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Mystery, by Sylvanus Cobb

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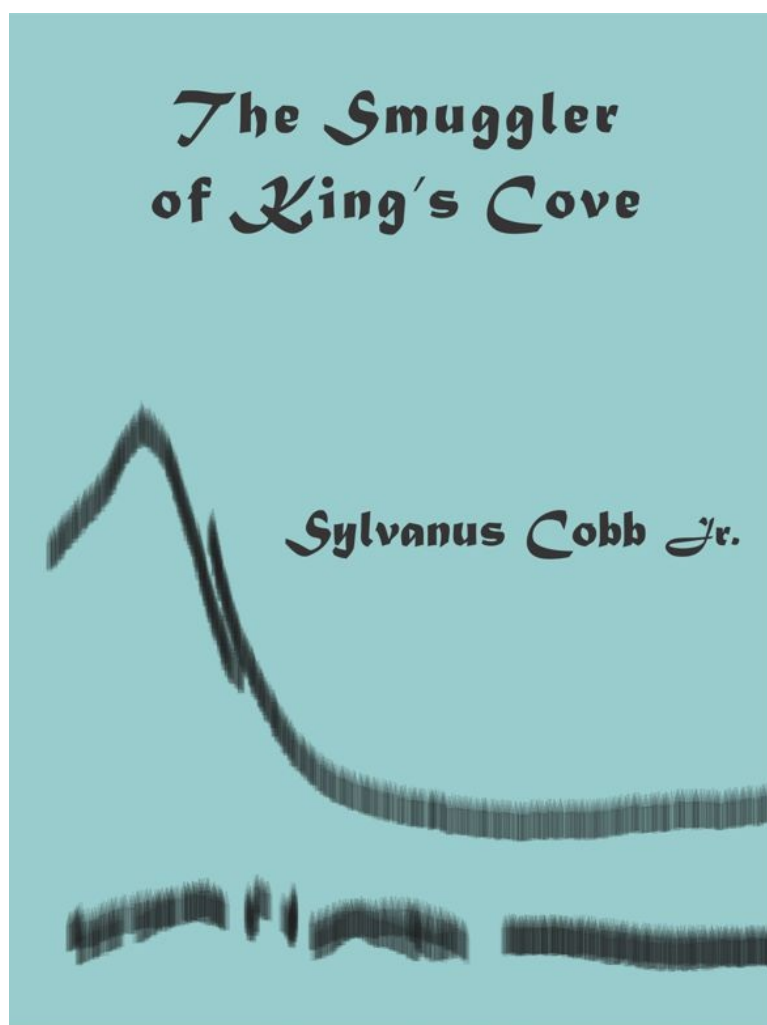
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OLD CHAPEL MYSTERY ***



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THE SMUGGLER OF KING'S COVE

OR

THE OLD CHAPEL MYSTERY

BY

SYLVANUS COBB, JR.

AUTHOR OF "ORION, THE GOLD-BEATER," "THE GUNMAKER OF
MOSCOW," "THE PAINTER OF PARMA," ETC.



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THE SMUGGLER OF KING'S COVE;

OR,

The Old Chapel Mystery.

CHAPTER I.

OUR HERO MAKES TWO PROMISES.

We doubt if there is anywhere on the sea board of England another stretch of coast so wild and rugged, and so forbidding of aspect to navigators, as is that of Headlandshire—probably so called because of its numerous bold headlands overlooking the Irish Sea.

Not far from midway of this stretch of coast is an inlet of the sea, called Raven Bay; and from this bay there is still another inlet, narrow and dubious of entrance, but deep and broad within, called King's Cove.

The story goes that once upon a time an English king, fleeing from his rebellious subjects by sea, sought shelter here and safety; and found them both.

The bay itself is no mean shelter when safely gained. About its entrance are numerous rocks, large and small—some lifting their storm-beaten crests above the surface of the water, while many lie hidden beneath it; also, there are a number of small islands so arranged as to effectually veil the inlet from the eyes of strangers passing to and fro outside.

The man who would run even an ordinary yacht in safety into Raven Bay must be thoroughly acquainted with every fathom of the true channel.

But, though we have gained that first haven, we see nothing of King's Cove—not a sign of it. Yet it is not far off. Away in the southeast corner are two small well-wooded islands, which appear, when viewed from the bosom of the bay, to be simple lumps of the mainland; but once get in behind the outer one and we find a narrow, deep, winding channel running between the two, and finally opening into a basin of water wonderful to behold.

There it lies, an entirely land-locked off-put of the sea, oval in form, very nearly a mile long by three-quarters of a mile wide, deep enough and broad enough to float a naval squadron.

Not only was this cove land-locked, but it was so completely environed by woods—by forest monarchs—as to be as invisible from the land as from the water side.

From Raven Bay the view landward was partly wild and rugged, but altogether picturesque and romantic. On the left, to the northward, as we face inward from the seas, distant a mile and a half rose a grim towering mass of volcanic rock, known as the Witch's Crag.

Towards the bay the crag descended gradually—a continuous ragged, rocky declivity—to the water's edge.

Eastward from the bay, on a gradual verdant slope, many miles in extent, opened to view one of the most beautifully romantic scenes in England—the magnificent park, the outlying farms, the flanking forest, and the grand old castle of Allerdale; while nearer at hand, close upon the shore, nestled a pretty village, bearing the same name.

And this whole stretch of landscape was cut in twain, near its center, by a silvery, limpid stream, rising in the distant hills and flowing westward until it mingled its tide with the waters of the bay. It was called Dale River.

There is one other view that must not be overlooked. Away to the right, towards the south, half a mile from the village, but only a few rods distant from the eastern shore of King's Cove, in the edge of the forest, with no other human habitation near, stood a small stone cottage, the abode, when on shore, of the chief of a crew of smugglers, whose lair was in the adjacent hidden inlet.

We now approach two scenes of a different character. The first is in the cottage of the smuggler chief.

Hugh Maitland, now close upon his fortieth year, had for full half his life been a bold and successful smuggler. Never, as yet, had he been arrested.

Not only had the secret cove afforded him safe hiding from the king's cruisers, but the mass of the people, high and low, whom he had furnished abundantly and cheaply with many a luxury of life, had been his friends, tried and true, in the hour of need.

At length, however, an enemy with whom he was powerless to contend had laid its unsparing hand upon him.

He was dying. A round shot, from the bow gun of a revenue cutter, had struck the quarter-rail of his brig, knocking therefrom a splinter, which had entered his side.

Two surgeons had been with him until within a few minutes of the time when we look in upon him, and had promised to call again during the day, but not with the hope of saving him. Death was sure, and close at hand.

The dying chief lay upon a comfortable bed, in a rear apartment on the ground floor of the cottage, and near him were two persons—his wife, Margery, and his son, Percy.

Margery Maitland was of middle age; a tall, handsome woman of dark complexion, her hair black

as a raven's wing, with a pair of full, bright, restless eyes to match.

She had loved her husband better than anything else on earth. Her marriage had cost her friends and position, and she had prized the thing gained accordingly.

She had been a faithful and devoted companion of his home life, making that home as pleasant and attractive to him as she could.

Perhaps if his life had been entirely passed at home she might not have made it quite an elysium for him; but let that pass. With regard to her love for her son—of that anon.

Percy Maitland had entered upon the sixteenth year of his life. He looked old for his age. Neither in form nor in feature did he resemble his father or his mother. He was tall, like his mother, and, like her, handsome, and there the likeness ended.

He was of a light, ruddy complexion; his hair, floating about his shapely head in wavy masses, was a rich, golden auburn in color; his eyes were blue as sapphires; his brow high, broad and full, with the lower features in symmetrical keeping.

The whole face, in short, was a picture of manly beauty. It was a face to admire, a face to love, and, above and beyond all, it was most emphatically a face to trust.

Falsehood and deceit, treachery and cunning, together with all the baser passions and instincts of human nature, were as foreign to that face as is darkness to the full blaze of noonday. His youth gave ample promise of a strong and vigorous manhood.

Whatever may have been the feelings of the mother toward her son, his father had loved him with a love bordering on passion.

He had been proud of his boy's beauty and proud of his surpassing intellectual qualities; and when Percy had decided that he would not sail in the brig as one of her crew—that he could not find it in his heart to become a smuggler—the chieftain had seen the curate of the village church, a finished scholar, and engaged him to be private tutor to his boy. And so it had been.

Strangely enough, the mother had fought against all this. She had insisted upon it—had put forth all her influence to that end—that the boy should follow the fortunes of his father, and be ready, when the time should come, to take command of the smuggler brig.

But she had pleaded and labored in vain. The love of the father had been proof against all opposing forces.

A November day was drawing to its close, and a November chill was in the fierce gusts that shook the limbs of the forest trees outside, as Hugh Maitland lay dying in the old stone cottage. For several minutes he had gazed upon the face of his son, thinking deeply. By and by he spoke:

"Percy!" The boy started and looked up. Then he arose and would have advanced to the bedside, but his father waved him back.

"No, no. Sit down, my boy; I have something to say to you. Now," when the youth was again seated, "I wish you to answer me. Have I not, so far as I could, so far as it was in me to do, been a kind and loving father to you?"

"Oh, my father!" cried the son, extending his clasped hands towards the bed. "You have been all that an earthly parent could be. I know you have loved me well and truly. Since I can remember your whole heart has been mine; and you know, you know, father, that I have loved you in return."

"Aye, my boy, I do know it; and I tell you truly, your love has been a blessing to me." He paused here, and closed his eyes as though to rest.

He had spoken with difficulty, for he had become very weak, and the speaking fatigued him. Presently he looked up and spoke again. His tones were low and wavering, but with a depth that plainly told of former power and compass; and he spoke distinctly.

"Percy, I have two requests to make; two promises I ask from you in return. It is understood on all hands—your mother understands, and Donald Rodney understands and through him every man of the crew will gain knowledge—that you are, henceforth and forever, free from any connection whatever with the contraband traffic. You shall never be asked to go outside in our vessel; nor shall you be asked to help land any item of our contraband goods—Hush! Don't thank me yet. Wait until you have heard my requests.

"My dear boy, I shall not live to see another day. I am bleeding internally. Ah! I know the signs. The end is nearer than you think. I am going—going to leave your mother alone, if you forsake her. My first petition is this: Until you have reached the age of one-and-twenty you will make the old cot your home, and give to your mother your presence and your care. Surely, you will not refuse me this. Margery has been a faithful wife to me, and I shall feel death robbed of much of its terror in the knowledge that she is not to be left alone."

Percy saw very plainly the hand of his mother in this. He knew, as though he had heard her, that she had put that request into his father's mouth, and had urged him to press it strongly.

But, under any circumstances, he would not have refused. He had a deep—a heartfelt—desire to be near the castle; and in what other way could he so surely attain that end?

If he took a few seconds for thought before he answered, it was not with the appearance of hesitation. When he spoke, not only were his tones frank and hearty, but the warm, loving light in his handsome face told her that he was sincere.

"Father, I will do what you ask, provided, of course, that no unforeseen event beyond my power to overcome shall interpose to prevent it."

"That is understood, of course, and I thank you, my boy—I thank you from my heart. I shall die easier in the assurance that Margery is to have the tender, loving care of our son after I am gone. And now, Percy, to my second request."

He paused for a little time, while his wife arose and went into the room adjoining, returning presently with a phial and a glass.

She prepared for the sufferer a potion which one of the physicians had prescribed, and he drank

it, experiencing therefrom temporary relief and strength.

"Percy, are you aware of the fact that when I am dead and gone that you will be the only living man who can safely run our brig into the Cove?" 9

"Rodney can do it, father," the youth replied, with much surprise.

"No, no, he cannot. The last time I gave up the command to him when we were about a mile outside Hood's Island; and, if you will believe me, we came within an ace of losing the old Staghound; and, most likely, losing a few of ourselves as well. While I was looking in another direction, never dreaming of danger, we were within a dozen fathoms of the northern point of Dead Man's Reef! Yes, my boy, had I been ten seconds later no power on earth could have saved us. Poor old Donald! He said he had no idea the reef made up so far.

"Perhaps I have been wrong. I have kept our secret too close for my own good. You learned the course almost by instinct. By the way—didn't you tell me that you had discovered a safe channel some where about midway of that reef?"

"Yes, father, I found it last spring. It is just about midway between the southern headland of the bay and the northern extremity of the reef. I took soundings, and got all the necessary bearings for coming in. There are no reliable bearings by which to run out."

"They're not needful, boy. But the time may come when that way of running in may be of use. My soul! it doesn't seem possible. I wouldn't have believed that a course through that reef could have been found for a fair sized barge, let alone a brig. But, my dear boy, this isn't getting on with business, and I feel that my voice is giving out." 10

"Yes, father—your second request. Has it to do with piloting the brig?"

"Yes, Percy. I want you to give me your promise that, while you find a home here in the old cottage, you will pilot the brig in whenever you are asked to do so. As you know, we have other havens. For the year to come she may not have occasion to run in here more than once or twice. This is the refuge when the king's cruisers are at our heels. On other occasions we come here but seldom."

"Of course," said the youth, "until I can teach others how to find the true course, I will find it for them; but, when I shall have taught Rodney, he can, in turn, teach others—"

"Ah! my boy," interrupted the chief, "the teaching of others is the very thing we wish to avoid. You and Rodney will be enough. Surely, you can do that for the old crew after I am gone."

"Enough, father. I give you the promise. While I shall remain here—say till I am twenty-one—whenever I shall receive due notice that the brig is outside, or is expected, and that I am wanted to pilot her in, I will take my boat and find her."

"Bless you, Percy! Bless you! I have no more to ask. I shall die with less of regret now that I have those two pledges from you."

"Father," said the boy, after a time of silence, during which Margery had given her husband another dose of medicine, "who is that young fellow that has made two or three runs with you to the French coast—Ralph Tryon, I heard Rodworshiperney call him?" 11

"Oh" returned the failing chief, with a dubious motion of the head, "he's nobody that you care about."

"But—you can tell me who he is—where he came from—or—or—"

"Percy! Don't you see? Your father is suffering."

It was Margery who had thus interfered. The dying man would have checked her, but his voice failed him, and he sank back on the pillow with a moan of pain. Sank back and lifted not his head again; neither did he speak any more. Half an hour later the son was kneeling by the bedside in devout prayer, while the bereaved wife, now widowed, wept in the first great sorrow of her life.

The second scene is at the castle, where there is a bed on which lies one dying.

It is now November. In the early springtime Sir William Chester had come to Allerdale Castle in failing health, bringing with him his only child, Cordelia, a girl of twelve years and little more.

She was all that was left to him of his own blood to care for and to love. His wife had died several years before in India, where he was employed by the government.

His parents had both died during his youth, and brother or sister he never had. Neither had he an uncle or an own cousin. An aunt by marriage he possibly may have had, but were she living she could be nothing to him. 12

Thomas Brandon, Earl of Allerdale, had reached the age of sixty-four, a hale hearty old man, seemingly as strong and vigorous as ever.

He was a handsome man, tall and strong, with a full, broad chest; his limbs shapely and muscular, with a step as firm and light as that of youth.

He had a grand head, covered with snow-white hair, and a strongly marked face that retained much—very much—of its old-time beauty, for Tom Brandon, when he had been simple Lord Oakleigh, had been accounted one of the handsomest men of his time.

The earl was but little better off in the way of kindred than was his guest. He had a son and a grandson, and that completed the list.

His wife had died while he was still young, leaving him with one child, and he had never married again.

His son George, Lord Oakleigh, was absent in India. From him Sir William had come when he first appeared at the castle. George Brandon and William Chester were very nearly of the same age. The former was forty-six, the later one year younger.

They had been friendly in youth, had been classmates at college, and had been much together in after life.

In India they had been like brothers, a common misfortune, or calamity, having cemented the bonds of their union more firmly and more closely than ever before.

It was the death of their wives. They had resided beneath the same roof in Calcutta. There Lady Chester had been taken down with fever, and Lady Brandon had helped to nurse her. 13

Suffice it to say, both had the fever, and both died. Sir William was left with his little Cordelia, then only ten; Lord Oakleigh being left with a son three years older.

A few months after the sad bereavement Lord Oakleigh sent his son Matthew home to England, to the care of his father, the earl having written out an earnest request that it should be so done.

The boy had arrived safely, and from that time had been his grandfather's charge.

Little more than a year later Sir William had begun to feel that his failing health betokened something serious. He was convinced that he should never recover in India.

He considered a perfect recovery impossible; but, were he to seek his native land, he might gain a few more years of life.

So, towards the close of the year, he had made his arrangements for returning home. Said Lord Oakleigh, after the thing had been settled, and the baronet had packed up:

"You say you have no settled home in England. Your family estate—the home of your ancestors—Leyburn Abbey, with its park and forest, you have leased for a term of years; and, of course, you can not push your tenant out, if he wishes to remain, which we know he does. So, my dear Willie, do you make your way to Allerdale, and there cast anchor. My father will be delighted to see you—delighted to hear from me—and a thousand times delighted when you tell him you have come to make a good long stop with him. There your little Cordelia will have my boy Matt to play with; and, further, the young hero will be old enough and strong enough to have a care for her. Tell me—promise me—it shall be so." 14

When Sir William had finally given the required promise he had a request to make on his own account. He made it thus:

"George, I am a sicker man than you think. Should it prove in the end that I am going to England only to die, I wish to leave my child in your charge. You will be her guardian. Promise me that."

At first George Brandon had been unwilling to listen to any such thing as his friend's dying; but, at length, when the baronet had pushed him into a corner, he had replied:

"Look ye, William, you are going to Allerdale. That is settled. If you are to die, as you seem to think may be possible, you will die there. If that is to be, let my father be your daughter's guardian. She could not have a better. You can arrange with him, if you please, that should he die while Cordelia is under age and I should survive him, he may transfer the authority to me. Under such circumstances I should assume the duties most cheerfully, though with sad remembrance. However, my father is a hale and hearty man, and comes of a long-lived stock. I am very sure, barring accidents, that he will live to see your daughter married." 15

So Sir William had left India with the understanding that if a guardian should be required for his child the old earl should be the man.

Once Lord Oakleigh had let fall the remark that it might be a pleasant thing in the future that their children should become united in marriage; but Sir William had made no response.

Perhaps he felt that it was too early to be thinking of marriage for his little pet, and it is not impossible that he preferred to wait a few years and see what sort of a husband his friend's son gave promise of making.

That was the first and the last word ever spoken between Lord Oakleigh and Sir William Chester regarding the marriage of their children; but it was not the last of the subject, as we shall see anon.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW LORD.

Sir William Chester came home to England to die. He had felt it when leaving India; he had felt it on the voyage, and he had become assured of it ere long after he had reached the fatherland.

He had made no movement towards ejecting his tenant from Leyburn Abbey. He had found rest and shelter at Allerdale, and had very soon come to love the old earl as he would have loved a father.

And the earl had quickly learned to love him. It had not needed the good word of his son. His own heart had found the lovable man; and love had been given without stint. 16

And the little Cordelia, now completing her twelfth year—she was like a ray of blessed sunlight in the old castle.

She was a plump little thing, bright and winsome, her silken locks giving promise of a rich golden brown; her large gray eyes, like twin stars, full of laughter and full of warm, impulsive love.

Where she loved she would love with all her heart; and strange as it may appear, her first and warmest love was given to the old earl—"Gran'pa," she called him, with her two dimpled arms round his neck and her rosy lips pressed upon his cheek.

And the love that Lord Allerdale gave to the bright-faced little girl became part of his very life. He could not, after a time, bear to have her away from him.

He held her on his knee; he carried her in his arms; he led her in the court and in the park, and he played with her; in short, in her society he renewed, not his youth, but his very childhood. What a happy old man he was when the little child had him in full subjection.

Lord Oakleigh had spoken of another as the prospective playmate of Cordelia—his son, Matthew.

And Matthew Brandon played with her often, though she would always leave him for the

companionship of his grandfather.

Matthew Brandon was now entering his sixteenth years—just the age of the smuggler's son. He was not what would be called a handsome boy. 17

His complexion was dark; his hair intensely black; and his eyes, deeply set in their sockets, were small, with an unusually narrow space between them.

His face was not a mirror of frankness; and the servants were painfully aware of two lamentable facts: First, he could be cruel and vengeful; and second, he could lie. Of this, however, his grandfather was ignorant.

The servants loved him too well to pain him by the telling, while the boy was wise and wary enough to hide his darker side from those who had authority to punish.

On the same November day that saw the smuggler chief lay dying in the stone cottage by the Cove, Sir William Chester lay dying in one of the tapestried chambers of Allerdale Castle.

He had sent for Matthew, and the boy had come—had come reluctantly enough from the making of a rabbit-trap.

With his failing hand on the lad's head, Sir William told him of his father—told him what a good, true and loyal man he was.

"And may I not hope, my boy, that you will grow up to be like him? You don't know how dearly he loves you; how proud he is of his son; nor do you realize how much of his joy and gladness in the future is dependent upon your success in life. Oh! Matthew! Matthew! Will you not strive, with all your might, to make your father happy and blessed? You can do it. Let him know that his beloved boy is good and true, and honest, and kind of heart—let him know this, and he will be as happy as a man can be. You will try, won't you?" 18

The boy kicked at the carpet with his foot; he gazed out at a neighboring window; gazed everywhere save into the watchful eyes of the speaker.

At length, when the baronet had finished what he had to say, Master Matthew grunted out a dubious—"Yes—I s'pose so"—and speedily thereafter sought his trap.

After this the baronet called his little daughter to his bedside; and when he had kissed her he fancied that he saw a cloud on her open brow and a look of disappointment in her bright eyes.

"What is the matter with my darling?" he asked, drawing her head down upon his pillow.

And pretty soon it came out. Percy had promised her that he would come up that afternoon and help her in her lessons.

Practically he had become her teacher, and she looked forward to his coming with so much of eagerness that failure on his part became to her a bitter disappointment.

"Well, well, little pet, do not worry. He may come yet."

"No, no, papa, he cannot come. His papa is sick, and is dying! Oh! think of it! He will never have a papa any more. Dear papa! you won't die, will you? Oh, tell me that you will not!"

A convulsion shook the dying man from head to foot. He had spoken to his child of death, had sought to accustom her to the thought; but not yet had he told her that he was surely leaving her. 19

He could not do it now—could not tell her that he was dying; but he told her she must be brave and strong; and she must remember that, even though he should be taken from her, she would have her dear grandpa left, who would love her always.

With regard to Percy, of whom his daughter had spoken, the baronet had no fixed thoughts of any kind. He knew the boy—knew him to be the son of a man who was said to be a noted smuggler; but, somehow, the idea of smuggling, as an offence, did not strike him with anything akin to horror.

On the contrary, he thought of it without pain and even without bitterness. Though he would not have willingly admitted a smuggler to his friendship, he would not make war against him. And, further, he would not visit the sins of the father upon the head of the child.

He had met Percy Maitland, and had spoken with him, and had been most agreeably surprised by the beauty of person, and his evident beauty and purity of mind.

He had seen enough of the boy to feel assured that the errors of the sire had not in the least given taint to the son.

Another thing had wrought somewhat upon Sir William's mind with regard to Percy Maitland. When he had become acquainted with him, the first thought that came to him thereafter found vent in these words, spoken aloud, to himself: 20

"Oh, what would I give if Matthew could be like that boy! What a blessing he might be to his father! What a blessing to us all!"

He knew that during the summer Cordelia had become not only acquainted, but intimate with the smuggler's son. One day the little pet had surprised her father by asking him a question in very good French.

"For mercy's sake! where did you learn that?" he had asked her.

"Ho! Percy taught me; and he is going to teach me to read French. Won't it be nice?"

And the baronet had suffered it to go on. It was enough for him that his child was the happier for this friendship; and, further, that under its influence she was really improving.

She was learning rapidly. Of danger in the future he never thought.

As the day drew towards its close Sir William found himself alone with the earl. The legal steps necessary towards constituting the latter guardian of the child, with full authority, had all been taken, and it only remained for him to give such instructions as he had to give.

The papers had been filled out, signed, sealed and witnessed some time before, and the earl had them in his possession, ready to act when the time should come.

"Lord Allerdale," said the baronet, when all preliminary matters had been disposed of. "I shall not see the light of another day. You know that." 21

"I suppose," replied the earl, with a faint, fleeting smile, "if I would be in the fashion I ought to declare that I do not know any such thing; but alas! I know it but too well. Still, I will give you more time than that. You shall not leave us to-night, nor yet to-morrow. No, no—we must keep you for days to come, if not for weeks."

"Well, well," rejoined the invalid, quickly, "be sure I will live if I can; but we will be on the safe side. The few directions I have to give you I will give you now, and then the end may come when it will. It will find us prepared."

"You are right in that, William. What you have to say to me I would have you say at once. And I am anxious to know your wishes. Remember, you have given your child into my care and keeping; and, though you have confidence in my judgment, yet I would have from you certain directions for my guidance."

"I have confidence in your judgment, my lord," said the baronet, with a warm light in his failing eyes, "but it is in your great love—in the goodness of your heart—that I most hopefully trust, for I know you will love my darling when I am gone. I know it."

"Love her!" repeated the old man, the tones seeming to come from the profoundest depths of his heart, "I shall love her now—as a bright angel, given to bless and brighten and beautify the evening of my life! Oh! I have no words that can tell my love for the little seraph."

For a time both the men gave way to their feelings in silence. At length the baronet broke the spell.

"My lord, you have spoken of directions from me. I have one or two to give you, and that is all. And here let us speak frankly. The time was when, I know, your son had a wish that his boy and my little girl should grow up to become husband and wife. Perhaps, at one time, I may have had some such thought; but, with my present light, I certainly cannot wish it. Matthew must grow up to be a different man from what he now gives promise of being if he would look upon my daughter with the thought of making her his wife. Surely, my lord, you will agree with me, in this?"

"Yes, yes, Sir William, I do, certainly," the earl answered sadly. "I have often wished that Matthew was different; and I have never held the wish so deeply as I have done since I have known your darling. Oh! if the boy were worthy of her how happy we all might be! But, who shall say what may happen? He is young yet. What he may be when he shall have grown to manhood we can not tell."

"That is so," nodded the baronet thoughtfully. After a little pause he added: "But, my lord, you will promise me, unless Matthew shall be truly worthy—in every way a good and reliable man—you will not allow him to offer love to Cordelia?"

"Yes, William, I promise that. But the promise was not needed. The good of your child will be to me as precious and as eagerly cared for as my own life could be."

"Another promise I would have, my lord; Cordelia shall never be urged to marry against her will. Oh! what misery have I seen from that cause! A marriage without love! It is a sin—a crime against common humanity, if not against heaven! Let my child be reared as I know you will rear her, and her own heart will be the safest, surest guide to happiness and peace in the future."

"Sir William," the old man replied, with deep feeling, "I give you that promise from my heart. Your sweet child shall never, with my consent be asked to wed without love. If I had a daughter of my own, it should be my chief desire—I may say, the end and aim of my life, to make her happy. I would keep her pure, and good and true; being well assured that in her blessedness my own greatest blessing of life would be found. And, my dear son—for you are as a son to me—I will do by your daughter as I would by a daughter of my own."

Sir William murmured a few words in grateful response; but they were not needed. His tears, and the impulsive grasp of his feeble hand, spoke louder than any words could have done.

"Dear father," the sick man said, breaking in upon a silence that lasted a full minute, he still held the earl's hand, not having relinquished it since he had caught it in his impulse of gratitude. "My dear father, if I may call you so—"

"Never call me by any other name," the aged nobleman interposed. He gazed for a few seconds into the pale, wan face upon the pillow, tears starting from his eyes while he did so; and then resumed: "William, my son, I know not why it is, but it is a fact nevertheless, a fact that you have won a place in my heart close by the side of my own noble boy. Ah! you know I may call him noble."

"I never knew a nobler man," the baronet responded quickly.

"Bless you!" the earl went on, two big tears starting down his ruddy cheeks as he spoke.

"I was saying that I could not understand it. I cannot quite understand the way and manner in which my heart has gone out to you. It is not that I love you. No, no. I could not have helped doing that had I tried. No; the mystery is this. In losing you or in contemplating your loss, I feel as though I were losing my all of life. Little Cordelia will be my only love."

"My lord! Do you forget your son?"

The old man shook his head with dubious look and motion, while a shadow that told of pain rested on his face.

"No," he answered, "I think of him continually." He paused a moment, and then abruptly asked: "William, are you inclined to laugh at presentiments?"

"No, my lord, far from it. I have had presentiments of my own that were later fulfilled to the letter."

"Chester, you speak of my son. It is a presentiment I have in relation to him that has drawn my heart so closely to yourself. Something tells me I shall see him never again on earth. It is not the result of a dream; it is not a weird fancy; it has come to me like a revelation, and I cannot put it away. But let it pass. I will not darken your last hours of life with my gloomsome forebodings. Had you not another request to make of me in relation to your child?"

The baronet had evidently thought to combat the unhappy presentiment of his old friend, but

when that friend had himself proposed that the subject be dropped he had no desire to reopen it. To the last question he replied, after a little reflection:

"Yes, my lord, there is one other subject upon which I wish to speak. I believe my worldly affairs—affairs of property—are all settled. My agent at Leyburn will account to you annually in the matter of rents. The amount will be from £15,000 to £18,000 a year. Something must be allowed for repairs and improvements. That agent, I think, is strictly honest; yet it may be well for you to have an eye on the estate for yourself. The distance is not great. You can go and return, with plenty of time for business, in two days, with only one night away from your home.

"My bank account will give you £10,000 more, as it now stands. Of course you will be adding to it from the returns of the agent. Thus you will see, I shall leave behind for my child an annual income of at least £25,000."

"And you would request me to look after this?" broke in the earl, with a surprise which he did not attempt to hide. "My dear Sir William, do you suppose—" 26

"My lord! My dear father—!" cried the baronet, as soon as he could gain the power of speech—for his powers were failing rapidly, "how could you mistake me? Bless my soul! I should as soon have thought of asking you to be kind and merciful to little Cordelia! Oh! no, no: I will tell you what I had to ask, and I pointed out the sum and substance of the dear one's wealth to show that my request was reasonable—that the cost would not stand in the way of its fulfillment.

"My lord—listen: It is my earnest desire that my child shall never be sent away from your immediate care—never from your castle while you find home in it—never away from your daily loving sight—for the purpose of attending any school. She can have tutors here; and she shall be taught whatever she desires to know."

And he then went on to enumerate the more important branches of education that had occurred to him. In the end, said the earl, holding his friend's hand while he spoke:

"My dear William, it shall be as you have said; and, I may add, it would have been so if you had not spoken. Expense! Pshaw! Why bless and save us! I can't spend the twentieth part of my income in the ordinary way of living. If I spend a portion of it for the good of our little cherub, I shall be happy. However, that is all understood. And now, is there not something more?" 27

"No, I think of nothing, it is growing dark."

"Yes; the sun is near its setting."

"Near its setting? What do you mean? It must have set long ago."

"Certainly not. Open your eyes—there. Do you see where the sunbeams fall upon the wainscot, near the door?"

The baronet turned his face in the direction pointed out and shook his head in disappointment.

"I can not see it. It is dark—dark. My lord."

"Here, William. What is it?" Thus speaking, the earl moved softly back to the bedside and took the baronet's thin, cold hand in his own warm grasp. "Have you something more to say?"

Chester looked up half vacantly but with an expression of eagerness not to be mistaken.

"Yes. Sit down, my lord."

"I am sitting. Do you not see?"

"Not plainly; but I can feel your hand." He paused here, and for a brief space seemed buried in profound thought. At length he turned the poor sightless eyes once more toward his host, and went on, with deep and anxious feeling:

"Lord Allerdale, will you tell me what is your plan in regard to Matthew. Is he to live here always with you?"

"Would it give you relief if I should answer you in the negative?"

"Oh! my lord! Do not think I would seek to drive the boy from his proper home. No! no! no! no! Yet—yet—you will not allow him to—" 28

"Stop! Stop where you are, William, and let me think a little bit." With this the earl took a turn across the room with his head bowed and his arms folded on his breast. When he came back his countenance had cleared and a brighter look was on his face than had been there for a considerable time.

"My dear Chester," he said with frank sincerity, "within these few moments last past I have resolved upon an important step. Matthew has for a long time been teasing me to let him go to school with a friend of his at Oxford. It is a private establishment, wherein youths are prepared for entering college. I have thought it all over, and have come to the conclusion that he will be better off there than here. I shall let him go."

Sir William tried to speak, but his voice failed him. His face, however, in the quick bright light that flashed upon it, told how much the earl's speech had comforted him. He had conceived a deep, harrowing dread of the influence of Matthew Brandon over his sweet child.

The sun had set and the shades of evening had fallen when Sir William Chester found strength to ask for his daughter.

She came and laid her head beside his own on the pillow. He kissed her and breathed a whispered blessing; and shortly thereafter the earl took her down into his lap.

A few moments later the dying man gave a sudden start, and put forth both his hands, as toward an object in the vacancy above him—the hands, which for two hours and more he had not been able to lift to his lips. But they were lifted now, and strongly upheld; and at the same time a celestial light beamed in his eyes, and brightened his death-white face. 29

"George! George!" he cried, in seeming ecstasy, "I come! I come! Oh! this is rest!" And that was the last. His hands fell back upon his hushed bosom. With those words on his lips, and that ecstatic smile upon his face, he died. But the strangest part was to come; though the earl was not unprepared for it. The dying words of Sir William—the evident vision that had called them forth—

had impressed him deeply. He could not believe they had been meaningless.

Four months had passed after the death of the baronet, when word came from India that George Brandon, Lord Oakleigh, was dead. He had died not more than three or four hours before Sir William Chester had breathed his last.

And thus, by one of those curious dispensations of Providence, given, it would almost seem, on purpose to puzzle us, a boy in his sixteenth year, more fit for the pillory than for a title—Matthew Brandon—had become Lord Oakleigh.

CHAPTER III.

30

OUR HERO MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE.

Six years, lacking only the weeks from the 1st of September to the middle of November, have passed since we stood by the death-bed of Sir William Chester. The changes in that time have been many. The death of the earl's only son, Lord Oakleigh, is already known to us. The rest of our friends are still living.

The good old earl, now at the full age of three score and ten, is as hale and hearty as ever, and appears to be not a whit nearer to the end of his endurance. Moreover, the six years last past have been, on the whole, to him years of happiness. His grandson has given him trouble—has often caused his heart to ache; but the bright angel of the household—his ward Cordelia—has given him joy and gladness enough to make up for all the pain from other sources.

A day that had been fair and bright, of the first week of September, was drawing to a close as Percy Maitland pulled his light, handsome skiff from the waters of the bay up into the river. He kept on until he had reached a point where, on the other side, toward the stone cottage, a small bay or inlet made up into the shore. Into this he turned his boat and shortly after landed. And as he now stands, his broad full breast thrown well out as he drinks in the pure air, we can examine him critically.

We need only say, however, that not a promise of his early youth remained unfulfilled. He had grown tall—almost six feet—and muscular in proportion; the symmetry of his form perfect. His hair, worn quite long, floated about his head in wavy, shimmering masses—not curling but coming very near to it. Its color had deepened to a golden brown—some might have called it auburn; but whatever it was called none might dispute its poetic beauty. His eyes of the same sapphire blue as formerly, and become brighter and more eloquent—bright with intellect and eloquent with lofty thought and noble aspiration. The whole face, in taking on the stamp of manhood, had increased in beauty as it had grown in strength and intelligence.

31

His garb was peculiar to himself. He had given his measurements and directions to a friend whom he could trust, and his garments had, for several years, been made to order in France. A loose, easy frock of purple velvet, trimmed lightly with narrow gold lace, so fitting as to show his perfect form; beneath this a vest of amber-colored silk, with silver buttons; then tights of knitted blue silk, revealing every thew and sinew of his muscular lower limbs; and on his feet a pair of light calf-skin boots, with tops of red morocco. His head was protected by a light blue velvet cap, or bonnet, on the left side of which was an eagle's feather, secured in place by a brooch of gold.

Could the youth afford this style of dress? it may be asked. We will only say in reply, his father had left him a goodly amount of gold which could not be taken from him, and a few of the old smugglers would occasionally force upon him goodly sums, not only for favors received, but in remembrance of the old times, when they had loved him as a boy. And they had never ceased to love him.

32

Having secured his boat, the young man stepped back and took from the stern-sheets a willow basket, in which were a dozen fine fish; and then, with the basket on his arm, he took the path that led toward the castle. The fish were intended for that place, he having promised the old steward that he should have them before dark, provided, of course, that he should have the good fortune to catch them.

For the distance of a quarter of a mile the path lay through a thick wood and flanked the westerly side of Allerdale park. Half-way through this wood the young fisherman had gone, when he saw, coming toward him from the direction of the castle, a man whom he would he have avoided if the thing had been possible. As it was, he made a movement as though he would step aside from the path, but the man had seen him, and was already upon the point of hailing him. "Oho! Maitland, you are the man I was after. I've been searching for you this half hour."

"Ralph Tryon! What do you want of me?"

The man whom Percy had thus named was not quite so tall as was our hero, though he appeared the heavier and more stocky of frame. His age would be a difficult matter for a stranger to determine. He might have been thirty, he might have been more; but, in all probability he was considerably younger. His face was more than half covered by a full, thick, coarse, yellow beard; his hair, long and matted, was tawny, like a lion's mane; while two eyes, small and sunken but bright and fiery, were decidedly black in color. His garb was of the sea, and, take him all in all, he was not a pleasant man to look upon.

33

Such was the man, who, for two years and a little more, had held the office which Hugh Maitland had once filled—chief of the Smugglers of King's Cove.

"You are wanted to pilot in the Staghound," was Tryon's answer to Percy's demand.

"Pilot in the Staghound!" repeated the youth in blank surprise. "Why don't you do it yourself?"

"Because I must go another way. I have business that I can not put aside."

"Donald Rodney is on board, is he not?"

"Yes, but he can not run her in safely. I would not trust him, and he dare not trust himself. No, no, you must do it."

"But, you have no right to ask it of me. I wish to have nothing more to do with the brig, in any way or shape."

"Have a care, young man! Do you forget your promise to your dying father?"

"No," said Percy quickly. "I do not forget it. For five years and ten months I kept it; and then it was at an end. I promised him that, until I reached the age of twenty-one, I would perform that task whenever called upon to do so. The one-and-twentieth anniversary of my birthday is past and gone; and I am free."

A fierce oath burst from the smuggler's lips, and he was evidently upon the point of launching forth into threats, but common sense came to his aid. He was situated peculiarly. The brig must be brought safely into her haven, for she had beneath her hatches one of the most valuable cargoes she had ever carried and he could not do it without making a change in his plans which he would not make if he could possibly avoid it.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, when he saw the other backing away from the oath which he had, in his hot anger, flung at him, "don't be a fool. Allow a man to spit out his feelings when he's in a tight place, can't ye? I didn't mean that oath for you, Percy. I was swearing at my own hard luck. Look ye, it will be a dead loss to me of more than £500 if I can't be in Bathgate to-morrow. The brig will be outside in the early morning, and the chances are that a king's ship—sloop of war—will be at her heels. If it was to be a flood tide we might trust Rodney to run her in: but it will be on the ebb, and he is shaky. Come, come, Percy, say you'll do it, that's a good fellow!"

"Tryon, I don't like it. I thought my poor share of that business was ended."

The tawny chieftain was evidently struggling with all his might. He could have put a pistol bullet through young Maitland's head with keen relish or a knife into his bosom; but that would not answer his purpose. Also, he could have cursed and sworn, with real enjoyment; but that would have been equally worse than useless.

"Percy, old Donald will be looking for you. Will you disappoint him? And think of the other friends you have on board the Staghound. Would you like to have them nabbed by the king's officers? Oh! if I could go I would; but I can not. It would ruin me. Donald was sure you would come. And others were as sure as he."

"Where did you leave the brig?" Percy asked.

"At the old place—Betty's Cove—in the Ribble. A few articles were to be landed there."

"What about the sloop of war? Has she been seen?"

"Bless you, yes. We ran away from her, just at dark night before last. Donald will run the brig out to-night, and make his way here under cover of darkness. We know the corvette is off the coast, and keeping a sharp lookout for us."

Percy stood for a few moments in thought. For the man before him he would not have gone from the promise he had made himself—a promise that he would never again have any part with the smugglers.

Had the crew remained as his father had left it—had Donald Rodney been the chief, as he should have been—and, had they confined their trade to the simple, straightforward course which had been pursued in other years, under such circumstances he might not have refused his aid in a time of need; but it was different now.

There was an atmosphere about Frank Tryon which he did not like; something was there that aroused within him dark and painful suspicions. But—for this once—should he leave his father's old friends in the lurch?

"Tryon," said he at length, looking up and speaking shortly and crisply, "do you believe Rodney will ever learn to find the channel to the Cove?"

"Never, in the ebb tide. It isn't in him. He is a good sailor, but he could never be a navigator, nor a safe pilot."

"Have you any one on board the brig who could learn?"

"Yes I have just the man."

"Very well. If I will bring the vessel in this time, will you promise not to ask me to do it again?"

The man hesitated. Evidently he did not like to give up his hold on the young man; but a little reflection told him he must do so; so he did it as gracefully as possible.

"All right," he said. "I will set about teaching my new pilot at once; and you shall not be again asked to do this work, at least, not by me."

Percy promised that he would run out on the next morning and look for the brig, and if he should find her, he would bring her in and then, with a simple nod, he picked up his basket, which he had set upon a wayside stone while he had been talking, and passed on.

The smuggler gazed after him with a dark look in his eyes—a look which, had the youth seen it, would have made him shudder.

Once Percy looked back and saw Tryon just starting away from the spot where he left him, but not by the path. No, instead of that he struck squarely off into the wood, his face toward the stone cottage.

"He is going to see my mother," said our hero, with a tinge of bitterness in his voice. "He is there oftener than I like." For a time he stood where he had stopped, with his gaze fixed upon the spot where the form of the smuggler had last appeared. At length he burst forth, at the same time smiting his free hand upon his bosom:

"Oh! where—where have I seen that man? Somewhere—somewhere—when he was not what he is

now! My father knew him, and would not tell me who he was. I wonder if my mother knows. Of course she does. And Rodney must know. I shall find out somehow. The mystery puzzles me. Aye, it frets me. There is something uncanny about the fellow. There is a piratical look about him that chills me to the very core. But, let him go. There are pleasanter things in the world than Ralph Tryon."

And with this the youth set forth once more on his way to the castle. A few minutes saw him clear of the wood, and in fifteen minutes more he was at the steward's door.

Allerdale Castle was a grand old pile. In fact it was both old and new. A portion of it, the main walls and the donjon, together with a portion of the outbuildings, were of the time of the Plantagenets; there was a later structure of the time of Elizabeth, and a wing of goodly dimensions—a fair-sized dwelling of itself—was of modern build, having been constructed by the grandfather of the present earl and finished by his father.

"Ah, Percy! It's good for one's eyes to see ye! What's in the basket? I hope ye haven't come empty handed, for his lordship has made up his mouth for a fish breakfast—O-o-oh! Bless and save us! Where did ye take 'em?"

It was the fat old steward, Michael Dillon, who had thus hailed the young man, and who had thus exclaimed when he had looked into the basket and espied the silvery treasures that filled it almost to the brim.

"I took them at the mouth of the Cove channel, Michael, the only spot I know where those mongrel salmon can be found. If the earl don't find them as toothsome as anything he ever eat in the shape of fish, then the fault will lie at the door of your cook."

"Ho! Lord Oakleigh has been out I don't know how many times to try for those same fish, and he has never caught one yet."

"Is Lord Oakleigh still at the castle?"

"Yes. He has gone over to Dayton—he went yesterday—to stop till to-morrow."

"When will he return to Oxford?"

"I don't know. Ha! but here comes somebody that does."

Percy turned, and his heart bounded with an impulse that shook him from head to foot. It was Cordelia Chester who had come upon the scene, the child whom we last saw with her bowed head upon the pillow of her dying father.

The promises of her childhood, so far as beauty was concerned, had, if such a thing could be possible, been more than fulfilled. The brown hair had grown darker and richer, and the eyes, gray like opals, had taken to themselves a depth of brilliancy wonderful to behold.

They were, in truth, marvelous eyes; as frank and unswerving as eyes could be, and as true as heaven. It is a strong expression, but it is true. If ever there was truth and purity on earth, the quality was mirrored in the opalistic depths of Cordelia Chester's eyes.

She was not tall; scarcely up to the ordinary stature of woman; but she was plump and ruddy, and healthful and strong, with a native capacity for fun and frolic, yet full of practical common sense, and a wonderful faculty for business.

The earl had promised Sir William that he would take care of his daughter's estate and look carefully after the returns of her agent, and this he had done for three or four years; but the time had come when Cordelia was able not only to look after her own business affairs, but to keep the accounts of her guardian as well. Yes, she was the business head of the castle. And who had taught her? We are to discover that immediately.

"Oh, Percy! I am glad you have come. I have got myself into a tangle from which you must help me out."

"A tangle, dear lady? What may be its nature?"

"It is a note which the earl holds against the lessee of his coal mine in Bentland. There have been three payments made on it: but there was a considerable sum of interest due on the amount paid, which interest was not paid. So, you see, there has been interest on interest, and—Oh! it is a mixed up mess in every way. Come; we shall have time to fix it before dark, if we go at it directly. Oh! I am so glad you are here!"

"If the mistress commands, I suppose the slave must obey," said Percy, a pleasant smile rippling over his handsome face, as he made a movement as though to follow her.

Ordinarily the sparkling, quick-witted girl would have made a joking, laughing rejoinder to his sally, but it was not so now.

"Oh! Percy," she returned, the look she gave him full of grateful emotion. "I do not feel like a mistress in this dire strait. I must acknowledge you the master. But," she added, as they started on their way, "I will be mistress to-morrow, when I shall expect you to obey me very punctually."

"You have but to command me, lady."

"We shall see."

Cordelia led the way to a prettily furnished boudoir on the second floor of the modern wing, where were found the books and papers she had been overhauling for her grandfather. So she always called him, and she could not feel that he had been anything else to her.

The note was produced, with half a dozen scrawling, blotted indorsements on its back, three of which were not dated.

"Paid on the within—£500," one of them read with no date.

"Paid £700," read another, also without date.

However, the earl's cash book was at hand, and here the entries were found with dates, as they should be; and with this help the young man went at the work. When he had made the matter of dates correct—entered them on the note—he turned to the work of computing interest. "Now, my lady, I think you would like to understand this business; because, do you know you will not have me

here always to help you."

The girl started as though word of some dire calamity had been suddenly whispered in her ear; but Percy had turned his eyes upon his work, and did not see; and before he looked at her again she had recovered from the shock, or she had at least overcome all outward signs.

She gave her attention as closely as she could, while her companion computed the interest, at the same time explaining to her the various steps as he progressed.

"There you have it, dear lady; and I will warrant it correct. You can see how important is interest on interest. The earl might have lost more than £200 if that had been left unreckoned."

But the girl was not in the mood, at that particular time, for the further study of interest, either simple or compound. She had planned an excursion to the Witch's Crag for the morrow, and she wanted Percy for guide and protector. So, having thanked him, with all her heart, for the kindness just received at his hands, she broached the other matter. There were beautiful autumnal flowers blooming amid the wild fastnesses of the crag, and she determined to find them if she could. He, however knew just where to look for them.

"Will it answer," asked the young man after a little thought, "if I come after noon?"

"Yes I don't care to start before noon. Mary will go with us to carry the basket."

Percy promised that he would be with her in time for the excursion and then took his leave. She watched him as he departed—watched him until an intervening angle of a wall had hidden him from view. Then with her hand pressed over her heart, she bent her head in thought.

"What did he mean, I wonder, by saying that he wouldn't be here to help me? Oh! if I dared to ask him! I will! He must not go away. He shall not. I would rather have—"

And there she stopped. Whatever she thought further was hidden in her own bosom. But we have heard enough to tell us that her heart was turning towards her kind and handsome Mentor.

CHAPTER IV.

DEAD MAN'S REEF.

On the morning following his meeting with the smuggler chief in the wood our hero was up with the sun, if not a little before it. But, early as it was, his mother was up still earlier. He had told her on the previous evening of his promise to Captain Tryon, and she had arisen to get him a bite of breakfast, as there was no telling at what hour he would board the brig.

Margery Maitland had changed but very little since her husband's death. There were a few lines of silver in the raven blackness of her hair which had not been there before. Old lines had deepened on her face while new ones had been added.

She was still a handsome woman, notwithstanding a certain sharpening of her features and an atmosphere of coldness, almost of misanthropy, that enveloped her. She was seldom seen to smile and in the presence of her son she smiled never.

Sometimes, when the old lieutenant, Donald Rodney, with a few of his chosen mates was spending an evening in the cottage, and the bottle and punch-bowl circulated freely, then, under the influence of jest and story, and hearty laughter, she might join them so far as to smile, with occasionally a hard metallic laugh.

"Mother," said the youth, after he had taken his seat at the table, on which she had spread a breakfast that should have pleased an epicure. "I have a question to ask you; and it is in relation to a matter which has puzzled me exceedingly. Who and what is this man who has taken my father's place on board the brig?"

The woman caught her breath and turned quickly to the fire. With the tongs she lifted a couple of fallen brands into place by which time she had regained her wonted composure, and was ready to face her son, which she did, with a look that she meant to be one of surprise.

"Do you ask me who and what Captain Ralph Tryon is?"

"Exactly, mother. Will you tell me?"

"Well! upon my word! Here he's been, off and on, for the matter of eight years and more; and now you ask me that!"

"Yes, mother, I do ask you; for I am sure you know more of him than I do."

"Why should you think so?"

"Don't do that!" the youth pleaded, beseechingly. "I pray you do not deny a self-evident fact."

"Boy!"

"Stop! Let me finish. Mother, I never spoke a word with Captain Tryon that I was not forced to speak—so forced by circumstances beyond my control. I never held with him a social confab; nor have I ever conversed with any of my old crew about him. I did, once, ask old Rodney the same question I have now asked you."

"Ha! You did! And what was his answer?"

"His answer left me more puzzled than I was before; for he plainly showed to me that he was not at liberty to talk about his commander. In short, he wouldn't say a word, only of refusal."

"And you'll get the same answer from me! So, now, go and eat your breakfast."

Percy knew his mother well enough to know that if she had so willed, that must be the end. He was disappointed, and he felt hurt; but there was no help for it that he could see and he turned his attention to his meal.

And that would have been the end had Margery been content to leave the matter as it was;

evidently, she was not satisfied. As she moved noiselessly about the small living-room she cast, ever and anon, inquiring glances upon her son, as though she had something to ask. And so she had. As is proved afterward, she was anxious to know what Percy had discovered or how much, if anything, he suspected with regard to her relations with the new smuggler chief.

At length she stepped close to his side and after a little further thought she said:

"Percy, what did you mean by the question you asked me? How could you suppose that I could know anything of Captain Tryon?"

The youth marked the anxiety in his mother's voice and it gave him new cause for distrust. Had all been clear and above board she could not have felt thus. 46

"Mother," he answered, calmly and kindly, but firmly, at the same time looking her straight in the eye. "I will only tell you what I know. I know that Ralph Tryon is a frequent visitor here and that you give him warm welcome. I know that he has more than once come to you for advice and assistance —"

"Advice, in what?" broke in the woman, eagerly. "In what has he ever asked me to advise him?"

"Ah! That I do not know. I only know what I have told you, and I know further that you have—" He stopped abruptly and paused. A moment later he added, with more feeling than he had before shown, "Mother, I have said enough in that strain. I have never watched you, never spied upon you, and never will. Heaven knows I seek only your good. Surely, you can not wonder that I, when I have seen a man so familiar and so warmly welcomed beneath this roof as is Ralph Tryon, should be anxious to know who and what he is. That, you know, I am convinced. What objections have you to telling me?"

"My dear boy, you see him commander of the Staghound and chief of the King's Cove smugglers. Is not this enough? What reason have you for thinking anything else of him?"

"Mother!" replied the youth, quickly and sternly, with his gaze fixed sharply on her face, "listen to me. I know that Ralph Tryon is all that you said. I know, also, that he is more. Somewhere, at some time, I have seen him under other circumstances, if not under another name." 47

Margery Maitland was startled—she was frightened. If not so, then her looks belied her.

"Percy! What do you say? You have seen him elsewhere—in another guise? Where? Where was it?"

The youth shook his head.

"Ah! that is the very thing that puzzles me," he said, dubiously. "I can not tell where I have seen him, nor when. I only know that it is so."

Margery had recovered herself, though traces of her recent fright were still visible.

"Pshaw!" she cried, trying to simulate contempt. "It's all in your imagination, boy. Just think of it; here he has been these seven or eight years, out and in before you, and now, when he is known of all men for what he is, and for nothing else, you begin to fancy that he is somebody else! It is ridiculous! You ought to be ashamed of such petty trifling."

"All right," returned Percy, getting up from the table as he spoke. "Let it pass. Only, my dear mother, I would like to correct you in one thing. I am not just beginning to fancy the thing I have mentioned. No, no: far from it. I can well remember the first time I ever set eyes on him and heard him speak—it was on board the brig—the same belief or impression possessed me. Yes, even then I could have sworn that he had been known to me in a totally different guise, and the impression has gone on gaining strength from that time. But I shall know one of these days. Something tells me it will be revealed to me. I can wait." 48

Again the woman started; and the look she darted upon her son was not pleasant to see; but his back was turned toward her, and he did not catch it.

Without further remark, our hero set about his preparations for departure. The garb he now wore was a neat, well-fitting seaman's dress, of fine blue cloth, with an ordinary Scotch cap on his head.

Having donned his cap, and put a flask of wine in his pocket, he threw a serviceable peacoat over his left arm, and was ready to set forth.

He asked his mother if she had any errand to send to Rodney, or any other of the crew. She had none. And then, as was his custom, he bade her a pleasant "good-morning," by way of adieu, and departed.

If Percy could have looked back upon his mother, as he walked swiftly away he would have seen that she was watching him with an expression of countenance far from pleasant or satisfactory.

If the words she spoke to herself could have reached his ears, he would have heard her mutter with marked anxiety:

"Mercy! He must be warned! I must put him on guard at once. If Percy is bent upon discovering his secret, who shall say that he may not do it? He is sharp; and he can be stubborn. Heavens and earth! If he should discover! But he must not! Ralph must look to himself. There can be no danger if we are both careful. I know I can be so; and I think he will be." 49

But the youth heard not; and it may have been well that ignorance in that direction was his portion. He was bound for the landing where we saw him step from his skiff to the shore on the previous afternoon.

It was distant half a mile from the cottage, the path lying through a deep wood most of the way.

The sun was just rising above the hills beyond the park when he reached it. He was in ample time.

He made quick work of getting his boat into the stream and his oars out, and he was not long in pulling to the lake.

Once there, where he could make use of the wind, he let drop the center board; then stepped the mast, and very soon thereafter the light craft was shooting away under a broad leg-of-mutton sail, like a race horse, that is, supposing that a race horse could travel like a duck.

The distance from the inner shore of the bay to the outer headlands was not far from two miles.

The brig was to come from the south, so our pilot put his boat's head in that direction, running it over Dead Man's Reef, the great black rocks of which he could plainly see as he passed above them.

They were, in truth, terrible looking things and the man who would have proposed to run a large vessel, anything deeper than a common sailboat, through the territory they occupied might well have been deemed insane or mad. 50

Percy ran out between the southern headland of the bay, called South Head and Hood's Island, and scarcely had he gained the open sea when he saw the brig three miles away or more, coming up with the wind on her larboard beam and every rag of canvas spread that she could carry. What did it mean? he asked himself.

Ha! Ere long he saw. Having run a little further out, so that his eye could sweep the southern horizon to the coast, he espied a heavy ship, also spanking along under all the sail she could spread. He kept a small telescope in the close locker in the stern-sheets, and, through this, standing erect against the mast, he viewed the stranger.

"Oho! The sloop-of-war, as I live!" He made sure there could be no mistake, then he put away the glass and resumed his place at the helm.

The corvette was, as nearly as he could judge, three miles distant from the brig and she appeared to be gaining. At first Percy was surprised. He had not thought there was a ship in the British navy that could sail with the Staghound; but he very soon solved the mystery. The latter's lee scuppers were under water. She was loaded as he had never seen her loaded before. Only a reckless, unreliable man could have done such a thing.

In a heavy seaway, or in the teeth of a respectable storm, she would have foundered, in spite of all that could have been done to save her. Of course, the throwing overboard of a portion of the cargo might have saved her; but, if they would have cast it over in a storm, why had they not done it to enable them to run way from the king's ship? 51

With the brig and the boat approaching one another rapidly, the three miles were quickly covered. Percy had taken in his sail, and unstepped his mast just in season to catch a line thrown to him from the brig's lee quarter; and in a few moments more he was on her deck, with his boat towing astern.

The brig was a Yankee-built vessel; originally, as lettering in her cabin proved, hailing from Baltimore. She had a capacity of two hundred and fifty tons; was sharp forward; with a clean, pretty run; spars lofty and very nearly perpendicular, depending for support more on the strength of stays and shrouds than on bulk and weight of timber, with a spread of canvas that completely overshadowed her.

The first man to greet the youth as he sprang over the quarter-rail, was the old lieutenant, Donald Rodney, a man past his first half century of life; a stout, rugged, pleasant-faced English seaman.

He was a true friend and he meant to do as nearly right as he knew how; or, such had been his aim in other years, but he had of late fallen under new influences, and Percy, as he gazed upon him, and found his eye faltering, feared that he had been going wrong.

In short, he feared that all hands—that everything on board, had been going wrong for a considerable time.

However, that was no time for moralizing. He had come to save the brig, and he would do it if he could. He cast his eyes over the taffrail, and saw the ship not a fathom more than a mile and a half away. She was nearer than he had thought. 52

"Donald, why haven't you cast overboard a part of your cargo! Mercy on us! If the corvette had a single mile more of running space she would be very apt to—"

The speech was cut short by the flash of a gun at the ship's weather bridle port and at the same instant a crashing aloft. A few moments later the brig's main top-gallant mast came tearing down over the lee rail.

"Cut away! Cut everything clear!" shouted our hero. He paused here, and looked around upon the men who came crowding upon the quarter-deck.

The brig's crew numbered five-and-fifty men, only thirty of whom had been with the old commander, Captain Maitland. The five-and-twenty new men had been added by Tryon, and they were a dark-visaged, evil-eyed looking set. The only thing that Percy could think of when he looked at them, was five-and-twenty pirates! He was well aware that of the old crew there were a number—perhaps the majority of them—who would have readily departed upon an evil course under the influence of an evil leader. He looked over the crew as they came aft, and asked them:

"Will you give the command to me? Quick with your answer!"

"Yes! Yes!" 53

"Then cut away the wreck of the mast and take your stations, Rodney!"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Put two of the very best men you have at the wheel."

"I guess I'd better be one of 'em, sir."

"No. I want you in the waist. I must take my place on the heel of the bowsprit, when the pinch comes."

Two good men of the crew, both of whom our hero knew well, took the wheel, and the brig was soon on her course, with the wreck of the topgallant mast floating astern. The corvette let fly one more shot, but without effect, and she seemed inclined to fire no more. She had found herself gaining so fast that further firing would be worse than useless. Not only would it be a waste of ammunition, but they would be making a wreck of their own prize.

Aye, the officers of the king's ship were as sure of the brig as they were of the coming of noontime. They knew there was a bay somewhere ahead into which the chase would probably run; but they could run in as well and capture the bold contrabandists at their leisure.

The brig was now within a few minutes' run of the southern headland of Raven Bay, and between that headland and Hood's Island was a broad, fair opening to the inlet beyond; but close behind it, lurking in the hidden depths like hungry beasts of prey were the sunken rocks of Dead Man's Reef. The reef stretched the whole distance, on a line between the headland and the island; and never yet within the knowledge of man had a vessel larger than a common pleasure-boat dared to attempt the passage. No fisherman of that region was reckless enough to risk his smack over that death-trap. The true channel, the proper and safe entrance to the bay, was a mile further to the northward, between the upper headland and Old Man's Island.

54

"I tell ye," cried a man of the brig's crew, looking back upon the corvette and then ahead upon the point beyond Old Man's Island, "we can never reach it in the world!"

"Silence!" shouted the youthful pilot, in a voice that reached every ear, and caused every man to start. "I said I would save you. Obey me to the letter and I will do it. Stand by, all hands! Clew up the mainsail! Lay the yards square! Up helm! Easily! So!"

The men were thunderstruck. They did not refuse to obey, yet they were sure they were going to wreck and ruin. Aye—for they were heading fair and square upon Dead Man's Reef! What in the world did it mean?

"Percy! Percy! You can never do it—never!" groaned old Rodney in an agony of terror.

"I'll do it, Donald, if you are sharp enough to follow me—to see that the helm answers my orders."

"I'll do the best I can, dear boy. But—Oh, can ye do it?"

"Wait and see."

The youth then spoke to the men a word of cheer, assuring them that he could take the brig safely through the reef, and then took his station forward, with Donald in the waist to pass his orders aft, in case there should be need. He had already given to the helmsmen general instructions, so they knew how to steer till the need should come for a change. And pretty soon it came. The brig had passed into the mouth of the bay, with South Head on her starboard quarter, and Hood's Island on her larboard; and now the long stretch of Dead Man's Reef was under her forefoot, and she had almost an eighth of a mile to run in the midst of the terrible rocks!

55

The young hero never blanched, never quivered, though every other man on board shook from top to toe.

"Helm, there!—starboard!—steady!—so! Starboard again! Easy!—hold! Now! port—so!"

And so he went on through the trying time. The men hung over the sides, looking down upon the ugly rocks, some of which were within two or three feet of the surface—looking down, and holding their breaths—wondering if the thing could be possible. It seemed a long, long time; though it was not many minutes before the glad shout went up.

"There we are!" exclaimed Percy, as he stepped down from his perch forward and went aft. "The reef is behind us, and all with us is well. How is it with the ship, I wonder?"

Aye, how was it? The commander of the corvette, seeing the heavily laden brig slip in so readily to the fair looking opening, between the headland and the island, determined that he would follow. If the brig could go his ship could go. But alas and alack for the ship! The last the smugglers saw of her, as they were about to pass from the sight of their expectant, prize-loving crew, she was hard and fast on the rocks.

56

We may add: Her boats were sufficient to save all the human life within her, but for herself, she was to lie there until the winds and waves, with the assistance of the sunken rocks, had beaten her in pieces.

CHAPTER V.

OLD DONALD'S CONFESSION.

While the unfortunate sloop-of-war lay jammed in between two jagged sunken rocks of the terrible reef, with rocks ahead of her, and rocks astern and rocks on every hand; and while her boats were busy in getting the men of her crew safely to the shore, the smuggler brig was at anchor in King's Cove, as effectually hidden from the prying eyes of her enemies as though she had been at the bottom of the sea.

Never mind about the wild plaudits of the outlaws as they gathered around their youthful pilot and preserver. But for him they would have been either prisoners or dead—every man of them; and they knew it.

Percy could not prevent them from being grateful, nor could he entirely hush their loud and boisterous acclaims; the most he could do was to persuade them to cut it as short as possible and, soon as he could find opportunity, to get away into the cabin with Donald Rodney.

57

Next to his father, old Donald had been the one man of the old crew whom Percy had loved and esteemed. He could not remember the time when he had not loved "Uncle Rodney" as he had called him in his boyhood.

The first crew organized by Hugh Maitland had acknowledged Donald Rodney as second in command, and from that time he had followed the career then commenced.

And the youth still retained his love for the dear old friend of his boyhood: and, further, he had accepted a great many favors from the old man's hand.

Thus loving, and thus respecting, the veteran, our hero had determined to hold with him a serious conversation. He was bound, if possible, to know the present character of the brig; together with

something more of the character of the man who now commanded her.

Rodney, as soon as his young friend had taken a seat, produced a bottle, and two glasses.

"Only one bottle, my dear boy; for I know its the wine you'll like. Just taste it, and say if you ever tasted finer."

Percy filled a glass and sipped a little of it, and the old man had not exaggerated. He had certainly never tasted a finer wine, and he said so. He drank the contents of his glass slowly, and then leaned back in his chair. 58

He saw very plainly that the old man was nervous and uneasy—that he would rather have been almost anywhere else than in that cabin with the son of his old commander looking him in the eye. But the youth intended to deal gently with him, though squarely.

"Donald, I have called you down here because I have a few questions to ask—questions which I hope and trust you will answer. But, first, let me give you my solemn promise that anything you may say to me—any information you may give me—shall be held sacred and secret in my own bosom. I will never use information from your lips to the injury of any living being. Surely that ought to lead you to trust me."

"Heave ahead, Percy!" the smuggler replied, frankly. Presently he added with a smile, but not a happy one, "I can imagine pretty nearly what ye want, and I tell ye, fair and honest, if ye lay too close I shall sheer off."

"All right, old friend. Take your own course. In the first place, will you tell me what your present cargo consists of? Remember, I have this day saved it—saved not only the cargo and brig, but every man on board. Where would you be at this moment, Rodney, but for me?"

"Either shot, or in irons on board a king's ship," answered the old man promptly.

"When I boarded the brig this morning," pursued Percy, "her main-hatch was off." 59

"Yes, I'd ordered it off, thinkin' we might have to throw overboard some of the cargo; and some of it would have gone if the captain's men hadn't stuck out so against it."

"You mean the new men, who came in with Tryon?"

"Yes."

"Well, Rodney, as I cast my eyes down into the hold I caught sight of two or three boxes, iron-bound, bearing the name and marks we sometimes see on boxes of merchandise brought over by American vessels. What are they doing in the Staghound's hold? What are they? Will you tell me?"

The old man was terribly perplexed. His two hard, brown hands were clasped on his knees, and his head was bent.

"Donald, can't you look me in the face, as of old?"

Upon that the poor man broke down. He could contain himself no longer.

"No, Percy! I can't!"

"Poor old Donald! What is it? How much have you—suffered them to lead you into doing?"

"Percy! I swear to you—I swear, on my Bible oath, that I've never lifted a hand to help in any of their mean, dirty work! The most I've done has been to let others do it, and wink at it. And yet, if we'd been taken to day by the king's ship I should have been strung up with the rest of 'em! I tell you truly, dear boy, I never thought how dreadful it would be till it was all over." 60

"Oh! when we were honest smugglers, only bringing over the goods honestly bought in France, or Holland, or Germany, payin' hard gold for everything we took, and simply runnin' it in without stoppin' to ask the king's permission, and sellin' it to them as would buy—why, then, my boy, I could look an honest man in the face anywhere. Then, Percy, some o' the first men in the land were our friends. Bless ye, boy, your father had friends everywhere. There was scarcely a lord or a lady anywhere along the coast that didn't bid him welcome. Ah! it's different now."

"In short, Donald, the Staghound has become a pirate?"

"Ye-e-es! You've hit it. I won't try to deny it."

"And Ralph Tryon is responsible for it?"

"Take care, Percy! Don't ask too much about him!"

"You can answer that. Is not he the chief power in this business? Was it not through his influence that the wicked trade was entered upon?"

"Through his and the rest of the gang."

"But he was the chief?"

"Yes, I s'pose he was."

"Now, Donald, how far has this thing gone? Have you taken human life?"

"For the love of heaven!" groaned the suffering old man, with his clasped hands extended, "don't ask me any more. Let the one thing I'm goin' to tell ye of my own free will satisfy ye. And, mind this, ye'll keep what I now say a secret. Will ye promise that?" 61

The youth promised, and the other went on, speaking in low, whispered tones, and ever and anon casting a quick, furtive glance around.

"There's two-and-twenty of us—all the old crew but eight—have sworn to one another by a solemn oath that we'll leave the brig after this. There's a good deal of property aboard—honestly got—that belongs to us, and we want it; but, as soon as we get the business squared, we will clear out. And, really, I doubt if we are wanted. At all events, I aint. They don't trust me."

"Good! good! And you will let me give you a bit of advice. Get clear of the brig as soon as you can. Your doings have made a noise in London, and very soon a strong effort will be made to find the offending vessel."

Donald assured his young friend that he and his mates would get clear as soon as they possibly could; and upon this a silence fell, which lasted while they both took another sip of wine, and a few seconds beyond. Percy broke it.

"Donald, I come now to a question which I am very anxious you should answer, and, before asking it, I will renew the pledge of secrecy which I gave you before. Will you tell me what you know of Ralph Tryon? Who—What—! Can a simple question startle you like that? Has the man such power over old Donald Rodney that he dare not speak?"

"No! no! Percy, you don't understand. We're all bound by a terrible oath—one of the most terrible ye can imagine—that we won't speak in answer to any such question as you have asked. I'd rather lose a hand than answer ye!"

"For how long a time have you been bound by that oath, Rodney?"

"For a long, long time. But don't ask me. I mustn't answer to anything of the kind."

"Well, look ye, old friend—my old 'uncle,' who loved me once, and who—"

"Loves you more than ever before," broke in the old man, feelingly.

"I believe you, Donald; and I hope you will feel like answering my next question. Tell me, haven't I known, or haven't I seen Ralph Tryon in another character—a character widely different from that in which he now appears?"

Rodney had started with the old fright as the youth began to speak, but a moment later he had taken on a new look—one of quick, keen inquiry.

"Percy," he said in a hoarse whisper, scarcely audible, at the same time laying his hand on his companion's knee. "What have ye got in your mind? Where d'ye think ye've seen him?"

"There is the trouble, Donald. For the life of me I cannot tell, and yet I am as sure of it as I am that you now sit before me. Will you help me?"

Every line and lineament of the old man's face was wrought upon by an agony of physical torture. After a little pause he started to his feet and laid a hand on the youth's head, and his voice when he spoke was full of earnest, prayerful supplication.

"Percy! Percy! If you love me, don't ask me any more! It's more than my life is worth to answer you as you wish to be answered. I can't! I can't! Oh! you will give over, won't you? You won't torture me any more? Ask me anything else in the world—anything—and I'll answer, if I know how; but not that—Oh! not that!"

"All right; I won't press you further, Donald. I am only sorry that the wretch has gained such power over you; but I am glad you have resolved to break the chain."

"Yes, yes, dear boy, I'll break that, be sure; but, you'll remember, my oath will last while I live. You will never ask me that question again, will you?"

Percy gave the promise, and thus failed his last chance, his last solid hope of solving the mystery that had so perplexed him and that was perplexing him still; aye, and that must continue to perplex him until he could discover that which was so strangely, yet so effectually, hidden from him.

"By the way," he said, after they had both arisen and were ready for returning to the deck—the thought had at that moment occurred to him—"there is one thing you can tell me. I have often wondered that Captain Tryon never offered nor asked to remain beneath the roof of our cottage through a night. Why is this? Where does he spend his time when on shore?"

The old man scratched his head, and then gave his trousers a hoist; then he scratched his head again. Finally, with a burst, he answered:

"'Pon my word, Percy, I can't tell you. One thing I will say—yes, two of 'em—and them's the only two I'll speak, if 'twas to save my life! First, then, the captain, when he is ashore, spends a part of his time in another place, where he's got friends. It isn't anywhere about these parts. Second, I haven't the least bit of doubt that he's got a secret hidin' place somewhere near the Cove, or, anyhow, not a great ways off; but, as I'm a livin' man, I don't know where it is. I aint one of them that he trusts with that kind of a secret."

"A hiding-place near—"

"Hush! Be careful, for heaven's sake! Don't say any more. Let that be the last."

"So be it, Donald, and for what you have told me I thank you."

"Say!—Percy!" catching the young man by the arm as he was about to lift his foot to the first step of the ladder, "you won't lisp a word to your mother of what I've told ye—not a word!"

"Have no fear, Donald. I will speak of it to nobody, and never as having come from you."

"Bless ye for that, my boy."

And then they went on deck, where they found the men of the crew variously employed. Half of them had gone on shore, while the remainder were at work putting matters to rights.

Old Donald's first care after his pilot had left him was to attend to the replacing of the lost topgallant-mast, for which they had plenty of spar timber aboard.

A dozen or more of the crew gathered around our hero as he stood on the quarterdeck, all eager to take him by the hand and speak a parting word. He read in their faces the feeling that they might never see him again. The information Donald had given him enabled him to do this. And his words of good will and blessing in response appeared to be accepted by them as though they were aware of his knowledge. They probably thought their old mate had told him of their plans for the future. He gave them, each and all, a hearty grasp of the hand and a soul-sent God's blessing, and so he left them.

Old Donald went with him to the shore; and the last friendly look exchanged between them was through brimming tears.

Percy was saved the trouble of telling to his mother the story of his adventure on board the brig. He found two of the old crew at the cottage before him—two men who had been true to his father, and who, he had no doubt, were of the number banded together for the purpose of seeking new employment.

But they would make no remark in relation thereto in the widow's hearing. The smugglers all knew that she was friendly to their chief; and they believed she would support and defend him

against the rest together.

They wondered at it, as her son had wondered. What she could have found in the man to respect or esteem they—the true men of the old crew—could not imagine. It was a puzzle in every way. 66

There were times when it appeared to our hero that his mother was warmly attached to Tryon, that she served and obeyed him because of her liking for the man. There were other times, however, when it appeared as though she was afraid of the man, that she held him in fear, if not in absolute terror.

Yes, it was a puzzle, a puzzle to Percy Maitland of the most perplexing and even painful character. And he thought of it now more painfully than ever before, now that the revelation or confession of old Rodney had opened up the full blackness of the villain's character. He had always believed Ralph Tryon to be a villain and now he knew it, knew him to be guilty of one of the gravest crimes known to the law of man. Did his mother know this? How could she help knowing it? She must have known it from the first.

Aye—as he reflected—as he called to mind certain scenes of the past, he remembered words spoken between the two—between his mother and Ralph Tryon—which had reference to this very business.

Once, very nearly a year before, when he had come suddenly and unexpectedly upon them while they were in close conversation, he had heard these words from Tryon's lips: "Ho! 'twould be a quick hanging, and no mercy, if he were once caught!"

And there had been other things as significant as that. Yes; his mother had been knowing to the man's true character from the first. And that had been—how long? He had forgotten to ask Donald the question, but he could judge nearly. 67

It had been little more than a year ago. At the time he had overheard that remark about a quick hanging the work of piracy had just been entered upon. It had been only a little while previous to that time that he, Tryon, had been given full and undisputed command.

But where was the use? The conversation in the brig's cabin had aroused his feelings to a high pitch of excitement, and it took a considerable time to quiet them; but he did it at length. He turned his thoughts to a pleasanter theme.

It was near noon when he arrived at the cottage, and he had found his mother at work setting out a repast for her two visitors. He went up to his chamber and made a radical change in his garb, appearing, when it was complete, very nearly as we found him on the previous day, save that in place of the high-topped boots he had put on a pair of light, but firm-soled, walking shoes, such as would be easy and safe in climbing the craggy eminence he had in view.

The meal had been prepared on his return to the room below, and a plate had been set for him, so he took his place at the board and made a hearty meal with the two seamen.

They were his friends, and while they ate together more than one glance passed between them signifying that they were in possession of a common secret; and once they came so near to letting it out by an unguarded remark that Margery was startled. 68

"What is that?" she asked, turning quickly upon the man who had spoken—an old seaman and a good one—named Stephen Harley. "What did you say, Stephen? That you wouldn't sail in the brig again?"

"Bless your dear soul! no," the poor fellow replied, trembling like an aspen. And a happy thought struck him in his moment of need. "I was sayin' to Master Percy—God bless him!—'at we shouldn't none of us been likely to've sailed in the dear old brig again—never again—if that king's ship had overhauled us. And she'd 'a' done it, ma'am, if it hadn't been for your boy here. My soul! I wish you could 'ave seen her on the rocks. Hi! I wonder 'f they've got any more ships that want to dance over Dead Man's Reef."

The woman took the answer seriously, never suspecting a hidden meaning. The men, both of them, knew her too well, knew too surely where her sympathies lay, to speak in her hearing of their plans for the future.

Had she but suspected an intent on the part of any of the crew to forsake their chief, she would be sure to give him warning.

Percy finished his meal, and having bidden his two friends an affectionate adieu, he left the cottage, feeling freer and lighter of heart when he was clear of it. It was his home—had been his home since his birth, and his mother presided at the hearthstone, yet he could not love it.

Since his father's death its atmosphere had not been congenial to him. There were times when this feeling was so strong within him that it seemed impossible that he could remain there longer; but his promise to his dying father held him. 69

Not, however, beyond his majority. Now that he had reached the age of one-and-twenty, he was free to go where he pleased. What should hold him after that? Ah! he was on his way to the attraction at that very moment. The bond that held him was not at the cottage.

CHAPTER VI.

ON WITCH'S CRAG.

When Percy reached the castle he found Cordelia all ready for her ramble, with her maid in waiting to attend her. Mary Seymour was this maid's name, a cheery-faced, intelligent, pretty girl, just a year older than was her mistress. She had flaxen hair and blue eyes—eyes full of good-nature and frolic; straightforward, truthful and honest.

The friendship between Percy Maitland, the smuggler's son, and the daughter of Sir William Chester was something curious. It had commenced within a month after the girl's first appearance at Allerdale—shortly before she had completed her twelfth year of life.

One of the first impressions made upon the baronet, after he had accepted a home at the castle, had been in relation to the earl's grandson—Matthew Brandon—who, as we remember, had then entered upon his sixteenth year; or he was about entering upon it when the baronet and his daughter arrived.

Instinctively—in spite of his love and esteem for the boy's noble father; in spite of his love and deep reverence for the good old grandfather, he conceived a strong, shuddering dislike toward that boy. He fought against it, but without avail.

Under these circumstances little Cordelia chanced to fall in with Percy Maitland, and a mutual attachment, as strong and enduring as it was sudden and unbidden, was the result.

Percy took her in his boat, and led her by the banks of the river, and taught her to fish, and he guided her through the wild passes of the crag, and gathered for her all the beautiful flowers he could find.

At length the boy of the stone cottage came under the eye of Sir William. Cordelia brought him. She had told so much about him that her father had become eager to see and know him.

In a very short time the keen-eyed, observing baronet had read the boy's character without mistake. In fact, it was one of those characters—and the character was written on a face and stamped in a voice—which could not be mistaken.

And the baronet had, from the very first, felt it in his heart to thank his good fortune that had brought such a companion and playmate for his sweet child: and when, later, he had discovered that the low-born boy was competent to teach all that his loved one could wish to know, his thankfulness was increased to a degree that rendered him happily content.

And so, as we have already seen, matters had gone on during the few remaining months of the parent's life. And since that time there had been no change. Percy had remained the lady's true and loyal knight, teaching her all that she knew of school studies, and attending faithfully upon her whenever need required, or opportunity offered. In truth, the earl had appointed the youth to the post of teacher.

When the question had arisen concerning a resident tutor for the young girl, she had herself decided. She had put her foot down emphatically, and had said:

"I will have Percy Maitland for my tutor, and none other."

And the earl had not disputed her. Really, he did not want a strange tutor beneath his roof; he did not want the trouble of selecting, with a chance, in the end, that he might be cheated.

The men in every way competent and morally qualified to teach a beautiful young lady, like his sweet ward, were not plenty. So it was, truly, a source of great relief to him when it had been finally decided that young Maitland should be her tutor.

And so matters had gone on from that time. If the old earl had ever asked himself if mischief, or trouble, could possibly come from it, he had not made the query manifest to others. Everything went so evenly, so smoothly, and so happily, that he had not the heart to disturb it.

With regard to Matthew, the young Lord Oakleigh, he was at home but little. It had been from the first his desire that he should attend school, with friends whom he loved, at Oxford; and his grandfather had not flatly refused him, though he had seriously objected.

Knowing the boy's character as he did—knowing how prone he was to error, how untruthful he could be and how easily he gave way to passion—knowing this, the earl had felt it to be his duty to keep the lad at home if he could.

But it was not to be. On the first occasion when he had asserted his authority, and kept master Matthew within the castle walls against his will, he had run away at night, and had remained away two months and more, and before he went he had robbed his grandfather's strong box of a large amount of money in gold. After that the earl had surrendered, and the boy had been suffered to lead his own life after his own will and pleasure.

One thing, and one only, gave the old man a grain of comfort: his grandson seemed desirous to gain a good education; and so long as the boy was at Oxford, at his studies, he would try to be content. Ah! if Lord Allerdale could have known the character and extent of the youth's studies, it might have been different!

At the age of eighteen Matthew had entered one of the best colleges, or, at least, he professed so to have done, and the time for his graduation was now near at hand.

Touching the matter of money, he had plenty to spend; more, in fact, than he should have had, but his father had left him a goodly sum. He had also inherited from his mother, so his guardian, as the less of two evils, had let him have about all he had asked for. The greater evil, which the earl could not have put away, was debt.

During his visits to the castle, from first to last, Lord Oakleigh had given Cordelia but little trouble; though he sometimes looked at her in a manner that made her afraid. And he had once let fall a remark that she could not forget. It had been about a year previous to the time of which we are now writing. He had been at home on the autumnal vacation.

One day he met Cordelia in one of the halls, alone, and offered to kiss her. She pushed him away angrily, and bade him, with quivering lips and flashing eyes, never to repeat the offense.

He laughed at her, seeming to enjoy her spitefulness, as he called it; and he said to her, with significant nod, and a look straight into her eyes:

"Don't be afraid of me, my pretty one. I should be a fool to harm you, seeing that you are my own. Look sharp, Cordelia. Be sure you're ready when I call for you!"

And with that he had turned away, and had never alluded to the subject since; but our heroine

was very sure he thought of it, and it worried and fretted her exceedingly.

They set forth, a happy, merry trio—Cordelia, Percy, and Mary—the latter being regarded as a dear companion rather than as a servant. 74

The distance from the castle to the foot of Witch's Crag was a full mile, perhaps a little more. Two-thirds of the way lay through the park, the remainder being woods.

The day had thus far been clear and bright. With the coming of noon it had grown to be very warm—almost too warm for September—but a gentle breeze fanned their cheeks and gave them comfort.

The course they were pursuing was toward the north. If there were clouds rising beyond the crag they did not see them. And had they seen them they would have taken no alarm.

"We must visit the old chapel of the monks!" said Cordelia, as they were entering the forest.

"Certainly," responded Percy. "A visit to the Witch's Crag, without paying one's respects to the memory of the old Franciscans, would seem almost sacrilegious."

Accordingly, when half-way through the wood, they turned into a path that swerved to the right, which they followed to the foot of the crag. They had seen the wonderful mass of ragged rock many times, yet they viewed it now in awe and wonder.

There it arose before them, a steep, wild ascent of broken, jagged rocks—ledge on ledge and boulder on boulder—until, at the summit, a height of 600 feet above sea level was reached.

And on that south side, which our adventurers had approached, the acclivity was bold and abrupt. Toward the west, as we remarked in the beginning, it sloped down gradually, its foot a mile and a half from the top, reaching to the water's edge. But the rugged rise of the crag was not all of interest their eyes looked upon. 75

Bearing to the right, a short distance up the rough ascent, was seen what, at first sight, appeared to be a mass of rock, thus quaintly piled up by some wonderful convulsion of nature; but, upon nearer view, it was found to be the work of human hands.

It was a solid, massive structure; its walls built from the rock of the crag; large enough to comfortably accommodate three to four hundred people within.

It was oblong in form: the walls were not far from fifteen feet in height: its roof—its most wonderful part—being a massive arch, formed of large blocks of stone hewn to the required form for the purpose.

Its broad doorway was an open arch toward the south, and on the sides were six arched openings for windows, with the brazen frames and leaden mullions of the casements intact; but there were no panes—no signs of glass to be seen.

How many years the structure had stood there none could tell. Tradition told that a fraternity of Franciscans—gray friars—had once occupied a monastery near where the castle now stood; and that they had erected this chapel as an offering to St. Francis, whose effigy, in stone, had stood near the altar, while they had occupied it.

How many years it had stood there, none could tell; yet its wall, and its wonderful roof, were as tight, as impervious to water, as ever. At the open windows, and at the deep arch of the vestibule, the storm could find entrance; but nowhere else. 76

Our three adventurers entered the chapel and looked around. The altar, at the end opposite the entrance, was a single stone set against the rear wall.

It was four feet high by about five feet wide, and three feet deep from front to rear. In a far corner at the other end, toward the door, were a dozen or more square blocks of stone that had evidently been intended for seats.

In those old times, and amongst those old friars, it was not deemed necessary that a worshiper should sit while holding communion with Jehovah; and seats, as a general thing, were not provided.

These few granite blocks might have been designed for the sick, lame, or aged, who could not stand. As they left the chapel Percy looked at his watch, a reliable time-piece his father had brought to him from France, and found it to be almost three o'clock.

"Shall we have time to go to the top of the crag?" he asked, with a shade of anxiety on his face.

"Oh, yes! yes! We shall have plenty of time—four hours, at least."

"It will be very dark in four hours from now, dear lady."

"Time enough. Oh, I must see the top; and the view out to sea! You shall know how fast I can walk." 77

Percy smiled and nodded assent, and on they went. It was a wild, rugged road, but more in the seeming than in fact, for the experienced guide, who had traversed the crag in every direction from earliest childhood, knew every inch of the way, and was able to follow a path almost as easy of ascent as would have been the climbing of a grassy slope of the same inclination.

By and by they came to a stretch of path which was restful—a grand aisle, with perpendicular walls towering aloft on either hand; the floor of which was very smooth and even, and wide enough to allow two persons to walk abreast, with room to spare.

In reaching this point, they had climbed an ascent where our hero had given to Cordelia his hand; and he continued to hold it after the need had passed.

Mary was several yards in the rear, and seemed inclined to remain so.

For a time the two in advance had been silent. The sublimity of the scene around them had inspired them.

Presently Cordelia looked up, with a new light in her eyes and a new look on her beautiful face. A new thought had possessed her—a thought that sent a tremor to her heart, imparting a perceptible quiver to her lips.

"Percy!" she said, withdrawing her hand from his grasp and transferring it to his arm, where it clung trustingly. "Percy! what did you mean by what you said to me last evening when you asked

me to look when you worked out that matter of interest?"

He looked at her with surprise, and his look plainly asked her to what she referred. 78

"Don't you remember?" she said, in answer to his silent question. "You said I shouldn't have you always to help me; and—and—Percy—you spoke as though I might not have you a great while. Did you mean that?"

The girl's look and tone—the light of her eyes, and the deep feeling unmistakably stamped on her face, would have caused a colder, sterner, and a duller man than was Percy Maitland to pale and tremble. The great love of his heart was never so near the surface before. It threatened, almost, to burst the bounds of sense and reason, and find for itself utterance.

But it must not be. The pure, gentle girl had trusted him, and that trust he would not betray.

"Dear lady," he said, as soon as he dared venture his voice, "you can not know how aimless is the life I now lead. I gave to my father, when he lay dying, a solemn promise that I would remain with my mother until I was one-and-twenty. That event is past. I saw the dawning of my twenty-second year three months ago. I am but wasting my life here."

"Wasting—your—life! Oh, Percy! Have all the months—the years—been wasted that you have spent in helping me? What should I do if you were gone?"

"Hush, hush! You know not what you are saying."

"Percy! What is the matter with you? What new freak have you taken into your head? Why are you so eager to go away?" 79

Was she playing with him—trifling with his heart? He asked himself the question, and then bent his gaze upon her upturned face. Oh, no, no! There were tears in her eyes, and on her face a soul-sent prayer.

What could she mean? How much dared he to speak? A curious thought occurred to him. In all the years he had known her—through all their intimate association—though she had always called him by his Christian name, she had done it in the days of childhood, and she had done it ever since—in all that time he had never dared, had never presumed, to address her in any way save as a lady, set by the rank of birth high above him.

In the early days he had been old enough, with manly feelings enough, to respect the rank she held, and he had felt proud that he was admitted to her friendship.

And now the thought came to him—an audacious thought—that he would call her as her grandfather called her; as Lord Oakleigh was permitted to call her. He would do it, and mark the result. He expected it would startle her; most likely, offend her; she might be angry, but he would try it.

He trembled with thought of the daring; but, after a time, he felt that his voice might be trusted. He looked down upon her—so looked that her eyes must gaze straight into his own when she lifted her head, and then, drawing the hand upon his arm more closely to his side, he made the venture:

"Cordelia!" 80

She looked up quickly, looked up with a joy in her face, with a happiness beaming in her sparkling eyes, such as the youth had never seen there before.

Never had his voice sounded so softly sweet in her ears, never had she heard music so nearly divine. She clung to him fondly, and expectantly, waiting for him to go on.

"Percy!" she whispered, when she found that he would speak no further. "What were you going to say?"

He could contain himself no longer. The deep feelings of his heart, held in check so long, were to find utterance at length. But he had a thought of the maid walking behind them, and was guarded.

"O dear, dear lady! Cordelia! How dared I speak that name? How dared I call you as those of your own rank in life call you? I will tell you, if I may. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, yes; go on." And she wound her arm more closely around the support it had found.

"I spoke that name for a test, dear—"

"Ah! Have a care, sir!" she broke in, as his voice hung for a moment in choice for a word, and she looked up archly, with something in her eyes that startled him.

"Cordelia!" he cried, gazing now without flinching, "I can not believe that you would trifle with me. I can not believe that you could find it in your heart to make light of the holiest feelings—the purest and loftiest aspirations of my soul. Something tells me—I see it in your face—in your kindly smile—that you will not be offended if I confess to you the one deep controlling sentiment of my heart. I can make the confession, and then bid you farewell. Ah! if—But why complain? I must suffer. And yet I would not lose the memory of this blessed hour for all the world beside! Cordelia, could I have been with you all these years—so intimate—our companionship so close and trusting—could I have lived through it all without—without—loving you? Are you very angry?" 81

She looked up, and smiled divinely through her tears—looked up, and clung still more closely to his side.

"Percy, do you think you alone have the capacity to love? Do you think I would have associated with you all these years if I had not found in you one whom I could honor and respect? And, dear Percy, how could I honor and respect one like you, without loving?"

"Cordelia! Oh, do not let me mistake! Do you understand me? Do you know what my love means? Oh, if I were to pour out the whole volume of my love—"

"Well—what would you say? Would you call me by another name?"

"Yes! Yes! Oh, my darling! my angel!"

"Percy," looking straight up into his eyes, with a wealth of love in her beautiful face which no mortal could have doubted—"I will not trifle; I will not mince words. I know what you mean; and when I tell you, from the uttermost depths of my heart, that your words have made me happier than I was before—happier than I had thought I could ever be—when I tell you that, you will know that I, 82

too, have learned to love. Oh, Percy, I have loved you from the first; and I believe it has been the same with you."

"Yes, yes. Oh, how I have loved you, Cordelia! But I had never dared to dream of this. I can scarcely believe it even now. Shall I awake and find it a dream?"

"If the dream makes you as happy as it makes me, dear Percy, I can only say—dream on."

"Aye! So I will. But—"

"But what?"

"The earl!"

"Look ye, my own dear love," said the brave girl, without a break or a quiver in her voice, "let the earl rest for the present. Let us become more used to our new-found joy. I have no wish to deceive the dear old man, and at a proper time I shall tell him. I expect he will be surprised; perhaps disappointed; but I can not believe he will be angry. At all events no power on earth shall take our love from us nor separate us."

"Oh, Cordelia!"

"Percy!"

"God grant that our love may prosper! Something whispers to me that I may hope."

"Yes, dear love, hope, and trust in me. I will forsake you never, never!"

Just then they heard the footfall of the maid drawing near, and Cordelia turned to speak with her. 83

CHAPTER VII.

A SPECTER IN THE MONKS' CHAPEL.

While Cordelia turned to speak with her maid, our hero, having shaken himself to make sure that he was awake and in possession of his sober senses, looked forward to see how far they were from the summit of the crag.

It was close at hand—not a hundred yards distant. He was surprised. He had supposed it still a long way off. But his surprise vanished when he had consulted his watch—half-past four!

"Mercy! Dear lady! Do you know what time it is?"

"No. I have not thought of it."

He told her; but she was not alarmed. Even though it should be dark when they reached the castle, it would not matter.

"Not if the weather holds fair," returned the guide. "I don't like the looks of those clouds rising away to the eastward."

"I thought storm-clouds always came from the sea."

"No, no. Clouds that give us long rains generally come from that direction; but, if you will remember, I think you will find that our severest storms are brewed on the other hand. But we will not complain in advance. Ah!" 84

"Oh! Oh, is it not beautiful!" It was Mary Seymour who had thus exclaimed.

Her mistress stood, drinking in the scene in awestruck silence. The sublimity of the view was too great for her poor speech to do it justice. And Percy was also silent. The single interjection had burst from him as his eyes first took in the grand panorama, and that was all.

The sea; the many islands; the long stretch of rugged coast; the beautiful park; the old castle; the forest; the silvery lakelets, and the sparkling streams—altogether, it was a picture well worth climbing to see. Cordelia gazed her fill—gazed until the first overwhelming emotions of awe were past, and then pointed out certain points with regard to which she wished for information. Her guide explained all he could—told her all he knew; and at length suggested that they had better be thinking of home.

"But the flowers! You promised me I should have them," insisted Cordelia. She was playful in her manner, yet earnest.

"Will you take time for that, lady? They are somewhat out of our way; but you shall have them, if you say so."

"Oh! never mind the time. A little twilight won't harm us. Let's have the flowers."

Evidently she was determined to prolong the walk, and, had it not been for those threatening clouds, her guide would have liked it as well as she. 85

"Dear lady—I tell you, truly, I do not like the looks of those clouds. I'm afraid we shall have rain before we get home, unless we make all possible haste."

But the lady insisted; and the guide yielded. A detour was made to the eastward and the flowers found and secured. Cordelia was happy.

She had wanted the sweet little treasures of scent and blossom for a long time, and she could not thank her kind guide enough for his goodness in getting them for her.

"Fifteen minutes of six!" said Percy, in a tone of hushed anxiety. "Oh! what would I give for a good horse."

"And, what would you do with a single horse, sir?" the lady demanded, quickly.

"I would look to the girths, make sure all was secure, then lift you to its back and start you homeward, my lady."

"But, dear Percy, do you really feel so uneasy about the weather?"

"I do, truly, dear lady. Look for yourself. If there is not a goodly store of electricity in those

clouds, then I am much mistaken."

"Well, we must hurry. You will let me take your hand."

He put forth his hand, took hers in a warm, loving grasp, and they set forward; but time had sped beyond the lady's calculations, or beyond her belief, for she had had no calculation about it. 86

By the time they had gained half the distance down the rugged slope cool gusts of wind struck their cheeks; the clouds had become so dense and so completely covered the firmament as to bring night on prematurely.

And that was not the worst. Pretty soon a vivid stream of fire shot athwart the dark vault, and a crash of thunder followed almost immediately.

"Courage, courage!" said Percy. "The old chapel is close at hand. We shall find good shelter there."

"Oh! Just think, dear lady," said the maid, who had drawn nearer the strong man since the lightning bolt. "We haven't touched the luncheon I have in the basket."

"Oho, it grows heavy, does it, Mary?"

"No, no; that isn't it. And yet," she confessed, after a momentary pause, "it is pretty heavy, come to carry it so far."

"Well, we'll empty it at the chapel."

But Percy took the basket into his own hand, despite the maid's earnest protestations, and he found it heavier than he had thought. It was but as a feather to him, but he could feel that it must have pulled on the weak girl during so long a walk.

"Ho! There it is!"

"Aye, and here is the rain."

It was the chapel which Cordelia had discovered, and they reached it with not a moment to spare, for scarcely had Mary crossed the threshold when the rain came down in a torrent. As the maid expressed it, with more of truth than poetry—it came down "like they were pouring it out of a tub." 87

But they had found perfect shelter, though somewhat gloomsome. Percy selected three of the most comfortable seats he could find, and he did not have occasion to move them.

They were already in the corner farthest away from the storm—in a corner between the arch of the vestibule and the first window on the easterly side. And there in the deepening gloom Cordelia opened the basket, and took out a portion of the provisions she had with her own hands packed into it. She had brought but one drinking-cup, but it answered every purpose.

"We can call it 'the Loving Cup,'" suggested the maid, little dreaming what chords she was touching to tuneful response in the bosoms of her two companions.

But the others knew, as a hidden hand-grasp testified.

"Now, mark!" commanded the lady, as Percy began to express his regrets at the unfortunate situation of the two women, "Mark what I say, and remember, we will have not a word of fault-finding, not a word of complaint. Here we are, and here we must make the best of it. It is all my fault, every bit and grain of it, and I am willing to bear the blame; but don't blame me too severely."

"Mercy! how it pours!" exclaimed the maid. "I am only thinking—how shall we ever find the way home in pitch darkness?" 88

Percy said, cheerfully, he thought there would be no trouble about that. "These sort of storms," he went on, "are not of long duration. The clouds will soon pass off when the rain is done falling, and then we'll have a moon within a day or two of its full to light us on our homeward way. My only serious thought is of the good old earl."

"Hush!" cried the law-giver, with a light laugh. "That is complaint, and is forbidden. I will make it all right with dear old grandpa."

The rain continued to fall in a torrent, ever and anon the lightning gleamed and the thunder came crashing down upon the solid roof.

The adventurers had eaten their luncheon and Mary had carefully packed the empty dishes back into the basket, by which time the darkness had shut them in like a pall. The blackest midnight could not have been darker.

Mary Seymour had found a seat at Percy's feet, and, despite the terrific voices of the storm, was inclined to sleep. The long walk, the weight of the basket, and, moreover, the soporific influence of the atmosphere, had completely overcome her, and, with the basket for a pillow, she was ere long soundly asleep.

Percy held his watch in his hand, waiting for the next gleam of heaven's light, and when it came he saw that it was close upon seven o'clock.

The sun had been gone little more than half an hour. Cordelia nestled close, held firmly in his loving embrace. And here, and thus, they exchanged the first sweet, ecstatic kiss of love. 89

"Oh, Percy! What would life be without your dear companionship, without your blessed love?"

"My love, darling, you will always possess. No power on earth can take it from you. It is yours now and forevermore."

"And your dear self with it, sweet love."

"Heaven send it may be so."

"Amen! and amen!"

After this they sat for a time in silence, their thoughts too deep for words. Her head was pillowed on his bosom, and his strong arm encircled her.

What need was there of further speech? The silence was eloquent; and the crashing thunder, when it fell, was as grand music in their ears. 90

By and by the patter of the rain upon the roof grew less; but, as the rain held up, the lightning seemed to come more frequently and with increased brilliancy. Oh, how dark it was when the fire of

heaven had gone out!

Several minutes had passed thus after the rain had commenced to slacken, and the furious blast that had accompanied the first flood had died away, when our hero was startled and his heart caused to bound suddenly by the unmistakable sound of a footfall without. It was the fall of a human foot upon the surface of rock in front of the chapel!

"Hush!" he whispered, as he felt his companion start and nestle more closely to him.

"Oh, Percy! What can it be? Is it somebody in search of us?"

"No; I think not. They would have scarcely had time since the storm arose. Hush! Promise me, darling, that you will utter no cry of alarm, let it be who or what it may. They may not discover us in this corner if we keep perfectly quiet. Ah! Hush! Not a lisp!"

The footstep—a heavy one—was upon the threshold, and a faint glimmer of light, seeming to come from the dingy lens of a dark lantern, shot into the chapel with just power enough to render the surrounding darkness visible.

A human figure entered; a figure tall, erect, and apparently bulky. The lantern was carried in the right hand, with its lens turned toward the rear of the place—toward the altar—in which direction the figure moved.

Cordelia's breath was almost hushed; and she clung to her dear lover closely and with perfect trust.

Nothing like a cry—not even a loud breath—had escaped her.

The figure—only one had entered—had reached a point directly opposite the place where our adventurers sat, when a terrific crash fell that shook the structure from its massive roof to its foundation; and following close upon it came a flood of light, filling the old chapel with a blaze as of noonday; and the light enveloped the new-comer as in a glowing halo.

And this is what Percy Maitland saw—saw it as plainly and clearly as he ever saw anything in his life:

A man, tall and stalwart, in the robe of a gray friar, with the cowl drawn only partially over his head. And the face—Oh! what did it mean?

It was his father's face!—the face of Hugh Maitland, as he remembered it, in its manly strength and vigor.

It was only for a moment—for two or three seconds—and then the darkness fell again and the poor glimmer of the lantern appeared no more than the glow of a fire-fly. Only for one poor moment; yet had he looked for an hour he could not have seen it more distinctly.

If ever he saw his father's face, he was sure he saw it then under that gray cowl. Or it had been something so nearly resembling it that the distinction could not be traced?

And still, with wildly beating heart, he listened. He heard the footfall, and he saw the ghostly glimmer of the lantern; the gray friar was approaching the altar.

Suddenly the light disappeared. A moment later the watcher heard a low, rumbling sound, and then all was still.

By and by another bolt of thunder fell, and a flood of electric light filled the chapel. Both Percy and Cordelia peered with all their might into the far end of the place; but the friar had gone!

The altar was there and the solid wall behind it, and that was all. The strange intruder had disappeared as though the stone pavement had opened and swallowed him up!

"Percy!" whispered the trembling girl, as soon as she dared to trust her voice above her breath, "What was it? Who was it?"

"Darling, I do not know. I am lost in wonder."

"But where did he go? I certainly saw him, close by the altar. I saw the lantern when it cast its feeble rays on the dark rock. Where could he have gone to?"

"Dear girl, I can not imagine. But we may henceforth be able to better understand the peasants' earnest stories of the place being haunted. You have heard them?"

"Yes, yes, often; and have laughed at them. But," after a pause, "is not the solution a greater puzzle than were the ghosts?"

"Verily, dear girl, it is even so. Aye, it is a puzzle; and it must, I fear, remain a puzzle, until we can gain more light than we are likely to receive to-night."

He would not tell her of the greatest marvel of all to himself. What to think of it he did not know. His mind was in a whirl.

He must have time to consider. He knew his father was dead; for he had sat by his dying bed, and had held his hand while he breathed his last, and had seen the mortal body buried in its mother earth.

So, it could not be his father in the flesh he had seen roaming in that old chapel, with a dark lantern in his hand. As to its being his father's ghost or spirit, that was to him simply monstrous.

Even admitting that the return of a spirit could be possible, the spirit of his father would have been engaged in no such nocturnal escapade.

Could there be another man—a man amongst the living—with his father's face? A wonderful likeness, like that, offered the most satisfactory solution of the marvel. But who could it be? If such a man lived, and was familiar with that part of the country, why had he never seen him before?

But—where was the use? Puzzle and conjecture as he would, he could come no nearer to the truth. The only thing to do was to take time; keep his eyes and ears open, and search. And one thing which he meant to search was this very chapel.

Almost before they were aware of it the rain had ceased to fall, and a low murmur of thankfulness fell from Cordelia's lips as she saw a stream of silvery moonlight on the chapel floor.

Aye, the clouds were rolling away and the bright moon, near its full, looked forth right cheerily

from the eastern sky, casting light enough through the three tall windows on that side to illumine the chapel very clearly. At all events, the stone altar was plainly visible, and all the adjacent wall.

"Cordelia, the man whom we saw—the gray friar—must have found a way out somewhere near the altar. Shall we look?"

"You do not think he can be lurking near?" she asked. 94

"No, no; there can be no danger of that. Be sure, he was seeking a place of hiding when he entered here. Darling!" he added, after a considerable pause, during which he had appeared to be thinking deeply, "I think I can tell you something new. It has come to me since we saw the moonbeam on the pavement.

"Listen; I remember—but I had forgotten it completely—I remember, when I was but a small boy—certainly not more than eight or ten years old—of hearing my father, in conversation with his chief mate, old Donald Rodney, mention the Monk's Chapel; and I am very sure that at that time he was trying to persuade Donald to go with him and explore. Of course, I can't remember their words, nor anywhere near thereto; yet I am confident that I am not mistaken about the object my father had in view.

"Cordelia, he believed there were secret crypts beneath the old pile, fashioned when it was built, and he wished very much to find them; but I am very sure he never did it. He probably searched, and had to give it up. If he had found them I should have known it. Aye, as sure as you live, there is a hidden way beneath where we stand, and, I tell you, I will find it if the finding is possible."

"Oh, you will be careful, Percy! What would become of me if harm should come to you?"

"Have no fear. Ah, Mary is awake. I think we had better not tell her of what we have seen." 95

"No, we will tell nobody, until we have gained further knowledge. Shall it be so?"

"Yes. We will leave it at that. And now for home. The way will be damp, but I think we shall survive."

The maid, when she had collected her scattered senses, and had called to mind the situation, was agreeably surprised upon finding the storm at an end, and the moon brightly shining. She picked up her basket, and was soon ready, with the others, to set forth upon the homeward way.

They encountered several pools of water over which Percy was obliged to carry the two girls in his arms; but nothing serious interposed to render the return at all unpleasant. Fortunately the path through the woods was broad and open, and lay in such direction that the moonlight fell full upon it for most of the distance.

They had reached very near to the southern extremity of the wood, and our hero had just borne his two companions across the last pool, when their ears were saluted by loud cries and shouts of distress and alarm, and a little later the glare of a dozen torches, in full blaze, burst upon them.

"Oh, my precious lady, are you alive? Are you safe? Oh! how frightened we have been." So exclaimed the stout old steward, Michael Dillon, when he had seen his young mistress in the flesh before him. And the glad acclaim of the party, when they knew that Cordelia was alive and well, told how deeply and truly she was loved by the household of the castle. 96

There were twelve men in the party which our adventurers had thus met; and two other parties had gone in other directions; but they were small.

The larger number had come this way, because this had been the path hit upon as most likely to be the true one.

As soon as old Michael had made sure that all was well with the dear young lady, he ordered two heavily charged muskets to be fired, which had been brought for that purpose, to inform the other parties that the lost one had been found.

He next dispatched a swift runner to the castle, with information to the earl of the happy ending of the search; and then, with a curious mingling of joy and pomposity, he issued his order for the homeward march.

CHAPTER VIII.

LORD OAKLEIGH.

On the morning following her strange adventure in the chapel, our heroine arose with the lark, not a whit the worse for her passage through the storm.

The old earl had suffered terribly when the tempest and the night had come, and his darling was known to be absent in the forest, or on the wild crag; but when the swift messenger had brought him the glad intelligence of her safety, his fears departed; and when he had finally held her in his arms, and had then held her off that he might gaze into her beautiful face and know that all was well with her, then his joy was great indeed. 97

When it was all so happily over he was almost thankful it had happened, for it had told him over again how dearly he loved her and what a treasure she was to him!

On this morning the girl put on her hat, with a light mantle over her shoulders, thinking to take a walk in her garden before breakfast. The air was fresh and pure after the storm and not at all chilly, and the autumnal flowers were in full bloom.

She had reached the place—an inclosure within the outer walls of the castle—and was slowly and thoughtfully walking in one of the graveled paths, when she was startled by the sound of a quick, heavy footfall behind her, and on turning she found herself face to face with Matthew Brandon—by courtesy Lord Oakleigh.

He was not a pleasant man to look at, and yet many might have called him good looking—perhaps handsome. If he had any beauty it was of the Mephistophelean order. He was tall and strong, and dressed in a costly garb of embroidered velvet and satin.

He wore a large diamond in his shirt-front, he had fine rings on two or three fingers, and his gold watch-chain was conspicuous.

His complexion was dark, even to swarthy; his hair black and quite short, with a pair of eyes now, as in his boyhood, set very near together and deeply sunken in their sockets. 98

He had a good nose but his lips were heavy and sensual, his mouth large, and his lower jaw broad and strong. He wore no beard, but his cheeks and his chin and his upper lip, where the razor did its work, betrayed the possibility of a beard, black and luxuriant, had he been willing to let it grow.

A friend had once asked him how it was that, with such a chance for a beard, he could be content to sacrifice it.

“Oh!” he had answered with a laugh, “I am black enough as it is; should I add a coal-black beard, I should be blackness incarnate.”

“Cordelia,” he said, when the usual salutations of the morning had been exchanged, “I have a few words to say to you; and I have come out here this morning to say them. I might not have time after breakfast, as I must return to Oxford to-day.”

The girl had stopped in her walk and stood facing him. A tremor, which she could not repress, shook her frame; for she knew very well, or she believed she knew, what he wished to speak about.

“I am listening, Lord Oakleigh.”

“Bah! Why do you eternally ‘lord’ me? I don’t like it, at least from your lips.”

“My lord, I give you the title respectfully, because it is yours. I can call you by your Christian name, if you wish it.”

“I do wish it: and I wish you to remember it. It will do very well for the servants to dub me ‘lord’ and for my grandfather when he is in the mood; but I don’t want it from you.” He paused and looked around. 99

“Haven’t you a seat anywhere about here?”

“If you are weary, you will find a very comfortable seat in yonder grape-arbor.”

“I’m not weary, my dear lady; but it is sometimes weary work to converse on one’s feet. Come with me to the arbor. I won’t keep you long. Bless me! I hope you’re not afraid of me.”

She was afraid of him; but she would not confess it. There was a coarseness in his manner; a lowness in his speech, his clipping and contracting words more like a private trooper than like an English gentleman, that disgusted her; and there was a look in his gleaming, sunken black eyes that made her afraid.

She presently saw that he would take her hand if she hesitated longer; so, without further remark, she turned and led the way to the arbor she had pointed out.

It was a small affair a framework of wood, over which the closely interwoven branches and tendrils of a number of stout grape-vines formed a complete covering, with plain wooden seats on three of its sides. Cordelia waited until Lord Oakleigh was seated; and she then sat down on the opposite side. She had struggled bravely to compose herself, being determined that nothing he could say should cause her to forget herself or to lose her temper.

“Matthew, it is nearer to the breakfast hour, perhaps, than you think.” 100

“Oh! don’t worry. I won’t take long to say the little I have in mind.” He paused here, and looked at her curiously. Presently he went on.

“Cordelia—you remember I once told you that when I should be ready to speak on a certain subject I should speak plainly, and in few words; and you will confess that from that time I have given you your own way, so far as I have been concerned. I have not sought to interfere with you in any way, neither in regard to your acts nor your choice of companions. ‘Pon my word! I think, all things considered, that I’ve done pretty well, don’t you?”

“Really, my lord, I can not imagine to what circumstance you have reference—what things you would have considered.”

“Can’t you?”

“Indeed, I can not.”

“Well, look here. You know very well that it was the earnest desire of your parents, of your father and of mine, that you and I should grow up to be husband and wife. That you know.”

“That I—do—not—know!” the girl replied, speaking slowly and with strong emphasis.

“What! You don’t know?” cried Oakleigh, feigning great surprise. “But you do know. You can not help knowing. I tell you—”

“Stop!” commanded the young lady, holding up her hand. “Let us not dispute. Your grandfather knows if my father ever expressed any desire of that kind. Let him decide between us.” 101

“Look ye, Cordelia!” Matthew exclaimed, with the flame of anger in his sunken eyes, “do you mean to throw me over now? After all these years of patient waiting, do you fancy that I am to be cast aside, like a worn-out boot? By the Host! you’ll find it a sorry work to do.”

“Lord Oakleigh!” said the proud girl starting to her feet, her face flushed and her eyes burning with deep indignant fire, “you have no authority—no right—for speaking to me in that manner. Let me tell you, once for all, I never had, I have not now, nor can I ever have a thought of becoming your wife. Let me hope that you will never broach the subject again.”

“My dear lady,” returned the suitor, attempting a sneer, his hot wrath simmering beneath, “you talk foolishly. Do you fancy I shall give up the cherished hope and plan of a lifetime to suit a whim of yours? I tell you, before your father left India he conversed with my father on this subject, and it was arranged between them that you and I should be married. Why do you suppose I have held my tongue so long? I’ll tell you. Simply because I regarded the whole thing as settled.”

"Have you said all you had to say, my lord?" the girl asked as calmly as possible.

"That depends upon how you take what I have said. What I had to say was this: Our marriage will take place before the present year is at an end."

"Is that all, sir?"

"I would like to have you tell me what you think of it?"

"I have said all that I have to say on that subject, Lord Oakleigh. If you did not understand me, I beg that you will understand me now. I shall never be your wife."

"But I say, you will."

"I can not prevent you from saying what you please; but, surely, over my own fate I should be allowed to hold an opinion. Breakfast will be waiting."

"Stop! By —!" starting up with a fierce oath and grasping her by the arm. "You do not leave me in that fashion. Before you go you must hear a word I have to say. If you will marry me quietly of your own free will—Hush!—keep still till I have said my say!"

She had attempted to break away and leave him, when he had thrust her back upon the seat from which she had arisen.

"There!" he went on, hissing out his words madly. "Sit you there and listen: If you will marry me quietly, as it is your duty to do, all may be well. I will do by you, for your good and comfort, all that any man could do. I will be a true husband to you, kind and loving. But if you refuse me, if you persist in your stubborn will not to be my wife, if you hold out against me and persuade my grandfather to join you, if you do this I will make your life a living torture! I will strike you down so that you shall cry to me for mercy! Aye, the time shall come when you will beg of me to take pity on you and make you my wife! How do you like the picture?"

"Lord Oakleigh! Let me go! I have no more to say."

"I ask you, how do you like the picture I have drawn?"

"And I ask you to let me go."

"Won't you answer me?"

"You need no answer. You do not wish for an answer. If you can find delight in torturing me I suppose I must submit until I can break from you."

"Why don't you call me, Monster!—as I see it plainly in your mind to call me?"

"Simply, sir, because I prefer that you should characterize yourself."

"Cordelia! By —! I would give a thousand pounds if you could be a man for just one poor minute! It is a wonder that I do not strike you where you sit."

"And yet you ask me to become your wife! I can scarcely understand you."

"My dear lady, you will understand me better before you are four months older; for I swear, by the heaven above me! that you shall be my wife! Do you hear that? Hold! Just a moment more." And he looked down upon her with an expression on his dark, passion-wrought face that startled her anew.

"Do you think I do not know which way your fancy is tending?" he demanded, his terrible wrath causing the last drop of blood to leave his face. "As I live, I believe you would marry that smuggler's brat to-morrow, if your guardian would suffer it! Oh it makes you wince, does it? I think I will see the gentleman."

"Monster! let me go!" And thus exclaiming she sprang from him, and leaped away. He jumped to catch her; but, at that moment, two men-servants approached the place, and he gave it up, and drew back into the arbor.

"By —!" He muttered to himself a horrible oath, and went on: "I believe she really does love the fellow! What in the world can the old man have been thinking of to allow it? By heavens! if he don't put a stop to it, I will. I'll have the girl for my own, if I have to force her to it! Mercy on us! she's been allowed to associate with young Maitland as though he'd been an own brother to her! No! we'll put a stop to that. If it can not be done in one way, it can in another!"

With this he smoothed his wrinkled front as well as he could, and left the arbor. He was not in the mood for sitting at the breakfast-table with his grandfather and Cordelia; so he took a turn away toward the river, prolonging his walk for an hour.

On his return to the castle he found that the meal had been kept for him. The others, he was informed, had eaten. He was further informed that the earl desired much to see him.

But he did not have to search. His grandfather came into the breakfast-room while he was eating, and took a seat near him.

"I want to ask you, my dear boy," the old man said, in his pleasant, cheery way, "when you thought of returning to Oxford."

"Why, I thought you knew," the grandson replied with seeming frankness, "that I had planned to go to-day. However, I may put it off till to-morrow. Had you anything of business to propose?"

"Well, my boy," the earl answered, with an earnest, yearning look into the dark face before him, "you do not forget that you have passed the age of proper youth—that you are now a free and independent man. Let's see—you were twenty-one—"

"On the first of June last," Matthew put in, while his grandfather hesitated.

"Exactly. And I had supposed that your term at college would have been at an end."

"So it would have been had I not taken an extra pull at some of my studies. But it will be over shortly. I shall come home and take a short rest, and then, I think, I'll take a run for a year or two on the continent."

"All right, Oakleigh. I am happy to know that you have a settled plan."

"Hark ye, my lord," said the young man, after a brief pause, looking up with a wine-glass in his hand, "I have to say to you, that one of my settled plans has been considerably upset this morning."

"Ah, how is that?"

"Let me answer by asking a question: Was there ever, between my father and Sir William Chester, a settled plan that Cordelia and I should marry?"

106

The old man started, and an expression of pain settled upon his countenance.

"You know, don't you?" Matthew added, as his grandfather did not speak. "Was it not a settled plan between the two fathers, before Sir William and his child left India, that Cordelia and I should become man and wife?"

"My dear boy," the earl replied, speaking slowly and earnestly and with evident pain, "I know all about it; I know all that was said, and all that was done. Have you ever believed that such an arrangement was made?"

"I certainly have."

"What reason had you for the belief? Surely I never told you so."

"Perhaps you never did; but you have gone on, allowing me to—"

"Hush! Hush, my boy. You surely can have no cause of complaint against me. Never before have you spoken to me on the subject."

"At all events," insisted the youth, "you should have known that I was likely to fall in love with the beautiful girl and to want her for my wife."

"Well, and what then? If you honestly love her, and will solemnly swear to be to her a true and loving husband, you shall have my consent, with God's blessing."

"Aye, but suppose the girl should refuse me?"

"Then, of course, that would be the end."

"And you would put up with it, would you?"

107

"What do you mean, Matthew, by that?"

"You would allow the girl to have her own way? You would not make an effort to influence her?"

"To influence her to what?"

"To accept your grandson for a husband."

The old man started and a perceptible shudder shook his strong frame. He looked again into the dark face before him, and thought of the precious darling who looked to him for care and protection.

"Did you understand me?" Lord Oakleigh asked, with a show of temper, as his grandfather continued to gaze upon him in silence.

"Yes, Matthew, I understood you but too well. I am surprised that you should put such a question to me."

"In Heaven's name! why surprised? Is it surprising that I should wish to make Cordelia Chester my wife?"

"Not at all; but I am surprised that you should for one moment suppose that I would urge her to marry against her will. In fact, my boy, I gave to her father, when he lay dying, a solemn promise that I would never do any such thing. She should not be asked to marry without love."

"Oho-ho-oo!" The angry man laughed coarsely and contemptuously. "If you stick to that you'll be likely to send your fair ward to a grand market! Do you know whom she will marry if she weds with the man of her heart's desire?"

"Boy! What do you mean?"

"Upon my word! I believe you know very well what I mean. Don't you know which way the girl is drifting? If you do not, it is time you opened your eyes!"

108

"Matthew," said the earl, drawing himself up proudly, and looking his grandson straight in the face, "I will not profess to misunderstand you. You are speaking, or thinking, of Percy Maitland. I am only sorry that he is not of gentle blood; for I tell you frankly, were he so, I should not hesitate an instant to bestow upon him Cordelia's hand, provided they both wished it."

"Which means, I suppose, that you would not give that hand to me?"

"If you will have it, boy, I answer you just as frankly, yes."

"By —! I begin to understand you!" the young lord exclaimed, prefacing the words with an imprecation the like of which had not been uttered in the earl's presence for years. "And let me tell you, old man—"

"Hush! Oh, boy! boy! have you no heart?"

"— —!" Another oath, and then, "You treat me as though I had none. I approach my gentle Lady Cordelia; and she receives me as though I were infected. I ask her if she will be my wife, and she almost spits on me."

"Ah! Then you have spoken with her?"

"Yes; this very morning. It was her treatment of me that took away my appetite for an earlier breakfast. If I had been a pariah, she could not have treated me more contemptuously. A fine home-coming, truly!"

109

"Matthew," said the old man, rising as he spoke, and gazing upon his grandson with mingled feelings of sadness and indignation, "I have but a few words to say, and those I speak to you from my heart though you may try to think otherwise. For the refusal of Cordelia, and for any harsh words she may have spoken, you have yourself to thank. If you spoke to her as you have spoken to me I wonder not that she took quick offense."

"And how, if I may ask, have I spoken to your lordship?"

"The tone in which you now speak is enough for answer. Add to that the gross profanity which fell from your lips but a few moments since, and the measure of my endurance is reached. Oh, boy! boy! why will you do so? You do not know how I could have loved you, had you but allowed me to do it. For the love of Heaven! will you not try to do differently? Who shall say what might have been had

you been pure and good?"

"Which is equivalent to saying, if I understand the king's English, that I am not pure and good?"

"Neither pure, nor good, nor truthful, Matthew! Alas! that I should live to say it, and that you should live to deserve it."

"Thanks! Many, many thanks, dear grandpapa! You'll excuse me if I go out and get a bit of fresh air after this." And, thus speaking the wretch turned away, with a sneer on his lips and a look of defiance in his eyes, and left the room. And the aged grandsire, when the distant door had been closed and he was left alone, sank into a seat, and burst into tears.

110

And so, a little later, Cordelia found him.

CHAPTER IX.

A COMPROMISE.

"Dear, dear grandpa! Has he been making you unhappy, too? What has he done? What has he been saying to you? Tell me all about it."

The earl felt two warm, loving arms around his neck, and a dear, treasured head pillowed on his bosom. By and by he looked up, and met the earnest, beseeching gaze of his beautiful ward—his grandchild of his heart—the one true, enduring love left to him in all the world.

"Oh, Cordelia, my sweet child! God and all the good angels keep and bless thee!"

And then, with many pauses, and many tears, he told the story of his interview with his grandson—all save that part of it which had reference to the smuggler's son. Of that he spoke not yet.

When this had been told, Cordelia gave a truthful account of the interview in the arbor; but she did not dwell upon it. She hurried through with it as rapidly as possible, and then broached a new subject.

"Grandpa," she said, with a world of eager inquiry in look and tone, "you have heard stories told of the old chapel of the Monks, on the crag—about its being haunted, and so on, haven't you?"

111

"Yes, darling. Those stories are older than I am."

"Well, what do you think about it? What did you ever think? Of course, you have had your thoughts."

"Really, my dear child, you puzzle me. I hardly know how to answer. I must have had a great many thoughts during all the years since, in my boyhood, I heard the first stories of the ghosts of the old chapel. And there was one thing curious. For many years—for almost two-score, I should say, those stories died out.

"Of late, however, within ten or a dozen years, they have revived. I remember, it was during the very week of your father's death, a number of our servants were frightened by a ghost—the ghost, they said, of a gray friar—wandering about the old ruin. But—but—it was, of course, the veriest nonsense."

Cordelia looked up into the old man's face searchingly. She looked so sharply, and with so much of meaning in the look, that he shrank away from it, and his eyes, usually so honest and true, wavered.

"Grandpa! grandpa! There is something you do not tell me. What is it? Come, you surely can have nothing that you would wish to hide from your darling."

"Child! child! why are you so eager? Ah! tell me, were you in the chapel through the storm? Why of course you were. You told me so. Did you see anything?"

112

"Grandpa, I want you to answer me first. You ought to. You are the oldest, and should take the lead. Tell me, what was it you kept back from me?"

Once more, after a little further hesitation, the frank, steady, and straightforward look came back to the old earl's eyes; and he said, first casting a swift glance around:

"Cordelia, the story I am going to tell you I have never told to anybody. It has puzzled me; and I have tried to solve the mystery involved; but I have kept it to myself.

"You will remember, shortly before your father's death, his old attorney, John Chudley, came up to make the papers necessary to prove my appointment as your guardian, and to make the will, and so on. You will remember also that his son Charles came with him. Charles was at that time somewhere near twenty years old; and he was observant and reliable, as was his father.

"Well, one day, while they were here, after the legal business had all been done, those two, the Chudleys, went off up the river after fish, a sport of which they were fond, and of which they got little at home. They fished through the greater part of the day, and on their way home they took a fancy to climb Witch's Crag. Suffice it to say—they went up—"

"Oh!—and got lost!" broke in the eager listener. "I remember the night, and how frightened everybody was. Just such another night as it was last night. Am I not right?"

113

"Entirely so, darling. They went up the crag, and on their way down they lost the path. The storm and darkness came and found them in sight of the chapel, and there they sought shelter. They had found some stone seats away in one corner, where they sat down and waited for the storm to pass, or at least for the rain to hold up a bit.

"And now comes the wonderful part. While they thus sat they were startled by the sound of somebody walking outside, and presently afterward they were sure somebody had entered the chapel. As luck would have it, a few seconds later there came a stream of lightning that made the place as light as day, and they plainly saw a human figure, tall and large, enveloped in the robe and

cowl of a gray friar! Strangely enough, not more than three seconds had passed when another flash came, and this time they saw the friar close by the altar. The third flash came in a few seconds more, and the friar had vanished.

"The mystery was, what could have become of the strange intruder? They, father and son, could both swear that he had not gone out by the door. He could not have done it and they not know it. The windows were beyond the reach of any man unless he had a ladder or a tall stepping-place of some kind to help him. And yet he had gone—vanished, as into thin air.

"On the next day they went to the chapel; and I went with them; and they there told the story over, at the same time pointing out the different localities—the course which the figure took—and the point at the altar where he stood before he disappeared. 114

"That is the story, Cordelia. And I am free to confess it has puzzled me. That a person in the guise of a Franciscan monk, or gray friar, entered the chapel on that evening I am confident. Also, I can not doubt that he made his way out without going by the vestibule or through a window."

"And now, my dear grandpa, what do you think of it? How do you think it was done?"

"To tell you the truth, dear child, I have thought there must be, somewhere near that altar, a secret trap—an entrance, in some way, to hidden vaults or crypts below."

"But you never found anything?"

"No. I have searched at every possible point. I have closely examined every seam and every crevice, but nothing have I been able to find—not a trace, not a sign."

"Now, grandpa, if I will tell you something, you will keep it to yourself, won't you—at least till I tell you otherwise?"

"Certainly, darling, if there is good reason for it."

"Well, there is the very best of reasons. We agreed—Percy and I—that we wouldn't speak of it until he had time to investigate; but, since you know so much, you ought to know this, too." 115

And thereupon she went on, excitedly and vividly, yet very clearly and succinctly, to tell the story of the adventure of the previous evening.

"Oh!" she cried, when she had concluded the narrative, "I am glad it was Percy. If there is anything to be found, be sure he will find it."

"Cordelia!"

The girl started. There was something in the tone—in the manner in which her name had been thus abruptly pronounced, that sounded strangely to her. It seemed to her as though she could detect pain in it.

"Cordelia! You think a great deal of Percy Maitland?"

What in the world did he mean? Had he read her secret? Did he know or did he suspect, that she loved him, loved him with all the love of her heart? Ah! Matthew had spoken. His word had given the earl's thoughts direction. She had hoped that the secret might be Percy's and hers for a time longer; and it would be an easy matter to deceive her questioner, even now.

But, could she do it? Could she, in this hour, when a holy love had sanctified and beautified her life, take her first step in falsehood? Oh, no! no!

"My dear child!—darling!" reaching out and taking her hand, when a full minute had elapsed and she had not spoken. "You are not afraid of your dear old grandpa. Will you not trust him fully?"

"Yes, yes!" the noble girl answered. She started to her feet, and threw her arms around his neck and kissed him; then having resumed her seat, she looked frankly, trustfully up, and added: "Ask me what you please, dear grandpa, and I will answer if I can." 116

"Cordelia! your generous tone, your entire readiness to answer, tells me that I, too, should be generous and confess to you my source of information. It was Matthew who put the thought into my mind, and he did it most unkindly."

"I knew it, dear grandpa. He taunted me, or he meant to do so, and he made terrible threats, but they do not frighten me. They did at first, but they do not now. Dear, dear old grandpa," she cried impulsively, after a short silence, at the same time grasping his arm with both her hands, "would you, could you ask me to marry with Lord Oakleigh?"

"Oh, my soul, no!"

"Did my father ever express a wish that I should marry with him?"

"No; he never did."

"Do you believe he would have allowed such a thing had he been living?"

"I know very well he would not have allowed it. So, my child, do you borrow no trouble because of your refusal of his suit."

"Grandpa, do you believe he loves me?"

"Alas! I can not believe that a true love of the heart—a pure, unselfish love—is possible to his nature! But let him pass. Tell me of this other—of Percy Maitland. What is he to you? You know what I mean." 117

She had thought to answer promptly, but when the moment came her heart was bounding too strongly for coherent speech. She bent her head and pressed her hands over her bosom, and by and by she had gained control of her emotions; or, at least, of those that had overcome her. She looked up, with a warm, radiant light in her truthful eyes, and a rich, rosy glow on her earnest, lovely face.

"Dear grandpa, don't be frightened; don't have any fear; and I pray you, don't blame me until you have taken a good long time for thought and observation; for I tell you, in the outset, while you live and need me, I will not leave."

"Bless you, darling, for that!"

"And now, I must confess to you, I love Percy Maitland with all my heart, and all my strength. I love him as I never loved another—as I never can love another—with a love that would be my death

if he were taken from me. We never knew till yesterday."

And then, in her frank bubbling manner, with the ice thus broken, she went on and told the story of the love-passage on the crag; and of how their love had been sealed in the old chapel.

The old man was deeply interested. He felt his own youth come back, with the one great love of his lifetime; and he lived over again the ecstasy of the long ago.

And another thing—the character and the behavior of the low-born youth stood out in flattering colors. The earl could not put away his admiration for him; he could not help respecting and esteeming him. 118

And again he found himself wishing, "Oh! that Matthew had been like him!" Yet there was another and sterner side to the subject. Could he allow the lady daughter of one of England's proudest, wealthiest knights to marry with the son of a smuggler?

But even here the old earl, his tender, loving heart, could find argument on both sides. He called to mind the dying words of Sir William. His gentle daughter should never be urged to wed without love, and he—the earl—had solemnly promised that he would never even ask her to do such a thing.

He remembered with a start how earnestly and feelingly the dying father of his fair ward had spoken of the misery that came from loveless marriage.

And here was the girl with a love in her heart that had become so much a part of her life that the loss of it would kill her.

Were the man the son of a landed proprietor—of an humble esquire—or even of a wealthy farmer, of good family, he might have hesitated; but—the son of an obscure seaman—aye, in truth, the son of an outlaw! Oh! it was too much!

"Cordelia? My blessed child, do you not see—do you not understand—this must not be. Think of it. You know how I love you. I do not exaggerate when I say, I would willingly die for you. Then, oh, then, you will believe I have only your best good at heart. Think who and what this man is. Think of his family—his parentage. Do you not see?" 119

"Grandpa, I can not quite understand it. Here am I with a heart capable of loving. In my brief span of life I have become acquainted with two men, and have been thrown more or less into their companionship. In fact my relations with these two have been such that their friendship could not have been otherwise than valuable and very pleasant to me, provided I had found them worth confidence and esteem. One of those men was born the child of a smuggler. He could not help it, could he? The question with me is, what sort of a man has the smuggler's son grown to be?"

"The other man, dear grandpa, was born the son of—"

"Stop! stop! Oh, I know what you would say. Aye, and what sort of a man has he grown to be? Oh, Heaven have mercy!"

"Dear grandpa!" rising to her feet and once more winding her arms around his neck, "let us say no more about the matter at this time. You will not forbid me to associate with Percy as I have heretofore done. Think what he has been to me—my teacher and guide through all these years! And what a teacher! Could there have been a nobler, truer, or purer guide? You need not fear that I shall marry him without your knowledge, and, I am almost ready to say, without your consent. But let it be for now. You may talk with my lover if you like; but mind, you shall not blame him. Mine is the blame if you have any to lay upon us. 120

"There!" giving him another kiss, "now go and be as happy as you can. Be sure your darling will do nothing to give you pain if she can help it. Shall it not be so?"

Poor, fond, foolish old man! He could not find it in his heart to say her nay. And, if the truth were told, he felt greatly relieved that the matter had been thus pleasantly disposed of.

He told himself things would simply be as they had been. If he would win his ward from the unfortunate love, he would not do it by beginning now to make her miserable and unhappy. He would wait. Who should say what of good the future might bring? He kissed her and blessed her, and the conference ended.

While this scene had been transpiring in the breakfast-room of the castle, another, of a somewhat different character, had been taking place in the wood by the river, not a great way off.

Lord Oakleigh had left his grandfather feeling about as angry—as thoroughly mad with rage and passion—as a naturally perverse and passionate man could be.

He went first to the butler's room and got a bottle of brandy, which he took with him to his own apartment, where he drank freely.

Then he buckled on his sword and took his hat and went out. He had no particular aim in view, though his thoughts, which he muttered aloud as he gained the open park, were of the smuggler's son. He could not believe that his grandfather would allow Cordelia to marry with the outlaw's offspring; but there was no telling what the girl herself might do. So far as true love—or real love of any kind—was concerned, he felt not a particle of it in his heart for his grandfather's fair ward. But he had never seen a girl he had liked better; and, surely, he had never seen one more beautiful. 121

In truth, he did not believe there was a more beautiful woman in the kingdom. At some time he would be earl of Allerdale; and he would want a mistress to preside over his household; and Cordelia Chester was the one woman of all the world upon whom his choice had been fixed.

So it would not answer to suffer this young smuggler to bewitch her. He was forced to acknowledge to himself that young Maitland was about the handsomest young fellow he had ever met—just the man, he told himself, for an impressionable young girl like Cordelia to go crazy about. "Upon my soul," he muttered on, "I believe she would run away with him in a moment, if she were crossed. And just so long as the fellow is in the neighborhood, just so long will the old earl allow her to associate with him. Poor old fool! He don't know what he is doing. But I think I've put a flea in his ear. Yet, for all that, the girl can befool him. She can coax and wheedle him into anything, I don't care how monstrous it is. 122

"By —! There's one thing I can do! Aye, and if the need shall come, I will do it. Ha! I was talking of him; and here he is."

Brandon had entered the wood at the edge of the park, and was now in the path that ran along upon the shore of the river.

He had been muttering to himself, as we have heard, when, on raising his eyes, he beheld not far away the very man of whom he had been thinking and speaking, coming toward him.

When Percy lifted his eyes on hearing an approaching footstep, and beheld Lord Oakleigh, his first thought was to avoid him; and he had half turned, for the purpose of striking into the wood, when it occurred to him that the act would not only appear cowardly, but the young lord might take it as an affront.

At all events his second thought, which he obeyed, led him straight on, and pretty soon they were face to face. Maitland had swerved to the right, intending to pass; but the other had stepped directly in front of him, thus preventing the passage.

Percy looked up in surprise—surprise and indignation. He saw that his lordship had been drinking, and there was mischief in his black, sunken eyes.

But the well-disposed youth would avoid trouble if the thing were possible; and, to that end, he turned to the left, making a movement to pass in that direction. And again the young lord stepped in front of him, thus interposing a second time.

123

CHAPTER X.

A BROKEN HAND—A WONDERFUL DISCOVERY.

Our hero looked straight into the face of the man before him, and he saw there not only the unmistakable signs of drink, but he saw, too, a fierce, ungovernable anger. The dark, sinister face was the face of a madman.

And there was still mischief in the eyes. They sent forth a malevolent, vengeful gleam not to be mistaken. What did the man mean?

What could have possessed him? It occurred to Maitland at once that his wrath had been aroused before this present meeting. The sight of himself might have set it boiling over, but that had not been the sole cause of it.

Instinctively Percy thought of his means of defense against attack. Oakleigh was armed with a good sword, and was angry enough to draw it upon the slightest provocation. Indeed, it was more than possible that his intent was in that direction. Fortunately our hero was armed. He had in his hand a leopard-wood staff—a common walking-cane—a stick that Donald Rodney had brought from one of the Pacific islands and given him as a present. It had a head of solid silver, and was, taken all in all, as serviceable a weapon as he could have wished for.

124

"Lord Oakleigh! why do you thus impede my progress? If you have anything to say, I am ready to hear it."

"Oho! you've found your tongue, have you? Well, my gay young spark, I have something to say, and you may find it of importance. I have to inform you that you have made yourself about as familiar at the castle as will be good for you. Henceforth you will give that place as wide a berth as possible. To come to the point, you will have nothing more to say to the Lady Cordelia. I think you can understand that, and I can assure you, you had better take heed."

"Is that all, my lord?"

"Is—that—all! Isn't it enough? Do you intend to obey me?"

"Lord Oakleigh, I answer you frankly—I do not recognize your right to command me."

"You don't, eh?"

"Certainly not."

"Then, by —! I'll give you a taste of my quality. I give you fair warning. I command you to cease all intercourse with Cordelia Chester! And I give you fair warning that if you do not, here and now, give me your promise to that effect, I will punish you! Aye, I will put it beyond your power to trouble her more! If you can not put that into plain English I shall not translate it for you. I'll expound it in a way you'll be likely to remember while you live! What say you? Shall I have your promise?"

125

"Lord Oakleigh, you have no right to speak—"

"Silence! Will you promise?"

"Lord Oakleigh, have you come hither on purpose to assassinate me?"

"Will you give me the promise?"

"I will not!"

"Then (the oaths he muttered in his mad rage were horrible) I'll show you for I am here! Take that!"

The first movement he made and he made it furiously, told his fell purpose.

He had drawn his sword, a heavy infantry sabre, of the pattern worn by the higher officers when on active service, and his first movement, following immediately upon the words he had spoken, was a direct, powerful lunge at the other's bosom.

But our hero had been on his guard and was prepared. Probably there was not a better swordsman in Headlandshire than was he.

With a downward and outward sweep of his heavy staff he struck the blade aside, and his lordship's own impetus, with the expected resistance thus removed, came near to sending him

prone upon the earth. But he quickly recovered himself and came on again.

And again did Percy beat his blade aside,—and again; and by and by he gave his lordship a rap on the knuckles that made him groan aloud in his pain.

“Oakleigh! if you do not desist, I will break your arm; or I will lame it for you so that you will not wield a sword again for a time at least. Beware!” 126

If Matthew Brandon had been in any degree sober, and in possession of his reason, he would have seen that he had no show against the antagonist he had chosen.

The staff was like iron in weight, and impervious to the cutting edge of the sword; and in the hand of its owner it was really a dangerous weapon. With only a jaunty velvet cap to protect Lord Oakleigh’s head, his antagonist could, had he willed so to do, have brought his stick down upon it with force enough to crack it; and more than once had the opportunity been offered.

At length, when Brandon had become so mad and furious as to lose all control of himself, when only an insane purpose to kill urged him on in his blind, headlong attack, Percy determined to put an end to the scene.

Twice, without particular effort, he struck aside the blade, and then, as the opening was given, he brought his heavy staff down upon the back of his lordship’s right hand with a force that closed the strife.

The sword dropped to the earth, and Lord Oakleigh fairly shrieked with pain.

“You’ve broken my hand! You’ve broken my wrist!”

“Thank me that I did not break your head, which I might have done half a dozen times!”

“You shall pay for this! Oh, you shall pay for it!”

“Lord Oakleigh, you attacked me with the intent to kill me. You meant it from the first; I saw it in your face, and you did the same as to swear you would do it. Listen, now, my lord: four separate times, at least, your life was at my mercy. I could have delivered a blow on your skull that would have crushed it like an egg-shell; but I spared you. I may say to you, however, don’t depend upon my sparing you should you make a second attempt upon me, because I might not do it. And now, noble sir, you had better go home and have your hand properly cared for.” 127

“You’ve broken every bone in it! Oh, you shall suffer for it, be sure of that!”

“I can only say to you once more, my lord, thank me that I did not break your head.” And with this our hero, who had changed places with his antagonist during the conflict, turned on his heel and walked swiftly away.

Lord Oakleigh watched him till a bend in the path had hidden him from view, and then burst forth into a torrent of oaths and imprecations and threats of vengeance, dire and deadly.

By and by, when he had regained sense enough to realize the needs of his situation, he bethought him of what he had better do. He was confident his wrist was broken. His best plan would be to see the village surgeon, whom he knew as a man of skill and judgment.

He managed to pick up his sword with his left hand and return it to its scabbard, after which he set forth for the village, distant less than a mile. 128

He was fortunate enough to find the surgeon at home, an elderly man, and really skillful in the way of his profession. He knew the young lord by sight, and was ready, and even eager, to be of service; but with not a particle of servility. He would have been just as earnest to help the poorest man in the town.

Oakleigh told him he had received a kick from a horse. And the surgeon, when he examined it, decided that it had been a pretty furious kick, and it was curious that the remark should have fallen from his lips, “Be thankful, my lord, it was not your head. You would never have come to me to fix it for you.”

His lordship winced, and, doubtless, felt like swearing, but he contained himself. The surgeon informed him that two of the metacarpal bones were fractured and dislocated at their point of articulation with the carpus.

“You are an Oxford man,” said the doctor, smilingly, “so, of course, you know what all that means.”

“Certainly,” the sufferer answered; but he lied, and the old man suspected as much, but he made no further remark. The dislocation was reduced, and the two central bones of the hand were properly set, and a couple of light splints bound on to hold them in place while they healed.

“I must go to Oxford at once,” said Oakleigh, when the surgeon had spoken of his calling again. 129

“You can tell me how I must manage.”

“When do you start?”

“This very day.”

“Then keep your hand in a good, firm sling; have your servant do your undressing and dressing for you, and as soon as you reach Oxford call on Dr. Cartwright and let him look at it. Mark you, don’t attempt to use that hand, and don’t you let either of those splints get out of place till you have seen the Oxford surgeon.”

His lordship promised obedience with a nod, paid the fee, and departed: his hand—and his whole arm, for that matter—giving him an exquisite sense of pain.

He did not think of wishing that he had kept clear of Percy Maitland. In that direction his thoughts were only of vengeance; and the imprecations that fell from his lips were terrible.

Meantime our hero had kept on up the river path. He was bound for the old chapel, having determined to make a search for the secret which he firmly believed had existence there. He had thought of calling on Cordelia to accompany him, knowing that she would be anxious to do so, did she know of his purpose, but he could not do it. After the adventure of the preceding evening, his calling her out would loosen people’s tongues; and even she might deem it an unwarrantable liberty.

Ah! he would not have felt this way four-and-twenty hours before. The whole world had changed to him in that time. A great joy had entered into his lowly life, uplifting and sanctifying it, a joy which must be kept hidden from the world until it could be published with safety to his darling.

130

Henceforth the end and aim of his existence would be to care for and bless the dear one who had so frankly and nobly trusted him; and for the present, for her comfort and well-being, their love must be known only to themselves.

Ah! he would be very careful that he did not give any one cause for suspicion. He could not be quite so free as he had been. He would go on his present excursion alone, and Cordelia should decide for herself how it should be thereafter.

It was near noon when Percy reached the old chapel. He entered and looked around. All was as they had found it on the previous day.

He went to the corner where the stone cubes were, and sat down where he had sat on the evening before. For a little time he gave himself up to thoughts of the blissful moment that had come to him amid storm and tempest. He lived them over again; and, naturally enough, his mind ran on into the future. What should it bring? Would he ever be permitted to make the daughter of an English nobleman his wife?

"But she loves me! She loves me!" he cried in tones of rapture; "and with her dear love I will be content. If darkness and disaster must come, I will not court it. I will love her while life is mine, and love shall be my joy. Oh! that can not be taken from me! That is a part of myself that will endure while I live, and can only die when I am done with earth."

131

Shortly after this he gave his attention to the business on which he came. He looked first and calculated the direction in which the spectral figure had gone after passing the center of the chapel.

It had been directly toward the altar, and there, very nearly at the right-hand corner of the huge block of stone as he stood facing it, the figure had last been seen.

He now approached the altar and looked around upon the pavement in its neighborhood. It—the pavement—was composed of flags of a bluish-gray stone, square in form and fully three feet across, laid in cement. He got down upon his knees and with the strong blade of his pocket-knife sought to find a crack or a crevice of any kind between the stones of the floor.

But his search was vain. Fully half an hour was spent thus, and to no effect. The pavement over that whole part of the chapel was as intact, as firm and solid as though it had been a single mass, without break or flaw.

Where could it be? He examined the altar itself. Certainly there was no possible opening in any part of that. It was a single block of stone, without flaw or blemish.

The explorer looked around at the open windows. Not by any one of them could the seeming monk have gone. That was decided at once. Where then?

Had the whole thing been a wild, fantastical hallucination? Only a dream? Could it be possible that they had seen nothing?

132

Could it be that the very excursion itself, together with what he had deemed the most rapturous event of his life—could that have been but a baseless vision of his distempered brain?

He looked down, and his eyes rested upon his poor staff—its beautiful, evenly spotted and highly polished surface, erstwhile so smooth and fair, now marred and cut, and bruised and hacked by its rough contact with the edge of Lord Oakleigh's sword. Ah! that had been real at all events, and he very soon told himself that all that had gone before had been real.

Yes—the gray friar had certainly vanished from sight at that altar. There had been no deception; no hallucination—the departure had been a fact; and that was the end.

He had given up, and had turned, in deep dejection, toward the vestibule for the purpose of departing, when suddenly a new thought came to him, under the influence of which he stopped, and presently went back to the altar.

Was it cemented to the pavement? Was it secured in its place in any way? Again he went down on his knees, with his pocket-knife in his hand.

He commenced at the rear wall, at the end of the huge block where the specter had stood, and examined the point of connection between it and the pavement.

Ah! he found places where he could insert the knife-blade. He arose, and went outside and cut a small twig from a bush near by, the wood of which was tough and elastic. This he shaved down to a long, thin strip, and returned to his work.

133

He commenced again at the rear wall, brushing away the accumulated dust, and probed with the new implement. And so he went entirely around the altar; and at no point had it any further connection with the pavement than simply to rest upon it.

He was gazing upon the line, between the lower edge of the block and the floor, when something caught his eye that caused him to start.

It was a series of marks—abrasions—extending out from the edge of the altar, with a circular sweep, entirely across one of the broad stone flags. What did it mean? What could have done it?

A critical examination, with a little calculation, showed him that exactly such an abrasion as that would have been made by the swinging outward of the altar, away from the wall.

Suppose the huge block could swing on a pivot fixed at the corner next to the wall, at its eastern end—the end on the left hand, as one stood facing it. With a pivot at that point, a swinging outward of the giant cube would produce exactly the marks he had discovered.

And why were they on that one flag, and no where else? Simply because that flag was an eighth of an inch higher than its mates.

He stood back and looked. He felt that he had made an important discovery.

134

Somewhere, out of sight, was mechanism by which the altar, ponderous as it was, could be moved out of place; and there, beneath it, would be found an entrance to regions below. He was as sure of

it as he could be of anything which his eyes had not absolutely beheld. And further, there must be some very simple and ready way of setting the mass free, and moving it from the wall. Enormous weights with easily working pulleys operating beneath might do it.

In fact, the explorer as he contemplated the scene could imagine several ways in which the end might be accomplished. But that did not help him. Where was the point of connection outside?

That was the thing now, and the only thing. It must be very simple, wherever it was. The friar had accomplished the work of opening and closing the way very quickly, and with but little noise. Our adventurer looked around once more, and once more stood and reflected, with his head bent and his hands folded.

Again he went down upon his knees, and with his probe went entirely around the altar a second time, closely examining the line of separation between the cube and the floor. And this time he noticed something which he had not noticed before.

On the left-hand—easterly—end of the altar, the space between it and the pavement was marked. At the other end the huge block of stone sat firmly upon the flagging, there being places where even the thinnest probe he could fashion would not enter; but on that left-hand end it was different.

There the stone of the altar came in direct contact with the pavement at no single point!

And he found another thing: from the outer corner on that left-hand end to a point midway on the front side, that line of separation continued.

It was very slight—not more than an eighth of an inch in width—and would never be detected by a person while standing erect. He would have to stoop to find it. Was there any meaning to this? Could the ponderous block possibly be tilted over toward that easterly end?

Just half its bulk at bottom appeared to be free from resting upon the floor beneath, so there might be just that eighth of an inch play in case it could be moved.

Percy looked the ground over once more, and then went around to the opposite—the westerly—end of the altar. That was where the spectral monk had last been seen.

Could the massive block be jostled? He laid his hands upon the upper edge, then stooped slightly, so as to lift at the stone when he should put forth his strength, and then made the trial. He did not apply his full force in the outset. It was an experiment, and he wished to note particularly the result.

With his two hands fixed in place, and his lower limbs firmly braced, he lifted, lightly at first, and then with renewed force.

By and by, acting upon the impulse of the moment, he gave a sudden upward pressure with all his might. The result was wonderful.

First, he felt the heavy mass yield; next, he heard a dull thud followed by a rattling, grating sound beneath the floor; and, a moment later, the ponderous cube, starting away from its rest against the rear wall of the chapel, swung outward for a distance equal to its own depth, perhaps a little more.

And there, exposed to his view, was an opening in the pavement seemingly as long and as broad as the altar would safely cover; and on looking down he saw the head of a ladder resting against the side nearest to him.

His first thought was of the mechanism by which this wonderful result had been wrought; and for the purpose of discovering that he went part way down the ladder. He examined thoroughly, and found it very nearly as he had thought. A system of enormous weights, slung in chains of copper, the chains working in easily running blocks, were so arranged that upon setting the weights free the stone would be moved, as we have seen. The huge stone itself swung upon a pivot, at the inner, eastern corner, and at the other end underneath were small trucks on which it traveled over the flagging, and which had caused the abrasions which had attracted the explorer's attention.

The tipping of the rock backward set the spring free, and our hero remembered that he had instinctively applied his force towards moving the stone away from the wall until it had stopped, and then he had heard a sharp click, as though another spring had been caught.

Would tipping the stone again cause it to resume its former position against the wall? He thought so.

The next question he asked himself was, Should he unarmed and without a light, attempt to explore the wonderful place he had so curiously discovered?

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE SECRET CRYPT.

Having discovered so much, our hero could not be content to leave the place without knowing something more. He did not expect that he could explore to any great extent without the aid of artificial light; but he could see the manner of place it was immediately below him, and he might be able to determine something of its depth and general character.

Of course there was a way or means of closing and opening the trap from below; but he did not care then to stop for the investigation of that part of the problem.

So he went out and took a survey around to make sure that no one else was in sight, then returned and made ready for the descent into the unknown regions.

He had no weapon save his battered leopard wood staff; but that had served him once, and it might serve him again should the need present itself.

He took one more look around, then put his foot upon the ladder and began the descent. The distance was not far, perhaps twelve to fourteen feet, at the end of which he alighted upon a bottom

of rock and quite rough.

As nearly as could be judged with the aid of the light he had, he concluded the crypt to be mostly the work of nature. Evidently the old monks or whoever had built the chapel, had found the cavern beneath and had thus utilized it.

It was irregular in form, its greatest width at the point where he now stood being nine full paces, not far from twenty-seven feet.

As soon as he had become more used to the gloom he moved on ahead, very soon making a new discovery, and one of importance.

At the point where he had landed from the ladder the cavern had been entirely bare, the only things to attract his attention, besides the jagged walls, being the somewhat complicated and bulky machinery by which the altar was moved to and fro; but he had not advanced many steps into the place before he came in contact with things that opened his eyes and sharpened his understanding.

Piled against the walls on either hand were barrels and casks and boxes, some of which appeared to have been there a long time, while others were evidently of more recent deposit. A little further on the cave narrowed, and was buried in darkness, but he believed there was a widening again further on. In this narrower part were a few boxes, and a lot of ship's rigging—ropes, blocks, and old sails.

Ah! Another thing struck the explorer; and it struck him forcibly. It was a strong draught of air fresh from the sea! He was too well used to the atmosphere of the sea to mistake it when it came full in his face, and filled his nostrils and his lungs.

And now he could understand. In the slope of the crag towards the shore of the bay were several caves, two of which were of considerable size.

One of these latter—he thought he knew which one it was—had a secret opening into a passage leading to the place where he now stood; and the smugglers had discovered it and were making use of it.

Many things which had heretofore puzzled him were clear to him now. His father, he was confident, had known nothing of this cavern.

During his father's lifetime he had known how all the goods landed at the Cove were disposed of; but it had not been so since his death.

Of late—within the three years last past—there had to his certain knowledge been many things brought in that had never been taken further inland, to be disposed of among the people there residing.

One occasion, in particular, he called to mind. It happened a year previously. He had gone on board the brig one evening, and had seen a number of boxes brought up from the hold and deposited on deck.

On the following morning he had been called on board again, when he found the boxes gone; yet he knew that no team had left the landing, and that no boat had gone up the river.

But it was all clear now. The goods had been landed at night at the foot of the crag, and taken up to the cave. When the secret had been first discovered by the smugglers he could not imagine; nor could he tell by whom, though he strongly suspected that Ralph Tryon had been the first to make use of it as a depository of contraband, and, perhaps, for pirated goods.

Having discovered so much, and having further determined that the space ahead was wrapped in total darkness, Percy concluded to leave further explorations to another and more favorable opportunity.

Furthermore, he determined that he would acquaint the earl with the discovery he had made and leave future proceedings to his direction. It would be proper so to do, and it would be right.

Thus thinking he turned about and started to retrace his steps. He had gone but a short distance on his return when his eye caught an object he had not before seen. The fact was, his eyes had become used to the dim light, and he saw things more distinctly.

Standing on the stone bottom, just under the head of one of the casks—a cask that had been set up on two small boxes—he espied a drinking cup.

He stooped and picked it up and made sure it was of silver and heavy at that. He further observed that in the head of the cask, close to the lower chine, was a wooden faucet.

The fancy possessed him to see what the cask contained; so, stooping down, he gave the tap of the faucet a turn, and speedily a liquid trickled out. He gave another turn and held the cup under it.

The first drawn he used to rinse the drinking-vessel with, and with it filled a second time he arose and stepped to where he had more light.

The liquid, as the fumes had told him, was wine, and there could be no mistaking its character or quality. It was old port, very strong, yet smooth as oil. It must have been old when first deposited in its present place of rest, and now the taster decided it to be the finest wine of the kind he had ever put to his lips.

Being well assured that no harmful ingredient could have found its way into the cask, he drank the potion and felt the better for it, but he wanted no more. Much wine of that quality would give to his head a buzzing not at all desirable.

Up the ladder, once more on the pavement of the chapel, our hero looked around. Everything was as he had left it. And now to move the altar back to its original place. With his hands on the upper edge, as before, he put forth his strength, this time at once and quickly. He heard the sharp click, as before, and immediately the ponderous mass swung back against the wall, with not a sign left to tell that a strange hand had been tampering with the mystery of the old chapel.

One mystery had been solved; but, in some respects, a greater yet remained in the dark. He had discovered how the seeming monk had made his exit from the chapel, but he had not discovered the meaning of the face that monk had worn. He knew not how many times he had recalled the scene,

how many moments he had spent in thinking of it; he only knew that the more he reflected the more sure he became that his eyes had not played him false.

Beneath that gray cowl he had as surely seen a face like his father's as he was sure that he had seen the figure at all. But he had seen it in profile. Perhaps could he see that same face in full front view it might appear different to him.

Yet, it was marvelous; and he could not think of it without wonder. He could only hope that the time might come when he could look upon the gray friar under other circumstances.

If he was one of the smugglers, or was engaged in their business on shore, he might yet be trapped. Who should say?

Upon leaving the chapel our adventurer took his way at once towards the castle, being resolved that the earl should be made acquainted with his discovery in the outset. He had no fear of Lord Oakleigh. It would not be over and above pleasant to meet him; yet he would not go out of his way, or, at least, he would not discommode himself to avoid him. How his lordship would account for his lame hand he could not guess; but he doubted very much the telling of the truth. 143

He thought he might at some time relate the incident to Cordelia; but under no circumstances would he tell the story to the earl, unless he should be asked; and he did not think that likely, as he had no idea that the grandson would let out the secret of his ruffianism.

Arrived at the castle, the first person whom he met was the very one whom he was most eager to see—the old steward, Michael Dillon.

“Michael, I have had nothing to eat since early morning, and I have had a long hard walk.”

“Bless my soul! And bless you, too, Master Percy! You couldn't have come at a more fortunate time. When the old lord is alone with no company, he likes his dinner early; and we're just after carrying it in. So come along to my room and eat with me—unless you prefer to try the upper table.”

“What! with the earl?”

“To be sure.”

“Mercy, no! What should put such an idea into your head?”

“Why, it wouldn't be the first time, not by a number; and, besides, I have a fancy that the old lord rather likes it.”

“But never when Lord Oakleigh is at the castle.”

“Oho, he isn't here! Thank fortune he's gone.”

“Gone! Are you sure?”

“Aye, that I am—bag and baggage—he and his rascally valet with him.” 144

“When did he go and how?”

“He came home at noon with his arm in a sling. He said a horse had kicked him and hurt him sorely, and he had his things packed up and a trap to take him over to Burton, where I believe he said he was going to spend the night with a friend. He is off for Oxford to-morrow.”

“Was the earl very sorry to have him go?”

“I should say not. He makes the good old man very unhappy when he is here; and yet I sometimes think he hates to see him going, being so sure that he's going to new mischief. Ah, he's a bad lot! I'm sure I don't know who he takes after. His father was one of the finest gentlemen I ever knew, and handsome as well; and his mother was a born angel. There couldn't be a sweeter, purer, or a nobler woman than she was, though she was a bit proud. When I tell you that she was just as beautiful as is Lady Cordelia, and just as good, you'll understand what I mean. Who in the world there ever was in the old earl's family, on either side, like him, I'm sure I don't know. It's one o' them marvels, Master Percy, that you've got to take as they come, and make the best of 'em.”

They went in to dinner; and our hero made a hearty meal and enjoyed it. The conversation of the steward was entertaining and interesting.

He had been in the earl's employ, boy and man, more than half a century, having been born on the estate little more than three score years before. 145

“By the way,” the old man said towards the close of the meal, “it's curious that we've never seen anything of the new captain of the smugglers at the castle. Your father, my boy, used to come up quite often; and a few of us were glad enough to purchase a few creature comforts that he had to dispose of. Of course, the earl never traded with him; but, for all that, more than one bottle of wine from his cargo, and more than one chest of tea, found their way into his lordship's larder and upon his table. From what I hear, I should judge the new captain—Tryon—to be rather a poor sort of a stick.”

“Then you never saw him?”

“Not that I know of.”

“He is a bad man, Michael—a man that I keep clear of.”

“Yes, I've heard so. They don't speak well of him anywhere. Even the old landlord of the Allerdale Arms don't like him; and when Martin Vanyard turns against a smuggler you may be sure there's a reason for it.”

“I was not aware, before,” said Percy, “that Captain Tryon had never shown himself at the castle. However, he doesn't appear to spend much of his time in this section any way. As soon as his vessel gets in he is sure to be off. Where he goes I do not know; and, to tell the truth, I care less. There is something about the man that puzzles me, and for that I would like to gain a more intimate acquaintance. I would like to follow him on one of his journeys and see what he does with himself—where he goes, and in what guise he appears when there.” 146

“Eh! D'ye fancy he's playin' a kind of hide and seek?—that he's got another character?”

“Yes. I am sure of it, and I intend to unmask him one of these days. In fact, the time may not be far distant.”

"Well, if he's as big a rascal as I've heard it whispered, I hope he may be nabbed very soon."

"Ah!" exclaimed the youth, with a slight start, and a curious look into the old man's face, "what sort of whispers have you heard, Michael?"

The steward hesitated. After gazing for a time into his glass, and taking a swallow of wine, he said:

"Really, Percy, I don't know as I ought to speak; but then it's no secret, and it's whispered pretty loudly, too. They say—I've heard old Martin at the inn say—that there was more carried on by the new captain of the Staghound than smuggling. I s'pose you know what that means?"

"Yes. I know. Has it come to the earl's ears?"

"I'm not sure; but I think it has. Mebbe, Percy, you know about it."

"Michael, whatever I may know with regard to a change in the character of the brig has come to my knowledge within eight-and-forty hours. I shall myself speak with the earl on this subject; so you and I will discuss it no more."

"But you'll tell me some time, my boy?"

"Yes; you shall know all about it, just as soon as there is something tangible discovered." 147

Shortly after this the meal came to an end, and the young man made his way to one of the smaller drawing-rooms, where Cordelia was in the habit of sitting, and where he had given her his instruction while acting in the capacity of private tutor.

He found the lady there, and with her was the old earl. She arose instantly on his entrance, and approached him with her hand outstretched.

She smiled, as she always smiled on meeting him; but to him there was a new flush on her lovely face; a new warmth in her greeting, and a new light in her radiant eyes.

"Percy, I am glad you have come. You can tell dear grandpa all about what we saw in the old chapel last night."

"My lord," said the visitor, turning to the earl, after he had responded to Cordelia's greeting, "I have come on purpose to speak with you. I think I have something to tell that will interest you."

Now Lord Allerdale had made up his mind—had firmly resolved—that the next time he should meet with young Maitland he would treat him respectfully, and not unkindly; but he would make him feel that he must know his place and keep it.

He would never unbend to him again—never again give his hand as a friend. It would not answer.

And this was the next meeting. The old man had arisen when his grandchild spoke, and as he turned and rested his gaze upon the handsome face, and ran his eyes over the fine, manly form, and met the warm, generous smile, and heard the rich, frank, truthful voice, his poor resolutions vanished into forgetfulness, and the old love and admiration, together with the old trust and confidence, came back to him. 148

He put forth his hand without knowing it—put it forth as it had been his wont to do, and smiled benignantly, almost paternally, as he said in a frank, genial tone and manner so natural to him:

"Percy, I am glad to see you. Sit right down here, and let's have your wonderful story. If you can hold your own with Cordelia I shall give you full credit."

"I will not presume, my lord," said the young man, "to tell over again anything that your granddaughter may have told you; for I know she must have done full justice to her subject. I suppose," turning to the lady, "you have told all about what we saw in the old chapel?"

"Yes. I've told everything I could think of; but you might remember things that I have forgotten."

"No fear of that, dear lady. But listen: I have been to the chapel to-day."

"What! And never told me?"

"Hush, darling!" interposed the old nobleman, as the girl broke in. "Let the young man speak. I can see by his look that he has something of importance to tell us."

"I have indeed, my lord." And thereupon, clearly and concisely, and with real dramatic elegance and force, he went on and told the story of his wonderful discovery of a few hours before. 149

He told how he had reached the chapel, and how he had pondered and studied, and how he had finally discovered the secret of moving the ponderous block of stone forming the altar.

And then he told of the crypt beneath, of what he had found in it, and how he had determined that the secret vault was connected with one or more of the caves on the long slope of the Witch's Crag, towards the bay.

Cordelia had contained herself with difficulty during the recital, and at its conclusion she was eager to burst forth in her impulsive way.

She was greatly disappointed that he should have gone without her; but a look which he bent upon her after he had closed, together with several glances which he had given her while he had been speaking, told her why he had not come to her. She understood and was content. Be sure, however, she was determined that the next visit would not be made without her.

The earl had listened patiently, but eagerly, to the end. Not a word escaped him, nor an intonation.

"My dear boy," he exclaimed, warmly and gratefully, "you do not know what a favor you have done me. The whole thing is now plain to me and my duty clear. Of course, I may depend upon your assistance."

"You may, my lord, depend upon me for everything within my power to do."

"What put it into your head to think of that particular way of moving the altar?" 150

The young man explained by pointing to a square-topped table that stood near. He told how he had found the end where the huge stone was clear of the pavement, while at the other end it rested on it; and how that had led him to make the trials which had proved successful.

"And to think that all these years I have searched in vain! Well, the credit is yours, my boy; and I

am glad you have found it. If I am not mistaken, we have an important work before us." At this point the earl bent his head upon his hand, and remained for a considerable time buried in a profound meditation.

"Grandpa!" called his fair ward, becoming restless and impatient in the dead silence, "what are you thinking about?"

He started quickly and raised his head. Twice he passed his hand to and fro across his eyes, and finally, with a look of deep anxiety on his frank, honest face, he spoke.

CHAPTER XII.

AN EXPLORING EXPEDITION.

"Maitland," said the earl, with a look upon the youth full of confidence and esteem, "the time has come when I must speak frankly with you; and I shall trust that you will be equally frank with me."

"Lord Allerdale," Percy returned, with a depth of feeling that imparted a perceptible tremor to his voice and to his frame, "say to me what you will—ask me what you will—and I will reply to you as I can. I will answer everything within my power to answer; and if I offer a suggestion or a remark of any kind it shall be frankly and truthfully done." 151

"I believe you, my boy. I will not hesitate to say I have perfect confidence in you." He paused a few seconds, and then went on:

"You have no doubt, I suppose, that the cavern which you so wonderfully discovered is, at the present time, used by the crew of the smuggler brig, the Staghound?"

"I am confident that such is the case, my lord."

"Percy, I am now going to ask you a question which you will answer as you think proper. What is your candid opinion of the present character of the crew of that vessel?"

"I would divide the crew into two classes, my lord," answered the youth, promptly, and with a bold frank look into the old man's earnest eyes. "There are men of that crew who are good and true—men who are outlawed, I know, but who have much excuse for the course of life into which they have been led. Another part of the crew, including the chief, I believe to be about as bad—as wicked—as it is possible for men to be."

"Do you think, my boy," the earl pursued, greatly excited, "that they—the bad men—are—have been guilty of piracy on board that brig?"

"My lord, had you asked me that question two days ago, I could not have answered it as I can answer it now. To accommodate old friends—to save from possible disaster those who had been kind to me, and loving, in my boyhood, in the absence of the chief, I went out and piloted the brig in. While on board I saw that which surprised me; and I questioned one whom I knew I could trust. 152

"I will not speak his name. I will only say of him further, he and a score and more with him have resolved that the piratical brig shall know them no more. By no consent of theirs, but against their earnest protest, the iniquitous work has been carried on.

"Yes, my lord—those bad men, with the chief at their head, have been guilty of piracy. The brig is even now fresh from a piratical venture. A portion of her cargo may have been honestly purchased, to be dishonestly disposed of in England; but I verily believe the bulk of the property she has on board was robbed from other vessels."

"And the brig is at this moment in the cove?"

"Yes."

"Have you any idea of what they are doing with the cargo?"

"I do not think any of it has yet been moved. They are waiting for the return of their chief, who is at present away."

"Percy, who is this chief?"

"Have you seen him, my lord?"

"He was pointed out to me once at the village. I can only remember that he reminded me of a big brown bear, though more of the color of a lion." 153

"Lord Allerdale, I can tell you nothing of the man that would inform you. He is an enigma to me. I only hope we may have the opportunity for a closer acquaintance ere long. I know him to be a villain; if there is any good in his composition, it is unknown to me."

The earl regarded his youthful companion for a time in silence, seeming the while to be debating with himself. At length, with the passing of a cloud from his brow, he said:

"Maitland, we must engage in this matter with a thorough understanding of each other, and, should you lend me your aid, I should naturally depend upon you to take the lead. You know the ground; I do not. You also know the persons, while scarcely one of them is known to me; in fact, I may say not one, for were Tryon to appear in a garb different from that in which I saw him I should not recognize him from an utter stranger."

"Well, my lord," said the youth having waited a time for the other to proceed, "I think you had more in your mind that you wished to say."

Allerdale started and changed color.

"Yes," he replied, "I will tell you. As I have just remarked, if you engage in this work, I shall have to depend upon you; and, even though I should have the assistance of the king's officers, I should still expect you to lead. And now, my young friend, I don't want you to place yourself in an unpleasant position for me. If you would prefer not to openly raise your hand against these men, I 154

will certainly excuse you."

Our hero saw the drift of the old man's thoughts, and he was grateful, though there was a touch of disappointment that he had not been weighed more correctly.

Still, judging by the past—by his parentage, and the associates of his childhood, he could not deem it strange that his lordship should have held a lingering thought that he might feel a grain of sympathy even now for the crew of the vessel which his father had so long commanded, and many of whom had been his warm and loving friends.

But he—the earl—did not quite understand. Percy answered, frankly and kindly, and with truth in every word:

"Lord Allerdale, I thank you for your kind consideration. I have to inform you, however, that you do not quite understand me. With regard to the sin of smuggling I will not speak, unless, indeed, I may be permitted to say that nothing in the world, not even starvation, would induce me to place myself in the position of an outlaw.

"But there are a certain number of the old crew of the brig—men who sailed with my father—who, as I have before remarked, would not, I am confident, commit what they believed to be a crime. In fact they can not, in the very nature of the case, of the facts surrounding them, look upon themselves as great criminals.

"They know that the great majority of the poor people are with them, and at heart uphold them. While they really harm no private individual living farther than the competition in trade may go, they have the feeling that thousands of honest people bless them. 155

"But, my lord, what shall I say of the man who goes upon the high seas, a pirate? There is something in the word, in the very thought, that strikes a horror to my soul; something that sets every fiber of feeling within me to crying out in vengeance against them. Wait one week.

"I do not think Captain Tryon will return before that time; and we must make no move until he is on the ground. Should we do so, he would be sure to take the alarm and escape us; and he can do it, be sure. I never knew a man—never heard of a man—who had such a capacity for secreting himself. Let him leave his vessel, with a few hours the start, and no mortal can find him anywhere. There are men on board the brig who declare that he vanishes into pure air. However, when he is once more on the spot—when I know that he has joined the brig—there is no doubt that we can capture him."

"You think he will be back in a week?"

"Not far from that. I should say it will not be before that time; but if he should return sooner, I should know it, and will at once communicate with you."

"Percy, I haven't told you all. Word of this matter—of these pirates in my neighborhood—has come to the ears of the admiralty, and they have sent to me, not only for information, but they wish to know what I can do to help them. They remind me that I am senior justice in this county, and intimate pretty strongly that I am expected to lead in the work of capturing the culprits. They have sent one sloop of war to look after the pirate and will send more if necessary. Also, just as soon as I will inform them what I want and when I want it they will send a land force to operate with me. Now, my boy, what shall I do? What answer shall I return to the admiralty and what to the commissioners?" 156

"What do the commissioners say?"

"They expect me to call on my chief constable and his forces, and if more help is wanted they will send it."

"How many men can your constable raise, and what sort of men are they?"

"Oh, he can raise all we can possibly want, and plenty of them are good and reliable."

"Very well. And now, my lord, I will answer your question. Write to the admiralty that they need not send any more vessels of war after the pirate. He will, in all probability, never put to sea again. Write to the commissioner of police that you will not need their help. With regard to the constable of Headlandshire, let him be prepared; but be sure that he makes no open movement until further orders. If you will trust to my guidance, I think you will not be disappointed."

"You will keep me informed—you will—"

"My lord," said the young man as the earl hesitated, "you need be under no anxiety. I will keep my eyes open, and you shall know just what is to be done and when." 157

The old nobleman was greatly relieved, more so, perhaps, than he would have acknowledged, and his thanks were warmly given.

A few more questions on the subject of the pirate chief, for such they did not hesitate to call him, were asked and answered, after which Cordelia, who had been an interested listener—particularly interested, because she saw her noble guardian deferring most respectfully to her dear lover—claimed to be heard. She was eager to know when they would visit the old chapel.

"If you refer it to me for decision," said Percy, as he found his host's gaze fixed inquiringly upon him, "I say the sooner the better. I wish there could have been time this afternoon, but to-morrow will answer. The goods that are now being removed from the brig are going back into the country. They are proper contraband articles, and were purchased in France and Spain and at the Azores, without the help, I believe, of Captain Tryon. The last of those goods will probably be out to-morrow, or on the day following, and after that they will be moving things into the cavern. So you understand why we need to be expeditious."

"Suppose, then, we call it to-morrow morning?" suggested the earl.

And so it was arranged. Percy promised that he would be on hand at an early hour; and he suggested that not a word should be spoken on the subject to others. 158

"Only to Mary," said our heroine, earnestly. "I will be responsible for her circumspection."

"Certainly," returned Percy. "You shall not go without your trusty attendant. But you will caution her in advance."

The girl promised that she would exercise all possible caution, and shortly thereafter the young man took his leave.

The morning of the following day dawned clear and bright, and by the time the sun was two hours high the party was ready for the excursion to the old chapel.

By previous arrangement Percy had brought his old fowling-piece with him; and the earl likewise took one, thus giving to the inquiring servants the impression that they were going out simply for shooting.

Cordelia often accompanied her old guardian on his woodland rambles, gun or no gun; and more than once Percy Maitland had been called to go with them; so the arrangement of the party caused no surprise.

On referring to his watch, when they had reached their destination, the guide found it to be only a few minutes past eight o'clock. They were in good season, and he felt very confident that they had nothing to fear from other parties in the cavern.

Cordelia was in a flutter of excitement as they approached the altar. Percy first pointed out to them the peculiarities of the huge stone. 159

He found his wooden probe which he had fashioned on the previous day, and with the aid of that he very soon explained the various points, the discovery of which had led him to the grand discovery of all.

This done, he went to the right-hand end of the block, and laid his two strong hands fairly on its upper edge.

"Now, my lady," he said, with a happy smile, "if you will keep your eyes open you will behold a wonderful thing."

A weaker man than he could have set the rock in motion. He put forth his strength gradually, for the purpose of testing the matter, and he had exerted not more than a moiety of it when he felt the ponderous mass give, and heard the sharp click of the spring beneath.

A moment later the end of the stone where they stood began to move—to swing outward, away from the wall—and in a few seconds the aperture underneath was exposed to view.

Never mind the loud astonishment of the lady, nor the more quiet surprise of the maid. The earl himself was filled with wonderment, and did not hesitate to acknowledge it. The whole thing was a wonder, not only the finding of the subterranean chamber and the marvelous mechanism by which the altar was controlled, but the very existence of the place.

"Evidently," he said, when Percy had asked him his opinion of the origin of the crypt, and its secret mode of entrance, "it was constructed by the monks a great many years ago. We have a record of a fraternity of Franciscans here, with a monastery somewhere near the site now occupied by the castle, probably on that self-same spot, as many of the foundation stones of the present structure show unmistakable signs of having been used before. 160

"For instance, there is a stone near the southeastern corner of the old keep, close down by the sward, which we know must once have served as the keystone of a strong, massive arch. And there are others near it, which came from the same arch. However, that has nothing to do with this chapel. My opinion is this: At the time when those old monks lived here there were frequent incursions on the coast from piratical hordes, and those pirates were in the habit of making churches and monkish establishments their especial game. We may suppose that the friars first found this cave; also its connection with other caves, at a distance, towards the sea. How natural that it should occur to them what a capital means of escape all this would be if they only had a way of entering the cave secretly—unseen by their enemies the pirates. And then, you see, as a natural sequence, came the chapel with its wonderfully constructed altar. Of course, it's only supposition; but it will answer till we can find a better solution."

"Which, I think," said the young man frankly and honestly, "would be difficult to find. In fact, your solution appears not only plausible, and entirely reasonable, but, come to think the matter all over, I can find no room for any other. We may suppose, of course, that the machinery beneath for working the ponderous trap has been renewed. But anybody with mechanical skill might have done that." 161

After that they prepared to go down. The earl and the guide had each a brace of good pistols, and each a sword. Also, they had brought with them two good lanterns which could be utterly darkened should occasion require. Percy produced flint and steel, by means of which he set on fire a piece of punk wood, then lighted a brimstone match, and very shortly the lanterns were alight.

The muskets and the basket of provisions they ventured to leave behind, on top of the altar, and presently Percy put his foot upon the ladder and went down. Cordelia followed next, then came the earl, with Mary Seymour bringing up the rear.

We can imagine the wonder of the girls and their various exclamations; but their interest was not greater than was that of the earl. And even the guide himself found more to interest him than he had found before.

He had light now to help him, and the whole scene was open to his view. He could now see that the cavern was entirely the work of nature. If the hand of man had done anything it had been only the breaking off of a few jagged points and projections from the walls, with an occasional leveling of the floor. 162

They went on a considerable distance beyond where the guide had gone on the previous day. He had stopped where the cave had narrowed down to a simple passage not more than four or five feet wide.

And here they felt the fresh air from the sea—quite a strong draught of it. This passage extended, perhaps, a distance of a hundred yards, at which point it widened into another chamber, very nearly as large as the first; and here were found more articles of merchandise—a considerable bulk of it—a portion of which was comparatively new.

This second chamber was, in its widest part, eight to nine yards across, by full thirty long; its roof near the center being very high—full fifty feet—as nearly as they could estimate.

At the far end it narrowed again to a passage not more than four feet wide, the sides rough and broken, with many places where it could be seen that serious impediments had been removed by the setting maul and chisel. And here it was found that the way began to descend very perceptibly.

“About where are we now?” the earl asked, as they reached the passage.

“We must be very nearly beneath the point where the abrupt portion of the crag—the proper Witch’s Head—terminates, and the more gradual slope begins. We have come a considerable distance. Will you go further?”

“Let us see where this narrow pass will lead us.”

They went on, Cordelia resting her hand in her lover’s warm grasp when she could; the way descending quite abruptly, for the distance of a hundred yards, or more, when they came to a point where the way widened again, and the floor became level; but it was not a proper chamber.

It continued thus, widening gradually, for the distance of ten yards, or thereabouts, when it came to a sudden termination against a seemingly solid wall.

Above, at the height of thirty or forty feet, there was a broad opening, through which the sea breeze came freely, but it was entirely beyond reach from where they stood, and, of course, could never be used as a pass by the smugglers.

At length, however, Percy discovered a small aperture through which he was able to look upon what lay beyond; and the moment he saw he knew where they were. Directly before them, only shut away by a partition wall, was a cave which he had visited hundreds of times. It was not far from half way down the foot-slope of the crag.

Of course there was somewhere—and they could probably find it if they tried—a means of passage through this wall; but would it pay to attempt to discover it at the present time?

“Will it pay to run the risk of detection?” was our hero’s chief thought.

And the earl thought, decidedly not. So, after a brief conference, they turned about and began to retrace their steps, well satisfied with the result of their exploration.

Happy was our hero on the way back, as he walked with his darling’s hand clasped in his own! And happy was Cordelia, trusting with all her heart in the strength and goodness of her dear lover!

Ah! little dreamed they of the darkness coming! Not a thought—not the faintest suspicion—came to them of the vengeful enemy that lurked in their path!

CHAPTER XIII.

A STARTLING REVELATION.

Our explorers made but one stop on the way back, and that was at the old wine cask. Percy rinsed the silver cup, and having refilled it he handed it to the earl to taste. The old man tasted. He tasted again, and again, and finally drank it to the last drop.

“I declare,” said he, with deep earnestness in look and tone, “if we ever perform the work of clearing out this place I must secure that cask. It is by far the finest port I ever drank.”

Percy drank half a cup full, after having offered it to Cordelia and Mary, who had only touched their lips to it. It was too strong for them.

They then passed on and ascended the ladder, finding everything in the old chapel as they had left it. Not even a mouse had found their basket, nor had any thief laid hands upon the muskets.

The others watched the movements of their guide while he closed up the secret opening in the pavement, and when it had been done and they had told once more how wonderful it all was, they turned their attention to lunch, for the walk had given them an appetite.

Not far from the chapel was a spring of pure ice-cold water in a little rocky dell, and to that our hero led the way. It was a romantic spot; and there they sat, and spread their banquet.

It was near the middle of the afternoon when they arrived at the castle on their return. The old steward was somewhat disappointed upon finding that no game had been brought home, but he said he had expected nothing better when he had seen the women folks mixing up with the sport.

Cordelia heard him, and boxed his ear, which event pleased him far more than the lack of game had distressed him.

Percy went in and spent an hour with the earl in conversation on the subject of their late excursion and matters connected with it. Before closing reference was again made to the pirate chief.

The youth promised that he would keep track of him as soon as he should once more show himself at Allerdale.

“Be sure of one thing,” he said. “The brig can not leave the cove without my knowing it; and she will not leave until Ralph Tryon has rejoined her. I say to you again—borrow no trouble. Do not be uneasy. My word for it, you shall yet make a full and favorable report to the authorities in London.”

“That’s the most I care for, Percy. I will leave it in your hands.”

“Do so, my lord; and sleep soundly the while. Remember, it may be a week before we can make a decisive movement.”

“All right. Let it be when it will, so that we find success at the end.”

And with this the visitor took his leave. Cordelia met him in the outer hall. She had not been present at the interview just closed; but she could not let him go without seeing, and speaking with

him before he went. She wanted to thank him for the pleasure he had afforded her; she wanted to bless him, and she wanted to kiss him.

"Oh, my dear love!" she murmured, with her hands on his shoulders, and her eyes gazing up into his own. "I can not tell you how happy I am. Will anything ever come to mar the perfect bliss?"

"Let us hope not, my darling. My trust is in heaven, and in your truth. I do not think either can fail me. We can love while we live; but, ah, there is after all a power between us which we may not surmount."

"You mean—the earl?"

"Yes."

"Let us not think of him at present. Wait, Percy, until this business of the pirates is settled. Do you know, my dear, I have thought it possible that you might come forth from that affair with a standing and reputation that will cause my dear old guardian to regard you in a different light from what he does now? Even now he respects and esteems you. Think how he has been to-day. Really and truly I had not expected him to be quite so free and affable, but certainly I never saw him more so. Wait, my precious. Don't fail the earl in the matter of the pirate chief. Who shall say what may happen after that?"

Ah, if they could have known what was to happen! Perhaps it was well they did not.

Percy thought he could understand his darling's feelings—her hopes and aspirations. She fancied, in her goodness of heart, and in her love for him, that he would come forth from the crusade against the pirates with a hero's crown, and that the world would respect and esteem him as such.

He would not destroy her castle. He promised her that he would do the very best he could—would do all that lay in his power—towards helping the earl and punishing the outlaws.

Then he kissed her once more, and shortly thereafter took his way homeward.

Home! He shuddered when he thought of it. There was something in the memory he held of his father that was sacred—something that imparted to the old stone cottage a faint shadow of homeness, but not another thing—not another memory of his life endeared the place to him, or gave him yearnings for it.

And since he had discovered Cordelia's love the place seemed less like home than ever before. He felt that it was no place for him. How long could it be before they—the smugglers—would suspect that he was at heart against them? And they would tell his mother. And—what would she do? Oh, he would have given much to know the woman's real feelings. Was she friendly to Ralph Tryon's wicked course; or, was she not? He feared that she sustained the man.

However, he would not remain much longer a dweller in the stone cottage. For three months, and little more, he had been free from the promise given to his dying father, and there was nothing to keep him. He had remained thus far because his mother had appeared to expect it, and because he would not leave her entirely alone.

The sun had set when he left the castle, and by the time he had reached the edge of the woods flanking the cove, and within which stood the cottage, it had grown quite duskish. So nearly dark was it, that when he had entered the wood it seemed really like night.

The fancy struck him as he took the first step into the woodland path, that he saw a moving figure, not unlike that of a man, a short distance away on his right hand. His thought for the moment was to stop and speak, but he heard nothing; and as the thing, whatever it was, had disappeared, he kept on.

He had not gone a great way—perhaps half the distance through the wood—when his attention was called to the pattering of feet behind him. He bent his ear and listened, and presently he stopped and turned.

"Ah, Guy! Is it you?"

"Yes, sir. I've been waitin' for ye a long time."

It was a boy—a bright-faced, bright-eyed, handsome youngster of fourteen, named Guy Carrol. He was son of a sister of old Donald Rodney, and for four years almost, he had been the old smuggler's *protégé*.

His mother, whom Donald had loved warmly, had been first widowed, and then, when her boy had reached the age of ten years, she had died; and, dying, she had given the boy to her brother, and he had promised that he would care for him as though he had been his own.

For three years the old uncle had sent the lad to school, and then, when the little fellow had teased, and coaxed, and begged, and fairly prayed, Rodney had yielded, and taken him to sea with him. But he would not have done it if he could have looked ahead and seen just what the voyage was to be.

The heart of the orphan boy had turned towards our hero the first time he had ever seen him.

Percy had gone on board the brig about a year before, and met the little fellow in the gangway, and something in the handsome boyish face and in the great bright, honest eyes, had at once appealed to his deepest heart, and he had laid his hand on the boy's head and blessed him, and spoke cheerily and encouragingly to him; had hoped he would love his old uncle and grow up to be a good man and true.

It was not much to do, but it proved the turning point in the boy's life; and from that time he had worshiped Percy Maitland.

"Well, here I am, at length. What can I do for you?"

"It isn't for me, sir. It is for yourself. Uncle Donald bade me come out and speak with ye. Wait a bit. S'pose we go on a little. There's a place close by where there's more room."

"Room, my boy! What in the world—"

"Sh! Speak low, sir! We don't know whose ears may be near us. Where there's more room we'd be more likely to see 'em."

Percy was becoming interested. At a short distance they came to a sort of clearing, where there had once been, so tradition said, a log hut; and here they stopped. The boy cast a quick, sweeping glance around, and then spoke.

"Mr. Maitland, Uncle Rodney bade me tell you there is danger, and you must look sharp. Cap'n Tryon has been to your mother's—"

"Captain Tryon! Is he here?"

"Yes, sir. He came some time in the night, and he's in a terrible way."

"But what has he come for? What has happened to upset him?"

"Why, sir—as Uncle Donald told it to me—somewhere on the road, between this and Burton, somebody saw him that knew him. He was on the outside of the stage-coach with the driver, and it was the driver that told him how the man had looked at him.

"Well, sir, the next time the coach stopped with the mail, up comes three officers and tells the cap'n he's their prisoner. P'rhaps you can guess how he took it. They must have had a pretty sharp time of it for a little while.

"Cap'n Tryon's got two bullets in him—one in his arm and the other in his shoulder, but he give 'em the slip. He says he left two of 'em on the ground, but he didn't know whether they were dead or not. Mercy! how he did swear! I heard him while he was on board the brig."

"But what has this to do with me, Guy?"

"Ah, that's just it, sir! He—that's the cap'n—swears 'at you've been and blowed on him; and on the rest of us. Of course, Uncle Donald knew better, and so did I; but what's the use of our saying anything against him? He swears 'at you've blowed, and now he's goin' to have vengeance."

The boy paused at this point, and looked up into Percy's face, as though waiting for a reply. Evidently, he expected a disclaimer. At all events, the young man knew that it would greatly please him to receive one, and he gave it at once, and emphatically.

"Guy—Ralph Tryon lies if he says so! and I believe he knows he lies! Now, tell me, what does he propose to do?"

"That's what we don't know, sir; but Uncle Donald says you must keep an eye on your mother. It's a hard thing to say—dreadful hard to tell a man to beware of his own mother—but so it is. It's to her the cap'n has been; and uncle overheard enough between 'em to be very sure 'at mischief is meant to yourself, sir!"

"How did your uncle happen to overhear this? Where did it happen?"

"At the cottage, sir, to-day. The cap'n came aboard the brig about midnight—the last that ever was. The lookout heard him call for a boat, and uncle went off and got him. This forenoon he went ashore, and Uncle Donald with him; and they went up to the cottage; and while the cap'n was tellin' his story to Mistress Margery, Donald went out; and they must have thought he'd gone further away. I s'pose, if the truth was told, he was list'nin'. I wish you could see the old man; but he can't leave the brig; and he says it wouldn't do for you to come there."

"Can you tell me anything that was said?" Percy asked eagerly.

"Only this, sir. Of course, my uncle didn't dare to get too near. If they'd caught him, there's no telling what might have happened. He heard Cap'n Tryon tell the mistress how that you had betrayed 'em—the whole lot of 'em—to the sheriff or the constable. What the mistress said he couldn't exactly hear; but he could tell that she sided in with the cap'n. After awhile the cap'n said something about clappin' a stopper on ye—on the young spy and informer, he called ye."

"And what said my mother to that?"

"That was what Donald tried awful hard to find out but he couldn't do it. Howsumever, he's sure she agreed to it. She didn't say she'd help, but it was understood that she shouldn't stand in the way of what the other would do."

"And that is all old Donald heard?"

"Yes, sir."

"He didn't learn or gain any intimation of how Tryon intends to operate—what he means to do?"

"No, sir. Uncle Donald says that's for you to find out. If the cap'n was to be on the ground, t'would be different. Then you'd keep an eye on him; but, seein' as he is goin' off again, you'll have to be more careful and keep a sharp lookout, fore and aft and on both sides."

"Going away!" exclaimed Percy, with a start of disappointment and disgust. "Do you mean, he will leave Allerdale?"

"Why, bless ye! he's gone, sir. He went early this afternoon. One of the gunners drove him over to Springvale in a cart belonging to the host of the village inn; and I understand he was bound north for Scotland. Uncle Donald said he was cross and ugly, and it was impossible to make out exactly what he meant to do. But he's off, sir, and won't be back for a week or thereabout, if what he told my uncle was the truth."

"You are anxious to get back to the brig, my dear boy?"

"I'm rather anxious to be out of this, sir," the lad replied, promptly and frankly. "I wouldn't have one of the cap'n's men catch me here with you for the world."

"Ah, you recognize a line of demarcation in the crew of the brig?—I mean you understand there to be two parties."

"Yes, sir, I do. Uncle Donald will never—But I mustn't blab."

"It's all right, Guy. I know all about it, and from your uncle's own lips. And now—if you have nothing more to tell me—you may trot back as quickly as you please; and be sure I shall not forget the great service you have done me."

"Oh, sir, don't say that! If you knew how much good it does us—Uncle Donald and I—to serve you, you wouldn't think of layin' it up as anything to be remembered."

"Never mind about that just now. You'll accept my gratitude; and you'll convey the same to your uncle, and tell him, further, that Percy will be sure to keep his eyes wide open."

Our hero stood and watched the disappearing form of his young friend, and when he could no longer hear the sound of his footfall he turned once more toward the cottage.

And he had something now to think about. He was not greatly surprised that Ralph Tryon should seek his life. Knowing the character of the man for all that was cruel and reckless and wicked, and remembering the antagonism that had existed between them from the very first of their acquaintance, he could find nothing surprising in this desire for dire and deadly vengeance. 175

What he wondered at was that the villain should have applied to his mother. How had he dared to broach such a subject to her?

Could there be any mistake? Had Donald Rodney been deceived or had he entirely misunderstood? In his heart he was forced to the confession that he had no respect for his mother, or no respect for her character, nor could he esteem her.

Oh, if his mother could be but a memory, as was his father, how much of misery might have been spared him! In the name of mother there was something sacred—something that quickened his pulses and elevated his feelings.

But in his own case, when he descended from the empty name to the living reality, the sacredness vanished, and a sense of repulsion took the place of calmer feeling.

He could not tell what to think—what to fear. He must wait and let time determine. The thought occurred to him of seeking rest at the village.

Why should he sleep again beneath the old roof? Would he not be safer at the inn? Would not that be the best and surest way of settling the whole matter?

But it would not answer. He could offer no excuse without opening his parent's eyes to the truth—to the fact of his having received warning.

No, he would go on, and make the best of it. He was sustained by a wondrous sense of power. Never in his life had he felt more secure than at that moment, and yet he did not doubt that a severe struggle—a dark ordeal—was before him. 176

Surely, the glory of Cordelia's love, with all its possibilities for future joy and gladness, had not dawned upon him only to be swallowed up in a dire calamity at the hands of a pirate chief! No, no; he would not, he could not believe it!

He walked on and entered the cottage, turning at once into the comfortably furnished living-room as soon as he had deposited his cap and light cloak in the narrow hall.

He found the supper-table set, and his mother was evidently awaiting his coming, as he had told her that he would be at home to the evening meal.

The kettle was steaming on the crane; the teapot was on the hob; while a pan of newly baked rolls was set up against a flat-iron before the fire to keep warm.

"Am I late, mother?" the new-comer asked cheerily.

"Not at all, Percy. Supper is all ready; but I have not waited long. I didn't expect you before."

Never had she spoken more pleasantly, and never had she appeared more kind. Once she really smiled, though there was but little of warmth or light in it.

If she had looked him straight in the face; if she had turned to him frankly and trustingly—he would certainly have cast old Donald's dark suspicions to the winds.

But she did not do this. There was a tendency in her eyes to avoid him. Even while addressing him, she did not look directly at him, and if, by chance, she caught his gaze fixed upon her—if her eyes met his own—she started guiltily. 177

"I suppose you've been at the castle?" she said after she had set the rolls and the teapot on the table; and there was a perceptible touch of bitterness in her voice.

"I have been at the castle during the day, twice," Percy replied, honestly.

"Do you hear anything new up there?"

"Nothing at all. Lord Oakleigh has gone back to Oxford."

He might have said more, but at that moment Margery turned quickly toward the buffet in a far corner, as though for something she had forgotten.

As his mother turned thus abruptly away, our hero's gaze wandered to the table, and something attracted his attention which he had not before seen.

He saw it now, however, and the sight gave him a start that sent a throb and a chill through his whole frame.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ATTEMPT AT MURDER.

What Percy had discovered on the supper-table, standing near to his own plate, was only a wine bottle. But it was a very peculiar bottle—that is, in his eyes. It might not have been so in the eyes of another. 178

Two circumstances in connection with it came to his mind; first, he was very sure there had been no such bottle as that in the cottage when he had left it that morning. In the very nature of the home arrangement it would have been next to impossible for a bottle of wine to stand in the dwelling without his knowledge, and he had no knowledge of that.

The next circumstance was startling. The bottle was of an entirely new pattern, the glass of a

color such as he had never seen in a bottle but once before, and that once before had been in the cabin of the Staghound, during his late conference with Donald Rodney!

It had been exactly such a bottle that the old man had produced when he had offered him the finest old wine that was ever tasted. How came the bottle here? That it had been brought during the day he was confident.

As his mother had turned away to the buffet, so he now turned away to a window, and did not come back until he had put away the last outward sign of his misgivings.

"I don't suppose the old earl loves that grandson of his over and above much, does he?" Margery remarked, looking at her son keenly after they had taken their seats and she had lifted the pot to pour out the tea.

"I can not presume to judge of that matter, mother," Percy replied, in an easy, natural tone. "I know that the young man tries his grandfather's patience somewhat; and I have no doubt that the old man wishes he were different. However, I know but little about him."

"I suppose you have spoken with the young lord?"

"Yes. I have spoken with him, and that is about all."

"It strikes me, Percy, if I was in his place I should ask you to make yourself a little less familiar at the big house."

The youth looked at his mother in surprise. What was she driving at? Was she seeking to pry into his relations with Cordelia?

"Mother, I do not quite understand you. What the world should Lord Oakleigh have to do with my familiarity at the castle?"

"Why, doesn't he intend to marry with the Lady Cordelia Chester?"

For the life of him our hero could not keep back the start, nor the flush that mounted to his brow and temples; but not a sign of the emotion appeared in his voice when he spoke.

"I know nothing of the young lord's intentions."

"But," pursued the woman, seeming desirous of gaining information, "so long and so intimate, as you have been at the castle, you ought to know what the general idea is, what the plan is in that respect. How does the old earl regard the matter? Of course he wants the girl to marry with his own son's son."

"Perhaps he does."

"What do you think about it? Do you believe he wishes it?"

"No, I do not!" Percy answered plumply.

"Then you don't think he would influence the girl to marry with Oakleigh?"

"He never will try to influence her in any way in regard to her marriage. That I know."

"And perhaps you know that the girl wouldn't have him for a husband on any consideration?"

"Yes," answered the youth, and, thus driven, he answered somewhat warmly, "I know just that!"

"Poor young man! I've heard he loved her dearly."

"Then you've heard more than ever I did; for I candidly believe the man can love no living thing save himself!—There, mother, I think we had better drop this subject. The affairs of those people can be nothing to us, and we will let them rest."

Percy saw the smile that curled his mother's lips, and he saw the sneer; but he made no further remark, nor did she, on that subject.

The meal was drawing toward its close, and Percy had not offered to touch the wine. Usually he had drunk a few swallows when commencing to eat. He was watching his mother narrowly.

He saw that her eyes often rested upon the bottle, and then turned toward himself; and more than once he was confident he detected a cloud of anxiety on her brow. Finally she spoke.

"Percy, won't you try the wine?"

"Certainly. I'll drink with you, mother."

The thought had come to him as he had spoken it, impulsively and not with premeditation, but the effect on the woman was quick and remarkable.

She gave a start like one frightened, and she looked into the speaker's face as though she would look him through. Very soon, however, she overcame the emotion, and said, with a poor attempt at a smile:

"Indeed, boy, you know I never drink wine in the evening."

"And it is seldom that I take it with my supper," the youth returned, pleasantly.

"But this is very fine."

"Ah," taking up the bottle and holding it between his eye and the blaze of the nearest candle, "where did this come from?"

"From France, I suppose; though it is of Italian vintage."

"I mean, how came it here? How did you get it?"

"It must have come from one of the brig's crew, of course. Very likely old Rodney brought it up, or it may have been Stephen Harley. I only know it is a very fine old wine, the like of which we do not often see."

Percy was strongly tempted to drive his mother to the wall, then and there; but second thoughts told him to hold his peace. If there should be any collusion between her and Ralph Tryon, he must know it; and to betray himself now would defeat his end and serve no good purpose.

First, if possible, he would discover if the wine which had been thus pressed upon him had been tampered with. He was very sure it had. Tryon himself had brought that wine to the cottage—had brought it with an object; and that object was his own—Percy's death!

Good heavens! could his mother be knowingly concerned in this? He did not wish to believe it. Yet, if he should find the wine poisoned, how could he doubt it?

Ha! A happy thought occurred to him. On the premises was a cat—it had been a little kitten when Hugh Maitland died—which the smugglers, when on shore and stopping at the cottage, had taught to lick up wine as it did milk, and more than once had poor puss been reduced to a state of utter inebriety in furnishing sport for the seamen.

"I'll tell you what I will do, mother," said our hero, after a little thought. "Sometimes I am thirsty in the night. Suppose I take the bottle up to my chamber."

"Do so," responded Margery, quickly. "And let me once more assure you, you'll find it about the finest wine you ever tasted. At all events, I found it so. You will see a part of it has been consumed."

That was true, but it proved nothing. The young man, when he had arisen from the table, took the bottle and carried it up to his room, together with a goblet.

Later he came down and took a look out of doors. There was a small shed in the rear of the cottage, with a cowhouse and sheepfold close by. 183

In this shed he found the cat, which he took in his arms, and carried to the front door of the dwelling; and, as good fortune would have it, as he passed the windows of the sitting-room he saw his mother on her way to the kitchen, with the last of the supper dishes in her hands.

To glide up to his own room, unseen, with the cat in his arms, was now easy; and it was accomplished without mishap. In his chamber, he put the cat on the floor, then gently turned the key in the lock of his door, and then reflected.

He hesitated. If his mother had done this thing, did he wish to know it? The query was very soon answered. His own safety—his life perhaps, demanded it.

And even then he held back. The thought of sacrificing the poor cat was really painful to him. He looked upon it—so trustful and so contented in his company, so full of life and sport, the puss he had played with and fondled and fed for so long a time—for years. Could he kill it? He hoped he would not. Perhaps, after all, the wine was as innocent as the dew of heaven.

He had in his room a cup and saucer. The saucer he took, and into it poured a little of the wine. He touched his tongue to it, but could perceive no unpleasant taste—Ah!—Wait!—By and by he was sensible of a puckering effect, together with a slight prickling, which he had not experienced at first. In fact, he was very sure that he might have drunk a full goblet of it without tasting the false tang. 184

However, he placed the saucer on the floor, and the cat came to it at once and began to lap it up. It lapped up not quite half of it, and stopped. Presently it lapped a little more; then stopped again and went away and lay down.

Had puss drunk enough, or was the taste of the beverage unpleasant? After a time Percy took the saucer and set it down close to the cat's nose, but she would not touch it. When he found that pussy could not be persuaded to drink any more he took up the vessel, and, by the exercise of a little care, succeeded in pouring the wine that remained in it back into the bottle.

He had done this and was in the act of setting the bottle away on the mantel, when a low, painful wail from the cat attracted his attention, and on looking down he saw the poor creature already in spasms. But it did not suffer long, for which the experimenter was profoundly thankful. Within a minute from the time of the first symptom of trouble its life was at an end.

Percy Maitland stood looking upon the dead cat, and thought. What should he do? That an attempt had been made to destroy—to murder him—he simply knew; and he knew, too, that his mother had been knowing to it. Aye, she had actively lent her hand to aid in its accomplishment.

Why—why—was Ralph Tryon so bitter toward him? Why did he hate him with such deadly hatred? 185

"It can not be because he thinks I will betray him," the youth thought aloud. "He has hated me from the first. The first time I ever set eyes on him, when he saw how I watched and studied him—when he saw perhaps that his appearance had puzzled me—even then he hated me and could have killed me, I verily believe, with a good relish."

And then he gave thought again to his mother. What should he do? Should he let her know of the dreadful discovery he had made? He had not the heart to do it. He knew not how he should meet her.

Yet she must know it, sooner or later. It could not be kept from her a great while. Of course he must leave the cottage. It could be no longer a home for him. Also, he must see old Donald, and make an arrangement with him for the immediate transmission of intelligence of the return of Tryon.

An hour later, when he knew that his mother had retired, he removed his shoes, and noiselessly carried the dead cat downstairs and out of doors, throwing it down among some bushes, where it might appear that the poor thing had there parted with life.

Back in his room, Percy locked his door, and set a table against it, and then went to bed, and finally to sleep. On the following morning he was up with the sun; and by the time he had performed his ablution, and completed his toilet, he had resolved fully upon the course he would pursue. 186

He would make no complaint to his mother; he would tell her nothing of what he had discovered, unless she should push him.

Yet he meant to put the laboring oar into her hand. She could demand what of explanation she pleased.

He possessed but little personal property. All the furniture in the cottage was the property of his mother, though a portion of it he had purchased. He had his clothing, a few valuable weapons—three swords, half a dozen pistols of different sizes and patterns, a fine rifle, and three fowling-pieces, or one of them was a proper king's-arm musket.

This property he collected—not together, but so arranged it that it could handily and quickly be taken in hand and carried away. He then went below, with the bottle in his hand, finding Margery just out from her sleeping-room, which was on the ground floor.

He met her eye as he entered the living-room, and saw that she was shaken. A tremor shook her from head to foot. Her countenance was not that of a happy woman.

Evidently she was not proud of what she had done, nor quite satisfied with it.

"Mother," he said, in his usual pleasant tone, but with a tinge of sadness in it, "I have brought back the wine."

"You—you did not drink any of it?" she said interrogatively, as she took the bottle from his hand. She certainly had not looked to see if any of the contents were gone.

"No—I did not care to."

"You were not afraid of it, I hope."

"Not particularly afraid of it, because I knew it could not harm me if I did not taste it. We are all of us, more or less, the creatures of our fancy; and I am willing to confess to you that I took a very strong fancy that it would be best for me not to drink from this bottle."

"Percy! What do you mean? I hope you—I hope—pshaw! If you're afraid of being poisoned here you'd better go up to the castle and make your home there. I've no doubt they would welcome you with open arms. Oh, what a word I could whisper in that old—"

She stopped suddenly, in full career, as though struck dumb. She looked for a moment longer into the young and handsome face before her; then turned on her heel, and went out into the kitchen, taking the wine bottle with her.

Percy watched her until the closing door behind her had shut her from his view; then he put on his cap; buckled on his sword—a light, but valuable weapon; took a light cloak over his arm, and went forth, determined within himself that he had slept his last sleep, and eaten his last meal, in the old cottage—the home of his boyhood—the only home he had ever known.

He took his way directly toward the shore of the Cove, determined to have speech with old Donald at all events.

And he could not see where would be the danger, unless Tryon had succeeded in stirring up his immediate friends more bitterly against him than he could think possible.

However he was saved all trouble—most agreeably saved. Little more than half the distance through the wood had he gone when he met both Donald Rodney and young Guy Carroll.

"Dear old man! I was coming to see you. I had determined to brave the danger, if any there might be."

"Mercy on us! I'm glad ye didn't come, my dear boy. The cap'n's laid in with a dozen or so of his own men, if ye do come aboard, to play some sort of a rough trick on ye. I don't know what it is, but it may cost ye yer life."

"Donald, I don't see how you can endure it."

"I aint agoin' to endure it, my boy, not a bit longer than it takes me to get what belongs to me. I don't forget that a part of the brig is my own property. I'll get that, and then I'm off, and this blessed boy with me. And now, Percy, what's up? I can't be here but a few minutes."

"Only this, Donald: I want you to let me know the moment Ralph Tryon gets back. That's all. Just give me the intelligence."

"I'll do it, Percy. Shall I find ye at the cottage?"

"No. At the inn—the Allerdale Arms."

"Eh! Are ye goin' to cut yer cable, my boy?"

"For a time, yes. Ah, old friend, the warning you sent me may have saved my life. At all events, I shall so regard it."

"I knew there was something in the wind, Percy. I'm blamed if I can understand it. How she can do it is beyond me. But I don't s'pose you care to talk about it."

"I would rather not, Donald. But it is due to you that I should tell you this: You were not mistaken. There was deadly mischief meant to me; and the pair of them were engaged in it. There! let it rest at that. Now, tell me, Guy said something about the captain's being set upon by officers of the constabulary. How badly was he hurt?"

"Oh, not very bad. He had a bullet through his right arm, below, and another higher up. It don't prevent him from traveling."

"Isn't he afraid of being again recognized by officers of the law?"

"He don't appear to be. Howsumever, that's his lookout. I don't care how quick he gets overhauled. He's a black-hearted wretch!"

"I agree with you, old man. You don't know when he will return?"

"I haven't the least idea anything about it. I don't know where he's gone, nor when he'll come back."

After this arrangements were perfected—made sure—for the conveying to our hero of intelligence of Tryon's reappearance at the Cove; and then they separated, Donald and his nephew returning to the landing, while Maitland took his way toward the village, and the inn.

Martin Vanyard, fifty years of age, fat, rosy and robust, loved the handsome son of Hugh Maitland almost as though he had been of his own flesh and blood; and he declared he'd heard nothing for years that had pleased him so much as had Percy's proposal to take up his quarters beneath his roof.

"Bless yer dear heart! I'll make ye as comfortable as a prince! Ye'll come to-day?"

"Yes. We'll begin with this morning's breakfast."

Toward the middle of the forenoon Margery Maitland was considerably surprised by the appearance of a cart, drawn by a single horse, before her door; and a few moments later Percy entered the room where she stood.

"Percy! What does this mean?" She was trembling at every joint, and her face had turned pale.

"It means, mother," the son promptly answered, "that I have at length carried into execution a plan which I have for several weeks contemplated."

"You're going to leave me?"

"Yes. I have engaged quarters with Vanyard at the village inn. I got my breakfast there."

"Percy! You needn't tell me! This is thought of suddenly. You didn't dream of it when you came home last evening."

"Never mind, mother. I dreamed of it during the night and this morning resolved to act."

"Percy! You—"

He advanced and laid a hand on her shoulder, and looked straight into her shrinking, cowering eyes.

"Margery Maitland! if you will leave the cause between us exactly where it is, I will do the same. If you force me to speak further, I shall speak that which you will not care to hear. Be wise and let it rest as it is. Be sure of one thing, if ever you suffer harm in life, if calamity of any kind shall befall you, it shall not be from me. I can not forget you are my mother. Mother! Mother! My last word to you shall be, from the very depths of my heart, God bless and keep you now and evermore!"

Half an hour later the cart had gone, bearing away Percy and all his personal possessions; and Margery Maitland, having gazed after it until it had gone from sight, for the first time since her husband died sat down and wept bitter tears.

CHAPTER XV.

CONSTERNATION AT THE CASTLE—FRIGHT AT THE LANDING.

Two days passed after our hero's removal to the inn, and not a sign from old Donald. Percy had visited the castle and reported progress to the earl. He told how the pirate chief had been arrested, and how he had made his escape with two bullets in his arm.

"He must have had help," said the old nobleman, "or the officers who took him did not wish to keep him. The story sounds to me like a fable of his own invention. You say he is trying to make his men your enemies?"

"Yes, my lord. He is leaving no stone unturned that can work to my injury."

"Then, depend upon it, the story of the arrest is all a sham, and so are his wounds. I know our Headlandshire constables better than that. But wait till we have him in sight."

"It can not be long, my lord."

"I pray it may not be."

Late on the evening of this second day, so late that Percy had retired to his chamber at the inn for the night, as he sat by his small table reading, he was disturbed by a rap on his door, and upon bidding the applicant to enter, the door was opened by the rosy-faced host, who ushered into the room Donald Rodney.

"My dear old friend!" as soon as the landlord had gone and closed the door, "what now? You know I am glad to see you under any circumstances, but something unusual must have happened to bring you hither at such an hour."

"Something unusual has happened, Percy, and I thought you'd like to know. This evenin', along about eight, or just when it was fairly dark, a boat from the landing came alongside with Abel Jackman in it. He, ye know, is Cap'n Tryon's servant. He came aboard with orders for three men—Gurt Warnell, Bryan Vank, and Jack Dormer—to come with him and join the cap'n on shore. P'raps ye know, and p'raps ye don't, them is three of the very worst—the bloodiest villains of the lot. Well, they went ashore with Jackman, but where they've gone or what it all means I've no more idea than the man in the moon. All is, I made an excuse that I'd got business ashore that couldn't be put off, and here I am."

"You don't know whether Tryon is here in town or not?"

"No, I'm not sure anything about it; but the fancy kind o' strikes me that he is. Something that Abel Jackman said give me the idea that he couldn't be a great way off."

"And you know nothing more about him?"

"Not a thing, my dear boy. If anything comes to my knowledge, you shall hear of it."

Percy called for a bowl of punch, which the old seaman preferred to wine, and after a social chat on various matters, but chiefly on the subject of the pirate chief, and his possible intentions for the future, the visitor took his leave.

Our hero, when left alone, paced to and fro in his chamber, far from satisfied with the appearance which matters connected with Ralph Tryon had assumed. He did not like it at all. Why had the villain thus come back under cover of night? And why had he sent off his servant to the brig, instead of going himself? And, further still, what did he want with those three men? He remembered them very well. They were comparatively young men, young in years, but evidently old in crime.

They were strong, muscular, brutish fellows, in all probability from the slums of the metropolis. These were the men whom the chief had called to his aid. Once more, what did he want with them?

For a full hour the young man remained up, a prey to various and conflicting emotions, and not until he had become too worn and weary to think further did he seek his pillow.

On the morning of the following day he was up with the sun, and he asked of the landlord that he might have an early breakfast.

He had promised Cordelia that he would come up to the Castle, and go with her to the river if the

day was fair. He had run his best boat up to the Park landing, as it had been their intention to enjoy a sail. He feared now, however, that they might have to postpone it. The news he had received of the presence in the neighborhood of Ralph Tryon made a difference.

He did not feel that he ought, for any length of time, to be beyond easy reach of Donald Rodney. But he would go to the castle, as he had promised, and explain the situation; and he had no doubt that the proposed sail would be given up cheerfully.

After that he would see the earl, and inform him what had happened; and then he might return to the village and await further intelligence from his friends of the brig. About this, however, he could not decide until he had seen Cordelia and the earl.

Good Martin had his young guest's breakfast ready for him about as soon as he was ready to sit down; and, as a matter of sociality, ate with him. But he found not a very entertaining companion. There was too much in the youth's mind—too much that was perplexing and harrowing—to admit the introduction of new topics to his thoughts. 195

The old publican understood, and gave him full sympathy; so the meal passed off very cheerfully after all.

And then, away for the castle. He went on foot; but many horses would have gone more slowly. He covered the ground as does one who walks for a wager, or on whose speed depends momentous results. In fact, he was very anxious; and there was no particular reason, known to him, why he should be.

He knew very well that his darling would not complain at the loss of her sail, when she came to know the cause of its postponement. Yet he was anxious.

It was not eight o'clock when he reached the castle. His watch said, ten minutes of it.

"Ho, Master Percy! the young lady and her maid have been gone this half-hour. Her ladyship said we were to tell you that they'd be found at the landing, where your boat is, or so near by that you can't miss 'em."

So said old Michael, the steward, who was the first person our hero saw on his arrival.

"You are sure she said to the landing, Michael?"

"Of course I am. I put up the luncheon for 'em; and she told me how she was going when I gave it to Mary." 196

"She knows which landing it was that I left my boat at?"

"She said the Park landing, and there is but one that I know of by that name."

"That is so," the young man nodded, and then, without stopping for further remark, he turned about and started toward the river.

His course was in a northerly direction, and the distance to the landing three-quarters of a mile. Not quite two-thirds of the way was down the gentle slope of the open, velvety park, and beyond was a belt of woods, but entirely free from wildwood or the tangle of underbrush.

The trees, however, were of the old forest growth, standing near together, forming a solitude grand and imposing. The woods extended to the river's bank, and the path which Percy was following led directly to the landing.

He began to look for his darling and to call her by name as soon as he had entered the strip of forest, but he saw nothing nor did he receive any answer.

Pretty soon he was at the landing—a platform of chestnut plank, built out to deep water, so that vessels of goodly draught could lie alongside it.

His boat was there as he had left it, but empty.

He looked up the bank and down, and he called aloud, in the end shouting with all his might—and his voice was powerful—but no response did he receive. 197

At length he thought of looking for the girls' footsteps, and he found them very soon. At only a short distance from the river was a place where a bed of fine yellow sand had been spread entirely across the path, and here, as plain and distinct as could be, were the footprints of the two girls, and freshly made. He compared them with the prints which his own feet had made on the previous day, when he had brought up his boat, and then with those which he had made on this present crossing. The result convinced him that the girls had crossed only a short time before.

And they had not gone back! No; they had gone down toward the river, as their footprints showed, but there was no sign of their feet going in the other direction.

Where could they have gone? He went back to the landing, and there shouted once more. Then he started upon a swift run up the stream. On the way he happened to think that there were spots where tracks would be found if they had gone in that direction. He looked, and found none.

Then he went down the shore, and with the same result. Not anywhere could he find a sign beyond the landing. The girls had certainly made their way to that point. Aye, he found their tracks close to its inner edge. He stood upon the outer edge of the platform, looking about him, when his eye chanced to droop, and suddenly he caught sight of a white object like a bit of fine lace or linen fluttering upon one of the posts below. 198

He got down to it as quickly as possible and brought it up. It was a fine, lace-bordered handkerchief with the monogram worked with crimson silk in one corner—"C. C."

Merciful heaven! What did it mean? Had she fallen into the flood? Had one of them fallen in, and the other nobly followed to save her companion? Again he searched in the new direction.

The current in the river was not rapid. He could row his boat against it without great labor. Yet it was sufficient to sweep a human body away if its owner could not swim.

The anxious, half-frenzied man now cast free his boat, and floated down the stream until he knew there could be no use in his going further, and he had seen no sign either in the water or on the bank.

Slowly he pulled back and made his boat fast again. What could he now do better than to return

to the castle? Perhaps he would find them there. Something might have frightened them and sent them back; or Cordelia might have felt unwell and gone home for that cause.

If he did not find them he could give the alarm and set the servants of the household upon the search. And the sooner that was done the better.

So back to the castle he went. It was near ten o'clock when he arrived. Had Lady Cordelia come home? was his first question. The old steward looked at him in wonder. How did he expect her to come home, when she had gone away on purpose to sail with him in his boat? No. She hadn't come. 199

While they were speaking—they were in the main hall—the earl joined them. He had heard, and recognized, young Maitland's voice, and he was anxious to know what had brought him back so soon, and, he was sure, alone. The story was quickly told.

The old man was in agony. That some direful calamity had befallen he was sure.

"Oh, Percy! Percy! We must find her! You will not forsake me in this great need?"

"Forsake you, my lord; I would give my life at this moment, were she in danger, to rescue her from it! My hand and my heart are yours until she shall be found. We shall find her, sir. I am sure we shall find her—though it may take time. Oh, no one could harm her! Who could have the heart?"

"Oh, Percy, those dreadful pirates! They know that I have been ordered to put forth my hand against them; and this may be a means they have adopted for gaining a powerful hold upon me!" And from that moment the earl seemed to look upon the smuggler's son as his one stay and support.

Percy's thoughts took a different direction from those of the earl. He was inclined to regard Lord Oakleigh as the villain whose hand had thus been laid upon them.

Look at it in what way he might, he could not put away the belief. Not only the young lord's character—his heartlessness, his recklessness, and his desire to possess the lady—pointed him out as the probable culprit; but he had made threats—he had sworn to the girl herself, with a horrible oath—that he would make her his own very soon. 200

Yes. Percy believed Lord Oakleigh to be the man; but he would not say so yet. Time should show. First, however, they must gain some sign—some token of the whereabouts of the missing ones.

The servants had collected and a general interchange of opinions had taken place—as weak and aimless as such interchanges usually are—when the earl, after a time of painful thought, looked toward the smuggler's son, and finally went up to him and laid his trembling hand on his shoulder.

"Percy Maitland, find my darling! I am old; I am shaken. I am not what once I was. Oh, find her! find her!" And he then turned to the servants and instructed them that to Maitland they were to look for direction, and he charged them to obey him in every particular. And so the search commenced, the earl himself going with them. He could not lead, nor could he remain behind.

Meantime where were Cordelia and Mary Seymour?

On that morning Cordelia arose with the sun. Percy had promised her, if the weather should be propitious, that he would have his boat at the Park landing, and take her, with Mary, to sail on the river.

She arose and looked forth; and never had she beheld the promise of a more beautiful day. She called her maid, and bade her go to the steward and have a basket filled with a proper lunch for three persons, after which she repaired to the apartment of the cook and asked for breakfast. 201

She wanted it at once—for herself and Mary—because she was going away. She was not particular about much cooking. She had eaten cold victuals before, and could do it again.

Everything went to please her, and by the time the sun was two hours high she was ready to set forth. She went in to kiss her grandpa, but he had not arisen; so she left word for him where she was going and with whom. The hands of the old clock in the hall were pointing to quarter-past seven as the two girls passed through, and ere long they were beyond the castle walls, tripping merrily along one of the graveled walks of the park, but the fresh, cool breeze of night had prevented the fall of dew, so they took the velvety sward when the fancy struck them. Percy had said on the previous evening that he would come to the castle for them; but she was confident he would come by way of the river bank and the landing, so it could make no difference, only in this, they would gain so much more time for the sail. If he had not reached the landing on their arrival at that point they would wait there for him.

They had crossed the open slope of the park and entered the woodland path when they heard voices away upon their left—the voices of men, as in ordinary conversation. They stopped for a time and listened. Mary suggested that they should turn back; but her mistress bade her to wait and listen. They stood thus for several minutes, hearing not another sound. 202

"Ho!" cried Cordelia, in her brave confidence, "what should harm us here? Why! this is a part of the park."

"But there were men, certainly," said the maid; "and of course they must have been strangers."

"Honest men, you foolish girl, who have been out thus early to catch a few fish for breakfast."

"Then they must be poachers, my lady; and I'm sure they are not honest men."

Cordelia laughed merrily at her companion's witty retort, and shortly afterward they started on again toward the river. They reached the landing, where they found the boat in waiting, but no boatman.

"Percy is not here!"

"You did not expect to find him here, did you, lady?"

"Why, no; but I thought we should surely meet him. However, he will soon be here. It is past the time he set."

"For meeting us at the castle, lady, not here."

"Pshaw! What do you take me up so quickly for, Mary? You make me quite nervous."

"Dear lady, pray do not pay any attention to what I say. I suppose I am a little timid. At all events,

I can not help wishing we had not come here alone."

"Well, to tell the plain truth, Mary, I begin to wish so myself. But it is too late to cry now. He will not be long after this. Ah! What's that? A man! A stranger!"

Yes, as the last words addressed to her companion fell from her lips she was startled by a quick footfall behind her; and on looking around she beheld a man advancing rapidly toward her, and presently she saw that he was not alone.

There was another, and another; aye, and still another, four of them in all; and a more rough and villainous set she had never seen.

In fact, the foremost man—he who seemed to be the leader of the others—was the very worst-looking, the most wicked and cruel looking human being she had ever set eyes upon.

He was a man tall and stout, dressed in the garb of the sea, though the material was rich and costly.

The velvet was of the finest; the silk and satin seemingly of the softest; a massive gold chain around his neck was attached to his watch, while a large diamond of purest water sparkled in the silken kerchief loosely knotted at his throat.

His face reminded her of a wild beast, and nothing else. His full beard, long, thick and shaggy, and the mass of hair that covered his head, were like the mane of a lion in color and character. His eyes, gleaming beneath the overhanging brows, were bright like fire and black as coals.

In an instant Cordelia thought of Ralph Tryon, the pirate chief. Percy had described him to her minutely, and here he certainly was.

With a low, faint cry, and with her two hands clasped over her bosom, she started back, but she could not move far in that direction, as the edge of the platform was directly behind her.

"Sweet lady," the man said, his voice hoarse, as voices are apt to be that have been long used to rising above the roar of the tempest, "I trust you are not afraid of me."

He bowed as he spoke, and looked at her with an expression which she could not translate, though it appeared to her one of cruel malevolence.

She noticed now that he carried his right hand pushed inside the bosom of his vest, and she remembered what she had heard of his being wounded in that arm.

"Lady!" he pursued, after a lengthy pause, "have you no word for me? May I not be permitted to hear the sweet music of your voice?"

"Sir!" our heroine returned, struggling with all her might to speak calmly, or at least coherently—"who are you? Why have you thus placed yourself in my way? What would you with me?"

At this point, and before the chief could reply to the lady's demand, one of those behind—a dark-visaged, low-browed, villainous-looking man—came to his side and whispered something in his ear. His words Cordelia could not distinguish, but she had no difficulty in distinguishing the response.

"Aye, Gurt, you're right," the tawny chief said. "The sooner we haul our wind out o' this the better it may be for us. Bryan! Jack! This way, and lend a hand. Mind now, no roughness! Handle them as lightly as you can."

And the three men, thus commanded, moved forward.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TERRIBLE MOMENT.

As our heroine heard the address of the chief to his comrades, and then saw the latter move toward her, she looked to see a possible way of escape, but there was none. There was but one hope, and that was in help. She whispered to Mary, who was clinging closely to her side:

"Scream!"

And a scream—two of them—that seemed to split the welkin, broke upon the startled air. With a fierce oath the chief himself sprang upon Cordelia, throwing his left arm around her shoulders, at the same time pressing his right hand over her mouth. The maid was likewise secured and her mouth stopped.

Cordelia was both brave and strong. With all her might she struggled, and quickly succeeded in freeing her right hand, which she instantly raised and clasped upon the wrist of the hand over her mouth, wrenching it away and at the same time sending forth another scream for help.

But her cry was not more startling nor more frantic than was the howl of pain and agony that burst from Ralph Tryon's lips—for we know him by this time—when the grasp of the girl was laid upon his wrist, and the furious wrench given it.

"Gurt! Gurt!—she's broken my arm again! Seize her and stop her noise!"

By this time the maid had been so far secured that one man could care for her, which left two of the ruffians to care for the mistress, the chief having moved aside to nurse his aching limb.

Cordelia's hands were quickly bound behind her, and a thick large bandanna was bound over her mouth for a gag, effectually preventing any more calling for help.

After this the chief, whom the lady now knew was none other than Ralph Tryon, started on ahead, directing his men to follow as rapidly as possible.

He took his course down the river's bank, keeping close to the water, and at the distance of a hundred yards and a little more they came to a small cove wherein lay a boat.

The two captives had been led at a pace that forced them more than once to break from a walk into a run, but they had not been used roughly.

Into the boat they were lifted without ceremony, and carried aft to the stern-sheets, where they were caused to sit on one of the sides; and presently the chief came aft and sat down directly opposite.

Then the head-fast was cast off, and the last man sprang in and came to the tiller, the other two taking the oars, and very soon the boat, which appeared to be a common long-boat, such as is carried by coasting vessels, shot out into the stream, with her head toward the sea, and sped rapidly on. The oarsmen were strong and skillful, and they had the current in their favor.

The distance from the park landing, where the capture had been made, to the bay was little more than two miles, and to the village not more than a mile and a half.

Cordelia knew that the smuggler—now the pirate—brig lay in King's Cove, and she wondered if she was to be taken there. She hardly thought it.

Too many of the crew would be opposed to it; and, again, those strange men would sympathize with her, and, if they dared, seek to help her. No, she was not to be taken there. Where then?

But another thing began to claim her attention. Her breathing was becoming labored and painful. And so it was with the maid. They looked at each other, and then looked across at the man opposite. He saw plainly the torture they were suffering.

"Ah, my dear lady!" he said, with a curious look at our heroine, "you appear to be suffering a slight discomfort just now, but it can't be much like the twinge you gave me a little while ago. Upon my word, if you'd been a man I think I should have shot you where you stood. I thought you'd broken the bone again, which the surgeon at Burton set for me; but you hadn't, so I'll forgive you. And now, say, if I'll take off that gag will you give me your word not to cry out for help?"

She hesitated. She knew if she should give her word that she would not break it. No matter what opportunity might present itself, she could not take advantage of it, should she give such a promise.

"It makes not a particle of difference to me," the chief added, after a considerable pause, finding that the lady did not speak. "If you are comfortable as you are, keep on the bandanna by all means, though I must confess it is not very becoming to you, nor does it look like a thing that I should take particular comfort in. Exercise your own pleasure, my lady."

This added cruelty of sarcasm almost caused the girl to put up with her suffering rather than accept a favor at the wretch's hands; but the torture was becoming insupportable. She could not endure it; and, by and by, she signified that he had her promise.

"You promise, mind you—if I remove this gag from your mouth that you won't offer to cry out, nor make any disturbance of any kind?" She silently promised; and Mary did the same.

"Well, my lady," after looking her straight in the eye for full ten seconds—a look which she returned without flinching—"Who do you think I am?"

"I know who you are, sir," she replied promptly. He started; but quickly recovered himself.

"Well, who am I?"

"You are Captain Tryon of the brig Staghound."

"Upon my word! Your gallant knight must have given you a pretty sharp description of me."

Cordelia's first impulse was one of anger at this slur; but she thought how foolish it would be, and straightway resolved that nothing his tongue could frame should cause her to betray or forget herself.

She looked at him steadily for a moment, and then, with a tinge in her tone which paid him back in full, she said:

"Captain Tryon, if you will look into a mirror when you next see one I think you will discover a face not likely to be forgotten when once seen, and not at all difficult to describe."

"Will you tell me how you would describe it?"

"No, sir. I will not."

"Why not?"

"You would be angry."

"Oho! Am I so ugly?"

"I prefer not to tell you what you are."

"Well I'm sorry for that. Do you know, dear lady, I had almost made up my mind to ask you to be my wife."

She did not start; the speech did not frighten her, for she had not the least thought that he meant anything more than simple badinage. So it was for a little time; by and by, as the man continued to eye her sharply, she asked herself—why had he done this thing?

Merciful heaven! Was it possible that he had seen her, and that he had conceived a passion to possess her for his own? The thought came to her like a bolt of thunder from a clear sky.

"Captain Tryon, for what purpose have you laid ruffianly hands upon me and dragged me away with yourself in this manner?"

"Wait for a little time, dear lady. I will explain by and by. We must land here."

They had gone down to a point near to the village, but shut away from it by intervening woods, where, on the side of the stream opposite to that from which they had set forth, was another small inlet, into which the boat had been steered.

There was an easy, natural landing, on a bit of bold shore, where a table of rock came out into the water, against the edge of which the boat lay without difficulty.

The girls were here helped out, and conducted a short distance up into the woods. Cordelia knew that the sloping foot of Witch's Crag was not a great way off, and a few moments later, when they had stopped, and Tryon told them they must be blindfolded, she was able to give a pretty close guess as to their destination.

"Why should you wish to blind us?" she asked. "Have you a secret which you are afraid we might

discover?"

"Never mind my reason. I choose that you shall be hoodwinked. It will not hurt you; and I promise you no indignity shall be offered while you are in that situation."

For one brief moment our heroine's thoughts were deep and rapid; the result was she submitted without opposition and without further remark.

The kerchiefs which had been before bound over their mouths were now bound tightly over their eyes, after which they moved on; and ere long, as she had anticipated, they emerged from the wood upon the rough and ragged slope of the crag. 211

They found a very good path, however, and were able to proceed without difficulty. Up—up—up, the gradual slope, Cordelia judged, very nearly half a mile—and then they stopped; and from the change in the feeling of the air she was confident they had entered one of the caves, which she had several times visited in company with Percy Maitland.

She wondered could it be that into which she and her friends had looked a few days before from the end of the subterranean passage they had explored. If it should so prove, then she might be taken into a place not unknown to her. She was destined, however, to a disappointment of which she had not dreamed.

She heard words spoken between her captors, and presently she heard a sound as of the very slight creaking of a heavy door on its hinges.

She knew that a passage had been opened before her by the sudden sweeping of a current of air on her face; and a few moments afterward, she was again led forward, being caused to stoop as she advanced.

If she could have whispered, unheard by others, to Mary, she would have said: "We are passing through an aperture in the wall where we stopped on our recent voyage of discovery. This is the very wall in which we found the crevice through which we looked into the outer cave."

When they had all passed through she distinctly heard the way closed behind them; and shortly thereafter they moved on again, Cordelia smelling the fumes of a burning candle or lamp. 212

She was confident—she felt that she knew—that they were now in a place which she had visited once before; yet, ere long, she met with something that confounded her.

They had gone perhaps a hundred yards beyond the point where she had stooped in passing, when they came to a halt, and pretty soon she heard on the left hand another sound, like the swinging of a ponderous mass on hinges or on a pivot, and there was, moreover, a peculiar grating sound as though one surface of stone had come in contact with another in motion.

"Now, my lady, this way. You will have to stoop a little." They had turned squarely to the left, and, as he spoke, Tryon placed his hand on Cordelia's head, causing her to stoop considerably lower than before. She made no resistance whatever, but kept her ears open and every sense she could use keenly alert.

She heard the closing of the way behind her, and when she next stood erect she felt that she was treading on something like a carpet.

At all events it was not the bare rock. She was conducted a short distance further, then caused to sit, and the hoodwink was removed from her eyes.

The light of two or three small waxen tapers was not sufficient to dazzle her sight; but sufficient to reveal to her what manner of place she was in.

It was a cavern, very nearly square in form; the walls seamed and uneven, but not ragged; the roof very high and quaintly arched, that is, it was a one-sided arch, like the half of a ship-roofed house. 213

The floor, which appeared to be comparatively level and smooth, was covered with a sort of Turkish matting, very soft and easy to the feet. Moreover, there was considerable furniture in the place, several chairs, a chest of drawers, a large oaken cabinet and a good sized table. In one corner was a fireplace, and on looking at the roof the observer could detect an aperture where smoke might escape.

Another thing Cordelia saw: an opening into another cave, a chamber beyond this. Tryon saw that she had discovered it, and he bade her to come with him and look.

He did not offer to lay a hand upon her. She followed him, and soon entered another apartment, not so large as the first, but much like it. Here was more furniture, and here was a bed, seemingly clean and freshly made.

"My dear lady, here you will tarry until to-morrow. You will here be safe. No harm can possibly come to you. You shall have plenty to eat; yonder bed is sweet and clean; and you may rest in it without dread."

"Ralph Tryon! What is your intention toward me? Why have you done this cruel, wicked thing? What end have you in view?"

"Lady, you shall be fully informed on the morrow, and when you have heard all I shall have to say you may not be so greatly surprised that I have done what you are pleased to call a cruel, wicked thing. Wait, wait, my dear girl, and you shall know everything. It would not be well that you should know my purpose without knowing, at the same time, the causes that have moved me, and those I must keep from you a little longer. Have patience. The morrow will soon be here." 214

"Oh, Captain Tryon!" She had sprung forward and sank upon her knees before him with her clasped hands upraised.

He stopped her with an oath, and lifted her bodily to her feet and set her back in her chair.

"Lady Cordelia Chester, were all the wealth of all the world at your command, and you could offer it to me for mine own, for it all I would not suffer you to put one of your feet beyond the outer door of yonder cavern until I am ready to take you out on my own terms. Is that plain to you?"

A moment she gazed into his face, a great horror—a nameless, shapeless dread—weighing her

down like an incubus, and then she sank back and covered her face with her hands. When she next looked up she was alone with Mary Seymour.

"Where is he?"

"He has gone, dear lady. Oh, this is dreadful! What shall we do? Dear mistress, what does he mean?"

"Sh! Are they not in the other cavern?"

"I think not. I will look." And the brave girl took a candle and looked out into the larger apartment—that which they had first entered—and found it empty.

"Oh, dear mistress! Who is that man? What—"

215

"Hush! Let me think. Or—let us look around, Mary, and determine where we are."

By a little effort the stricken lady collected her mental and physical forces, and started, with her companion, on a tour of investigation.

She went around the larger cave, examining every part; but the point of entrance claimed her special care. She was able to detect the section of stone that was movable.

The distance she had been forced to stoop aided her in determining this; and, further, the instruction she gained from Percy, during their exploration of, she firmly believed, a cavernous passage of which this was a branch.

"Mary," she said, when she had seen all there was to be seen, "you remember the wall which stopped our further progress on the day when we came with Percy to the Old Chapel—the wall in which we found a crevice through which we looked forth into another cave beyond?"

"Yes, lady."

"Well, this is a branch of that passage. Did you notice how we ascended the slope of the crag, and how we were led into the first cave; and then how we came to a wall, where we stooped in passing through? That was the same wall, only we had approached it from the other side."

"I have thought the very same, lady. Of course we must have passed the entrance to this place on that day."

"Certainly; but having had no intimation of its existence Percy did not think of looking for it. I venture to say, with the information which we now possess, Mr. Maitland would find it without much trouble. At any rate he would find it."

216

They talked longer on the same subject, and made further examination; and the more they considered the stronger became their faith in the fact that they were in a place separated only by the thickness of a wall from the passage they had traversed under the guidance of Percy Maitland.

Cordelia had worn her watch, and by and by she thought of it.

Twelve o'clock! Noon! Where was Percy? Where the earl? Where were they looking? What did they think? Oh, could Percy in any possible way discover where they were? If he could, they would be delivered!

An hour passed—and another. Mary found a box in which were plenty of wax tapers. So they would not be left in the dark.

It was toward the latter part of the afternoon when a noise beyond the outer wall arrested their attention, and presently a section of it—the very stone Cordelia had selected—swung slowly inward, revealing an aperture about four feet wide, and the same in height.

Into the cave came two of the men who had been with Tryon in the morning. They brought between them a large basket, in which, they said, were food and drink sufficient for a small garrison.

The men looked so repulsive, so hard and brutish and cruel, that neither of the girls cared to ask them a question; and they would have been likely to receive no answer had they done so.

217

"There, my beauties," said the biggest and most piratical looking of the twain, after they had set the basket down and looked around, "I guess ye'll be all right now. Rather cosy quarters, aint they? One thing ye ken be sure on—nobody can't break in, an' rob ye! Ho! ho! ho!"

The two men laughed and then departed. No attempt was made to conceal from the captives the locality of the entrance, as the knowledge, in all probability, could be of no help to them.

The day passed, and the evening. Together the two girls sat, not yet quite hopeless, though how help was to reach them they could not imagine.

At length, when weariness had so far overpowered them that they could keep awake no longer, they ventured to trust themselves in the bed. It was, as their captor had said, clean and sweet, or freshly aired, and it was soft and grateful to lie upon. They prayed in unison, and very soon thereafter slept.

Once during the night Mary awoke, and her movement awoke her mistress. The former got out of bed and lighted two fresh tapers, and from that they slept soundly until morning. They found plenty of water, and having washed and dressed, they set out the food and drink for breakfast.

It was then, by Cordelia's watch, seven o'clock. Two hours had passed when she consulted the watch again. Oh, what should come next?

218

Half an hour later, perhaps more—they could not surely judge—the sound of the moving stone once more fell upon their ears.

Slowly it swung inward—further and further—until the way was open wide. And then entered the pirate chief, Ralph Tryon, dressed in the rich and costly garb of an English nobleman! And behind him, coming two abreast, followed six men of his crew dressed in holiday attire.

But that was not all. Last—was it real or but a wild fancy of her overwrought brain?—last came a man in the somber robes and bearing in his hands the missal of a Catholic priest!

What did it mean?

CHAPTER XVII.

A SURPRISE FOR ALL HANDS.

Through the long and weary day and far into the night Percy and the earl worked hard and unremittingly in the search for the missing ones.

During the afternoon the former ventured down to the shore of the cove, at the point where he had once been in the habit of keeping a boat of his own, and there remained until he had succeeded in attracting the attention of Donald Rodney.

It was a considerable time before the old smuggler could get away from the keen and suspicious watch of Ralph Tryon's partisans; but his patient endeavors were finally rewarded. 219

He took a boat and pulled to the shore, ostensibly for the purpose of responding to a signal, which he professed to have received from Margery Maitland.

"In mercy's name!" he ejaculated, when he met the agonized look of his young friend, "what has happened?"

"Donald, where is Ralph Tryon?"

"I believe he is somewhere in the neighborhood of Burton, and I rather think there is mischief afoot. Leastwise, one of our friends heard Abel Jackman, when he was talking with Gurt Warnell, say something about a lord's house over there which they intended to visit."

"Do you really believe he is away from here, Donald?"

"Why shouldn't I? He certainly sent for those men to go away with him on a job of some kind; and, as I just said, one of our men—it was Tom Bidwell—overheard Jackman talkin' about Burton. Yes, I think he's there."

After a little reflection Percy told to his friend the story of the wonderful disappearance of Lady Cordelia Chester and her maid.

Rodney was deeply affected, but he did not believe Tryon had anything to do with it. If such a thing had been in the wind he was sure he would have detected some signs of it. But one thing the old man promised. He would return to the brig, and he would not rest until he had found out all that could possibly be discovered in that quarter. 220

"And, my dear boy," he added, earnestly, "nothing shall prevent me from giving you information as soon as it comes to me. I will either come myself or send Guy to-morrow morning at all events, whether I have news or not."

It was not very satisfying; but the interview, and the bringing it about, had used up two painful hours, besides giving him something more to think of and look forward to.

He had taken to himself a hope that old Rodney would bring him something of importance in the morning, if not before. It was very slight—very slight indeed; but a ray of light came with it, nevertheless.

Leaving the shore of the cove, our hero made his way to the inn at the village, where he was to have a new direction given to his thoughts—or, rather, an aforesaid thought was to be revived.

"Ah, Maitland! the very man I've been wishing for," the host exclaimed, as our hero made his appearance in the tap-room. "That horse has come. Just step around this way with me, and you shall have a look at him."

Percy knew this to be simply a blind for closing the eyes of the few loungers in the room. He followed the good man out through the bar into a little parlor beyond, where with the doors closed they were safe from intrusion.

"Maitland, you asked me, this noon, about Lord Oakleigh; and I told you I knew nothing about him. Well, I can tell ye more now. Dan Corbett came in half an hour ago and told me he met the young lord over at Saybrook, at Seth Arnold's inn, last evening." 221

"He knows it was Lord Oakleigh?" interrogated the youth, much excited.

"Bless ye, yes! He knows Lord Oakleigh as well as he knows you or me."

"Last evening?"

"Yes."

"At what time?"

"It must have been somewhere between eight and ten o'clock."

"Does he know what he was doing there, or anything about what he intended to do?"

"He could make out only this: His lordship was in a great flurry, with his right arm in a sling, Dan said; and seemed to be waiting for somebody—Dan thought his servant—who was to take him away from there; but where he was bound or what he was about, I couldn't find out."

Percy asked a few more questions, and then, having thanked the landlord for his kindness, he left the inn and made all possible haste to the castle. He was well armed, and he kept a sharp lookout around as he wended his way through the bit of woods he had to traverse, for he well knew that he had deadly enemies, and there was no telling where nor when they might strike. At the castle he found the earl, pacing to and fro, suffering intensely.

"Percy, dear boy! what have you found?" 222

"Will you sit down, my lord, and listen to me for a few moments?" The old man did as requested, and the youth went on:

"Lord Allerdale, I am going to surprise you—to wound you; but you must bear it as best you can. When it was first known to me that Lady Cordelia had been taken away—as we know she must have been—my suspicions fell upon—Lord Oakleigh. I believed he was more likely to be the abductor than any other man; and now I am sure of it."

"Oh, Percy! Don't say it!"

"My lord, where do you think is his lordship at the present time?"

"He is at Oxford."

"He was at the Saybrook inn at nine to ten o'clock last evening, my lord. That I know." And thereupon the young man went on and related all that he had learned from old Rodney, at the Cove, and from Martin Vanyard at the inn. He was sorry to say it, but he was confident that Oakleigh was the offending party.

"My lord," he pursued, "did Cordelia tell you what Lord Oakleigh said to her on the occasion of their late interview in the garden?"

"She did not tell me all, but I know he was very unkind."

"Aye,—and he used threats. He bade her beware of him; and—but, my lord, I need not tell you any more." He had come to the point where his own name had entered into the discussion, and of this he cared not to speak.

However, the earl was satisfied that his young friend might be right, and he finally confessed that his own suspicions had run in that direction, but he had fought them down with all his might.

Half an hour later, our hero, with a trusty servant of the castle in company, was on his way to Saybrook, a small town five miles away toward the south.

He had a smart horse, and a light, easy-going vehicle, and the passage was speedily made. There at the inn, he found the host—Seth Arnold, who, when he knew the messenger had come from the old earl, was ready to give all the information he could; but that was not much, although it was something.

Lord Oakleigh had been at the inn—the Stag and Hounds—on the preceding evening, and had appeared to be in a great hurry, walking nervously about, with his arm in a sling, cursing and swearing to himself. At about ten o'clock his servant had arrived with a light dog-cart, into which he had gone and been driven away; and the landlord had seen nothing more of him.

"Which way did they go?"

"Back toward your way, Allerdale."

A few more questions, and Percy started on his return to the castle, where he arrived at about nine o'clock in the evening.

The earl, on hearing the report, surrendered his last doubt. He was now convinced that his grandson was the villain. Oh, what would he do?

"Let us not think," said the younger man. "Let us find them and set the lady free."

"Heaven send that we may do it!"

Percy went again to the village, where he made further inquiries; but nothing of importance was learned. He had promised the earl that he would spend the night at the castle; so at midnight he returned, finding the old nobleman up waiting for him.

It seemed almost wrong to go to bed and to sleep while the dear one was lost to them, but the demands of nature were not to be denied. The earl read a prayer, the youth prayed fervently from his own heart, and then they sought their rest.

It was near the hour of eight o'clock on the following morning, and our hero had been to the village and back again to the castle, and was on his way to the village once more, when he was met by the boy, Guy Carroll, his face flushed and his blue eyes fairly blazing.

"Guy! What is it?"

They were in the edge of the wood, and free from observation. The boy cast a quick, eager glance around and then—

"Oh, Mr. Maitland! It is Cap'n Tryon after all!"

"What of him? What? What?" Percy exclaimed, catching the boy by the arm, with an anxiety that was torturing.

"It's he, sir, that has run off with the lady from the castle! Yesterday—late in the afternoon—Bryan Vank and Gurt Warnell—they were two of them that had been sent for by the cap'n—they came aboard the brig and carried away a big basket full of provisions; and late at night Uncle Donald found out all about it. He wouldn't tell me who told him; but it seems Vank let it leak out while he was waitin' for the basket to be filled. The provisions were for two women—two young girls—that the cap'n'd got stowed away in one of the caverns on the slope of the Crag."

Percy started as though he had been shot. It was like the bursting of a thunderbolt over his head from a clear sky. In his wild imaginings he had several times had a picture in mind of his darling shut up in that place; but he had given it no serious thought.

Could it be Ralph Tryon, and not Lord Oakleigh, who had spirited away the two girls? It must be.

He questioned Guy closely, and was, in the end, perfectly assured there could be no mistake. The pirate chief himself had stolen away the dear one, and now had her shut up in the cavern of the Crag.

"Guy, do you know where that cave is?"

"I only know, sir, that it is just about half-way from the shore of the bay to the point where the head of the Crag shoots up steeply. I was never there. But Uncle Donald says there'll be no use in your attemptin' to get at 'em in there, for there's a secret entrance which nobody can find only them as knows it. Uncle knows it, but he can't tell it. Leastwise I don't believe he'd want to break such an oath as he'd have to break if he did it. He says you'll watch till they come out—the cap'n and the lady—and then, p'raps, you'll be able to catch him. Oh, I hope you will!"

"You are sure Ralph Tryon will be in that cavern this forenoon?"

"Yes, sir. He's there, now, somewhere. I should think, from what I've heard, that it was a big place with lots of odd nooks and corners in it. I heard old Ben Popwell say once, when he didn't

know 'at I was listenin', 'at it would be a great place for blind-man's buff."

The startled, electrified youth waited for no more. He thanked the lad kindly, promising him that he should never seek his good offices in vain; then he said:

"Tell Uncle Donald that the rat is in more of a trap than he dreams of!" And with this he hurried away, keeping on to the village, as he had first intended; but with his purpose changed. His first call was on the chief constable, who there resided, named Allan Tisdale. He was a man of middle age; large and powerful of frame; bold and fearless in the line of his duty, yet kind, affable, and gentlemanly.

He had been intimate with our hero for a long time and esteemed him highly.

"Well, Maitland, have you anything new?"

The visitor was not a great while in telling him. He told all that he had learned from old Donald's nephew.

"And now, what?" the constable demanded, open-eyed. He was nervous and excited. He could not see his way. "We know where the man is; but how are we to reach him? Ah! and that reminds me; I saw a squad of seamen—a dozen or more—not half an hour ago, landing from a boat at the foot of the rocky slope. In all probability they are to do guard duty up at the cave." 227

"How many good, reliable men can you raise at once?" Percy asked.

"I can muster twenty in half an hour, perhaps; if I should call upon the villagers, I might make it thirty."

"Very well—will you take with you five of your best men—those in whom you have the most confidence, and come with me? I will lead you into that cavern by a way that will astonish you."

"Ha!—Maitland!" exclaimed the officer, with a quick start and a look of intense eagerness. "Is it at the Old Chapel? Have you found it?"

"Yes, Mr. Tisdale, I have succeeded. You will see a strange place. But speak not a word to another. My soul! it must not leak out until we are ready to strike the blow. You will be circumspect."

"Trust me. Ah, you've found the secret of the ghosts. The haunted chapel is haunted no more, save by spirits in flesh and blood! Good! But this isn't work. Come with me and give me your help. We'll very soon have our men ready for duty."

Everything worked favorably. The men wanted were found without difficulty; and the stout artisans and laborers of the village, when they had been told of the business on hand, were not only willing but eager to join. 228

In little more than half an hour from the time of their setting forth the work was done. Tisdale had selected the five men who were to accompany him, while his lieutenant—Martin O'Brien—a faithful and reliable officer, at the head of four-and-twenty more, all well armed, was to proceed up the face of the Crag—not to go to the cave—but to stop at a point where they would be sure to intercept any who should attempt to escape from the cave in that direction.

Thus, Percy believed, they would be able to capture the whole party—all of the pirates whom the chief had called to his assistance—and he thought there might be twelve to fifteen of them. When these arrangements had been perfected, and they were sure that O'Brien understood his part exactly, Percy and the constable, with the five helpers—strong, experienced officers, every one—took their way to the castle, where they found the earl anxiously waiting for intelligence.

When the old nobleman had heard the story, when he knew that his darling had been found, or the same as found, and he was assured that he should ere long behold her, when it had all been made clear to him, his joy was beyond his power of language to express it.

"Percy! Percy! My noble boy!" he cried, regarding the youth with loving trustful looks, "you must take the lead. You know all about it. You are the man. I am sure Mr. Tisdale will not be offended." 229

"Pooh! pooh! Maitland is the man to lead, my lord. We all understand it."

"Let me give my humble help, as best I can," said Percy, not at all discomposed by the encomiums thus passed upon him. "Where I can lead, be sure I will; and when I can follow I will do so with all my heart. And now, my lord, how many of your men are we to take with us?"

"Here is Michael. He will muster them. There should be ten, at least."

"Twelve, my lord, counting me. Of course you'll let me go."

"Yes, you may go. Now hurry and collect the men and get out the arms. Oh, do be expeditious!"

Now was the time and the need when our hero showed the quality that was in him. Under his calm, quiet, prompt guidance, with a power of command natural to him, the force of the castle was mustered, armed, and organized in less than twenty minutes, and in half an hour after the arrival of himself and the constable at the castle the party, twenty in number, counting the earl, was ready to set forth.

The appearance of a man in priestly robes, following behind the pirate chief and his comrades, at first struck Cordelia with a paralyzing horror. The significance of the scene was not to be mistaken. It was the voice of Ralph Tryon that roused her to indignation and gave her strength. 230

The chief, in his gorgeous raiment of velvet and gold, advanced to the center of the cavernous apartment; his six comrades, in broadcloth and silk, filing in behind him, where they took position in a well-dressed line. Then the pretended priest, with slow, even step, moved to a place on Tryon's left hand and a little in front.

"Now, fair lady," said the master of the situation, "I have come to fulfill my promise. I will set you free from this place, but you will go with me as my wife. Do you understand me?"

Something in the man's voice—something new and strange—gave to our heroine a start of wonder. It had lost much of its huskiness and had put off its roughness; it sounded no more like the voice of the sea. She looked at him sharply, looked long and earnestly, and presently she saw a

smile curling about his deep black eyes, a smile so wicked and malevolent and so vengeful that it aroused her beyond her endurance.

"Man! Demon! Fiend! Whatever you call yourself, I tell you, in your teeth, you speak falsehood! You have no power to make me your wife! Lay a hand upon me, and I will kill you if I can! Were this man in sacerdotal robe a true priest, he would know he can not do the wicked deed. It would be but mockery—an empty form. If he be a true man, he will not attempt it."

"Holy father," said the chief, turning to the pretended priest, without paying any heed whatever to the hot and angry words of the girl, "you hear what she says. Now what say you?" 231

"I say, my lord, if the situation is as you have represented it—if such has been the general understanding, and if the lady's lawful guardian consents, I could marry you, and the bond would be too strong for man to break."

"Now, Cordelia." He had put his hand to his head, and appeared to be loosing something behind his ear, when a quick, sharp cry of alarm from one of the men behind him caused him to look toward the entrance.

On his way to the cave, as we might judge from what the constable had that morning seen, Tryon had been accompanied by a strong force of his sworn friends and adherents.

Ten stout men, well armed, he had left at the mouth of the outer cave, and the six who had come in with him he had brought for witnesses, being determined that the ceremony should not lack in that respect.

With regard to danger inside his cavernous retreat, the pirate had not dreamed of such a thing. He would as soon have thought of finding the sunlight streaming into its uttermost recesses.

Hence he had entered the chamber, leaving the others to follow, never once thinking of closing the way behind him.

Now, upon hearing the note of alarm, he looked toward the entrance and there beheld a sight that confounded and bewildered him.

He saw Percy Maitland, and by his side the constable, Allan Tisdale, just entering the place, or rather he saw them leap quickly in, and directly behind them came the old earl, with seemingly a score of men at his back. 232

"In the king's name," shouted the constable, "surrender!"

"Not until I have made my mark here," the pirate chief replied; and quick as thought he snatched at a pistol in his bosom, and drew it forth, his purpose being to shoot young Maitland.

But two other persons were as quick as he; though they might not have been had not his lame hand bothered him.

Before he could cock the weapon, Cordelia, who had heard and understood his words, struck up his hand, causing him to utter an audible groan of pain; and at the same moment the earl, full sure in the heat and excitement of the moment, that the life of his brave young friend was in peril, raised the pistol in his hand and fired.

The pirate pressed his hand over his bosom and sank back, coming in contact with the pretended priest as he did so. The latter, thinking the wounded man would fall, caught him to uphold him, and in doing so his fingers became entangled in the thick, heavy beard of the face, and—pulled it away.

The chief had cast loose the principal fastening of his disguise while speaking with Cordelia—the speech which had been interrupted by the appearance of the new-comers and the note of alarm from the startled seamen. 233

Yes, the disguise came away just as the last of the pirate gang had been overcome and secured—the tawny beard and hair—revealing the swart face of Matthew Brandon, Lord Oakleigh!

At first those who beheld refused to believe the evidence of their own senses. It did not seem possible that one and the same man could have filled both characters.

But they were forced to believe in time. And now Percy Maitland knew what it was in the looks of Ralph Tryon that had so puzzled and perplexed him from the first.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARGERY'S REVELATION—CONCLUSION.

The aged earl, when he had come to a realizing sense of the horror of the situation, sank back with a groan of the deepest, bitterest agony, and covered his face with his hands as though to shut from his sight the terrible thing before him.

And then arose the voice of the pirate, coarse, brutal and cruel, even though the hand of death lay heavily upon him.

"Oho! my dear grandpapa! You will have a happy thought—a beautiful, blissful memory—through the remnant of your life. Your own hand took your grandson's life!"

"Oh, Heaven have mercy!" the stricken old man groaned. "It needed but this to fill the cup of my misery to the brim!" 234

"Aye," pursued the wretch, with a withering sneer, "and you killed me to save the beggarly life of a smuggler's brat! Oho! may the memory give you joy! Oh, I am burning up!"

"Dear, dear grandpa!" Cordelia exclaimed, hastening to her guardian's side and winding her arms about his neck. "Oh, do not notice him. Look to us who love you, and who—"

"Love one another!" Oakleigh broke in, madly. "Oho! Aha, old man! what did I tell you? A thousand guineas to a pewter sixpence you give your consent yet to the marriage of the baronet's

daughter with the spawn of the—oh, how it burns!”

The priest, a man whom Oakleigh had been able to buy, after confession to him who and what he was, proved to be a handy surgeon, and he at once proceeded to examine the wound. It was in the left side, toward the breast and near the heart, and it was very quickly pronounced fatal, though the clerical leech said the patient might live several hours. If he was to be moved, the sooner it was done the better.

“Let me die at the castle,” said the wounded man. “If I am to live for hours, let my good, kind grandfather be blessed with the sight of his handiwork!”

At this point Percy and Cordelia, who had found opportunity for a word together—she had sprung to him at the very first, in the fullness of her heart, to bless him for having come to save her. “Oh,” she had cried, “I knew you would come!”—these two came to the old man’s aid and led him away.

“The man is mad,” said Maitland. “You shall not suffer the cruel torture more.”

“Come, dear grandpa! Come with us.”

They led him to the entrance, where he promised to go with his darling, after which Percy returned and attended to the arrangements for moving the wounded man; but he finally gave the work into the hands of old Michael, the priest having promised to accompany them to the castle.

Meantime Mr. Tisdale, with two of his men, had gone on to the outer cave, toward the face of the slope, where he was just in season to meet others of his men, who informed him that they had captured ten of the pirate crew outside. And this completed the work. They believed they had taken all who had left the brig.

Under these circumstances, as the constable could not be wanted at the castle, he returned to the cave with a few of his men and took in charge all the prisoners, saving only the wounded chief; and while the servants of the earl conveyed him forth, by way of the old chapel, he and his force would take the others down over the slope of the crag, outside.

On their way through the long and devious subterranean passage Matthew Brandon did not once open his lips; but when they had reached the chapel, and he saw our hero start to move the altar back against the wall, thus uncovering the secret pass, he burst forth, though weakly:

“Oho! So it’s you? Viper! You have found the secret. Oh, may the fiends of—” He stopped, with a shoot of pain in his side, and was forced to hold his tongue for a time.

Cordelia was strongly tempted to tell him that the sight of himself, one stormy evening, entering the chapel, and disappearing beneath the altar, had led to the discovery. But Percy told him the same later, and he confessed that he had come in on that night wearing a monk’s robe.

And then in astonishment Percy looked at what had never before attracted his attention. In profile the face of Lord Oakleigh was an exact pattern of what Hugh Maitland’s face had been.

Sure, it was curious; and yet not at all wonderful that he had not before noticed it. With the full beard of Ralph Tryon on his face, his profile was hidden; while with the face of Matthew Brandon he had not been familiar. On that stormy evening he had not worn his beard nor his wig.

A very good litter had been found in the chamber beneath the chapel, and on this the wounded man was placed and so conveyed to the castle. And there a new surprise awaited them.

Standing in the court in company with old Donald Rodney was Margery Maitland, looking pale and wan—not the Margery of the olden time. In truth she looked like a woman not long for this lower life.

Percy, when he saw her, felt his heart bound with a thrill of regret—almost of remorse.

Had his forsaking her caused this sad change? He could not believe it. She had never loved him deeply enough for that. Yet he hastened to her and put forth his hands.

“Mother! Oh, why are you—”

“Hush, boy! You know not to whom you speak. Where is the other—Ralph Tryon? Where is he?”

“Mother! Oh, did you know? Of course you did. There he is, wounded—dying.”

“Dying! dying, did you say?”

“Yes. He was shot in the flurry of capture.”

“Shot in attempting your life, was he not?”

“You are right. Whoever told you, told the truth.”

“Nobody told me, boy. My own instinct so impressed me. Ah, he is on yonder litter! Oh, this is judgment! This is the vengeance of heaven! Matthew Brandon!” going to the side of the litter, “your hand was not red enough with pirating, but you must steal defenseless girls away from their homes!—Oh, boy! boy—your crimes have found you at length!”

“How now, beldam! What do ye here?” cried the wounded man. Presently, with a fiendish gleam in his eye, he added: “Oh, Margery, give yonder old man joy! His hand it was that shot me down! aye! he shot me to save the life of the smuggler’s spawn! What d’ye think of it?”

“Was it the earl’s hand that did it?”

“Aye, verily.”

“And to save—”

“The smuggler’s brat! the spawn of an outlaw!” the wretch broke in upon her.

“Fool! Fool! How long can he live?” she suddenly asked, turning from the litter to the priest, who stood nearest.

“Not many hours.”

“Then carry him in, and I must go with him. I have that to say which he must hear.”

“Ho! ho! Will ye tell them how ye tried to do the very work they shot me for attempting, Margery?”

“Yes, I’ll tell with all my heart. Don’t think I fear.”

“Don’t let her come! Don’t let her come!” the fallen chieftain howled. And he tried to speak

further, but his strength failed him and pain overcame him.

Something in the woman's look, in her manner, and in the sound of her voice attracted the earl's attention and interested him, and he determined that she should have her way.

At any rate it should be as Percy said, and so he told her. And she besought her son to suffer her to go in with them, and he could not find it in his heart to refuse her.

They bore the litter to the foot of the steps of the main vestibule, and thence took the wounded man in their arms.

They carried him into the great hall and into the principal drawing-room,—took him in there because there was in the apartment the largest and softest sofa in the castle, and upon that sofa they laid him, and then brought pillows for his head and pillows for his shoulders. 239

The pseudo-priest, really a surgeon, having found a suitable instrument for a probe, thought to find the location of the bullet, but the pain he caused was so great, with a threatened flow of blood, that he desisted, deciding at once, with perfect assurance, that it could do no good to find the missile and might hasten the fatal end.

"How long do you give me to live?" the patient asked, when he had recovered from the pain that had been given him by the probe.

"You may live an hour; you may live longer, and you may not live so long."

"Oh! Aha! ha! ha! Where's the earl? Ha! old man! Don't forget the joy that is to be yours in the memory of this day's work! Say—did you love my father?"

"Oh, boy! boy! Why were you not like him?"

"Ha! He was a saint, was he? Well, if I should chance to meet him in the great hereafter—and who shall say what may happen?—I may meet him, you know. If I do, be sure I'll tell him who shot me. Aye, and I'll tell him for why his own father shot his boy. It was to prevent him from dealing out justice to a traitor! Ay!" the pirate shouted in a sudden outburst of fury and mad passion, "where is the traitor?—the low-lived, false-hearted spawn of a low-lived, outlawed smuggler. Where is he? Ho! Earl of Allerdale, will ye mate your fair ward with the—" 240

"Hush!—Poor fool! You know not what you say." So spake Margery Maitland, advancing to the mad man's side, and laying her hand over his mouth. She saw that his own weakness would keep him quiet for a time; and she brought a chair and sat near him.

And so she sat for a full minute, and during that time the only sound that broke the air was the stertorous breathing of the wounded man. At length she raised her head and looked around, her eyes presently resting upon our hero.

"Percy," she said, her voice low and tremulous. "I have but little to say, especially to you. I did—I did, with my own hands attempt your life! I offered you the death which another had prepared—you know him—let us call him Ralph Tryon. No, I'll call him by his true name—"

At this point the man to whom she had thus alluded offered to interrupt her, as he did several times later; but his weakness and his pain held him quiet.

"Matthew Brandon is his name. He had gained a hold upon me, and he knew it. As you are aware, he made the acquaintance of my husband little more than a year before his death; and he sailed with him in three or four trips to France—sailed thus while they at the castle thought him safely at Oxford at school. You know how, at length, he joined the brig and finally took command, having taken another name, together with a disguise so cunningly contrived that no one could detect or mistrust it. So he came to the command, and he contrived to keep the momentous secret safe. He worked upon me. He sought my confidence. He flattered me. He appeared to be kind to me. You will wonder how it could be. That I will explain by and by. 241

"Percy, not long ago he came to me and solemnly swore that you had entered into an agreement with the officers of the law to deliver up—to betray—himself and the brig and the whole crew into their hands. At first I refused to believe it, but he swore so solemnly and I saw you coming here, and I knew how your heart was not with us—that finally, I came to accept it as a fact, and then I felt bitter toward you. What would become of me, if the smuggling was stopped? And so, when he brought to me the wine, and bade me to give it to you, swearing that if I did not he would clear out and never look upon me again,—then I yielded.

"Oh, Percy! On that morning when you went away—when you blessed me and left me—then, Percy, my eyes were opened, and I felt in my heart what you had become to me. I felt then all the difference between you and him; and I sat down and wept—wept as I had not wept before since my own Hugh left me. After that I saw Matthew Brandon again, and he had the face to ask me to help him get Lady Cordelia Chester away from the castle, that he might marry her. If he had asked me that six months ago I might have listened; but other feelings had come to me. I told him no; and I told him further, if he persisted in the purpose evil would come of it; but he laughed at me, and went his way. This morning I saw Donald Rodney, and asked him what was being done; and when he knew how I felt—when he had seen the desire of my heart—he told me all; and then I persuaded him to come up here with me, being sure that Brandon would be taken. 242

"I will say nothing about his piracy, only I assure you that I fought against it as long as I could, feeling sure that it could end but in one way. But he was headstrong, and he conquered. Percy, do you believe me?"

"Yes, mother, with all my heart."

Tears sprang to the woman's eyes, but she put them back; and again there was silence, the significant breathing of the sufferer on the sofa becoming more and more weak and labored. By and by she looked up again, this time turning to the earl. She gazed upon him for a few moments, evidently in deep thought, and at length spoke.

"Lord Allerdale, please do not interrupt me. I have a strange story to tell to you—one that I think will interest you. Will you let me tell it in my own way?" She paused for a little time, looking at him

curiously, and then glancing toward the sofa, and, anon, toward where Percy and Cordelia sat near together. Finally she went on:

"My lord, you have not forgotten when I was a servant in your family. Ten years—from the age of twelve to two-and-twenty—I was a member of your household. I see that you remember. 243

"You remember too, that when your son George, then Lord Oakleigh, brought his young and beautiful wife home I was detailed to wait upon her, and I became, after a time, her especial servant. I had no other duties but to wait on her. She was kind; and she was, in her own way, just, but she was proud, and a strict observer of what she deemed the proprieties of life.

"I had served Lady Oakleigh not quite a year when she discovered that I was soon to become a mother. She asked me who was my husband. At first I hesitated, and she misunderstood me; and finally, when I told her that I had been lawfully married to Hugh Maitland, she would not believe me.

"But that was not all. She broke out into a harsh and bitter denunciation of my lover, as she called him. He was a smuggler and an outlaw, liable at any time to be gibbeted; and she would suffer me no longer to remain in her service. She cast me out, coldly, and, I felt, cruelly.

"You, my lord, were away at the time, traveling on the continent. Had you been here I should have appealed to you, and I believe you would have taken pity on me, but there was no pity in the bosom of my lady; and her husband would not have crossed her for his life; for she, too, was about to become a mother.

"And now, my lord, a curious thing happened. When I had been turned away, my lady, being so near to her motherhood, wanted a wet nurse in my place, and she found one; and who do you think it was? 244

"My own sister!—the only relative of blood I had in the world. She was a widow; her husband dead only a few months; and was living in Burton. Huldah—that was her name—Huldah came; and the mistress liked her. She was plump, and strong, and healthy, with rosy cheeks and bright black eyes.

"She was obedient, and meant to do her duty; but she was indignant at the way in which I had been treated; and, to make the matter worse, Lady Oakleigh so far forgot herself as to denounce me and terribly abuse my husband. It so happened that Hugh was a favorite with Huldah; and when she heard her lady so berate him she was very angry.

"And now, my lord, you may be able to understand what followed. It was evident that her ladyship and I would become mothers at very nearly the same time; and my sister joined me willingly in a plot not only for vengeance, but for placing a child of our blood on the way to rank and station. If the children should happen to be of the same sex there would not be much trouble.

"Do you ask me if I had not a mother's heart of love for her own offspring? I answer you—by the plan we proposed I should be near my child all my life. Should it be a boy, which I was sure it would be, I should find real joy and pride in seeing him grow up, rich, proud, noble, and honored. But, oh, heavens! what a fall of all my glowing anticipations have I found in the reality! 245

"My lord, everything happened to help on our plan. The children were born within six hours of each other and were both boys. My child was born in your woodman's cottage, just in the edge of the walnut grove, at six o'clock in the evening, Lady Oakleigh's six hours later.

"The old physician left me and went to her. He left the castle at two o'clock; and the only human being who had fairly examined the infant was the nurse, Huldah.

"An hour later, my lord, when the nurse had got rid of the last hanger-on, and her ladyship had gone to sleep under the influence of an opiate, Huldah took the infant in her arms, wrapped snugly in warm blankets, and brought it to me; and she carried my child—the child of Hugh Maitland and Margery his wife—back to the castle, back to the arms of Lady Oakleigh; and the cheat was not discovered—was never mistrusted.

"When the daylight came, those who saw the infant nestling in the nurse's arms, or resting on her ladyship's bosom, wondered where it got such black eyes and such black hair; but it was a fine, healthy child, and they were proud of it.

"Ah! my lord, it was a healthier, heavier child than was brought to me; and I verily believe had Lady Oakleigh been permitted to keep her own offspring, she would not have reared it to even early youth.

"The free air of our woodland cottage; the out-of-door sports; the sailing; and the rough-and-tumble; and, above all else, the plain, substantial food, gave health and strength and vigor; and he grew up as pure and beautiful in mind as he was in body. 246

"I may remind you here that my husband—Hugh Maitland—smuggler though he was, was a Christian gentleman; and from him the boy never received a precept nor an example that was not good, setting aside, of course, the one matter of his profession.

"And now, my lord, do you ask me why I did not love the child—the beautiful boy—with all my heart? I will tell you.

"I was jealous of him! I had robbed him of rank, and wealth, and high, brilliant life, and given, as I had fondly believed, those things to my own son. But look at the result! I looked upon the boy under my roof, and saw him all that Heaven itself could ask a perfect boy to be. 247

"Then I looked upon the boy to whom I had given every opportunity for high and noble life, for wealth and luxury and power, and what did I see? I looked upon the child of my own blood, in whose greatness I had promised myself so much pride and joy, and what did I find? Alas! my evil deed had recoiled upon myself. I saw my boy, him to whom I had given all the world at the cost of my own soul, going down, down, down, a poor worthless stick! Had I kept him to myself and thrown him at an early age upon his own resources for a livelihood, he might have been different. But I can not complain.

"Percy! Percy!" turning to the half-stupefied youth, with tears starting down her shrunken cheeks. "On that morning when you blessed me—when, after I had raised my hand against your life, and you knew it, you asked God to give me blessing, now and ever more—in that hour, Percy, I resolved that you should be restored to your rights; that, so far as I could effect it, you should, for the time to come, enjoy the rank and wealth that is lawfully your own.

"I can not speak more. Yet—one word—Oh, my lord!—Lord Allerdale! look upon this boy—look into his face—and tell me what you see. Oh, how have you been so blind? He is his own father over again! Do you not see? Ah, your heart has told you! You have loved him, even when you thought him the smuggler's child."

"Percy! Oh, I will always call you so! Can you doubt the truth of this?" So asked the old earl, holding the handsome youth by the shoulders and gazing eagerly, through bright tear-drops, into his face.

"My lord," Percy answered, trembling at every joint, "how can I doubt it? I do certainly believe it true."

"Doubt!—Believe!" cried Margery, springing to her feet with arm outstretched. "Look at that face—the face on those pillows! Oh, Heaven, have mercy! Is it not my own face made masculine, and hardened and brutalized? Your face, boy, is the face of your father. Had it been your mother's, I do not think I should have endured you. Forgive me! I will say no more."

At this point the pirate chief, who had been thus far held in check by the surgeon, started to a sitting posture, with fury in his face and a literal flame in his sunken eyes. He raised his maimed right hand toward Margery, and his lips moved. He gasped, and flecks of foam started out, but he did not speak. Another effort resulted in a low gurgling howl, and he sank back on his pillows—dead.

Margery stood for a time at the sofa side and gazed down upon the swart, dead face. By and by she turned toward the earl.

"Lord Allerdale," she said, with a steady, earnest look into his watchful eyes, "I will tell you how you can prove to me your undoubting faith in the story I have told you. Give to the men whom I shall send, this body, and allow me to bury it by the side of the grave wherein I laid the mortal remains of his father. Will you do it?"

The earl looked at the stark form on the sofa and shuddered. The sight was a horror to him. Then he turned and looked upon the other—the truly noble, handsome, gallant lad, who had already, against heavy odds, found the way to his heart.

A single moment he gazed upon that face—Oh, so like the face of his dead son—and then he turned back to the woman.

"Yes! yes! Take it, for I know it is yours! And may the Father of us all, in His infinite mercy, give you peace and comfort for the remainder of your life! Heaven bless you, Margery, for the restitution you have this day made!"

"I am glad I have made it. I feel better—I feel less of unhappiness than I have felt for years. The gain is mine as well as yours. Percy could have been never any more to me, while to you he will be a new joy, a new life."

"And now, my lord, before I leave you, I have an earnest petition to offer. There are, of the brig's crew, a full score of men—I think two-and-twenty of them—at all events, Percy can give you their names."

"I know them," said the young man, as she hesitated and glanced toward him.

"They are men, my lord," she went on, "who never willingly committed crime. I have to beseech you, that when you come to lift the sword of justice against the pirates, these men may be spared. They—"

"My good Margery," interrupted the earl, with a benignant, happy look on his aged face, "I am pleased to tell you that the promise you ask I have already given to another. The only consideration on which Percy would at first agree to assist me in capturing the chief of the pirates was that I would give free passage, whithersoever they would go, to the men of whom you have spoken. Rest you easy, for I give you my word, not one of them—not one, in short, who can prove that he possesses your avouchment for his character—shall be molested."

Margery bowed low as she thanked him; then turned and left the room. Percy followed her out, but she had nothing more to say to him.

"Go back, boy, to those who have a right to your love and your care. Yes, Percy, you are indeed and in truth that old man's grandson. Go back to him, and let your love make some little return of joy to him for the many, many hours of pain and grief my sin has cost him."

The youth murmured a fervent blessing upon her, and left her. She found old Donald in the hall, and with him she returned to her cottage.

An hour later four stout men, with a written order from her hand, appeared at the castle for the body of Ralph Maitland. That was the name which the mother had written.

It was delivered to them, and they bore it away; and the whole castle, in every part, and the whole household, seemed brighter and better when it was gone.

With the coming of evening a calm and tranquil joy had settled upon the household of the castle; for there was not a servant on the broad estate who did not heartily rejoice in the knowledge that the brave and handsome youth, whom they had so long esteemed and loved for himself alone, was indeed and in truth their young lord and master.

"Ah," said the old earl, later in the evening, as he took the hand of his beautiful ward and gave it into the loving grasp of his grandson, "If your parents are permitted to look down from the celestial abode, and can behold the things we do here on earth, I believe, in my deepest heart, they will bless me for that which now I do!"

THE END.

Silently corrected typographical errors and inconsistencies; retained non-standard spelling.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SMUGGLER OF KING'S COVE; OR, THE
OLD CHAPEL MYSTERY ***

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