]

A few paces brought them to a flight of steps, which, after a moment's hesitation, they ascended, and passed over the landing to an adjacent door. Raising the latch, the lady pushed the door open, and disclosed a lighted hall within.

"Follow, and say not a word!" she said.

She passed into the hall, and Hildebrand, pursuant to her injunction, followed her in silence. They crossed the hall on tiptoe, and halted at the foot of a staircase, which, dividing in the middle, ascended in two distinct flights, and opened into a sort of gallery, or continuation of the landing, which ran round three sides of the hall above.

The lady looked anxiously up the stairs, on either side, and round the whole range of the hall, to see if any one was about, but everything was still as death, and the hall seemed to have no other inmates but themselves. Apparently satisfied on this point, the lady moved forward again, and, with a light but quick step, ascended to the gallery, followed by her silent gallant. [195]

At the summit of the stairs, a few feet from the landing, was a narrow door, which the lady opened. A flood of light poured through the aperture, and, looking in, Hildebrand discovered a well-lighted and elegant room, furnished as a sitting-chamber. The lady held the door open, and Hildebrand, perceiving that she wished him to enter first, passed in. His companion followed in his wake, and shut the door behind them.

Up to this moment, Donna Inez—for such was the name of the fair Spaniard—had spoken but once, and then only to request Hildebrand to be silent. But the effects of Hildebrand's first approach had now worn off, and the excitement of her progress from the garden, through a part of the house which might have exposed her to unfriendly observation, and which, therefore, involved some degree of peril, had re-nerved her, and her features had lost all trace of confusion or embarrassment. [196]

As she closed the chamber-door, she turned round, and fixed her eyes full on the face of her gallant.

"Thou art not an Andalusian," she said, wistfully surveying his features, "nor art thou from Catalonia: wast born in Spain at all?"

"No, lady," answered Hildebrand: "I am from the North."

"Ah, methought thou hadst not our accent," returned Donna Inez; "and yet, though they be foreign, thine accents are good, and become thee right well. Be the Northerns true?"

"Thou wilt find me true, lady," replied Hildebrand.

"Thou'lt say so, I warrant," said Donna Inez. And thrusting her hand under her mantilla, she drew forth a small dagger, and continued:—"Regard thou the temper of this steel! Consider, while thou admirest its flashing lustre, how ready it is to defend, and how prompt to revenge! Canst thou be true as this?" [197]

"Ay, truer!" answered Hildebrand, smiling, and clasping her uplifted hand in his.

Firmly as she had clutched the dagger, the small hand of Donna Inez relaxed, after one vain effort, in the passionate grasp of Hildebrand. She turned her eyes on his face, but it was not, as before, with the searching glance of inquiry, but with a look of the fullest confidence, mingled with overpowering passion. There was nothing in the tone of his face, however earnestly surveyed, but might confirm her confidence; the flush of triumph on his cheek, and the excitement in his eye, while they lent his countenance a more stirring animation, seemed to offer to her his warmest sympathy, and to speak of love that was as dear as life, and as true as she could wish it. [198]

Still holding her hand in his, Hildebrand led her to a contiguous chair, and seated himself by her side. Probably he would here have followed up, by a few well-timed words, the impression which he had made upon her by his bearing; but if he had resolved upon this, he was prevented from carrying his intention into effect. Just as he had taken his seat beside her, the door of the chamber, which was right opposite to where they were sitting, was hastily pushed open, and the old duenna rushed in.

"Oh, Donna, child, thou art lost!" exclaimed the faithful governante, in broken accents. "Don Gonzalez has returned, and is, alack! even now upon the stairs, calling for thee with all his main."

Nothing could exceed the embarrassment of the lovers on hearing this intelligence. Hildebrand, it is true, did not know who Don Gonzalez was, or precisely understand what might be the effect of his arrival. But, though he was unacquainted with the exact and particular nature of the danger, he clearly saw that a danger impended, and that its consequences might cause both Inez and himself very serious annoyance. Inez viewed the arrival of Don Gonzalez with still greater concern. She had known him from her childhood, when she was left, with a large dower, to his uncontrolled guardianship, by his younger brother, her father. Being thus entirely at his disposal, and knowing him to be a man of unscrupulous passions, and a jealous and vindictive temper, she naturally saw the danger in its blackest colours, and was perfectly overwhelmed with anxiety and apprehension. [199]

"Alack!" she exclaimed, "I am indeed undone! Fly, Sir! fly, I beseech thee!" [200]

"Madonna! and how is he to fly, I prithee?" asked the duenna. "There is no way out, I ween, but through this door, and the tyrant will be on the threshold presently."

Startled by this intelligence, Hildebrand glanced round in search of some place of concealment. A large casement stood on one side of the chamber, screened from observation by a flowing merino curtain, which was fastened, about a foot below the roof, to a pole of cedar, whence its ample folds fell to the floor. This was the only covert that presented itself, but Hildebrand thought that, unless the jealous Spaniard should suspect his ward to have been entertaining a gallant, and subject the chamber to a rigid search, it might prove sufficient.

"Have no fear!" he said to Inez. "I will hide me behind yonder curtain; and if it come to the worst, I carry a good Toledo at my side, and will make my way against more foes than one." [201]

There was no time to spare; for the step of Don Gonzalez, rendered more distinct by the clink of his spurs, was now heard at the door. Hardly had Hildebrand slipped behind the curtain, when, pushing open the door, he entered the chamber.

He was a man in years; but time, though it had whitened his hair, had not bent his tall form, or broken the stiffness of his figure. Even his grey hair, which would have given a venerable look to others, served to render his appearance more rigid, and the severity of his glance was magnified by his white brows, while his lips, pressed sternly together, looked more repulsive under his grizzled moustachios. He was dressed in grave habits, with a slouched hat, as though—which probably was the case—he had but just returned from abroad, and had passed straight to his ward's sitting-chamber.

On his entrance into the apartment, he closed the door behind him, and, turning round, glanced [202]

inquiringly at the two inmates. His quick eye, surveying them earnestly, readily detected the embarrassment of his niece, and discerned that all was not right with her grave duenna. But what probably tended most to excite his suspicions, and led him to surmise that some evil was on foot, was the attire of the two females, which, considering the lateness of the hour, was certainly singular, as it comprehended their veils and mantillas.

"Ye have been walking late, Senhoras," he said, "yet not, I trust, without good escort, or ye may have met some misadventure."

There was a pause.

"And whither hast thou roamed, fair niece?" resumed Don Gonzalez. "What happy gallant, of all the young bachelors of Cadiz, hast thou favoured with an assignation?"

"What meanest thou, Sir?" said Inez, recovering herself.

"Wouldst thou outface me?" demanded Gonzalez. "There is that on thy cheek, woman, would avow thy guilt, though thy tongue grew dumb in swearing its tale false." [203]

But Inez was not to be brow-beaten. Though the unexpected intrusion of her uncle had taken her aback, it could not, by any possible bearing, bend and overcome her indomitable spirit; and now that the first shock of the surprise had worn off, she was prepared to meet him, and could look the danger in the face with perfect firmness. She met his insinuations with indignant remonstrance; and answered his taunts, though they were the most bitter he could devise, with taunts more galling. He sought to silence her once or twice; but the more he stormed, the more did Inez persist, both by her voice and gesture, in braving his fury, and treating him with scorn and defiance. At last, his passion rose, almost to madness. There was one thing that Inez had not explained, and that was, how, at so late an hour of the night, she and her duenna were dressed for walking. This was a point, however innocent it might be in itself, that he was not disposed to give up, and it furnished him with an excuse for his last outburst. [204]

"Thou hast had no assignation," he said, "and yet, by all appearance, hast been abroad at midnight. I prithee what mighty matter took thee forth so late?"

"Is it a sin, then, Senhor, to stroll at nights in the garden?" demanded Inez.

"'Tis a fair night, certes, for ladies to go strolling," answered Gonzalez.

"Thou art too careful for me, Sir," returned Inez. "There was no rain."

"No rain!" exclaimed Gonzalez. "Wouldst thou make me doubt mine own senses? But, no! I will not be braved thus. Thou shalt confess, with thine own lips, and before thy helpmate here, that the rain hath been abundant." [205]

As he thus spoke, he caught a firm hold of her wrist, and drew her towards the chamber casement. The detection of her lover, to whom the curtain of the casement had hitherto afforded a secure covert, seemed inevitable; and her rage sank under her anxiety and terror.

"Hold, Senhor! hold!" she exclaimed, throwing all her weight on her guardian's arm: "I know it hath rained hard."

But her submission had not the effect she sought. Indeed, it rather increased suspicion, than subdued it; and as it was not till he moved towards the casement that she had tried to conciliate him, Gonzalez fancied that the casement would present something to view, in some way or other, that she desired to conceal. Directly the thought occurred to him, he cast off her hold, and threw her from him.

Inez beheld him approach the curtain of the casement, behind which her lover had taken refuge, without the power of interposing. The old duenna, in the back-ground, was equally helpless, and could only raise her hands in speechless terror. Inez scarcely dared to breathe, when, twining one hand round the hilt of his rapier, Gonzalez fastened the other on the curtain, and tore it aside. [206]

The two females started back in astonishment: the casement was open, and Hildebrand had gone.

CHAPTER VII.

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It was a fortunate circumstance for Inez, apart from any immediate inconvenience it might have occasioned her, that Gonzalez did not turn round from the casement at the moment he tore back the curtain; for if he had done so, he could hardly have failed to observe her utter bewilderment and amaze. But as the abortive issue of his proceedings had caused some surprise to himself, he hesitated before he turned round; and Inez had time to subdue, in a great degree, every trace of the emotion which had so deeply stirred her.

There was a quiet smile on her face when she again met the gaze of her guardian. This, however, failed to convince Gonzalez that his suspicions of her incontinence had been without ground, though he thought it better, in the absence of any certain evidence, to conceal those suspicions, and defer all measures of severity till he should discover something that would excuse them. Nevertheless, his fury was not calmed. He hesitated to resume his attack on Inez, but it was because, during the many years she had been under his guardianship, he had become too sensible of her unbending spirit, and haughty and resolute temper, under provocations less [208]

serious than that which he had furnished on this occasion, to suppose that he would come off the victor; and not from any feelings of delicacy or forbearance. But the old governante, whom he could discharge from his service at his pleasure, did not come under these protective relations, and, therefore, he felt no hesitation in discharging his fury at her.

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"So, thou old beldame!" he exclaimed, "wouldst thou bring thy pestilent gallants into our very chambers? 'Tis well, indeed, thou canst find them no place of resort but my house."

"Don Gonzalez, this is past all bearing," cried Inez, stepping in to her confidant's rescue. "I will put up with thy cruel suspicions and arbitrary rule no longer. I will petition the King, Sir, to have thy guardianship cancelled; and have my inheritance, which thou engrossest solely to thyself, turned over to my own hands. Come, good Amina," she added to her governante, "let us retire."

"Aha! would you go plot again?" cried Gonzalez. "No, no! we'll no more on't to-night. Get thee to thy chamber alone for once; and, harkye, thou old hag!" he added to the duenna, "get thee to thine, or I will have thee made do penance in the public streets. Petition the King, eh?"

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"Remember, thou hast been warned!" said Inez.

Uttering these words, she turned abruptly to the door, and passed to the contiguous gallery. Here she was joined by her governante; but before they could interchange any communication, Gonzalez followed them, and they were obliged to separate. A female servant, who was in waiting in the hall below, furnished them each with a light, and, with this in their hands, they passed in silence to their respective chambers.

But though Inez repaired to her chamber, she did not retire to rest. Indeed, to have sought repose in the state of mind she was in, agitated with contending influences, would have been the extreme of folly. Yet it was not any remembrance of the conduct of her guardian that engaged her attention. The anger and indignation arising from that source, though deep and bitter, was soon lost in her anxiety concerning the disappearance of her lover. She started a whole host of conjectures, as to the manner in which he had effected his escape, but none of them could reduce, in any material degree, her excruciating doubts of his safety. Whatever had been the mode of his egress from the casement, she fancied that he could not descend from so great a height, by his own unaided efforts, and under the disadvantage arising from the darkness of the night, without incurring injury. A thrill of anguish shot through her frame, as, pursuing this train of reflection, she thought that he might now be lying disabled on the damp ground, writhing under the torture of a broken limb. Yet, how could she afford him any succour? how could she even ascertain, without the cognizance and sufferance of her guardian, that he needed succour?

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She pondered on the subject till she grew distracted. At last, after she had thought of every possible mode of proceeding, she resolved to wait till the household should have retired, and then search for her lover in the garden.

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She did not determine on this step without some hesitation. In making an assignation with a stranger, without so much as knowing his name, or ever interchanging a word with him, she may seem to have manifested little delicacy, and committed excessive indiscretion; but, before passing judgment on her conduct, it must be borne in mind, in reference to her being the first mover of the assignation, that this was in accordance with the custom of her country, and was no way singular or unusual. She invited Hildebrand to meet her, if his sentiments were such as, on the two occasions she had seen him, he had endeavoured to reveal to her by his looks; and though this might not be a legitimate favour, it was a gallantry that was every day practised, and the bachelors of Cadiz hardly ever ventured to address a young lady, especially when she was remarkable for her beauty, till they received some such licence.

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Though she was precipitate, ardent, and romantic, and placed scarcely any bridle on her headlong passions, Inez had never entertained a gallant before. It was the noble form, and fine, manly countenance of Hildebrand, which the contrast they presented to the persons of her countrymen rendered more than usually prepossessing, that wakened a sense of love in her breast for the first time. Yet it was not love, but rather a feeling of satisfaction, if a term so cold may be used, that her charms could win from such a cavalier the homage of his looks. She felt gratified by his admiration; his appearance struck her with a responsive impression; and it was this influence, more than any other, that induced her to invite him to an assignation.

Precipitation in an affair of the heart is often attended with peril and mischief. Inez was the creature of impulse, and, in her correspondence with Hildebrand, all had been hurry and action. She had not paused once. Moreover, from the moment that she had opened a direct communication with him, the novelty and excitement of every individual circumstance, by associating him constantly with her thoughts, had combined to invest him with a new interest. The expectations raised by his approach, the feelings awakened by his first address, by their progress to her chamber, by the intrusion of her guardian, and by his mysterious disappearance, with the tormenting doubts which she entertained concerning his safety, knit him to her heart, and opened to his hand its most precious sympathies, and all its priceless affections.

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The heart may seem too lightly won that surrenders without a struggle. Even the love that has sprung from time, by slow and gradual degrees, and under the propitious influence of intimate fellowship, often retains some taint of selfishness, and acknowledges a fixed and distinct limit. But it is those warm natures which, once aroused, abandon to their love their every thought, that are soonest and most easily vanquished. They might endure the vicissitudes of a slow and gradual attachment with perfect equanimity; but the magic force of love's first touch, taking them off their guard, awakens in their bosoms their deepest springs of feeling, and hurries them over every restraint, and past every opposing scruple, into all the excess of unbridled passion.

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In the impetuosity of her nature, Inez had unlocked to her unknown lover the inmost recesses of her heart. He was the light and key to all her thoughts. What would have been to his disadvantage with some, by enforcing caution, and keeping before them the necessity of acting with prudence, pleaded to her in his favour; and her very ignorance of his name and station made her look upon him with a more ardent and passionate interest. [216]

At length, the silence that prevailed, and the lateness of the hour, which was now past midnight, led her to suppose that the household must all have retired, and she proceeded to put in execution her purpose of visiting the garden. Softly opening her chamber-door, she looked out into the gallery, and found that the lights in the hall below had been extinguished. Nevertheless, she was afraid to bring her own light forth, and she set on her way in the dark.

Wrapping her mantilla tightly round her, she pressed close to the wall, and proceeded, with a light but quick step, to descend to the hall. She soon reached the bottom of the stairs, and, with a beating heart, groped her way to the rearward door. It was very dark, but, from long familiarity with the building, both by night and day, she knew where to tread, and she made out the door without difficulty. She raised her hand to draw back the bolts; but, to her surprise, she found that, either from neglect or accident, these were not secured, and the door had been left unfastened. [217]

It was not without some qualms of fear that Inez looked out on the pitchy night. The rain was still falling, though not with any force, and the light showers drew from the foliage of the trees, as they fell upon it, a distinct vibration, that gave to the prevailing darkness an unearthly terror. But her apprehensions of peril from fellow-mortals, which her venturing out alone at so late an hour might well inspire, repressed any superstitious fears in the bosom of Inez, though they rendered her equally timid and irresolute. After a brief pause, however, her decision returned, and, drawing the door close after her, she passed out.

Without the door, there was a stone landing, guarded on either side by an iron rail, which led down a flight of steps to the garden. Above the landing, on a level with the top of the door, was a sort of veranda, open at the sides, which ran the whole length of the rails. Inez now perceived, what she had not thought of before, that this veranda was immediately beneath the casement from which her lover had made his egress, and she doubted not that he had easily lit upon it from the casement-sill, and thence leaped to the ground. A thrill of joy shot through her frame, as, measuring the height of the veranda with her eye, she perceived that he could do this without incurring any hurt; and the prompt manner in which he had seized such a means of escape, when the danger must have been yet remote, and the expediency of retreat could hardly have occurred to him, led her to look upon his image with more confirmed admiration. [218]

Nevertheless, he could not have got out of the garden; for, on his entry with her duenna, the latter had locked the gate which, as was shown heretofore, opened into the street, and there was no other outlet but through the house. She determined, therefore, pursuant to her original intention, to seek him in the garden, and lend him her aid to get clear off. [219]

She passed on for some little time, without observing anything to cause her the least alarm. At length, turning a sweep in the walk, where the area was less confined, her eye took in a more extended range, and she was able to distinguish objects more clearly. Here, as she gazed earnestly round, her eye fell on a large orange-tree, a few paces in her front; and she distinctly discerned two men, muffled in long cloaks, standing against its trunk. She turned to flee directly, but, in the hurry of her retreat, she forgot how necessary it was to proceed with caution, and the tread of her feet, reverberated by the wet ground, made the two men sensible of her vicinity. One of them called to her, in a voice which she recognised as her guardian's, to come to a halt, and, at the same time, prepared to give her chase. But Inez fled at her last speed. Turning the sweep already noticed, she came abreast of a walk which, breaking through a small shrubbery, led to the further end of the garden; and this suggested itself to her as a safe route for retreat. But the steps of her pursuers were close in her wake, and the difficulty of escape, if it depended solely on her speed, became every moment more and more apparent. Moreover, her breath was failing her, and her energies were, what with fear, and what with her exertions, nearly exhausted. In this dilemma, she came to a stand, intending to deliver herself up. As the steps of her pursuers drew nearer, however, her desire to escape revived, and, with something like renewed hope, she stepped out of the walk, and hid herself among the contiguous shrubs. [220]

Her pursuers soon came abreast of her hiding-place. To her great terror, however, they did not pass on, but halted right before her. She kept her eyes continually upon them, every minute expecting to see them move away; but minute after minute expired, in slow and melancholy succession, and they were still stationary. Her stooping position, though relieved of some of its weariness by the support of her hands, was growing painful; but she was afraid to move—she hardly ventured to breathe. The excitement was becoming intolerable, when, after an interval of about half an hour, one of the cavaliers spoke.

"Dost think it was he?" he asked of his companion.

"No," answered the other. "I fear me he hath got off."

"Art thou sure he was ever here?" asked the first speaker.

"Did I not tell thee I dogged him, and the old duenna, Amina, almost to the very gate?" replied the other. [221]

"Thou canst hardly be mistaken, then," said the first speaker. "If he have escaped, 'tis through thy pestilent knave of a groom, whom we sent, with a charge to use his utmost despatch, for the

guard of alguazils."

The other cavalier made some reply, but it was in so low a tone, and the rain at the moment made so much noise, that his words reached the ear of his comrade only, and afforded no trace of their purport to the anxious Inez. Whatever their purport might be, however, they evidently directed them to some other quarter; for they moved away without more ado.

Inez now breathed more freely. It was a great relief to her to stand upright; but her tender limbs, unused to any hardship, and cramped by her recent stooping, suffered severely from the wet and cold. She was still afraid to move out of the shrubbery; for she doubted not, from what she had overheard, that the two cavaliers continued on the watch, though they had removed from her immediate vicinity. Their brief dialogue also apprised her, in terms too broad and distinct to be misunderstood, that they were aware of her having received a visit from a gallant; and this circumstance tended to increase her uneasiness, and make her more and more melancholy. But she was somewhat assured by the reflection, arising out of this train of thought, after she had started all manner of conjectures, that Hildebrand had got clear away; for if he had effected his descent from the casement without incurring any hurt, she thought it highly improbable that he would pause or linger in his retreat and suffer the low wall of the garden, the only remaining obstacle, to prevent his making off. The matter, however, was involved in uncertainty; and her conjectures, and hopes, and apprehensions, rising one upon another, in quick and unbroken succession, harassed her excessively, and subjected her mind to the most exquisite pangs of suspense. [223]

She remained standing in the shrubbery for nearly half an hour. Then, finding all quiet, she stepped over the parterre, and ventured out on the walk. No one was in sight, and she resolved, though not without hesitation, and many lingering fears respecting the safety of Hildebrand, to endeavour to return unperceived to the house. [224]

She set forward with a trembling heart, but she grew more confident as she progressed, and discovered nothing around, so far as she could distinguish, to indicate the presence of a single living creature. Her heart quite bounded as she arrived in front of the house, and she mounted the flight of steps at the door, under the shelter of the veranda, with a sense of recovered buoyancy. Passing over the landing, she paused in front of the door, and clutched eagerly at the latch:—the door was fastened within.

Her head reeled again as she made this discovery; and yet, on a moment's reflection, she could hardly bring herself to believe that the door was really fastened, and she fixed her hand on the latch once more. But the door resisted her efforts, and she tried it over and over again, sometimes with all her force, and at others gently, but still with the utmost earnestness, with the like disheartening result. [225]

She was very cold, and wet withal, and her tender and delicate frame, from the severe manner in which it had been tried, was already fast sinking from exhaustion. How could she bear up till the morrow? What resource was left her, in her utter helplessness and misery, against the terrors and hardship of a night in the open air?

In vain she pondered on her situation. The more she thought of it, in a fruitless pursuit of some one hopeful reflection, the greater became her misery, and the more confirmed her despair. Nor were the great personal apprehensions that she entertained, and which every moment augmented, the most afflictive element of her distress; for the solitude around now raised within her a host of ideal and superstitious terrors, far more grievous and depressing. For some minutes she hardly ventured to raise her eyes from the ground. The sputtering of the rain on the veranda, a few feet above her head, made her thrill with fear; if she sought to relieve her wearied limbs by changing her position, either by supporting her arm on the hand-rail, or by leaning against the door, the rustling of her drapery, whenever she moved, turned her heart cold, and conjured up before her the most morbid and distracting fancies. [226]

She might have remained in this position till the morning, but, happening to glance on one side, her eye fell on the dim outlines of an outhouse, stretching away from the main building, only a few yards from where she stood. This she knew to be the kitchen, and, though she had no doubt of the kitchen being duly secured, she recollected that there was a wood-house adjoining, in a line with the kitchen, the door of which was fastened only with a staple, and would, therefore, afford her ready access. Poor as such a refuge would be, it would, in her present destitution, still be a refuge; and it no sooner presented itself to view than she hastened to embrace it. [227]

Quickly descending the flight of steps, she kept close against the side of the house, in order to screen herself in its shadow, and pushed forward to the kitchen. On arriving before this building, she paused a moment, and looked anxiously round. But she could discern no trace of any overlooker, and, drawing a deep breath, she again pressed against the wall, and resumed her progress to the wood-house. As she passed along, however, keeping close to the wall, she came against the kitchen-door; and, yielding to her involuntary pressure, which its situation in an indenture rendered more forcible, the door flew open. [228]

A sensation of pleasure rose in her bosom at this unexpected prospect of a comfortable retreat. Before the feeling had well sprung up, however, it was overtaken by an opposite one; for as she was about to avail herself of the passage afforded by the open door, something like the rustling of drapery saluted her ear, and she shrank back in dismay. Looking quickly round, she fancied that she saw a shadow, which had protruded from the deeper gloom, hastily flit back, a few yards further up the walk; but if this had really happened, it retreated so fleetly, and the variety of shadows thrown out by the trees and shrubs were so perplexing, that she could not but regard it

with uncertainty and doubt. Nevertheless, she kept her eye on the spot for several minutes, intently surveying its every outline, without discerning anything confirmatory of her fears; and, somewhat reassured, she turned to the door again. [229]

Passing in, she softly closed the door, and glanced around. Some embers of a fire were gleaming in the andirons, on the side of the room opposite to the door, and the light they afforded, though no more than rendered the darkness visible, served as a mark for her steps, and enabled her to grope her way forward. As she came up to the andirons, her dress caught in something at her feet, and, stooping to see what it was, she found that there was a heap of furze, or dried heather, on one side of the andirons, ready for use in the morning. She threw a handful of this into the fireplace; and the dim embers, revived by her breath, which she blew upon them with all her force, mounted into a flame. A log of wood which she found at hand, and which she laid on the top of the furze, soon provided her with a good and cheerful fire.

The light thus furnished enabled Inez to look round the kitchen more narrowly. It inspired her, too, with more courage—if that which was derived from an extraneous influence, not from any source within, might be called courage. Still her glance was timid and hasty, and the cheering effect of the fire, though it rendered her situation more tolerable, had evidently not relieved her of her many depressing apprehensions. Indeed, this very light itself, by revealing to her the outlines of every part of the room, soon presented her with some ground, beyond that which sprang from her natural timidity, for her very worst fears. As her survey progressed, she observed the door of a neighbouring closet, on which the fire shed its full light, slightly pulled back, as though it had been a little open, and was drawn close by some person within. Her terror was excessive, but it was of that kind which, by representing escape to be impracticable, impelled her forward, and she made one desperate spring to the closet-door. [230]

She drew the door open, and the light, pouring full into the closet, revealed to her the person of a cavalier. But though she started, it was not with fear, but surprise; for the cavalier, in whom she had expected to find a ruthless enemy, was no other than her lover.

“Is’t thou?” she exclaimed. “Come forth to the fire.”

Hildebrand, thus invited, stepped out of the closet, and advanced with her to the fire.

“How camest thou hither, dear lady?” he inquired.

“I came to seek thee, Senhor,” answered Inez, blushing. “I was afeard, from the manner of thy retreat, that thou mightst have met some mishap, and be lying disabled in the garden. How didst thou come hither?”

“It may be briefly told, dear lady,” said Hildebrand. “When I had got me behind the curtain, in thy chamber, I found the casement was open; and, looking out, I observed the veranda over the rearward door, by which we had gained ingress to the house, only a few feet beneath. Meantime, thy churlish guardian, as I suppose him, did intrude on thy presence, and I heard him and thee bandying high words. It struck me, on this hint, that, if he should hap to fall on my covert, ’twould bring on thee more particular injury; and, so thinking, I sought to get me beyond his reach. The casement being already open, I turned myself over the sill with ease; and the noise made by your voices, which anger and jealousy had raised to the very highest parlance, prevented my proceedings from being heard.” [232]

“’Twas well we talked so loud,” smiled Inez. “But how then?”

“Clinging round the lower frame of the casement,” resumed Hildebrand, “I dropped my feet to the veranda, and there, standing upright, surveyed its height from the ground. It looked a marvellous great distance, but I knew, from my experience of such matters, that it got this look of magnitude from the prevailing darkness; and, supposing it to involve but little peril, I made a bold spring for ’t. My conjecture proved correct, and I lit safely on the ground.” [233]

“’Twas bravely done,” said Inez, unwittingly clinging more fondly to his arm. “But having reached the garden, how was it thou didst not pursue thy retreat?”

“By this hand,” answered Hildebrand, raising her trembling hand to his lips, “I could not have won the street, an’ I had been minded. I had scarce touched the ground, when a man started out on the path before me, with something in his hand, which I took to be a rapier. Though I was not afeard to encounter him, I had no desire to spill blood, and, therefore, I resolved to keep *perdu* a while. But he was on the watch, and, whether he suspected my vicinity, or simply sought to overlook the house, he held his ground, and so kept me close. This wearied me, and I determined, whatever should ensue, to set forward again. The darkness favoured me, and, keeping close to the house, I crept stealthily onward, and paused not till I came here. After staying here a space, I had concluded to sally out, and, if no one should be about, try to gain the street; but at this juncture, I heard thy step approach, and that, of course, brought me to a stand. Not doubting that thou wast some enemy, I looked round for a hiding-place; and, by good fortune, espied yonder closet, where thou didst happily discover me.” [234]

“’Tis a downright tale of adventure,” observed Inez, with a smile.

“And I will be surety,” remarked Hildebrand, in reply, “thy progress hither hath also been venturesome. How didst thou fare, lady?” [235]

Inez, quite reassured by their seeming security, did not hesitate to meet his inquiry with a full account of her excursion, and the thoughts and apprehensions that, according as its incidents were favourable or adverse, or her anxiety for Hildebrand more or less pressing, had marked its progress. Her narrative had a deeper effect on Hildebrand, whom his recent moments of

reflection had rendered more collected, and less subservient to the wild impulses of passion, than she supposed; and inspired him with a more apparent interest than she had looked for. Indeed, in its detail of risks and terrors, it exhibited such a devoted affection for him, above what he had sought to excite, that he could no longer regard her as a mere light-of-love, or safely venture to trifle with her heart. The artless narration awakened his better nature, and, by the very confidence that it placed in him, called up in his bosom a sense of remorse, that was far from lending a stimulant to the dictates of passion. In the revelation of her fears and anxieties, he saw the tenderness and deep sensibility of her amiable heart, and became aware, by this discovery, that her character was not composed of the light elements he had imagined, but of all the choice and sterling qualities of her sex. [236]

It would have been well for Hildebrand if he had paused on this interposition of his better judgment. It would have been a happy reflection for him, at a more advanced period of his life, that the first compunctious qualms of his warm and generous nature had not been unheeded, and that he had made a timely retreat from the temptation which he had so diligently sought. But his remorse and hesitation lasted only while he remained silent. Directly he replied to Inez, they began to subside, and, with the renewal of the conversation, his passion revived.

If Hildebrand betrayed such indecision under this first trial, it may reasonably be expected, from her youth and inexperience, not to mention the greater weakness of her sex, that Inez should be off her guard in an equal degree. Her passion, indeed, was true and genuine, and was becoming deeper and more deep every moment. It was attachment—not only to his person, but to his thoughts, wishes, and character; an interest in everything that, now or hereafter, in any measure concerned him, and which was gradually and imperceptibly absorbing all thought and care of herself, and making him the leading influence of her most precious affections. [237]

Her attachment had just attained that crisis, if we may use such a term, at which it would be difficult, but might not be impossible, to uproot or restrain it. Here she might pause, but a single step more, with whatever caution it were taken, must be decisive and final, and could never be retraced. Whether she knew this, or not, or ever gave it a thought, she did not pause once, but left her affections without the least guard, and exposed to all the impressions which a fervid and sanguine temperament, free from the least taint of selfishness, could derive from the dangerous and very striking peculiarity of her position. [238]

The timidity she had manifested on discovering Hildebrand in the closet gradually wore away, and, whether from the excitement of conversation, or the fellowship that sprang from a sense of surrounding peril, by which they were both alike affected, she shortly became more confident. She had dropped her hold of Hildebrand's arm, but had suffered him, by way of requital, to retain possession of her small hand, which he probably considered a greater favour. Whatever light he viewed it in, however, it did not lead him to forget, in the pleasure of the passing moment, that his situation was one of some danger, and that it was expedient to make an early effort to gain the street. After conversing with Inez for a while, he reminded her of this, and proposed that he should now set out. [239]

"Ah, art thou so hasty?" said Inez, plaintively. "Even thus restless, I fear me, will be thy professed love, which will soon wander from me, to light on some other."

"'T'faith, fair Inez, 'tis thy reproach that is hasty," answered Hildebrand. "But"—

"Hush!" whispered Inez, shrinking back on his arm.

Hildebrand, following her eye, glanced anxiously at the door. Listening a moment, he distinctly heard the tread of footsteps, and some voices, as it seemed to him, conversing in whispers. He had hardly time to seize the hilt of his rapier, when the door was thrown open, and two cavaliers, with their rapiers already drawn, sprang into the room. The light of the fire, which the draught through the open door had somewhat brightened, enabled Hildebrand to distinguish their faces; and, to his surprise, he recognised in the foremost cavalier an old and unexpected enemy:—it was Don Felix di Corva. [240]

CHAPTER VIII. [241]

Although Dame Shedlock had fully explained to Zedekiah and Abigail the mystery of Sir Walter Raleigh's pipe, it must not be supposed that those two individuals were satisfied, by this unsupported testimony of their mistress, that the said pipe was merely a harmless source of recreation, and no way allied to the powers and elements of the infernal regions. They forbore to alarm the neighbourhood, and, to the eye of their mistress, appeared to award her explanation implicit credence; but their belief that the pipe was Sir Walter's familiar demon, by means of which he corresponded with Lucifer, was unshaken, and too firmly rooted in their minds to be easily removed. [242]

Zedekiah, indeed, did not care much, after his first fright had subsided, whether it were true or not, so long as he was beyond Sir Walter's reach; but Abigail's horror of the Evil One was more inveterate. No sooner had Dame Shedlock retired, than she made Zedekiah sensible, by a few hurried words, how deeply this horror was now moving her, and implored him to lend his aid towards blocking the Enemy out. There was but one way, in her opinion, in which the blocking out could be effected; and this was by procuring a horseshoe, and nailing it, with the fore-part upwards, on the outside of the kitchen-door. Without ever having been suspected of sorcery, she

had the reputation of being deeply versed in the science of charms, as her whole life, in private, was one uninterrupted precaution against bad luck and witches; and, therefore, Zedekiah readily believed that this contrivance would be fully adequate to the purpose in view, and constitute a barrier that the devil could not pass. There was one bar to its success, however, that he thought calculated to cause them some inconvenience; and this was, that they had no horseshoe. [243]

"Be that all thou canst say?" asked Abigail, in answer to this objection of the man-of-all-work. "Doth thy horse run barefoot, then?"

"Scoff not, woman!" replied Zedekiah; "for the beast hath in nothing offended thee. Verily, he is shod complete."

"Then, we will straight unshoe him," returned Abigail. "Better a lazy beast should go barefoot, than harm should come to any Christian folk."

This, however, was a proposition that Zedekiah would not concur in; and it required all the arguments that Abigail could muster, independent of a forcible and highly-coloured representation of the danger that threatened them, and which might be so easily averted, before he would engage to carry it into effect. Even when he did give a reluctant consent, he had nearly marred all, in Abigail's estimation, by setting forward for the stable with his right foot, instead of taking the first step with his left. This mistake brought them to a stand, and, in order to render it of no effect, it became necessary, according to the rules which Abigail followed, that they should turn round three times, and then set forward anew. Having made these gyrations, they prepared to proceed, Zedekiah going first, and Abigail following with the poker. [244]

Moving along in this order, they had just gained the kitchen-door, when a loud crack, like the report of a pistol, which came on them from their rear, brought them both to a halt. The report emanated from the fire, and was caused by a large log of wood, which had been for some time consuming, splitting in twain, and discharging a small fragment into the middle of the room. Some people would have considered this a natural consequence of the wood splitting, and would have had no notion, in their views of cause and effect, that it could refer to, or foretoken, a coming event; but, fortunately for her design, Abigail was not so simple. She knew well, from a long experience of such matters, that it portended something of moment, and, therefore, directly she became aware that the noise emanated from the fire, and that it had been caused in the manner described, she hastened to gain possession of the small fragment of wood which had been shot forth. [245]

It was lying in the middle of the room, and seemed, on a cursory view, to be of a shape perfectly unmeaning, and to have no resemblance to any one thing in the whole world. Abigail, however, did not view it with ordinary eyes, and she quickly discerned that its shape was but too indicant of its melancholy import. [246]

"Woe's me!" she exclaimed: "'tis a coffin!"

"A coffin!" cried Zedekiah, in ecstasy. "Is't for me?"

"By cock and pie, I think it be!" answered Abigail, very willing to take the impending calamity off herself.

Zedekiah, far from being dejected, was quite elated by the prospect thus opened, and received the reputed coffin from Abigail with the greatest eagerness.

"I am to be at Cummer Griffin's burying to-day," he said. "What a goodly corpse the cummer makes!"

And here, to explain this morbid disposition of Zedekiah, it may be observed, that that worthy considered everything that related to coffins and funerals, in what shape soever it might present itself, as one of the most fruitful sources of human enjoyment. Some people might think a bridal, or a christening, in which all is life and festivity, worthy of attention; but Zedekiah's object of desire was a burial. Many would have preferred to pass the summer evenings in the green fields, where, if the weather served, every object looked fresh and cheerful, and the air was laden with fragrance; but Zedekiah, with a singular constancy, took his walks in the churchyard, and recreated himself among the tombs. He could tell the date of every death in the neighbourhood for a whole age; and could repeat literally, at a moment's warning, the epitaph and inscription on any given tomb. He attended every funeral for miles round; and though, by his own account, he had never yet had the happiness to officiate as chief mourner, he always held a conspicuous and prominent place in the procession, and was considered as indispensable at a decent interment as the undertaker himself. [247]

These circumstances being borne in mind, it will be readily imagined, on a closer glance at his character, that Zedekiah looked forward to the funeral of Cummer Griffin with no small degree of pleasure. Abigail, however, having a mortal horror of death, did not participate in this feeling, and she replied to Zedekiah's remarks in a tone of some asperity. [248]

"What a pestilent din dost thou make o' this burying!" she said. "Thou'dst like all the world to die, so thou mightst but see them buried. But let us to our work, or the Evil One, mayhap, will be upon us anon, and lead us some other dance."

"Art advised that the horseshoe will keep him out?" inquired Zedekiah.

"Ay, and conjure him into the Red Sea, too," answered Abigail. "But, go to! Let us about it!"

Zedekiah acquiesced, and, without more ado, they set forward, taking care to put out the left foot first. They passed along unmolested, and, in due time, reached the stable, where Dobbin—by [249]

which humble name the Rosinante-looking steed described in a former chapter was known—was lodged.

Abigail, pursuant to a concerted understanding, stood on sentry without, with the poker clutched tightly in her hand, while Zedekiah proceeded to bring Dobbin forth. That patient beast passively submitted to his hand, and he was brought out, unconscious of his doom, to undergo the operation that Abigail had suggested.

“Be wary now, Zedekiah,” remarked Abigail, at this juncture; “for the demon, thou mayst be sure, will be well on his guard. Do thou look to Dobbin, and I will keep watch against harm.”

“I begin to be marvellously afeard,” replied Zedekiah, in a tremulous voice. “I would the demon were well in the Red Sea.” [250]

But there was, he knew, no hope of the demon absconding, or being transported to the remote locality alluded to, until the horseshoe should be fixed on the kitchen-door; and therefore, trusting that Abigail would not fail to keep a good watch, he proceeded to take the preliminary and foremost step in this great undertaking.

Turning his face towards the back of Abigail, a pace or two in her rear, he lowered his head to a level with her waist; and, drawing one of the hind legs of Dobbin between his own legs, raised it up, with the foot uppermost, so as to view the shoe. Meantime, Abigail, with commendable caution, swung her poker round, on either side, as far as her arm would reach, and this rendered any intrusion of the demon almost an impossibility. But how can mortals, however skilled in charms, expect to be able to cope with demons? The very precaution which, in the simplicity of her nature, Abigail considered inductive to success, and a bar to every demoniacal approach, was destined to be the engine of their overthrow. While the trembling Zedekiah was yet surveying Dobbin’s shoe, preparatory to commencing operations, Abigail, in swinging round the poker, dealt the poor horse a tremendous blow in the ribs, and let the poker rebound from her hand. Dobbin struck out instantly, and, with a spirit which seemed scarcely his own, kicked Zedekiah bodily forward, knocking down both him and Abigail at one and the same time. This done, he gave utterance to a neigh of triumph, and cantered gaily into his stable. [251]

Zedekiah was on his feet in a moment. He had no doubt, from what had passed, that the demon had baffled the precaution of Abigail, and was about to visit them with summary vengeance. His terror was excessive; but it did not blind him to the fact, as he thought it, that his safety lay in flight; and, therefore, on gaining his feet, he made off at his last speed. [252]

He kept on his course till he came to the outer boundary of the front garden, where a gate, which had formerly been protected by a porter’s lodge, but at this time was wholly unguarded, opened into the high-road. Here, as it was some distance from the stable, he ventured to halt, and sought to recover his interrupted breath.

Zedekiah’s mind was not very retentive, and though, on the present occasion, his memory of the demon was kept alive for a time by his terror, he gradually began to recede from this fixed idea, and to fall back on such fancies as, from their giddy and fleeting character, were more natural to his mind, and more consonant with his temper. A few minutes after he had come to a halt, the first cause of his flight, having made no settled impression upon him, had passed from his recollection, and left him to wander at will over the various and disordered images of an unbridled mind. While he was thus engaged, a sprinkle of rain fell around, and this—so easy is it always to call the imagination to its leading theme—reminded him that he had an interest in the weather for the passing day, as it was to witness the celebration of Cummer Griffin’s funeral. His countenance, which hitherto had been sad and gloomy, brightened as the rain increased, and, after a while, he gave utterance to his feelings in an old distich:— [253]

“Happy is the bridal that glistens in the sun,
And blessed is the corpse that the rain rains on.”

“Whose burying comes off to-day?” asked a voice behind him, apparently speaking through the gate.

Zedekiah, with the view of facing the quarter from which he might expect any danger, had his back to the gate, and his face turned in the direction of the stable; but on being thus accosted, he altered his position, and, with fear and trembling, turned his face round to the gate. His fear, however, was not of long continuance; for, on effecting this evolution, he perceived that the individual who had accosted him was no more than a mortal man, and one, moreover, whom he well knew. [254]

“Old Cummer Griffin’s, Master Gray,” he answered.

Bernard Gray—for the person addressed was no other—appeared to be somewhat downcast by his intelligence.

“So, the old cummer is dead,” he said. “Well, she was a round age, I ween; and led an indifferent good life.”

“She was fifty odd when Gaffer Wiggins was buried,” remarked Zedekiah, “and that is twenty years ago, come Martinmas.”

“So long?” said Bernard, “Ah! life fleets fast. But how comes it, Zedekiah, thou art not at the cummer’s now? Thou art not wont to be thus tardy.” [255]

“The Lord required me elsewhere,” answered Zedekiah. “We have been at the Grange all the morning.”

"How?" inquired Bernard. "Had ye aught to do at Sir Edgar de Neville's?"

"Ay, ay, we have chained down the arch-malignant," replied Zedekiah. "The Pope may deliver him now, an' he can."

His information, though full of weight and meaning, was not very explicit, or calculated to give Bernard a correct idea of the momentous event it referred to. Still it let him know that something strange had happened, in which, if it should any way have affected Hildebrand Clifford, he might himself be interested; and he applied himself diligently to learn from Zedekiah the full particulars. Some time elapsed before he could bring matters to such a satisfactory issue; but, in the end, he accomplished his purpose, and thus became acquainted, among other things, with the exact position of affairs at the Grange, excepting only the solitary circumstance of the disappearance of Hildebrand. [256]

Satisfied that he had learned from Zedekiah all he knew, he bade that worthy a hasty adieu, and took his departure. It was now approaching the hour at which, according to their appointment of the previous day, he was to have an interview with Hildebrand, and, with an anxious and troubled spirit, he hastened towards the spot where they had agreed to meet.

He did not expect that Hildebrand would keep his appointment. He felt that, in the existing state of things, it would be difficult for him to absent himself from the Grange, though it were only for a few moments, without showing disrespect to his host; and from what he had seen of Hildebrand, and the views he entertained of his character, he thought it unlikely that he would incur an imputation of that sort. Indeed, he was not without some apprehension, from all that he had heard, that Hildebrand might be threatened with danger himself, and, perhaps, be involved in the charge which had been brought against Sir Edgar. It was true, he argued, when this apprehension first occurred to him, that Hildebrand had not been mentioned by Zedekiah, but that might arise from his supposing that he did not know Hildebrand, and therefore, in the ordinary course of things, could feel no curiosity about what should happen to him. He knew that Shedlock, if he found any opportunity, would strive his utmost to make away with Hildebrand, and his proceedings against Sir Edgar might be a mere feint, designed, with a Satanic cunning, to cover an attack on Hildebrand. As he mused on these possibilities, he was almost inclined, at one time, to turn back to Zedekiah, and see if he could glean anything more from him; but ultimately, thinking this would be a fruitless mission, he changed his mind, and pursued his original intention of proceeding straight to his appointment with Hildebrand. [257]

It may speak little in Bernard's favour, on a first view, that the unhappy consequences of the attack on Sir Edgar's carriage, though they now caused him some anxiety of themselves, awakened in him no remorse or compunction for his share in the attack. The outrage had been attended with the loss of two lives, and had since, through the interference of Shedlock, involved the innocent family against whom it had been levelled in the deepest affliction; but, for all this, the enthusiast, amidst his concern for these evils, had not one prick of repentance. Was he, then, void of every sense of humanity? was his heart insensible to the most urgent calls of feeling and affection? No! It was stored, to the very brim, with choice and noble sympathies; it was naturally melting and pitiful as a child's; but the remembrance of horrors that it would curdle the blood to mention, and which no interval of time could soften or deface, locked up his gentle qualities, and mailed his nature in revenge. [258]

Walking at a quick pace, he soon arrived at Neville Park, and pursued his way, without meeting any interruption, to the spot where his appointment with Hildebrand was to come off. It was some time past noon, the hour agreed on: but though he looked round, as far as he could see, in every direction, there was no sign of Hildebrand coming. He lingered about for an hour, walking to and fro; but, at the expiration of that period, he was no nearer his object than at first. Although, in the main, this was no more than he had expected, it greatly increased his anxiety, and tended to confirm his doubts of Hildebrand's safety. He remembered that Hildebrand was to take his departure from the Grange to-day, on business which, at their last interview, he had alleged to be extremely urgent; and he was assured, therefore, as they could not meet again for some time, that, if he were at liberty, he would make an effort to keep his appointment. But another hour passed, and Bernard, now grown impatient, was still pacing the park-walk, and still utterly alone. Wearied with his watch, he began to grow angry, and, as he came to a sudden pause, he gave utterance to his feelings in a passionate exclamation. [260]

"The scornful boy neglects me!" he said. "I will even take me homewards."

The idea of home reminded him that Hildebrand had inquired after his residence, and suggested, on a second thought, that, as he might be unable to meet him in the park, it was not improbable that he would seek him there. Meditating on this probability, he determined to repair to his lodgings at once.

It was in an obscure alehouse, distinguished by the sign of the "Angel," and situated at the further extremity of the neighbouring village of Lantwell, that Bernard had fixed his residence. Although an alehouse, however, it was a retired tenement; and old Cummer Fisher, who was its proprietress, and only resident beside himself, was rarely invaded by any great influx of guests. Being at the other side of Lantwell, it was two good miles, if not more, from the spot he started from; but, after he had once determined what course he would pursue, he set off at a smart pace, and shortly arrived before the hostel-door. [261]

But a brief greeting passed between Bernard and his hostess, and, this despatched, he proceeded to his own room, which was on the upper floor. Here, secure from interruption, he revolved over again all those reflections and conjectures that he had started in Neville Park, and impatiently

waited for whatever might be the issue.

But no tidings reached him that night. The next morning, meditating as before, he made certain that he would that day receive some communication from Hildebrand; but, as on the previous day, hour after hour passed, and the morning gradually elapsed, without bringing him any intelligence of his friend's situation. His worst apprehensions were now becoming confirmed, and he began to have no doubt, on mature and deliberate reflection, that Shedlock had involved Hildebrand in the charge which he had brought against Sir Edgar de Neville, and had committed them both to prison. [262]

Directly this conjecture took full possession of Bernard's mind, he formed a resolution to ascertain, by immediate and personal inquiries, how far it could be borne out by the facts. The only way of prosecuting such a purpose, in his situation—which, from his participation in the outrage that all these troubles had sprung from, prevented him from making any inquiries at the Grange—was by repairing to Exeter, and there learning who had been arrested; and the course thus open to him, though it was not unattended with some risk to himself, he resolved to pursue. Accordingly, having saddled and mounted his horse, he set out, and pushed forward for Exeter. [263]

It was night when he entered the city; and he thought it advisable, before he advanced his mission any further, to provide himself a lodging, and procure bait for his horse. Both these objects being effected, he sallied forth on foot, determined to leave no means untried of finding out Hildebrand.

It was at the countinghouse of Shedlock and Craftall, in the High-street, that Bernard first paused in his excursion. The house was shut up; but in the part which might be more properly called the countinghouse, there was some trace of a light, peeping through the outlines of the window-shutters, which showed that one of the inmates was yet astir. The room in question, like the generality of commercial offices, opened into the street, and, consequently, Bernard was able to approach the door, and there listen a while before he solicited admittance. [264]

All was still within; and it suddenly occurred to Bernard, on meditating how he should proceed, that it would be well to try if the door were unfastened before he knocked, and, should the result be favourable, enter without notice. In pursuance of this design, he cautiously raised the latch, and, pushing forward, the door flew open.

Hastily glancing in, Bernard perceived a man at a contiguous desk, immediately in front of a lighted lamp, whom he recognised as Craftall. He was leaning forward, with his elbows fixed on the desk, and his hands, which were raised to a level with his lips, clasped together before him, as if he were engaged in prayer. Hearing Bernard's step, he snatched up some article that, while he was in the posture described, had been standing on the desk before him, and hastily slipped it into one of the drawers; and then, with the same precipitation, turned to see who was his visiter. [265]

His face was deadly pale, and his thin, shrivelled lips, on his turning fully round, were agitated by a nervous quiver, which could only be caused by a very stirring emotion. Whatever it might be that thus discomposed him, the discovery that his visiter was Bernard Gray, whom he well knew, by no means tended to inspire and embolden him with new spirit. It was, however, no part of Bernard's design, on the present occasion, to suffer him to see that he was sensible of his confusion, and, with the view of soothing and diverting his suspicions, he at once proceeded to draw him into discourse.

"The good time of the night to thee, Master Craftall," he said. "Hath Master Shedlock been here of late?"

Though his faculties were somewhat disordered, Craftall's characteristic caution, far from being asleep, was more prompt and lively under the pressure of his embarrassment, and he was less open to a surprise than at a moment of composure. The inquiry of Bernard, though deliberately and readily propounded, might signify nothing, and he believed that such was the case; but, however this might be, it was his laudable and discreet practice ever to be on his guard. Being obliged, however, on the passing occasion, to speak on the instant, and without forethought, it was difficult to frame an answer that would not some way commit him; and for once the man of craft hesitated. But his hesitation was so transient, that it could hardly be detected; and, after a moment's interval, he was prepared with a reply. [266]

"By dad, I don't know," he said.

Bernard smiled as he rejoined, "Doth he purpose to come here shortly?"

"In faith, Master Bernard, I cannot say," answered Craftall.

Whether he sought to entangle him in talk, or merely to amuse himself, Bernard did not give over his inquiries with these rebuffs, but continued to push the cautious merchant for a straightforward answer. [267]

"He still lives at New Bethlehem, I ween?" he said.

"By my troth, 'tis not unlikely," returned Craftall. [268]

It was clear that, say what he might, Bernard would be able to draw but little information from the wily trader; but, for all this, he was not inclined to let his project fall to the ground. He saw that Craftall was in momentary expectation of another visiter, and he thought that, if hard pressed, he might yield him some information, in order to induce him to retire. It was the fact of Craftall glancing repeatedly at a contiguous door, leading to an inner apartment, in the rear of Bernard, that induced him to lend this conjecture credit; and, from the anxiety of his glances, Bernard judged rightly, that he would regard his departure as a deliverance. For the reason

stated, however, he determined to remain, and still sought to keep Craftall in discourse.

"Be the report true, Master Craftall," he pursued, "that certain Papists have been lately hatching a new plot?"

Craftall, from whatever cause, was quite disconcerted by this inquiry, and again exhibited the liveliest confusion. Nevertheless, he rendered his watchful interrogator a prompt reply.

"Worthy Master Jenkins, the city-bailiff, hath told me there was such a report abroad," he said. "Gentle Master Pry—"

At this moment, some person within, as it seemed, inflicted on the door behind Bernard, before alluded to, three distinct taps; and the speaker abruptly paused.

"Some one calls," said Bernard, turning towards the door; "I had best see who it be." [269]

"No, no! I will see to that myself!" cried Craftall, springing nimbly before him.

Bernard, without objecting a word, suffered him to pass him, and he pushed on to the door. While he was yet on his way thither, Bernard stepped softly round the desk, and, with a quick and steady hand, drew open the topmost drawer. It was in this drawer that, on his first entry, he had observed Craftall place some article which he snatched from the desk, and which he evidently wished to conceal. Anxious to discover his secret, Bernard looked eagerly into the drawer, and found that the object of his search was its sole contents. With a trembling grasp, he raised it to the light; and his eyes lit up with a sparkling frenzy, strangely at variance with their previous serenity, as he discerned that it was a crucifix.

Craftall had by this time reached the door. Instead of drawing it open, however, he proceeded to lock it, and then, with a quiet smile on his face, turned to meet Bernard again. As he did so, Bernard held up the crucifix, and his smile, which had risen in exultation, passed into a quick spasm. [270]

"I hold thee mine!" cried Bernard. "But the Spirit is upon me! The fire thou wot'st of, that makes saints, is blistering my very heart. I might do thee harm: so I'll leave thee now."

Thus speaking, he made towards the outer door. Before he could reach it, however, Craftall, nerved by despair, sprang after him, and fastened on his arm.

"Mercy! mercy!" he said.

"Mercy to a Papist!" cried Bernard. "Ha! ha!"

And, with a slight effort, he threw the supplicant from him, and dashed into the street.

CHAPTER IX.

[271]

True courage, distinguished from that which is called forth by particular occasions, and the operation of a powerful and headlong excitement, comprehends not only a contempt for danger, but self-possession under surprise. To meet an expected peril, for which we have had time to prepare, is a trial only for the most ordinary minds; but to retain firmness and judgment under a shock, attended by circumstances of which we could have no possible anticipation, and which render the danger more striking and formidable, undoubtedly requires a brave and intrepid spirit.

Hildebrand, on the entry into his retreat of two armed men, one of whom he recognised as an individual that he had supposed to be in England, certainly experienced no small surprise; but, despite of this, he was perfectly firm and collected. On the other hand, Inez was quite confounded, and her presence of mind, which she had hitherto maintained entire, appeared to have utterly deserted her. [272]

There was no time for hesitation. The two intruders, preparatory to making an onset, had already unsheathed their rapiers, and, if the expression of their respective countenances might be received as evidence, seemed to be stirred and animated by the most determined hostility. The posture taken up by Hildebrand, however, and his evident resolution, induced them to pause, and, after a moment's interval, to enter on a parley.

"Surrender, Sir!" cried Don Felix. "We have a warrant from the corregidor, apart from any suit of our own, for thine immediate apprehension." [273]

"I cry you mercy, Senhor," replied Hildebrand, "but, with thy good leave, I must hold thy warrant in exceeding doubt. Thou art no alguazil, I know; and, this admitted (and 'tis past dispute), where be the powers that will put the warrant in force?"

"Thou shalt see them anon," answered Don Felix. And, raising his voice, he added, in Spanish, "Without, there!"

He had scarcely uttered his brief summons, when the tread of feet was heard without, and, the next moment, four alguazils, armed with their long staves of office, presented themselves at the doorway. This array, however, did not have that effect on Hildebrand that the two cavaliers had expected.

"Senhors," he cried, maintaining his original defensive posture, "I have done your laws no offence, and I am resolved that ye shall not take me alive. Look to it, therefore! or your [274]

unprovoked opposition, if ye press it further, may bring on you serious detriment."

"Tut, Sir!" cried the cavalier who had not yet spoken, contemptuously, "dost think to brave out such a power as ours?"

Hildebrand, seeing that nothing was to be gained from parley, was about to manifest his purpose by action, and, though the opposing power was so decidedly superior, endeavour to carry his egress by force. Before he could commence his meditated assault, however, he was arrested by Inez.

That lady, having for the last few minutes been perfectly passive, and left to recover from the shock she had sustained, had by this time somewhat collected herself. The appearance of the alguazils, indeed, being also unexpected, had slightly discomposed her again; but as she observed the unshaken attitude of Hildebrand, and, what surprised her more, that it was not without effect on his adversaries, her determination revived, and she acquired firmness and nerve from the disposition of her lover. [275]

There was a flush of anger on her face as she stepped forward, and, though the cavalier who had last spoken, and who was no other than Don Gonzalez, her guardian, met her with a smile, his look sank before her flashing eye.

"There is no need of the corregidor here, Don Gonzalez," she cried, "or even of an alcaide, as I know thee to be. This cavalier is a guest of mine."

"And there is no need that thou shouldst publish thine own dishonour," answered Gonzalez.

"Thou liest, villain!" returned Inez, trembling with passion. "But beware! beware! I will go bury me in a convent, but I will be revenged on thee!" [276]

Gonzalez turned pale on hearing this threat; and though, at first sight, the injury it would invoke against him might seem but small, he did not shrink without good cause. Whatever way he might ultimately dispose of Inez, he would be able, by a little underhand dealing, to secure a large share of her dower to himself, and, further, avoid all troublesome accounts; but if Inez should take refuge in a convent, and unite herself with the church, his views in that respect, however artfully contrived, would be utterly frustrated. There was a long account of stewardship to make up, and, if that could be accomplished, years of administration to report on, which he knew the church would not overlook; and these reflections gave a weight and importance to his ward's threat, that he might well regard with great dismay.

His hesitation was not unobserved. Don Felix, watching him intently, detected it in a moment, and, seeing that he was silenced, began to fear that he would suffer Hildebrand to escape. As he thought that such an issue would be very unsatisfactory, and might involve him in some difficulty, if not actual peril, he deemed it advisable to interpose; and, by taking all blame from Gonzalez, avert any further interference of the enraged Inez. [277]

"Senhora," he said, "thy right to receive what guests thou wilt cannot be questioned. We apprehend the stranger, not because he is thy guest, but because he is an Englishman, and a spy."

"This is the second time, Sir Spaniard," cried Hildebrand, in Spanish, "that thou hast named me a spy. I spared thy life before; do thou look to it now!"

Before any one could come between them, he dealt Don Felix a blow, on his first guard, that knocked his sword out of his hand; and then made a spring at his throat. He had hardly seized his collar, however, when he was himself laid hold of by the alguazils, who, under cover of his attack, had entered the kitchen unnoticed, and now effected his capture. [278]

But Inez, though the terror and excitement of the scene had almost overpowered her, was determined not to surrender him without a struggle. She had observed, with a quickness of perception that was not unusual in her, that her threat of retiring into a convent had not fallen on her uncle unheeded; and at this juncture, the effect of its first appliance emboldened her to recur to it.

"Don Gonzalez, mind thee what I have threatened," she said. "Let the cavalier depart, and I promise thee, afore these witnesses, to abide myself by thy disposal."

"Lady," cried Hildebrand, "if thou wouldst do me a service, let my state be made known to the English Ambassador."

Don Felix, who, on being delivered from the grasp of Hildebrand, had shrunk a pace or two back, here stepped forward again, and darted at Hildebrand a glance of exultant enmity. [279]

"No need to trouble the lady, Sir," he said; "we will bear thy commands to the Ambassador ourselves. But of what avail were this? The Ambassador, whom thou thinkst will succour thee, is in prison himself; and his heretic servants have been attached by the Inquisition."

"Thou liest again, knave!" exclaimed Hildebrand. "'Tis more than Spain durst venture on."

"Spain will venture more anon," said Don Felix, sneeringly. "Thou wilt soon find her fleets in London river."

A light now struck upon Hildebrand, and as he thought of the large ships of war which he had seen in Cadiz harbour, and which probably were but a small part of the armament in preparation, he was inclined to receive this assertion with some degree of credence. But, whether it were true or not, he could have no doubt about the danger of his own situation, or of the fact that, do what he might, resistance would be perfectly fruitless. His only resource, therefore, at the present [280]

moment, was to submit, and to reserve his efforts to escape till a more favourable period.

"Ye will have to give an account of your doings, nevertheless," he observed. "But I am your prisoner now; bear me whither ye will."

"Ye know your orders, alguazils," cried Don Felix. "Bear him off!"

"Hold!" screamed Inez, "or, by the holy mass, ye shall heartily rue it! Don Gonzalez! an' thou wouldst keep me from the Sisters of Mercy, have the cavalier released."

"I durst not, Inez," answered her guardian, in a deprecatory tone.

"Thou shalt! thou shalt!" exclaimed Inez, "or, by sweet Jesu!—"

But the excitement, which she had all along supported with difficulty, now shook her brain, and, as she was making a step forward, she reeled back, and broke into an hysterical peal of laughter. She would have fallen, but, whether from pity, or some motive of interest, her uncle sprang to her assistance, and caught her in his arms. [281]

"Away with the prisoner!" he cried to Don Felix. "I will myself look to my ward."

The alguazils, on a signal from Don Felix, tightened their hold of Hildebrand, and drew him forth to the garden. Don Felix followed them, and, under his direction, they proceeded to the garden-door, whence they passed into the street. Here, enjoining them to take good care of their prisoner, Don Felix left them, and they pushed on with their charge to the city-prison.

The prison, being situate at the other end of the city, towards the mainland, was some distance from their starting-point, and stood in a quarter to which Hildebrand was a stranger. But, walking at a brisk rate, their progress thither did not occupy them long, and they soon came to a stand before the prison-door. [282]

But a few words of explanation passed between the alguazils and the gaoler. These rendered, Hildebrand was, without further ceremony, pushed within the gaol-door, and given over to the gaoler and his assistants. Two of the last-named functionaries, by the direction of their principal, instantly secured him, and hastened to deprive him of his arms. Having effected their purpose, they hurried him down a flight of steps, at the lower end of the passage, to a subterraneous dungeon, where they left him in hopeless captivity.

Solitude and bondage are melancholy companions. Hearts that never knew the melting influence of pity, or experienced the thrill of fear, but met every vicissitude with a stern and unbending front, have been cowed and overwhelmed by their first whispers, and have been hurried on, by an enlarged and more intimate fellowship, into distraction and despair. They are a sort of living death, enclosing the spark of life in a walled grave, where the air, so sweet and buoyant without, is pestilence, and one's breath corruption. Acquainted with these, we seem to be dead before our time, and yet, though shut out from action, to live in thought,—to suffer all the terror and captivity of the grave, and be convulsed with the workings of a restless vitality. [283]

As he heard the fastenings of his dungeon-door secured, a chill like that of death, if one can form a conception of the last sensibility of the dying, crept through the bosom of Hildebrand. He was there alone—without solace, without hope, without even God.

He durst not pray. The reflection that he had been brought into this situation by his own imprudence—nay, by a corrupt and abandoned selfishness, which affected the peace of another—this reflection was upon him; and, when he thought of imploring the protection of Heaven, it met his prayer in his throat, and turned it back with a reproach. [284]

But the image of Inez, though predominant, was not his only accuser. If, urged by despair, he drove it for a moment from his mind, a hundred bitter and remorseful recollections rushed into its place. His imprudence, if so mild a term may be retained, had not only brought destruction on himself, from which there was no prospect of escape, but, in its consequences, would entail ruin on others. He could not think of his ship, lying in an enemy's harbour, within the range of the batteries, and every moment liable to be visited by the local officials, without a thrill of anguish. Even his benefactor, Sir Walter Raleigh, would not be exempt from the effects of his folly; and, in the utter failure of his design on the Mexican fleet, which he had laboured so diligently to accomplish, and in which he had embarked the chief part of his fortune, would suffer irreparable detriment. Nor did Hildebrand forget, while pursuing this train of reflection, to charge himself with having failed seriously in his duty to his country. The assertion of Don Felix, on his being arrested, that the Spanish government contemplated the invasion of England, and which the martial preparations everywhere in progress amply corroborated, afforded ground to his conscience for a more startling accusation, and a more bitter and excruciating reproach. [285]

He had stood upright in his dungeon, within a pace or two of the door, ever since he had been left alone, without moving a single step. The darkness around him, like that of Egypt, could almost be felt; but he was insensible to it, and could only think, at that moment, of his folly, his imprudence, and his guilt.

It may seem strange, on a superficial view, that a man who had passed his life in action, and had undergone all manner of vicissitudes and perils, should be reduced by the first touch of calamity to such utter prostration. That a sudden blow to an even and prosperous life should fall with severity, and be met by dejection, is no more than one might expect; but if it unman him who has been adversity's companion, and, in his progress onward, walked hand in hand with all the accidents of war, it excites our surprise, and scarcely seems reasonable, or possible. But, however this may be borne out by ordinary cases, it is no less true, in the particular instance under consideration, that Hildebrand did not meet the passing calamity with any degree of [286]

fortitude. On the contrary, indeed, it found him totally unmanned,—his spirit cowed, his mind foundering, and his once brave heart, that a sense of rectitude would have nerved against the heaviest tribulation, burthened and weighed down by an overwhelming remorse. [287]

It is often at the eleventh hour, when it is too late to make reparation, that a man becomes alive to the full effect of a past and irretrievable excess. Even then, however, if heartily resolved on amendment, it is possible to render the consequences of his trespass less grievous and severe. A good intention involves some of the benignant influence of a good act; and though we should be unable to carry it into effect, the conviction that it had received our best support, and that its failure was not owing to any lack of effort, but to causes beyond our reach, will afford us a savour of that satisfaction and cheerfulness that attend success. When we conceive a sincere regret for wrong we have inflicted on others, the heart is beginning to expand, and, if we may use such a phrase, to develop its resources; and though we may writhe under the first and earlier visitings of self-accusation, and feel its continuance to be torture, it will gradually call up in the heart better and softer feelings, and, in our compassion for those we have injured, lend a comfort and strength to ourselves. [288]

Thus did Hildebrand ultimately attain a certain degree of fortitude and composure. As the reproaches of his conscience became more familiar, and the terrors of his position, from his surveying them over and over again, lost their air of novelty, his manliness seemed to revive, and, though he was still unutterably miserable, his wretchedness was not without dignity, and his remorse was no longer despair.

But, notwithstanding the amelioration of his distress, he remained pensive and restless the whole night. The day—for even in the gloom of his dungeon, to which perfect light was unknown, there was a slight distinction in the seasons, and he could tell the day from the night—found him still awake, and still rapt in anxious reflections.

The morning was somewhat advanced before he received a visit from the gaoler; and though, as his remorseful mood was unshaken, the immediate features of his situation continued to press themselves on his mind, this circumstance did not escape him. It had hardly incurred his notice, however, when, not without feeling some interest in the issue, he heard the fastenings withdrawn from the dungeon-door; and the door being thereupon pushed open, the gaoler entered. [289]

The grim functionary was not alone. He was followed, a few paces in his rear, by a short, broad-built friar, who, from his hesitating step, appeared to enter the cell with anything but complacency.

The friar, for whatever reason, had his cowl drawn close, so that his face was invisible; but, through the small eyelets of the cowl, one could see a spark of gentleness in his eyes, that at once recommended him to favour. He carried a lighted lamp in his hand, and, on passing through the doorway, he held it out before him, and glanced rapidly round the limits of the dungeon. [290]

Meantime, the gaoler, whom familiarity with dungeons rendered less curious, advanced to the unhappy prisoner, and, without a word of greeting, placed before him a repast of bread and water. Leaving him to regale himself therewith, he turned towards the door again; and the friar, who had by this time finished his survey of the dungeon, and fixed his eye so as to meet his, waved him forth.

“Well, have thy will,” said the gaoler, in reply, “but ‘tis only till thou canst take his confession, mind! I will wait thee without.” [291]

Thus sulkily complying, the gaoler passed out of the dungeon, and drew to the door behind him. The friar, as though he looked on his movements with suspicion, followed him with his eye; and, when he had passed out, held up the light, with a fixed and steady hand, to see if he had closed the door. Apparently satisfied on this point, he turned away from the door, and stepped hastily towards Hildebrand.

Hildebrand was in the further corner of the dungeon, seated on the floor, with his arms, to protect them from the cold, folded close over his bosom, and his back resting against the wall. The movements of the friar, though he watched them earnestly, did not induce him to alter his position, and he waited his approach in the same posture.

The friar stood right before him. Coming to a halt, he leaned his head a little forward; and with the hand which he had at liberty—for he carried the light in his left hand—threw back his cowl, and disclosed the features of Inez.

Hildebrand, uttering an exclamation of surprise, sprang to his feet, and caught her by both her hands.

“Hush!” whispered Inez, perceiving that he was about to speak: “remember, thy surly keeper, though without the door, may be within ear-shot. Moreover, what I have to say must be told with despatch.” [292]

“Every word thou sayest,” answered Hildebrand, “is life and blood to me. Speak on!”

But though he was so anxious to hear what she had to say, Hildebrand’s attention was not so wholly engrossed by this object, above every other, that he could look on Inez herself without emotion. Her appearance was not calculated to encourage or confirm his reviving fortitude. On throwing back her cowl, her long black hair, which was wont to be arranged with such exquisite taste, appeared loose and dishevelled, and had evidently been pushed behind her small ears with a rude and careless haste. Her eyes were red with recent weeping, and, withal, by their quick and furtive glances, betrayed an anxiety and restlessness, if not terror, that it was distressing to [293]

behold. Her other features, as far as the light rendered them apparent, looked equally anxious, and her face was pale as death.

A single glance was sufficient to reveal these particulars to Hildebrand; and by the time Inez was ready to answer him, he was able, with a slight effort, to give her statement his undivided attention.

"I have ventured hither," she said, "not without imminent hazard, lest thou shouldst think I had deserted thee, and so grow desperate. There is a young cavalier in this city, right trusty in his disposition, whom I know well—indeed, he is my cousin; and, through him, I think I may do thee some service."

"What may he be?" inquired Hildebrand, eagerly catching at the slightest prospect of succour.

"Little of himself," answered Inez; "for he is a mere youth. Nevertheless, with thy aid, and under thy counsel, he may do thee great service. I will make it a suit to the corregidor (who is a bachelor, and will be well content to do me grace) to grant him a pass to visit thee. When he is here, thou mayst confer with him, and see how he can help thee!" [294]

A conference with such a person did not promise to be attended with any material and decided benefit; but, in fortune's extremity, we are inclined to look on every change, whatever may be its aspect, with an eye of favour, and to tender countenance and welcome to the most flimsy prospect. Incidents that, like the images that the sun calls up on a reflective lake, become mere shadows on inspection, originally assume the shape and attitude of substantial advantages; and when the turbulent flood of life is rushing mercilessly over us, a very thread of hope, which the eye can hardly distinguish, appears to be a cable, and we seek to haul ourselves from the depths by floating straws. [295]

Hildebrand caught at the proposition of Inez as if it had opened a channel for escape.

"How can I ever requite thee, dearest lady?" he said. "I prithee, see the cavalier use despatch in coming."

"Have no fear for that," answered Inez, with unabated agitation.

"There is one service he might do me ere he come," pursued Hildebrand. "Thou knowest now (what I should have told thee before, but from a fear of thy displeasure) that I am an Englishman. Sooth to speak, I am captain of an English cruizer, which lies in the harbour yonder."

"Jesu shield us!" exclaimed Inez, with lips that would have told her terror without words. "Durst thou, then, to enter Cadiz Harbour with a single cruizer?"

"'Twas a perilous deed, certes," answered Hildebrand, "and Heaven grant it prove not fatal! But, to the point. My bark is the outermost one in the harbour, and hath the Scottish flag (St. Andrew's cross, red on white) flying at the stern. I would the cavalier would visit her." [296]

Inez hesitated a moment.

"It shall be done," she said, at length.

"He must inquire out my lieutenant," resumed Hildebrand. And, taking a ring from his finger, he let it drop in the hand of Inez, and continued:—"This ring will be my token to him; and when he knows how I am fast—But, down with thy cowl."

Inez, however, taken by surprise, turned on his face a glance of bewilderment, and made no attempt to give his injunction effect. It was fortunate that Hildebrand immediately perceived her hesitation, or the gaoler, whom he heard entering, and had perceived to be alert in his vocation, would have been upon them before she had resumed her disguise. But observing that her presence of mind was completely gone, he drew down her cowl himself; and thus, by a prompt interposition, which surprise could not arrest, deprived the impending peril of half its terror. [297]

He had hardly drawn down her cowl when the gaoler entered. A terrible degree of fear had come over Inez; and by one of those revolutions of the system which it is impossible to account for, and which are effected in a moment—as though the loose thought that they must originally spring from, having snapped under the weight and pressure of the occasion, had shaken and unbraced every faculty—by one of those strange revolutions, her excited nerves were left without restraint, and her imagination without a bridle. A dreadful infatuation fell upon her; and, with this in her mind, she was prompted to throw off her disguise, and yield herself a prisoner to the gaoler. Fortunately, however, her subjection to the morbid influence was but momentary. Recklessness of herself, though it was supreme for an instant, was quickly overtaken by affection for Hildebrand, and, with the magic presence of love, her spirit revived, and her self-possession was recovered. [298]

The gaoler entered with a dogged look, as if he were determined, whether Hildebrand had been confessed or no, that he would allow of no longer conference.

"St. Jago be gracious!" he cried, "hath he not got his shrift yet, father?"

"I have done," answered Inez, in a feigned voice. "Let him be looked to!"

"Ay, ay, he shall be looked to, I'll warrant thee," rejoined the gaoler, with a grin. "That be good, i'faith—very good!"

Inez, who was not disposed to talk, made no reply to his observations, but proceeded in silence to the door. The gaoler followed her, and, drawing open the door, they passed into the passage beyond. Having effected their egress, the gaoler, lingering behind, drew to and secured the door; and Hildebrand was again the sole inmate of the dungeon. [299]

Want of rest had rendered his mind less obedient to its helm than usual; but, for all this, it had derived great solace, and even strength, from the visit of Inez. It may seem a strange anomaly, but observation will prove it to be true, that, after we have been writhing under the pressure of despair, we are most disposed, by the constitution of our nature, to give free room to the least inspiration of hope. This singular fact was exemplified in Hildebrand. He was still unhappy, but, though his prospects had undergone no sensible amelioration, he was no longer hopeless. If his interview with Inez should result in no personal benefit, it at least afforded him an assurance that his situation would be communicated to his friends, and, whatever might be the issue, some effort would be made, he was certain, to set him at liberty.

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Revolving these reflections in his mind, the misery of his situation became considerably alleviated; and though, every now and then, as he remembered the nature of his connexion with Inez, and how tenderly she had shown herself to be attached to him, his breast would be visited by an involuntary pang, his fortitude was now fixed on a solid and stable foundation. He was not free, it is true, from the depressing effect of a want of repose; but his thoughts being no longer swayed by distraction, he was better able to seek repose, and more open to its approaches.

Sleep stole upon him insensibly. It was late in the night ere he awoke, and, though not at ease, he felt considerably refreshed. Rising to stretch his limbs, his foot struck against something on the floor; and, with more curiosity than the circumstance seemed to warrant, or his position to admit of, he stooped to ascertain what it was. It was a large flagon, filled with water; and on passing his hand round the outside, he found a small loaf also; and he remembered it was the meal which the gaoler had left him in the morning.

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The provision was far from being unwelcome, and Hildebrand, not without a good appetite, proceeded to discuss it. Having finished his meal, and warmed himself by a little exercise, he lay down again, and with some degree of patience waited the coming of day.

Conformably to his expectations, he was visited in the morning by the gaoler, who, as on the preceding morning, brought him his day's provision. From this time, he was in momentary expectation, through the whole of the day, of hearing from Inez; but every succeeding moment brought him only disappointment. The evening came on, and night; and he was still without intelligence of his anxiously expected visiter.

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His suspense sank into depression as the night advanced, and, from the unlooked-for delay, he began to fear that Inez had been unable, by her own unaided efforts, to bring the design which they had concerted into effect. While, however, he was yet pondering on his not unreasonable fear, he thought that he heard footsteps approaching. The matter was not long doubtful; for, before he could well be said to be listening, he heard the massy bolts of the dungeon-door shot back; and by the time he had sprung to his feet (which he did almost instantaneously), the door was thrown open.

Two persons entered, one of whom, from the light which he carried in his hand, Hildebrand perceived to be the gaoler; and he supposed the other to be his expected ally. His supposition was shortly confirmed; for the cavalier, having taken the lamp from the gaoler, came more into the light, and, on near inspection, was seen to wear the guise and appointments of a gentleman.

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He was, as Inez had described him, a mere stripling, and seemed to have scarcely seen his sixteenth year. But it was more by his face that his youth was apparent, in his present attire, than by his form. So far as the latter could be seen, through the fall of his deep-brown cloak, it was round and full, and almost matured. At the waist, it is true, it was slender in the extreme; but the broad volume of his chest, and the full and graceful outline of his shoulders, which could be traced on the outside of his cloak, showed that he was well proportioned, and, at a little distance, might be thought to be verging on manhood. His face was almost too beautiful for a man's; and its resemblance to that of Inez, especially about the nose and eyes, was so striking, that Hildebrand discerned it directly. He wore a light moustache above his mouth, and under his nether lip, where it fell into the chin, a subordinate imperial. But it was his movements, more than anything else, that fixed attention; for his step was like light, and, in its carriage of his person, displayed a grace and dignity surpassing man's.

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It will readily be supposed, from this description, that, however greatly the cavalier might excite Hildebrand's admiration, his appearance was not calculated to inspire him with a reasonable hope that he would be able to afford him any succour. Hildebrand conceived such an impression of him on the instant. The high expectations that he had entertained were dissipated, and, now that he seemed to have reached a crisis, his heart turned cold with despair.

But he had no time to follow up his gloomy reflections. He had hardly effected his survey of the stranger's person, by which the feeling described had been prompted, when that individual, without knowing how his thoughts were occupied, drew his attention to other matters.

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"Thou mayst retire," he said to the gaoler.

"May I, forsooth?" answered the gaoler. "By the holy rood, I take it mighty kindly of thee to give me such great licence. Howbeit, I be disposed to stay."

"How?" rejoined the cavalier. "Did not I give thee the corregidor's pass?"

"But that said nought of my leaving thee alone with the prisoner," replied the gaoler, who, with the rapacity of his profession, was looking out for a small *douceur*. "No! no, Senhor? I'll even stay, an' it please thee."

"Then, shalt thou stay altogether!" cried the cavalier, vehemently. And, drawing a pistol from under his cloak, he levelled it at the gaoler's breast. "Secure him!" he added to Hildebrand.

[306]

It was a happy circumstance that Hildebrand fulfilled this injunction with promptitude, or the nervous agitation of the cavalier's extended arm, not to mention the tremor of his voice, which, in his utter surprise and consternation, the gaoler did not observe, would have made it immediately apparent that his prowess and resolution might be easily overcome. Before the gaoler could collect himself, however, Hildebrand, favoured by his bewilderment, sprang boldly on his chest, and grappled him in both his arms. They struggled for a few moments with fearful earnestness and energy. Hildebrand's first assault, while the gaoler was uncollected, had given him some advantage, and he had been enabled to secure the gaoler's arms; but, as the struggle proceeded, the gaoler gained ground, and got his right arm free. He had his back planted against the door, and one of his short, bandy legs, by way of outwork, pushed between the legs of Hildebrand, so that the latter could not well throw him; and on obtaining the freedom of his right arm, this enabled him to maintain his position with the other, and make his right arm the vehicle of offensive measures. While Hildebrand was striving to throw him to the ground, he dropped his hand into his girdle, and, with a sudden jerk, drew forth a long knife. From the position of Hildebrand, however, he could not use it within, as he had intended; and he was obliged to draw it forth, and seek to stab him in the back. [307]

All this time, the young Spanish cavalier, with a singular and unaccountable indecision, had remained perfectly quiescent. He seemed, indeed (if the truth must be told), to be overwhelmed with fear, and to possess neither the will nor the power to interpose. But his irresolute disposition did not continue. As he saw the long knife of the gaoler raised above Hildebrand's back, on the point of dealing him a deadly wound, his indecision appeared to vanish, and, whether from the impulse of the moment, or a more manly agency, his spirit to revive. [308]

"Jesu! he will stab him!" he exclaimed.

With these words, he sprang nimbly forward, and seized the uplifted arm of the gaoler with both his hands. At the same moment, Hildebrand, hearing his exclamation, looked up, and perceived his danger. The incident seemed to nerve him with new determination, and, throwing all his strength into his grasp, he seized the gaoler by the shoulders, and threw him bodily to the ground. As he fell, his head came in contact with the wall of the dungeon, and the concussion, with the fall, rendered him senseless.

"'Tis bravely done," said the young cavalier. "We will now go forth. But, hist!" [309]

"They are footsteps!" whispered Hildebrand.

CHAPTER X. [310]

Hildebrand Clifford, on distinguishing the sound that had alarmed him to be the tread of an approaching foot, gently laid his hand on the arm of the young Spaniard, who was a pace or two nearer the door, and drew him back. The sound came nearer, and Hildebrand felt his friend's arm, which he still held, tremble violently. His agitation, though it might be owing to his extreme youth, and the novelty and strong excitement of the occasion, more than downright cowardice, greatly degraded him in the estimation of Hildebrand, and he began to regard him with some degree of contempt. But recollecting that it was to serve him the young cavalier had placed himself in danger, the feeling had scarcely found harbourage in his bosom, on the spur of the discovery, when he repelled it; and the irresolution of the Spaniard only rendered him more prompt and decided. [311]

The former seemed to be sensible that it was on Hildebrand their safety depended. On coming behind the door, he presented him with his pistols; and, without interchanging a word, or manifesting the least hesitation, yielded himself passively to his control.

Meantime, the unfriendly footstep, after approaching close to the door, suddenly paused, and the door was pushed open. As the door opened, it screened Hildebrand and his ally, who, with this view, had placed themselves on the inner side of it; and, consequently, the person entering did not observe them. Nor could they, at the first start, survey him, being equally blinded by the door, though, from his ignorance of what had passed, he alone was open to surprise. To take him by surprise was Hildebrand's object. Directly he heard him clear the range of the door, and before he could glance round the dungeon, he threw the door back, and, while he thus cut off his retreat, prepared to reduce him to subjection. [312]

The individual thus surprised was one of the gaoler's assistants. He was a short man, and, though thick-set, of a frame that, in a struggle for mastery, would render him but a poor match for the muscular energies of Hildebrand. He was, moreover, except for a long knife which was thrust through his girdle, unarmed, and further incapacitated for offensive measures by his surprise.

His first glance had informed him of the position of affairs in the dungeon, and, with the door closed against retreat, his survey, it may be supposed, was not calculated to encourage him. While he was yet overwhelmed with alarm, Hildebrand, seizing his arm with one hand, levelled one of his pistols at him with the other, and, in a decided and peremptory tone, proceeded to require his surrender. [313]

"Lie thee down there," he said, pointing to where his master, the gaoler, still lay senseless, "and no harm shall come to thee. If thou hesitate, I will straight take thy life."

The man, however, did hesitate, though only for a moment. Seeing that Hildebrand displayed no

indecision, he shortly fulfilled his injunction, and laid himself down by the gaoler without a word.

All these incidents, which it has taken so long to describe, scarcely occupied a moment, and, as has been remarked, the gaoler was still insensible. Hildebrand did not fail to seize this advantage. Directly the gaoler's man had lain down, he hastened to secure him, and, at the same time, further secure his master, by tying them together by their arms and legs. Their leather girdles, with the sash of his companion, which he quickly possessed himself of, supplied him with the necessary bonds; and, in a moment after the design had occurred to him, they no longer afforded him ground for any apprehension. [314]

Having tied them well together, he turned to his ally.

"Now, Senhor, quick!" he said. "Take up the light, and lead the way."

The young Spaniard, with a trembling hand, which Hildebrand did not overlook, caught up the lamp, and drew open the door. Hildebrand followed him into the passage, when, turning round, he paused to secure the door. Having drawn it home to the jamb, and shot the bolts into their sockets, he prepared to set forward again.

"Art thou well advised of the way?" he whispered to his companion.

"Right surely," answered the other. "But there is a chamber on one side of the door, overlooking the passage, where, when I entered, there was an alguazil on guard. I waited there, on my entry, while the gaoler examined my pass; and I noted that the alguazil was armed." [315]

Although Hildebrand had remarked in the young cavalier what he could not but consider as traces of cowardice, the manner in which he delivered this information, and the forethought and judgment revealed by its acquisition, effaced the impression he had conceived in that respect, and quite restored him to his esteem. Indeed, he began to think, from his present bearing and aspect, that the manifestations which he had supposed to indicate pusillanimity were rather the effect of the passing excitement, and that it was the novelty of his situation, not its peril, that had so sensibly agitated him. He did not pause to make these reflections, but, with the quickness of perception peculiar to his profession, caught them on the instant; and then rendered his reply.

"'Twas most admirably noted, Senhor," he said. "Take good heart now; and lead the way." [316]

The Spaniard, without making a reply, hereupon stepped forward, and preceded Hildebrand up a contiguous flight of steps. On reaching the summit, they found themselves in a short passage, which was crossed, a little higher up, by another passage, running the whole length of the gaol. Glancing up the passage on his right hand, Hildebrand distinguished the gaol-door; and on one side of this, in the wall of the passage, the open door of the guard-chamber. A flood of light issued from the latter doorway; and the necessity for their own light being thus superseded, Hildebrand signed to his companion, who was waiting his directions, to lay it down. He then waved him to the rear, and, with a cautious but unhesitating step, led the way himself.

All was quiet. But the guard-chamber, if the light were any evidence, was no doubt tenanted, and probably by more persons than one. It is true, it was close to the door; but its proximity, far from being advantageous, was rather adverse to a clandestine egress, and, as the door of the chamber was wide open, to pass it unobserved was almost beyond their hopes. Even should they be able to accomplish this object, they had still to open the gaol-door, which, at the least, was well secured with bolts, and might possibly be locked. [317]

Hildebrand was fully alive to these varied difficulties. After he had once stepped forward, however, he did not pause, but pursued his way undaunted.

They passed along on tiptoe. They ordered their movements so noiselessly, that the silence, unbroken by their progress, rang in their ears, and they could almost hear the beat of their own hearts. A few paces brought them in a line with the door, and Hildebrand, emboldened by the prevailing stillness, ventured to peep round. [318]

In a line with the door, on the further side of the chamber, was a fire; but the smoke which issued from it passed pretty regularly through the chimney-hole in the roof, and the view, though clouded, was no way broken. A man stood before the fire, warming one of his hands; and though he had his back to the door, a lighted lamp which hung from the roof, about midway across, enabled Hildebrand to observe that he was armed. Indeed, one of his hands, which was thrown back from the fire, clasped the barrel of a caliver, the butt of which rested on the floor; and even if he had no other weapon, he was in this invincible.

As Hildebrand observed his disposition, he mechanically raised his pistol, and levelled it at his head. But, though self-preservation is an overpowering impulse, the truly brave heart, however excited, will always shrink from a sacrifice of life; and Hildebrand had scarcely extended his pistol when he drew it back. Still holding the pistol in his hand, he placed the other hand, which he had at liberty, on the arm of his companion, and passed that person towards the gaol-door. [319]

The young Spaniard reached the door in a moment. The guard, as in the first instance, still kept his face to the fire, and evidently felt perfectly secure. Satisfied with his disposition, Hildebrand resolved to pass the aperture himself. He had reached the middle of the doorway, when, feeling secure of the guard, he ventured to turn off his gaze, and glance at his companion. Just as he did so, the guard, whether from a desire to change his position, or that he heard something to alarm him, wheeled round from the fire, and perceived him. He raised his caliver directly, and, with a steady aim, levelled it at Hildebrand's head.

"Stand!" he cried, "or I fire!" [320]

Hildebrand stood as still as a statue. To move was certain death; for the guard, besides that he stood right opposite to him, was scarcely twelve paces distant. His companion, although, from his being under the cover of the passage-wall, he could not see the guard, fully understood his situation, and saw that his first movement would probably be his last. A spasm passed over his face as this horrible truth occurred to him. For a moment—not only as regarded his person, but his complexion—he seemed perfectly petrified: then, with recovered energy, he darted forward, and threw himself between Hildebrand and his enemy.

His unexpected obtrusion evidently threw the latter off his guard. Before he could recover himself, Hildebrand had raised his pistol, and they now, to a certain extent, stood almost on an equality. Hildebrand knew that, in this situation, a great deal would depend on having the first shot, and that that alone could save him. Pausing only to push back his companion, he steadied his aim, and fired. [321]

The alguazil fired almost at the same instant. The young Spaniard, whom Hildebrand had just before pushed under cover, heard both the reports at once, and watched for the result with the most intense terror. To his great joy, Hildebrand, when the smoke passed away, appeared wholly unhurt; but a heavy fall in the chamber, following the last report, intimated that such was not the case with his adversary. The flash of Hildebrand's pistol, which his eager eyes instantly detected, had shaken the alguazil's aim, and his charge passed harmlessly over Hildebrand's shoulder. Before he could observe its effect, he received Hildebrand's charge in the centre of his forehead, and fell to the floor a corpse.

The report of the fire-arms, which the prevailing silence carried a good distance, raised an alarum throughout the gaol, and voices and footsteps were heard in every direction. The fugitives had not a moment to spare; for the door, if it happened to be locked, might still cut off their retreat, and, in any case, presented an obstacle not to be trifled with. [322]

The young Spaniard, who had recently displayed such heroism, seemed to have lost his self-possession again, and stood perfectly still. Fortunately, however, Hildebrand's characteristic promptitude, which was unshaken, made up for his inertness. Directly he saw the alguazil fall, he sprang towards the gaol-door; and gently drawing back his companion, who, in his distraction, had thrown himself right in his way, proceeded to examine it.

The door was secured by two massy bolts, one at the bottom, and the other at the top; and a lock, from the keyhole of which, attached to the key of the door, was suspended a bunch of large keys. Hildebrand drew back the bolts in a moment, and, with the same despatch, turned back the key, and pulled the door open. [323]

The night, though not far advanced, was pitchy dark, and thus calculated to cover their retreat. Although, however, it was so far in their favour, it was not altogether propitious, inasmuch as the darkness prevented them from pursuing their way with that accuracy that they would have done in the light. There were three or four steps at the door, leading into the gaol-yard; and, on darting out of the doorway, Hildebrand only escaped falling over these steps, which he could not distinguish, by his prolonged spring. Thus held up, he alighted unhurt in the yard, and pushed forward amain.

The yard, after passing along the front of the gaol, turned a little higher up, and continued its course along one of its sides. It was enclosed by a stone wall, about ten feet high; but at its further extremity, fronting the side of the gaol, there was an iron gate, which it would not be difficult to scale. Hildebrand, though the internal structure of the gaol had escaped his memory, remembered these particulars, and, having once reached the yard, he made for the gate directly. [324]

As he came to the corner of the gaol, where the yard turned along the side, he was about to wheel round, when he ran against a man, with his arms extended for action, who was approaching from the opposite quarter.

They both started back a few paces.

"Avast there, mate!" cried the stranger, in English. "What cheer?"

"Halyard!" exclaimed Hildebrand, recognising the voice of his chief mariner. "How camest thou here?"

"I came with the Don to the gate," answered Halyard. "Hearing fire-arms, I guessed ye were making way; and so, not to miss sport, came to lend a hand. The gate is open."

"Where is our friend?" cried Hildebrand, looking round.

The young Spaniard, instead of being behind him, as he supposed him to be, was nowhere visible. Though the din within the gaol was now greatly heightened, and indicated that pursuit was close upon them, Hildebrand, on ascertaining this, sprang back to the gaol-door, determined to perish rather than leave him behind. [325]

On gaining the door, he found him lying on the steps. In the hurry of his egress, and the prevailing darkness, the steps had escaped his observation, and, striding heedlessly forward, he had fallen over them. Hildebrand, though concerned at his situation, did not pause to inquire how this had happened, but, without a word of greeting, caught him up in his arms, and thus proceeded to carry him off.

They reached the gate without being interrupted. Halyard, who had closely followed Hildebrand, then led the way, and Hildebrand followed with the young cavalier.

After they had gone a short distance, the last-named personage, addressing Hildebrand, [326]

expressed a desire to be set on his feet, as he was perfectly able to pursue his way unaided. Hildebrand, who had caught him up with the impression that he was seriously hurt, instantly complied with his request; but, at the same time, declared that he would see him bestowed in safety, either at his own residence, or that of Donna Inez, before he proceeded further.

"There is no safety here now," answered the cavalier, in an agitated voice, "for either thee or me. I must with thee to England."

Hildebrand was silent.

"Think not," resumed the cavalier, with increased agitation, "that I would impose myself on thee at thy charge. I have left a casket on board thy ship, under care of thy lieutenant here, that will more than meet my expenditure. Howbeit, rather than put thee to trouble——"

"Prithee name it not, Senhor," replied Hildebrand. "All that I have, to my very life, is thine, and shall be to the last. Go with me, an' thou wilt. But," he added, in a lower tone, so as not to be heard by Halyard, "shall we not see thy fair cousin first?" [327]

"Dost thou so love her, then?" asked the cavalier. And Hildebrand thought that his small, soft hand, which he still held in his, trembled a little, and lost itself in his clasp.

"I would see her before we go," Hildebrand answered; "for we may never meet again."

The cavalier drew back his hand.

"She will not see thee," he said, hastily. "She hath given me a billet for thee, wherein, as I understood her, she so tells thee her mind. Wilt thou read it?"

Then, without raising his eyes, which for the last few minutes had been fixed on the ground, he presented Hildebrand with a sealed billet. The latter person eagerly accepted it, and, with an involuntary sigh, thrust it into his vest.

They had lingered behind during this brief dialogue. When Hildebrand had disposed of the Donna's note, he stepped forward more boldly, and they shortly came abreast of Halyard. [328]

"Art thou making for the mole?" asked Hildebrand of that person.

"No, captain, but for the beach," answered Halyard. "I have a boat off the beach, with muffled oars."

"Muffled oars?" echoed Hildebrand.

"Faith, I forgot to tell thee, captain," rejoined Halyard; "but the Dons boarded us this morning. They seemed to be satisfied, after well overhauling us, that we were Scots; but, since then, we have a great gun-boat anchored alongside of us, and I doubt not are closely watched."

"An' the moon rise not quickly," observed Hildebrand, "we may baffle them."

Halyard, whether because he was of a different opinion, or that he conceived his sentiments to be unimportant, made no reply, and they pursued their way in silence. After a short interval, they came to the water-side, and passed directly to the beach. [329]

Not a person was about, and the dark hulls of the shipping, scattered here and there over the water, at various distances, were the only objects that could be distinguished. After progressing for a few minutes, however, the quick eyes of the two Englishmen, used to maritime observation, discerned the less striking outline of their boat. It was lying afloat, a length or two out from the beach, with its oars—whether as a precaution against surprise, or for some less obvious purpose—shipped for service, and its coxswain stationed ready at the rudder.

A shrill whistle from Halyard, with a cry of "Boat ahoy!" uttered in a low but distinct tone, reached the coxswain's ears, and the boat was instantly shot up to the beach. Halyard and Hildebrand, as by a preconcerted arrangement, hereupon stepped on one side, with the view of allowing the young Spaniard to pass in first; but that person, by a negative inclination of his head, declined the precedence, and waved them foremost. [330]

While, in compliance with his wish, they were stepping into the boat, the young cavalier turned round from the water, and glanced earnestly over the indistinct lines of the city. It was his native place; and though, if truly viewed, it might hold none who had any claim on his affections, there habit must have fixed his thoughts, and early associations have rooted his ambition.

Whatever were the ties that connected him with home, there was something singularly distressing, to a sensitive mind, in the prospect opened by their dismissal. He was about to start into the wide world—to discard the dearest impressions of nature—to relinquish country, kindred, and birthright, and to trust himself, wholly and unreservedly, to the protection and companionship of strangers. How might not the confidence he reposed in those persons be abused! National prejudice, and, what was more influential, his religion, held them to be enemies; they had been stigmatised as spies; they might be pirates. His lip quivered—probably with hesitation—as the thought occurred to him, and his noble bosom, which for his years displayed uncommon volume, heaved sensibly. [331]

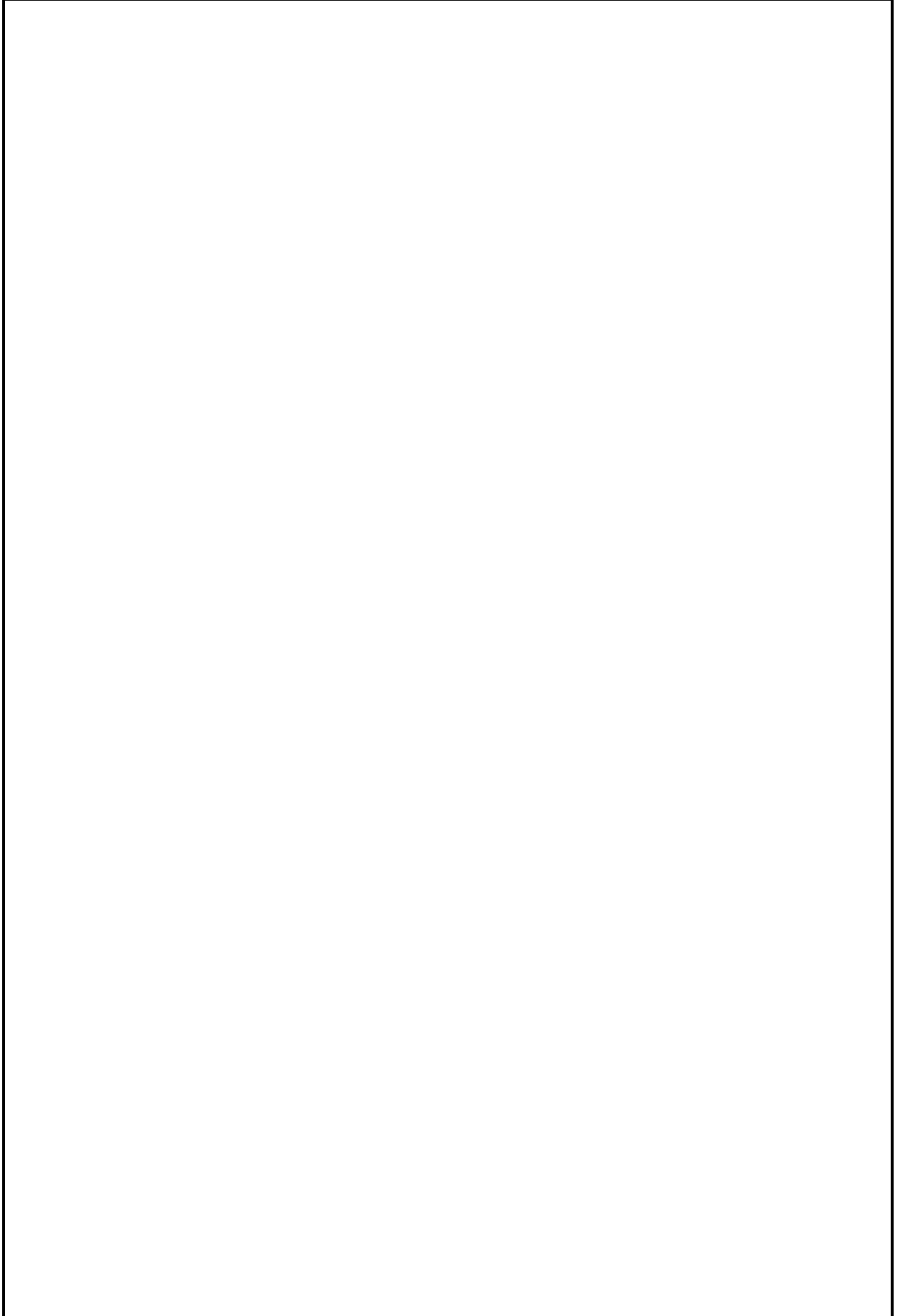
But his indecision was only momentary. The feelings, whatever they were, that had first led him to associate himself with Hildebrand, then revived, and all his involuntary apprehensions subsided. Instead of looking on him as a national enemy, he regarded him only as one of a marked race, who, by their daring and genius, stood out in relief from the rest of the world, the lords and leaders of all mankind.

Hildebrand, with that instinctive apprehension which belongs exclusively to refined minds, [332]

readily divined what was passing in the cavalier's bosom; and though, out of regard for their mutual safety, anxious to proceed, did not offer to bring his meditation to a close. Thus left to himself, the cavalier, as if unmindful of their situation, lingered on the shore for several minutes, and took the final step of entering the boat at his own unbiassed prompture.

END OF VOL. I.

London: HENRY RICHARDS, Brydges-street, Covent-garden.



Transcriber's Notes:

Table of Contents created to facilitate eBook navigation. There are two Chapter IV's. The chapters were not renumbered.

Spelling and hyphenation (including inconsistent hyphenation) consistent with the period were retained.

Added punctuation and quotation marks missed in printing.

Changed "his" to "his" on page 52. (His thoughts as our thoughts)

Added missing "s" in "his", on page 76. (Sir Edgar and his family)

Changed "prerations" to "preparations" on page 125. (bustle attending the preparations)

Changed "acconnt" to "account" on page 276. (There was a long account)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HILDEBRAND; OR, THE DAYS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH, AN HISTORIC ROMANCE, VOL. 1 OF 3 ***

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