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Richard III, by G. P. R. James**

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**THE WOODMAN;
A ROMANCE
OF
THE TIMES OF RICHARD III.**

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

**AUTHOR OF "DARNLEY," "THE SMUGGLER," "THE CONVICT," "MARGARET GRAHAM," "THE FORGERY,"
ETC.**

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CHAPTER I.

Of all the hard-working people on the earth, there are none so serviceable to her neighbours as the moon. She lights lovers and thieves. She keeps watch-dogs waking. She is a constant resource to poets and romance-writers. She helps the compounders of almanacks amazingly. She has something to do with the weather, and the tides, and the harvest; and in short she has a finger in every man's pie, and probably more or less effect upon every man's brain. She is a charming creature in all her variations. Her versatility is not the offspring of caprice; and she is constant in the midst of every change.

I will have a moon, say what you will, my dear Prebend; and she shall more or less rule every page of this book.

There was a sloping piece of ground looking to the south east, with a very small narrow rivulet running at the bottom. On the opposite side of the stream was another slope, as like the former as possible, only looking in the opposite direction. Titian, and Vandyke, and some other painters, have pleased themselves with depicting, in one picture, the same face in two or three positions; and these two slopes looked exactly like the two profiles of one countenance. Each had its little clumps of trees scattered about. Each had here and there a hedgerow, somewhat broken and dilapidated; and each too had towards its northern extremity a low chalky bank, through which the stream seemed to have forced itself, in those good old times when rivers first began to go on pilgrimages towards the sea, and, like many other pilgrims that we wot of made their way through all obstacles in a very unceremonious manner.

Over these two slopes about the hour of half past eleven, post meridian, the moon was shining with a bright but fitful sort of splendour; for ever and anon a light fleecy cloud, like a piece of swansdown borne by the wind, would dim the brightness of her rays, and cast a passing shadow on the scene below. Half an hour before, indeed, the radiant face of night's sweet queen had been veiled by a blacker curtain, which had gathered thick over the sky at the sun's decline; but, as the moon rose high, those dark vapours became mottled with wavy lines of white, and gradually her beams seemed to drink them up.

It may be asked if those two sloping meadows, with their clumps of trees, and broken hedgerows, and the little stream flowing on between them, was all that the moonlight showed? That would depend upon where the eye of the observer was placed. Near the lower part of the valley, formed by the inclination of the land, nothing else could be perceived; but walk half way up towards the top, on either side, and the scene was very much altered. Gradually rising, as the eye rose, appeared, stretching out beyond the chalky banks to the north, through which the rivulet came on, a large-grey indistinct mass stretching all along from east to west, the rounded lines of which, together with some misty gaps, taking a blueish white tint in the moonlight, showed it to be some ancient forest, lying at the distance probably of two or three miles from the spot first mentioned.

But there were other objects displayed by the moonlight; for as those soft clouds, sweeping rapidly past, varied her light, and cast bright gleams or grey shadows on the ground, every here and there, especially on the south western slope, a brilliant spot would sparkle forth, flashing back the rays; and a nearer look showed naked swords, and breast-plates, and casques, while every now and then, under the increasing light, that which seemed a hillock took the form of a horse or of a human being, lying quietly on the green turf, or cast motionless down beneath a hedge or an old hawthorn tree.

Were they sleeping there in that dewy night? Ay, sleeping that sleep which fears not the blast, nor the tempest nor the dew, which the thunder cannot break, and from which no trumpet but one shall ever rouse the sleeper.

From sunset till that hour, no living thing, unless it were fox or wolf, had moved upon the scene. The battle was over, the pursuers recalled, the wounded removed; the burial of the dead, if it was to be cared for at all, postponed till another day; and all the fierce and base passions which are called forth by civil contest had lain down to sleep before the hour of which I speak. Even the human vulture, which follows on the track of warring armies to feed upon the spoils of the dead, had gorged itself upon that field, and left the rich arms and housings to be carried away on the morning following.

The fiercer and the baser passions, I have said, now slept; but there were tenderer affections which woke, and through that solemn and sad scene, with no light but that of the moon, with no sound but that of the sighing wind, some four or five persons were seen wandering about, half an hour before midnight. Often, as they went, they bent down at this spot or at that, and gazed at some object on the ground. Sometimes one of them would kneel, and twice they turned over a dead body which had fallen with the face downwards. For more than an hour they went on, pausing at times to speak to each other, and then resuming their examination--I know not whether to call it search; for certainly they seemed to find nothing if they did search, although they left hardly a square yard of the whole field unexplored.

It was nearly one o'clock on the following morning, when with slow steps they took their way over the rise; and the next moment the sound of horses' feet going at a quick pace broke the silence. That sound, in the absence of every other noise, might be heard for nearly ten minutes; and then all was stillness and solitude once more.

CHAPTER II.

Years had passed, long years, since the little scene took place which I have described in the preceding chapter. The heads were grey which were then proud of the glossy locks of youth. Middle life was approaching old age; and children had become men.

It was evening. The sun had gone down some two hours before; and the lights were lighted in a large comfortable well-furnished room. The ceilings were vaulted. The doorways and the two windows were richly decorated with innumerable mouldings; and the discoloured stone work around them, the clustered pillars at the sides, the mullions which divided the windows, and the broad pointed arches above, spoke that style of architecture known as the early English. The tables, the chairs, the cupboard at the side, were all of old oak, deep in colour and rich in

ornament. The floor was covered with rushes, over which, in the centre, was spread a piece of tapestry; and the stone work of the walls between the pillars was hidden by tapestry likewise, on one side representing the siege of Troy, on the other the history of David and Goliath, and on a third the loves of Mars and Venus, which, though somewhat too luscious for our irritable imaginations, did not in those days at all shock the chaste inhabitants of a nunnery. The fourth side of the room was untapestried, for there spread the immense, wide, open chimney, with a pile of blazing logs on the hearth, and, in the open space above the arch, a very early painting of the Madonna and child, with gilt glories around the heads of both, and the meek eyes of the virgin fixed upon the somewhat profuse charms of the goddess of love on the other side.

This is description enough. The reader can easily conceive the parlour of an abbess towards the end of the fifteenth century, the heterogeneous contents of which would be somewhat tedious to detail.

Let no one, however, form a false idea of the poor abbess of Atherston, from the admission into her own private chamber of such very ungodly personages as Mars and Venus. She had found them there when she became abbess of the convent, and looked upon them and their loves as upon any other piece of needlework. Nay, more, had it ever occurred to her that there was anything improper in having them there, she would probably have removed them, though to get a more decent piece of tapestry might have cost her four or five marks. Not that she was at all stiff, rigid, and severe, for she was the merriest little abbess in the world; but she combined with great gaiety of heart an infinite deal of innocence and simplicity, which were perfectly compatible with some shrewdness and good sense. Shut up in a convent at a very early period, exposed to none of the vicissitudes of life, and untaught the corrupting lessons of the world, her cheerfulness had been economised, her simplicity unimpaired, and her natural keenness of intellect unblunted, though there might be here and there a spot of rust upon the blade. It was without her own consent she had gone into a convent, but neither with nor against her wishes. She had been quite indifferent; and, never having had any means of judging of other states of life, she was not discontented with her lot, and rather pitied than otherwise those who were forced to dwell in a world of which she knew nothing.

As piety however had nothing to do with her profession, and mortification had never entered into her catalogue of duties, she saw no sin and could conceive no evil in making herself as comfortable and happy as she could. Her predecessor indeed had done a little more, and had not altogether escaped scandal; but our abbess was of a very different character, performed her ceremonial duties accurately, abstained from everything that she knew or thought to be wrong, and while exacting a fulfilment of all prescribed duties from her nuns, endeavoured to make their seclusion pleasant, by unvarying gentleness, kindness, and cheerfulness. If she had a fault, perhaps it was a too great love for the good things of this life. She was exceedingly fond of trout, and did not altogether dislike a moderate portion of Gascon wine, especially when it was of a very superior quality. Venison she could eat; and a well-fed partridge was not unacceptable--though methinks she might have spared it from its great resemblance to herself. All these things, and a great number of other dainties, however, were plentifully supplied by the lands of the convent, which were ample, and by the stream which flowed near at hand, or by the large fish-ponds, three in number, which lay upon the common above. Indeed so abundant was the provision for a fast day, that the abbess and the nuns looked forward to it, as it came on in the week, with great satisfaction, from its affording them excuse for eating more fish than usual. Not that they fared ill on the other days of the week; for, as far as forest and lea would go, they were well provided.

To a contented spirit all things are bright; and the good abbess could have been satisfied with much less than she possessed; so I suppose whatever little superabundance existed went to make the heart merry and the tongue glib; and there she sat with her feet on a footstool, sufficiently near the fire to be somewhat over warm, but yet hardly near enough for that delicious tingling sensation, which the blaze of good dry wood produces till we hardly know whether it is pleasant or painful. In her hand there was a book--a real printed book, rare in those days, and which might well be looked upon as a treasure. As she read, she commented to two young girls who sat near with tall frames before them, running the industrious needle in and out.

I have called them young girls, not alone to distinguish them from old ones--though that might be necessary--but to show that they had barely reached womanhood. The eldest was hardly nineteen; the other some fourteen or fifteen months younger. Both were beautiful; and there was a certain degree of likeness between them, though the face of the elder had features more clearly, perhaps more beautifully, cut, and an expression of greater thoughtfulness, perhaps greater vigour of character. Yet the other was very beautiful too, with that sparkling variety, that constant play of everchanging expression, which is so charming. Its very youthfulness was delightful, for a gleam of childhood lingered still in the look, especially when surprised or pleased, although the lines of the face and the contour of the form were womanly--perhaps more so than those of the other.

That they were none of the sisterhood was evident by the mere matter of their dress, which also indicated that they had not a fixed intention of ever entering it; for it was altogether worldly in form and material, and though plain yet rich. Seated there, with a near relation, their heads were unencumbered with the monstrous head-dresses of the time, the proportions of which, not very long before, were so immense as to require doorways to be widened and lintels raised, in order to let a lady pass in conveniently. Each wore a light veil, it is true, hanging from the mass of glossy hair behind the head, and which could be thrown over the face when required; but it

was very different from the veil of the nun or even of the novice.

"Well, my dear children, I do declare," said the elder lady, "this new invention of printing may be very clever, and I wot it is; but it is mighty difficult to read when it is done. I could make out plain court hand a great deal better when written by a good scribe, such as they used to have at Winchester and Salisbury."

The younger girl looked up, answering with a gay laugh. "The poor people never pretend to make you read it easily, dear aunt and mother. All they say is that they can make more copies of a book in a day than a scribe could make in a year, and that they can let you have for three or four shillings what would cost you three or four crowns from a scribe."

"Ay, that's the worst of it all, child," replied the old lady, shaking her head. "Books will get into the hands of all sorts of common people, and do a world of mischief, good lack. But it can't be helped, my children. The world and the devil will have their way; and, even if there were a law made against any one learning to read or write under the rank of a lord at least, it would only make others the more eager to do it. But I do think that this invention ought to be stopped; for it will do a world of mischief, I am sure."

"I hope not," replied the other young lady; "for by no contrivance can they ever make books so cheap, that the lower class can read them; and I know I have often wished I had a book to read when I have had nothing else to do. It's a great comfort sometimes, my dear aunt, especially when one is heavy."

"Ay, that it is, child," said the abbess; "I know that right well. I don't know what I should have done after the battle of Barnet, if it had not been for poor old Chaucer. My grandfather remembered him very well, at the court of John of Ghent; and he gave me the merry book, when I was not much older than you are. Well-a-day, I must read it again, when you two leave me; for my evenings will be dull enough without you, children. I would ask sister Bridget to come in of a night, in the winter, and do her embroidery beside me, only if she staid for my little private supper, her face would certainly turn the wine sour."

"But, perhaps we shall not go after all, dear mother," said the younger lady. "Have you heard anything about it?"

"There now," cried the abbess, laughing, "she's just as wild to get into the wicked world as a caged bird to break out into the open air."

"To be sure I am," exclaimed the light-hearted girl; "and oh, how I will use my wings."

The abbess gazed at her with a look of tender, almost melancholy, interest, and replied:

"There are limed twigs about them, my child. You forget that you are married."

"No, not married," cried the other, with her face all glowing. "Contracted, not married--I wish I was, for the thought frightens me, and then the worst would be over."

"You don't know what you wish," replied the abbess, shaking her head. "A thousand to one, you would very soon wish to be unmarried again; but then it would be too late. It is a collar you can't shake off when you have once put it on; and nobody can tell how much it may pinch one till it has been tried. I thank my lucky stars that made it convenient for your good grandfather to put me in here; for whenever I go out quietly on my little mule, to see after the affairs of the farms, and perchance to take a sidelong look at our good foresters coursing a hare, I never can help pitying the two dogs coupled together, and pulling at the two ends of a band they cannot break, and thanking my good fortune for not tying me up in a leash with any one."

The two girls laughed gaily; for, to say truth, they had neither of them any vocation for cloisteral life; but the youngest replied, following her aunt's figure of speech, "I dare say the dogs are very like two married people, my aunt and lady mother; but I dare say too, if you were to ask either of them, whether he would rather go out into the green fields tied to a companion, or remain shut up in a kennel, he would hold out his neck for the couples."

"Why, you saucy child, do you call this a kennel?" asked the abbess, shaking her finger at her good-humouredly. "What will young maids come to next? But it is as well as it is; since thou art destined for the world and its vanities, 'tis lucky thou hast a taste for them; and I trust thy husband--as thou must have one--will not beat thee above once a-week, and that on the Saturday, to make thee more devout on the Sunday following. Is he a ferocious-looking man?"

"Lord love thee, my dear aunt," answered the young lady; "I have never seen him since I was in swaddling clothes."

"And he was in a sorry-coloured pinked doublet, with a gay cloak on his shoulders, and a little bonnet on his head no bigger than the palm of my hand," cried the other young lady. "He could not be ten years old, and looked like some great man's little page. I remember it quite well, for I had seen seven years; and I thought it a great shame that my cousin Iola should have a husband given to her at five, and I none at seven."

"Given to her!" said the abbess, laughing.

"Well," rejoined the young lady, "I looked upon it as a sort of doll--a poppet."

"Not far wrong either, my dear," answered the abbess; "only you must take care how you knock its nose against the floor, or you may find out where the difference lies."

"Good lack, I have had dolls enough," answered the younger lady, "and could well spare this other one. But what must be must be; so there is no use to think of it.--Don't you believe, lady mother," she continued after a pause, interrupted by a sigh, "that it would be better if they let people choose husbands and wives for themselves?"

"Good gracious!" cried the abbess, "what is the child thinking of? Pretty choosing there would be, I dare say. Why lords' daughters would be taking rosy-cheeked franklins' sons; and barons' heirs would be marrying milkmaids."

"I don't believe it," said the young lady. "Each would choose, I think, as they had been brought up; and there would be more chance of their loving when they did wed."

"Nonsense, nonsense, Iola," cried her aunt. "What do you know about love--or I either for that matter? Love that comes after marriage is most likely to last, for, I suppose, like all other sorts of plants, it only lives a certain time and then dies away; so that if it begins soon, it ends soon."

"I should like my love to be like one of the trees of the park," said the young lady, looking down thoughtfully, "growing stronger and stronger, as it gets older, and outliving myself."

"You must seek for it in fairyland then, my dear," said the abbess. "You will not find it in this sinful world."

Just as she spoke, the great bell of the abbey, which hung not far from the window of the abbess's parlour, rang deep and loud; and the sound, unusual at that hour of the night, made the good old lady start.

"Virgin mother!" she exclaimed--it was the only little interjection she allowed herself. "Who can that be coming two hours after curfew?" and running to the door, with more activity than her plumpness seemed to promise, she exclaimed, "Sister Magdalen, sister Magdalen, do not let them open the gate; let them speak through the barred wicket."

"It is only Boyd, the woodman, lady," replied a nun, who was at the end of a short passage looking out into the court.

"What can he want at this hour?" said the abbess. "Could he not come before sundown? Well, take him into the parlour by the little door. I will come to him in a minute;" and returning into her own room again, the good lady composed herself after her agitation, by a moment's rest in her great chair; and, after expressing her surprise more than once, that the woodman should visit the abbey so late, she bade her two nieces follow her, and passed through a door, different to that by which she had previously gone out, and walked with stately steps along a short corridor leading to the public parlour of the abbey.

This was a large and handsome room, lined entirely with beautiful carved oak, and divided into two, lengthwise, by a screen of open iron-work painted blue and red, and richly gilt. Visitors on the one side could see, converse, and even shake hands with those on the other; but, like the gulf between Abraham and Dives, the iron bars shut out all farther intercourse. A sconce was lighted on the side of the nunnery; and when Iola and her cousin Constance followed their aunt into the room, they beheld, on the other side of the grate, the form of a tall powerful man, somewhat advanced in life, standing with his arms crossed upon his broad chest, and looking, to say sooth, somewhat gloomy. He might indeed, be a little surprised at being forced to hold communication with the lady abbess through the grate of the general parlour; for the good lady was by no means so strict in her notions of conventual decorum, as to exclude him, or any other of the servants and officers of the abbey, from her presence in the court-yard or in her own private sitting-room; and perhaps the woodman might think it did not much matter whether his visit was made by night or by day.

"Well, John Boyd," said the abbess, "in fortune's name, what brings you so late at night? Mary mother, I thought it was some of the roving bands come to try and plunder the abbey again, as they did last Martinmas twelvemonth; and we cannot expect such a blessed chance every time, as that good Sir Martin Rideout should be at hand to help our poor socmen. Had it not been for him, I wot, Peter our bailiff would have made but a poor hand of defending us."

"And a poor hand he did make," replied the woodman, in a cynical tone; "for he was nowhere to be found; and I had to pull him out of the buttery, to head the tenants. But I hear no more of rovers, lady, unless it be the men at Coleshill, and King Richard's posts, planted all along the highways, with twenty miles between each two, to look out for Harry of Richmond."

"Posts!" said the abbess; "posts planted on the highway! What mean you by posts?"

"Why men on horseback, lady mother," answered the woodman; "with sharp spurs and strong

steeds to bear to Dickon, our king that is, news of Harry, our king that may be, if he chance to land any where upon the coast."

"Now Heaven assoil us!" cried the abbess; "what more war, more war? Will men never be content without deforming God's image in their fellow creatures, and burning and destroying even the fairest works of their own hands?"

"I fear not," answered the woodman, twisting round the broad axe that was hung in his leathern belt. "Great children and small are fond of bonfires; and nature and the devil between them made man a beast of prey. As to what brought me hither, madam, it, was to tell you that the wooden bridge in the forest wants repairing sadly. It would hardly bear up your mule, lady, with nothing but yourself and your hawk upon its back; much less a war-horse with a rider armed at point. As for my coming so late, I have been as far as Tamworth this morning, to sell the bavins, and didn't get back till after dark. So marking the bridge by the way, and thinking it would be better to begin on it early in the morning, I made bold to come up at night for fear anyone, riding along to church or market or otherwise, should find their way into the river, and say the abbess ought to mend her ways;" and he laughed at his own joke.

While he had been speaking, both the young ladies, though he was no stranger to them, had been gazing at him with considerable attention. He was, as I have said before, a tall and still very powerful man, although he seemed to have passed the age of fifty years. His shoulders were very broad, his arms long and muscular; but his body was small in proportion to the limbs, and the head in proportion to the height of the whole figure. His forehead was exceedingly broad and high, however; the crown of his head quite bald, with large masses of curling hair falling round his temples and on his neck. What his complexion originally had been, could not be discovered; for the whiteness of his hair and eye-brows and the sun-burnt weather-beaten hue of his skin afforded no indication. His teeth, however, were still good, his eyes large and bright, and the features fine, although the wide forehead was seamed with deep furrows, giving, apart from the rest of his appearance, a look of much greater age than that at which he had really arrived.

His dress was the ordinary woodman's garb of the time, which is well known to almost every one. There was the thick stiff leathern coat, which no broken branch or rugged thorn could pierce, the breeches of untanned hide, and the hoots of strong black leather, reaching above the knee. Round his waist, over his coat, he wore a broad belt, fastened by a brass buckle in front, and in it were stuck the implements of his craft, namely, a broad axe, which required no ordinary power of limb to wield, with the head uppermost, thrust under his left arm like a sword; a large billhook, having a broad stout piece of iron at the back, which might serve the purposes of a hammer; and an ordinary woodman's knife, the blade of which was about eighteen inches in length. His head was on ordinary occasions covered with a round cloth cap; but this, in reverence of the presence of the lady abbess, he held by the edge in his hand.

The expression of the good man's countenance, when not particularly moved, was agreeable enough, though somewhat stern and sad; but when he laughed, which was by no means unfrequent, although the sound was loud and hearty, an extraordinary look of bitter mockery hung about his lip and nostril, taking away all appearance of happiness from his merriment.

"Well, well, you might mend the bridge without asking me," said the abbess, in reply to his report. "It is a part of the head woodman's duty, and the expenses would always be passed. So if you had nothing more to say than that, you might have chosen another hour, goodman Boyd."

"Crying your mercy, lady," said the woodman, "I would always rather deal with you than with your bailiff. When I have orders from you, I set him at nought. When I do anything of my own hand he is sure to carp. However I had more to say. We have taken a score of mallards in the great pond, and a pike of thirty pounds. There are two bitterns too, three heronshaws, and a pheasant with a back like gold. I had four dozen of pigeons killed too, out of the colombier in the north wood; and--"

"Mother Mary, is the man mad?" exclaimed the abbess. "One would think we were going to have the installation of an archbishop."

"And there are twenty young rabbits, as fat as badgers," continued the woodman, taking no notice of her interruption. "If I might advise, lady, you would order some capons to be killed to-night."

The good abbess stood as one quite bewildered, and then burst into a fit of laughter, saying--

"The man is crazed, I think;" but her eldest niece pulled the sleeve of her gown, whispering--

"He means something, depend upon it. Perhaps he does not like to speak before me and Iola."

The abbess paused for an instant as if to consider this suggestion, and then asked--

"Well, have you anything more to say, goodman?"

"Oh, yes, plenty more," answered the woodman; "when I find a meet season."

"On my word you seem to have found a fish and fowl season," rejoined the abbess, playing

upon the word *meet*. We must recollect that she had but little to amuse herself with in her solitude, and therefore forgive her. She continued, however, in a graver tone: "Is it that you wish to speak with me alone?"

"Yes, lady," answered the man. "Three pair of ears have generally got three mouths belonging to them, and that is too many by two."

"Then I'll carry mine out of the way, goodman Boyd," said Iola, giving him a gay nod, and moving towards the door; "I love not secrets of any kind. Heaven shield me from having any of my own, for I should never keep them."

The woodman looked after her with a smile, murmuring in a low voice as if to himself--

"Yet I think she would keep other people's better than most." Then, waiting till Constance had followed her cousin from the room, he continued, speaking to the abbess: "you'll have visitors at the abbey, lady, before this time to-morrow night."

"Marry, that is news, goodman," answered the abbess; "and for this then you have made all this great preparation. It must be an earl, or duke at least, if not king Richard himself--God save the mark that I should give the name of king to one of his kindred. Methinks you might have told me this without such secrecy. Who may these visitors be?"

"They are very simple gentlemen, my lady," answered the woodman, "though well to do in the world. First and foremost, there is the young Lord Chartley, a young nobleman with as many good points as a horse-dealer's filly; a baron of the oldest race, a good man at arms. He can read and write, and thanks God for it, makes verses when he is in love--which is every day in the week with some one--and, to crown all, is exceedingly rich as these hard times go."

"You seem to be of his privy chamber, goodman Boyd," said the abbess; "you deliver him so punctually."

"I deliver him but as his own servants delivered him to me," answered the woodman. "Tell me, was he not in the battle of Barnet, fighting for the red rose?" inquired the abbess. "Ay, and sorely wounded there. He shall be right welcome, if it were but for that."

"Nay, Lord Chartley fought at Barnet," said the woodman; "and if to fight well and to suffer for the cause of Lancaster merit such high honour, you might indeed receive him daintily, for he fought till he was killed there, poor man; but this youth is his nephew, and has had no occasion to fight in England either, for there have been no battles since he was a boy. Lancaster he doubtless is in heart, though king Edward put him into the guardianship of a Yorkist. However, with him comes Sir Edward Hungerford, who, they tell me, is one of those gay light-hearted gentlemen, who, born and bred in perilous and changing times, get to think at last, by seeing all things fall to pieces round them, that there is nothing real or solid in the world--no, not truth itself. But let him pass; a little perjury and utter faithlessness, a ready wit, a bold heart, a reckless love of mischief, a pair of hanging sleeves that sweeps the ground as he walks along, a coat of goldsmith's work, and a well-lined purse, have made many a fine gentleman before him; and I'll warrant he is not worse than the greater part of his neighbours. Then with these two, there is Sir Charles Weinants, a right worshipful gentleman also."

"But tell me more of him," said the abbess. "What is he? I have heard the name before with honourable mention, methinks--Who and what is he?"

"A lickladle of the court, lady," answered the woodman, "one who rises high by low ladders--who soars not up at once, either as the eagle or the lark, but creeps into favour through holes and turnings. He is marvellously discreet in all his doings, asserts nought boldly, but by dull insinuation stings an enemy or serves a friend. Oh yes, he has his friendships too--not much to be relied on, it is true, but still often useful, so that even good men have need of his agency. All that he does is done by under-currents, which bear things back to the shore that seem floating out to sea. Quiet, and calm, and self-possessed, he is ever ready for the occasion; and with a cheerful spirit, which one would think the tenant of an upright heart, he wins his way silently, and possesses great men's ears, who little know that their favour is disposed of at another's will. He is an old man now; but I remember him when I was a boy at St. Alban's. He was then in much grace with the great Lord Clifford, who brought him to the notice of king Henry. He has since lived, as much in favour, with Edwards and Richards and Buckinghams, and is now a strong Yorkist. What he will die, Heaven and time will show us."

"Goodlack, that there should be such things in the world!" exclaimed the abbess; "but what brings all these people here? I know none of them; and if they come but to visit the shrine, I have no need to entertain them, nor you to make a mystery of their visit. I hate mysteries, my good son, ever since I read about that word being written on the forehead of the poor sinner of Babylon."

The woodman laughed irreverently, but answered, "I want to make no mystery with you, lady. These men bring a great train with them; and in their train there is a reverend friar, with frock, and cowl, and sandaled feet; but methinks I have seen a mitre on his shaven crown, though neither mitre nor cowl would save him from the axe, I wot, if good king Richard got his hands upon him. What he comes for--why he comes, I cannot tell you; for I only heard that their steps

tended hitherward, and the lackeys counted on drinking deep of the abbey ale. But when that friar is beneath your roof, you will have a man beside you, whose life is in much peril for stout adherence to the cause of Lancaster."

"Then he shall have shelter and protection here," said the abbess boldly. "This is sanctuary, and I will not believe that Richard himself--bad and daring as he is--would venture to violate the church's rights."

"Richard has two weapons, madam," answered the woodman, "and both equally keen, his sword and his cunning; and take my word for it, what he desires to do that he will do--ay, even to the violation of sanctuary, though perhaps it may not be with his own hand or in his own name. You have had one visit from a roving band who cared little about holy church; and you may have another, made up of very different men, with whom the king might deal tenderly if they did him good service."

"Then we will call in the tenants," said the abbess, "and defend our rights and privileges."

"The tenants might be outnumbered," said the woodman, shaking his head. "There are many men straying about here, who would soon band together at the thought of stripping the shrine of St. Clare; especially if they had royal warranty for their necks' safety, and the promise of farther reward, besides all their hands helped them to."

"Then what is to be done?" exclaimed the abbess, in some consternation. "I cannot and I will not refuse refuge to a consecrated bishop, and one who has suffered persecution for the sake of his rightful race of kings."

"Nay, Heaven forbid," replied the woodman warmly; "but if you will take a simple man's advice, lady, methinks I could show you a way to save the bishop, and the abbey, and the ornaments of the shrine too."

"Speak, speak," exclaimed the abbess eagerly. "Your advice is always shrewd, goodman Boyd. What way would you have me take?"

"Should you ever have in sanctuary," answered the woodman, "a man so hated by the king that you may expect rash acts committed to seize him, and you find yourself suddenly attacked by a band that you cannot resist, send your sanctuary man to me by some one who knows all the ways well, and I will provide for his safety where they will never find him. Then, be you prepared for resistance, but resist not if you can help it. Parley with the good folks, and say that you know well they would not come for the mere plunder of a consecrated place, that you are sure they have come seeking a man impeached of high treason who lately visited the abbey. Assure them that you sent him away, which you then may well do in all truth, and offer to give admission to any three or four to search for him at their will. Methinks, if they are privately set on by higher powers, they will not venture to do anything violent, when they are certain that success will not procure pardon for the act."

The abbess mused and seemed to hesitate; and, after a short pause, the woodman added, "Take my advice, lady. I do not speak without knowledge. Many a stray bit of news gets into the forest by one way or another that is never uttered in the town. Now, a messenger stops to talk with the woodman, and, overburdened with the secret, pours part of it out, where he thinks it can never rise in judgment against him. Then, a traveller asks his way, and gossips with his guide as he walks along to put him in the right road. Every carter, who comes in for his load of wood, brings some intelligence from the town. I am rightly informed, lady, depend upon it."

"It is not that; it is not that," said the abbess, somewhat peevishly. "I was thinking whom I could send and how. If they surround the abbey altogether, how could I get him out?"

"There is the underground way to the cell of St. Magdalen," said the woodman. "To surround the abbey, they would have to bring their men in amongst the houses of the hamlet, and the cell is far beyond that."

"True, but no one knows that way," said the abbess, "but you, and I, and sister Bridget. I could trust her well enough, cross and ill-tempered as she is; but then she has never stirred beyond the abbey walls for these ten years, so that she knows not the way from the cell to your cottage. I trust she knows the way to heaven better;" and the abbess laughed.

"'Twere easy to instruct some one else in the way to the cell," said the woodman. "The passage is plain enough when the stone door is open."

"Ay, doubtless, doubtless," continued the abbess; "but you forget, my good friend, that it is against our law to tell the secret way out to any of the sisterhood, except the superior and the oldest nun. Mary mother, I know not why the rule was made; but it has been so, ever since bishop Godshaw's visitation in 1361."

"I suppose he found the young sisters fond of tripping in the green wood with the fairies of nights," answered the woodman, with one of his short laughs; "but however, you are not forbidden to tell those who are not of the sisterhood; otherwise, lady, you would not have told me."

"Nay, that does not follow," rejoined the abbess. "The head woodman always knows, as the cell is under his charge and care, ever since the poor hermit died. However, I do not recollect having vowed not to tell the secret to any secular persons. The promise was only as to the sisters--but whom could I send?"

"Iola? Nay, nay, that cannot be," said the abbess. "She is not of a station to go wandering about at night, guiding strangers through a wild wood. She is my niece, and an earl's daughter."

"Higher folks than she have done as much," answered the woodman; "but I did not think that the abbess of Atherston St. Clare would have refused even her niece's help, to Morton, bishop of Ely."

"The bishop of Ely!" cried the abbess. "Refuse him help? No, no, Boyd. If it were my daughter or my sister, if it cost me life, or limb, or fortune, he should have help in time of need. I have not seen him now these twelve years; but he shall find I do not forget--Say no more, goodman, say no more. I will send my niece, and proud may she be of the task."

"I thought it would be so, lady," answered the woodman; "but still one word more. It were as well that you told the good lord bishop of his danger, as soon as you can have private speech with him, and then take the first hour after sundown to get him quietly away out of the abbey, for to speak truth I much doubt the good faith of that Sir Charles Weinants--I know not what he does with men of Lancaster--unless he thinks, indeed, the tide is turning in favour of that house from which it has ebbed away so long."

Although they had said all they really had to say, yet the abbess and the woodman carried on their conversation during some ten minutes or quarter of an hour more, before they parted; and then the excellent lady retired to her own little comfortable room again, murmuring to herself: "He is a wise man, that John Boyd--rude as a bear sometimes; but he has got a wit! I think those woodmen are always shrewd. They harbour amongst the green leaves, and look at all that goes on in the world as mere spectators, till they learn to judge better of all the games that are playing than those who take part therein. They can look out, and see, and meddle as little as we do, while we are shut out from sight, as well as from activity."

CHAPTER III.

Under some circumstances, and upon some conditions, there are few things fairer on this earth than a walk through a wild forest by moonlight. It must not be, however, one of those deep unbroken primeval forests, which are found in many parts of the new world, where the wilderness of trees rises up, like a black curtain, on every side, shutting out the view, and almost excluding the light of day from the face of the earth. But a forest in old England, at the period of which I speak, was a very different thing. Tall trees there were, and many, and in some places they were crowded close together; but in others the busy woodman's axe, and the more silent but more incessant strokes of time, had opened out wide tracts, where nothing was to be seen but short brushwood, stunted oak, beech tree and ash, rising up in place of the forest monarchs long passed away, like the pigmy efforts of modern races appearing amidst the ruins of those gigantic empires, which have left memorials that still defy the power of time. Indeed, I never behold a wide extent of old forest land, covered with shrubby wood, with here and there a half-decayed trunk rising grandly above the rest, without imagination flying far away to those lands of marvel, where the wonders of the world arose and perished--the land of the Pharaohs, of the Assyrians, and of the Medes; ay, and of the Romans too--those lands in which the power and genius of the only mighty European empire displayed themselves more wonderfully than even in the imperial city, the land of Bolbec and Palmyra. The Arab's hut, built amongst the ruins of the temple of the sun, is a fit type of modern man, contrasted with the races that have passed. True, the Roman empire was destroyed by the very tribes from which we spring; but it was merely the dead carcase of the Behemoth eaten up by ants.

Be all that as it may, an English forest scene is very beautiful by moonlight, and especially when the air has been cleared by a light frost, as was the case when the woodman took his way back towards his cottage, after his visit to the abbey. The road was broad and open--one of the highroads of the country, indeed--sandy enough, in all conscience, and not so smooth as it might have been; but still it served its purpose; and people in those days called it a good road. Here, an old oak eighteen or twenty feet in girth, which might have seen the noble ill-fated Harold, stretched its long limbs across the turfy waste ground at its feet, and over the yellow track of the road beaten by horses' feet. In other places the eye might wander far over a wide scantily-covered track of ground, with here and there a tall tree starting up and casting its broad shadow upon the white and glistening expanse of bushes below. A vague sort of mysterious uncertainty

hung about the dells and dingles of the wood, notwithstanding the brightness of the moonlight; and a faint blueish mist prevented the eye from penetrating into the deeper valleys, and searching their profundity. To the left, the ground sloped away with a gentle descent. To the right, it rose somewhat more abruptly; and, peeping over the leafless trees in the latter direction, appeared here and there a square wall and tower, cutting sharp and defined upon the rounded forms of the forest. Above all stretched out the wide deep sky, with the moon nearly at the full, flooding the zenith with light, while to, the north and west shone out many bright and twinkling stars, not yet hidden by the beams of earth's bright satellite.

With a slow and a firm step, the woodman trudged upon his way, pausing every now and then to gaze around him, more, apparently, as a matter of habit than with any purpose; for he seemed full of busy thoughts; and even when he stopped and let his eye roam around, it is probable that his mind was on other things, once or twice, murmuring a few words to himself, which had certainly no reference to the scene. "Ah, Mary, Mary," he said, and then added: "Alas! Alas!"

There was something deeply melancholy in his tone. The words were spoken low and softly; and a sigh followed them, the echo of memory to the voice of joys passed.

Onward he walked again, the road somewhat narrowing as he proceeded, till at length the tall trees, pressing forward on either side, shut out the light of the moon, except where, here and there, the rays stole through the leafless branches and chequered the frosty turf.

As he was passing through one of the darkest parts of the wood, keeping a good deal to the left of the road, the sound of a horse's feet was heard coming fast down from the top of the hill. Without change of pace or look, however, the stout woodman walked on, seeming to pay little attention to the measured beating of the ground by the strong hoofs, as they came on at a quick trot. Nearer and nearer, however, they approached, till at length they suddenly stopped, just as the horse and rider were passing the man on foot, and a voice exclaimed, "Who goes there?"

"A friend," replied the woodman. "You must have sharp eyes, whoever you be."

"Sharp eyes and sharp ears too," replied the horseman. "Stand out, and tell us who you are, creeping along there under the boughs."

"Creeping along!" answered the woodman, advancing into the more open road and placing himself in front of the rider. "I will soon tell you who I am, and show you who I am too, master, when I know who it is that asks the question. Since it comes to that, I bid you stand and tell me who you are who ride the wood so late. You are none of King Richard's posts, or you would know me;" and, at the same time, he laid his hand upon the man's bridle.

"You are a liar," replied the horseman, "for I am one of King Richard's posts, coming from Scotland, with news of moment, and letters from the princess countess of Arran. Let go my bridle then, and say who and what you are, or, by the Lord, I'll drub you in such a way as you have seldom been drubbed before."

"Ha! Say you so?" cried the woodman, still retaining his hold of the bridle. "I must have more satisfactory knowledge of you, ere I let you pass; and, as for drubbing me, methinks with a green willow and a yard or two of rope, I'd give thee that which thou hast not tasted since thou wert a boy."

"So, so," said the man, "thou art a robber, doubtless. These woods are full of them, they say; but thou shalt find me a tougher morsel than often falls within thy teeth. Take that for thy pains."

As he spoke, he suddenly drew his sword from the sheath, and aimed a rapid and furious stroke at the woodman's head. His adversary, however, was wary; and, springing on one side, he escaped the descent of the blade. The other instantly spurred his horse forward; but, before he could pass, the woodman had pulled his axe from his belt, and, with a full sweep of his arm, struck a blow at the back of the horseman's head, which cast him at once out of the saddle. It was the back of the axe which he used, and not the sharp side; but the effect seemed equally fatal, for the man neither moved nor spoke, and his horse, freed from the pressure of the rein, dashed down the lane for some way, then stopped, paused for a moment, and trotted quietly back again.

In the meantime, the woodman approached the prostrate body of the messenger, murmuring to himself, "Ah, caitiff, I know thee, though thou hast forgotten me. Thou pitiful servant of treachery and ingratitude, thou hireling serviceable knave, I would not have hurt thee, even for thy master's sake, hadst thou not assailed me first--Methinks he is dead," he continued, stirring the body with his foot. "I hit thee harder than I thought; but it is well as it is. Thy death could not come from a fitter hand than mine, were it not the hangman's--I will see what thou hast about thee, however; for there may be news of value indeed, if for once in thy life thou hast found a tongue to speak truth with. But I will not believe it. The news was too sure, the tale too sad to be false."

He stood a moment or two by the corpse, gazing upon it in silence, but without the slightest sign of sorrow or remorse. Those were bloody and barbarous times, it is true, when men slew each other in cold blood after battles were over, when brother spared not brother, and the companions of infancy and boyhood dyed their daggers in each other's gore. Human life, as in all barbarous states of society, was held as nought; and men hesitated as little to spill the blood of a

fellow creature as to spill their own. But yet it must surely always be a terrible thing to take a life, to extinguish that light which we can never reilluminate, to fix the fatal barrier which renders every foolish and every dark act, every sin and every crime, irretrievable, to leave no chance of penitence, no hope of repentance, and to send the erring and burdened spirit into the presence of its God without one dark record against it uncancelled. Heavy must be the offence indeed, and deep the injury, which leaves no sorrow in the heart of the slayer.

None seemed to be felt by the woodman. He stood and gazed, as I have said, for a moment; but it was--as he had gazed over the prospect below--without a change of countenance; and then he stooped down and with calm and patient investigation searched every part of the dead man's apparel. He found, amongst other things, a purse well supplied with gold, at least so its weight seemed to indicate; but that he put back again at once. He found some papers too, and those he kept; but, not satisfied with that, after some trouble he caught the horse, examined the saddle, unloosed the girths, and between the saddle cloth and the leather found a secret pocket from which he took more papers. These too he kept, and put them in his wallet. Everything else, such as trinkets, of which there were one or two, a pouncet-box, some large curiously-shaped keys and other trifles, he carefully replaced where he had found them. Then, taking up the dead man's hand, he raised it and let it fall, as if to make sure that life was extinct; and then once more he addressed the corpse, saying--

"Ay, thou art dead enough! I could find in my heart to spurn thee even now--but no, no. It is but the clay. The demon is departed," and picking up his axe, which he had laid down for a moment, he carefully replaced the saddle on the horse's back, fastened up the girths, and cast loose the rein. When this was done he resumed his walk, proceeding with the same quiet steady pace with which he had been wending his way towards his cottage, the moment before this adventure befell him. All remained calm and still on the spot which he had left, for somewhat more than an hour. The moon reached her highest point, travelled a little to the westward, and poured her rays under the branches of the trees where before it had been dark. The dead body still lay upon the road. The horse remained cropping the forest grass at the side, occasionally entangling its foot in the bridle, and once plunging to get free so as to bring itself upon its knees. At the end of the time I have mentioned, the woodman reappeared, coming down the hill at the same quiet rate at which he had gone away. When he approached the place he stopped and looked around; and then, stooping down by the side of the dead man, he placed some of the papers in the pocket, saying with a sort of bitter smile, which looked wild and strange in the moonlight--

"Thy comings and goings are over; but others may carry these at least to their destination. Oh, thou double-dealing fiend, thou hast died in the midst of one of thy blackest deeds before it was consummated. The messenger of the dove, thou wert but the agent of the hawk which was watching for her as a prey, and would have betrayed her into all the horrors of faithlessness and guilt. May God pardon thee, bad man and--"

Again there was the sound of horses' feet coming; but this time it was mingled with that of voices, talking with loud and somewhat boisterous merriment.

"Some of the king's runners," said the woodman; and, with a slow step, he retreated under the trees, and was soon lost to sight amidst the thick brushwood. The next moment two men might be seen riding down the hill and laughing as they came.

"'Twill be pleasant tidings to bear," said one to the other; "and my counsel is, Jago, instead of giving them to the next post, as thy fool's head would have it, that we turn away through the by-road to the abbey, and carry our good news ourselves. Why, that Richmond has put back again to France, is worth fifty broad pieces to each of us."

"But our orders were strict," answered the other; "and we have no excuse.--But mercy have us! What is here? Some one either drunk or dead upon the road. There stands his horse too, under that tree."

"Look to your weapon, Jago," replied his companion. "On my life, this is that fellow Malcolm Bower, who passed us three hours ago, as proud as a popinjay; and I'll wager a stoup of Canary, that he has met with robbers in the wood and been murdered."

"Likely, likely," answered the other man, loosening his sword in the sheath; "but if he have, king Richard will burn the forest down but he'll find them; for this fellow is a great man with those he serves now-a-days."

"Here, hold my horse," cried the other. "I'll get down and see;" and, dismounting, he stooped over the body, and then proceeded to examine it, commenting in broken sentences, thus--"Ay, it is he, sure enough. Stay, he can't be murdered, I think, either, for here is his purse in his pocket, and that well filled--and papers too, and a silver box of comfits, on my life. Look ye here now, his horse must have thrown him and broken his neck. No, upon my life, it's his head is broken. Here's a place at the back of his skull as soft as a Norfolk dumpling. What shall we do with him?"

A short consultation then ensued, as to how they should dispose of the dead body, till at length it was agreed that the horse should be caught, the corpse flung over it, and thus carried to the neighbouring hamlet. This was effected without much trouble; and the whole scene became wild,

and silent, and solitary once more.

CHAPTER IV.

I must now introduce the reader to a scene then very common in England, but which would now be sought for in vain--although, to some of the habits of those times a large class of people have a strong tendency to return. Round a little village green, having, as usual, its pond--the merry-making place of ducks and geese--its two or three clumps of large trees, and its two roads crossing each other in the middle, were erected several buildings of very different look and magnitude. Nearly three sides of the green were occupied by mere hovels or huts, the walls of mud, the roofs rudely thatched, and the windows of so small a size as to admit very little light into a dwelling, which, during the working hours of each weary day, saw very little of its laborious tenants. Amongst these were two larger houses, built of stone, richly ornamented, though small in size, having glazed windows, and displaying all the signs and tokens of the ecclesiastical architecture of the day, though neither of them was a church or chapel, but simply the dwelling-places of some secular priests, with a small following of male choristers, who were not permitted to inhabit any portion of the neighbouring abbey. Along the fourth side of the green, where the ground rose considerably, extended an enormously high wall, pierced in the centre with a fine old portal with two battlemented turrets, one on either side. From the middle of the green, so high was this wall and portal that nothing could be seen beyond it. But, from the opposite side, the towers and pinnacles of the abbey itself peeped up above the inclosure.

If one followed the course of the wall, to the left as one looked towards the abbey, passing between it and the swine-herd's cottage, one came to a smaller door--a sort of sally-port, we should have called it, had the place been a fortress--from which a path wound away, down into a valley, with a stream flowing through it; and then, turning sharp to the right at the bottom, the little footway ascended again towards a deep old wood, on the verge of which appeared a small Gothic building with a stone cross in front. The distance from the abbey to St. Magdalen's cell, as it was called, was not in reality very great in a direct line; but the path wound so much, in order to avoid a steep rise in the ground and a deep ravine through which in rainy weather flowed a torrent of water, that its length could not be less than three quarters of a mile.

The little door in the abbey wall, which I have mentioned, was strong and well secured, with a loop-hole at each side for archers to shoot through, in case of need. Over the door, too, was a semicircular aperture, in which hung an enormously large bell, baptized in former years, according to the ordinary custom, but which, whatever was the name it received at its baptism, was known amongst the peasantry as the "Baby of St. Clare." Now, whether St. Clare, whoever she was, had, during the time of her mortal life, a baby or none, I cannot pretend to say; but certain it is, that the good nuns were as angry at the name which had been bestowed upon the bell, as if the attributing an infant to their patroness had been a direct insult to each of them individually.

This bell was used only upon special occasions, the ordinary access to the abbey being through the great gates; but, if any danger menaced in the night, if any of the peasantry were taken suddenly ill after sunset, if any of the huts in the hamlet caught fire--which was by no means unusual--or any other business of importance occurred during the hours of darkness, the good people of the neighbourhood applied to the Baby of St. Clare, whose loud voice soon brought out one of the inferior sisters to inquire what was the matter. Passing on from this doorway, and leaving the path towards St. Magdalene's cell on the left, one could circle round the whole extent of the walls, which contained not less than five or six acres of ground. But no other doorway was to be seen, till the great portal was again reached. The walls themselves were of exceeding thickness, and had a walk all round them on a sort of platform at the top. It would have required cannon indeed to have effected a breach at any point; but, at the same time, their great extent rendered them indefensible against the means of escalade, by any force which the good sisters could call to their aid.

Within the great portal was a large open court, flanked on three sides by habitable buildings. To the right, was what was called the visitors' lodging, where a very considerable number of persons could be accommodated, in small rooms very tolerably furnished according to the mode of the day. There, too, a large dining-hall afforded space for the entertainment to the many guests who from time to time partook of the abbey's hospitality. The opposite side was devoted to offices for the lay sisters and servants of the abbey; and the space in front of the great gates was occupied by the chapel, into one part of which the general public was admitted, while the other, separated by a richly-wrought stone screen, was assigned to the nuns themselves. A small stone passage closed by an iron gate ran between the offices and the chapel, and extended, round the back of the former and along the north-western wall to the little doorway which I have

mentioned; while, on the other hand, an open door and staircase led to the parlour, which I have mentioned in a preceding chapter, as that in which friends or relatives might converse with any of the recluses, through the grate which divided the room into two. Behind the chapel was another court, cloistered all round, and beyond that the main body of the building.

All these arrangements would seem to show, and, indeed, such was the intention, that the sisterhood were cut off from all immediate communication with the male part of the race; but yet, in truth, neither the order nor the abbey was a very strict one--so little so that, twenty or thirty years before, the sisterhood had not altogether escaped scandal. All occasion for gossiping tongues, however, had been taken away by the conduct of the existing abbess, whose rule was firm though mild; but, at the same time, she neither scrupled to indulge her nuns in all innocent liberty, such as going out once or twice in the year in parties of six or seven together, nor to use her own powers of free action in receiving, even in the interior of the building, during the day time, any of the officers of the abbey, whether lay or clerical, with whom she might wish to speak, and in going out mounted on her mule, and accompanied by several attendants, to inspect the several estates of the foundation, or visit any of the neighbouring towns. This just medium between extreme severity and improper license secured her against all evil tongues; and the abbey was in high repute at the time of which I speak.

About one o'clock, on the day after the woodman's visit, which I have described, some twenty or thirty people were gathered together on the green just before the great portal. But this was no well-dressed and splendid assemblage, no meeting of the high, the rich, and the lordly. It was a very motley band, in which rags and tatters greatly predominated. The most aristocratic of the crowd was probably an itinerant piper, who, with an odd-shaped cap on his head, somewhat like the foot of an old stocking, but spreading out at the edges in the fashion of a basin, had a good coarse brown cloth coat on his back, and hosen on his legs, which, though not new, were not in holes. He kept his bag tight under his arm, not venturing to regale the devout ears of the nuns with the sounds of his merry minstrelsy; but he promised himself and his fellows to cheer their hearts with a tune after their daily dole had been distributed, to receive which was the object of their coming.

They were not kept long waiting, indeed; for one of the elder sisters soon appeared, followed by two stout serving women, dressed in grey gowns, with white hoods and wimples, each carrying an enormous basket filled with large hunches of bread and fragments of broken meat. The contents of these panniers were distributed with great equity, and savoured with a few words, sometimes of ghostly advice, sometimes of reproach, and sometimes of consolation.

Thus it was, "There Hodge, take that, and do not grumble another time as thou didst yesterday. A contented heart makes food wholesome; and you, Margery Dobson, I do wonder that you do not think it shame to live upon the abbey dole, with those good stout hands of yours."

"Ah, dear mother," replied the person she addressed, in a whining tone; "that is always the way. Everything goes by seeming. I vow I am dropsical all over; and then folks say it is all fat. I could no more do a day's work like another, than I could take up the abbey tower and carry it off."

The good sister shook her head, and went on to another, saying--

"Ah! Jackson, if you would but quit your vile drunken ways, you need never come here for the dole. Two hours' work each day would furnish you with as much food as you get here in a week. Ah, Janet Martin, my poor thing," she continued, addressing a woman, who had contrived to add some little scraps of black to the old gown which she wore, "there were no need to give you any of the dole, for the lady abbess will send down to you by and by; but here, as there is plenty for all to-day, take this for yourself and the babes. I dare say they'll eat it."

The woman made a melancholy gesture with her head, replying merely--

"They have not tasted a morsel since last night, sister Alice."

"Well, take heart, take heart," answered the nun in a kindly tone. "You can't tell what may be coming. We are all very sorry for you and for your poor children; and your good husband who is no more, rest his soul, has our prayers night and morning."

"Blessings upon you, sister Alice, and upon the house," replied the poor widow; and the nun turned to the itinerant musician.

"What, Sam the piper come back from Tamworth. I trust, brother, you remembered all your promises, and did not get drunk at the fair."

"Never was drunk once," replied the piper boldly; but the next moment, he turned his head partly over his shoulder, and winked shrewdly with his eye, adding, "The ale was so thin that a butt of it would not have tipsied a sucking lamb. So I have little credit; for my well-seasoned staves would have drunk the whole beer in the town without rolling. But nevertheless, I was moderate, very moderate, and drank with due discretion--seeing that the liquor was only fit to season sow's meat. Well, I wot, they got very little grains out of each barrel; and I hope he that brewed it has had as bad a cholic as I have had ever since."

"Well, get you each to the buttery, one by one as you are served; and there you will get a horn of ale which won't give you the cholic, though it won't make you drunk," said the good sister; and then, beckoning to the piper, she enquired in an easy tone: "What news was stirring at Tamworth, Sam Piper? There's always something stirring there, I think."

"Bless your holy face," answered the piper; "there was little enough this time. Only, just as the fair was over, some gay nobles came in--looking for King Richard, I wot; and a gorgeous train they made of it; but if it was the King they sought, they did not find him, for he has gone on to Nottingham with his good Queen."

"But who were they? Who were they?" asked the nun, who was not without her share of that curiosity so common among recluses. "And were they so very splendid? How many had they in their following?"

"Why, first and foremost, lady," replied the piper, with a tone and air of secrecy and importance, "there was the young earl of Chartley. Marry, a gay and handsome gentleman as ever you set eyes on. I saw him come up to the inn door, and speak to mine host; and every other word was a jest, I'll warrant. What a wit he has, and how he did run on. It was nothing but push and thrust, from beginning to end. Then, as for his dress, it might have suited a prince, full of quaint conceits and beautiful extravagance. Why his bonnet was cut all round in the Burgundy fashion, for all the world like the battlements of a castle made in cloth, and a great white feather lolling down till it touched his left shoulder."

"Oh, vanity, vanity!" cried the nun. "How these young men do mock Heaven with their vanities! But what more, good brother?"

"Why then there were the sleeves of his gown," continued the piper; "what they were intended for I can't tell, unless to blow his nose with; but they were so long and fell so heavy with the sables that trimmed them, that I thought every minute the horse would set his feet on them. But no such thing; and though somewhat dusty he seemed fresh enough."

"Well, well," said the nun. "Come to the point, and tell us no more about dress, for I care not for such vanities."

"Good faith, but there were some pieces of it would have made you care," replied the piper. "However, I do not know what you mean by the point."

"Who were the other people; for you said there were many?" demanded the nun sharply.

"So there were, so there were," replied the wandering musician. "There was Sir Edward Hungerford, a gay gallant of the court, not so handsome as the other, but as grandly dressed; and then there was Sir Charles Weinants, a very reverend and courtly gentleman, with comely grey hair. There--talking of reverencies--there was a godly friar with a grey gown and shaven crown."

"That speaks well for the young lords," observed the nun. "They cannot be such idle little-thrifts as you make them out, if they travel accompanied by a holy man."

"Nay, Heaven forbid that I should make them out idle little-thrifts," replied the piper. "I think them serious sober-minded gentlemen; for, besides the friar, they had with them, I wot, a black slave, that is to say not quite black, for I have seen blacker, but a tawny Moor, with silver bracelets on his arms, and a turban on his head."

"How does that show them serious sober-minded gentlemen?" asked the nun.

"Because I fancy they must have been to the Holy Land to fetch him," answered the piper; "but what is more to their credit than all else, they love minstrels, for the young lord at their head gave me a York groat, which is more than I had taken in all the fair."

"Minstrels!" cried the nun, with a toss of her head. "Marry! call'st thou thyself a minstrel, piper?"

But before her companion could reply, three men rode into the little circle, formed by the houses upon the green, and approached the great portal of the abbey. One of these, by his dress and appearance, seemed to be a principal servant in the house of some great man. Another was an ordinary groom; but the third was altogether of a different appearance, being a man of almost gigantic stature, dressed in oriental costume, with which, his brown skin, strongly-marked features, and large deep black eyes, were in perfect harmony. He wore a crooked scimitar by his side, a short cane spear was in his hand, and his seat in the saddle of the beautiful black horse he rode would have distinguished him at once as the native of another land. He was magnificently dressed, as was usually the case with the eastern slaves, of which not a few were to be found in Europe, even at that time; for although the epidemic madness of the crusades was over, yet the malady from time to time attacked a number of individuals, and we find that towards the end of the fifteenth century, between two and three hundred thousand persons were assembled from different countries in Rome, with the professed object of making war upon the infidels. They were without leaders, undertook little, and executed less; but if one of the noblemen or gentlemen, who set out upon those wild enterprises, could bring home with him two or three Mahomedan slaves, he thought he had performed a great feat, and judged himself worthy of the name of a

crusader.

The very approach of a follower of Mahound, however, was an abomination to the good nun, who had never seen such a thing before; and, taking a step back at the aspect of the Moor, she crossed herself devoutly. "Sancta Clara, ora pro nobis," she uttered devoutly, and seemed to derive both consolation and courage from the ejaculation; for she maintained her ground, although the Moor rode close up to her with his companions--nay, she even examined his garb with a critical eye, and internally pronounced the yellow silk, of which his gabardine was composed, the most beautiful she had ever seen in her life.

She was not subjected to the shock of any conversation with the infidel however; for the person who addressed her was the good-looking elderly man, dressed as one of the principal servants of a high family. Dismounting from his horse with due decorum, he presented a letter for the lady abbess, and requested that it might be conveyed to her immediately, saying, that he would wait there for an answer.

The nun pressed him to enter the court and take some refreshment in the visitors' lodging, looking askance at the Moor all the time, and seeming to doubt whether she ought to include him in the invitation. The steward, or whatever he might be, declined, however, stating that he must return immediately when he had received an answer, as to whether the lady abbess would extend her hospitality to his lord; and the nun, usurping the function of the portress, carried in the letter herself. An answer was soon brought, by word of mouth, that the Lord Chartley and his friends were right welcome; and the servants departed on the road by which they came. Cooks and scullions were immediately put in requisition, and all the good things which the woodman had sent up were speedily being converted into delicate dishes for the table of the guests.

Such a scene had not been displayed in the kitchen of the abbey since the visitation of the bishop; but hour after hour passed by without the arrival of the expected company, till the cooks began to fear that the supper would be spoilt; and the beggars, who had lingered about the gate, in the hope of alms, grew weary of waiting, and dropped off one by one. It was not till the sun had set, and the whole sky was grey, that a distant trumpet was heard, and the sacristan of the chapel, from one of the highest towers, perceived a dark and indistinct mass which might be men and horses coming up the slope of the hill.

CHAPTER V.

Much did the good nuns wonder, why and wherefore such splendid preparations had been made by the abbess, for the reception of a young nobleman and his companions, none of whom, as far as they knew, bore any prominent part in the state. Had it been a bishop, a mitred abbot, or even a dean, they could have understood such a magnificent reception. A duke or a prince would have been worthy of it; but, "Who was Lord Chartley? What claim had he upon the abbey?"

If they were surprised, however, at that which went on in the kitchen--and they all found out sooner or later what was taking place there--previous to the arrival of the guests; if they commented upon the arrangements made for feasting the number of forty in the strangers' hall, while the abbess herself with the old prioress, who was as deaf as a post, proposed to entertain the principal visitors in a room apart, how much more were they surprised when, on its being announced that the train was approaching, the lady herself went out into the court, with her two nieces, and her usual attendants upon state occasions, and waited nearly opposite the principal door of the chapel to receive her visitors in form. Much did they remark upon these facts; and much did they whisper among themselves; but still the abbess pursued her course, though, it must be confessed, it was with some degree of perturbation, which was very evident, in a slight degree of nervousness of manner, and in a variation of colour which was not common with her.

She was not kept in the court long before the first horseman rode through the portal; and, without waiting for grooms or horse-boys to come up, the young Lord Chartley himself sprang to the ground, and advancing with an easy and graceful air, bonnet in hand, paid his respects to the superior of the convent. Nay, more, with a gay light sort of gallantry, fitted perhaps rather for the court than the cloister, he pressed his lips upon the hand of the abbess, and looked very much as if he would willingly have made them acquainted with the cheeks of the two beautiful girls by whom she was accompanied.

"A thousand thanks, dear lady," he said, "for your kindly welcome. Let me crave pardon for having detained you so long; but some business stopped us by the way. Let me present to you my friends, Sir Charles Weinants, a wise and sage negotiator, deep in the secret mysteries of courts, and most discreet in all his doings--trust him with no secrets, lady," he added, laughing; "for

though he may not betray them, he will use them as his high policy may dictate. Then here is Sir Edward Hungerford, the pink of all perfection and the winner of all hearts, the web of whose courtesy is the most superfine, and who is very dangerous to all ladies not under vows. Then here again is my friend, Sir William Arden, whose character you must not take from himself, whose looks are rougher than his intentions, and his words harder than his heart."

"And his heart harder than your head, my good lord," said the gentleman of whom he last spoke, who had just dismounted from his horse. "Marry! my lady abbess, I only wonder how you let such a rattle-pated young lordling within your gates. I would not, if I were you; and were he to ride twenty miles further before he got his supper it would do him good."

"Not so, I think," said Sir Edward Hungerford. "I never knew any good come to a man by riding without his supper, especially when he left bright eyes and beautiful faces behind him;" and, after fixing his look for a moment upon the abbess herself, he glanced meaningly to the faces of her two companions.

"Peace, peace, my children," said the elder lady. "I must not let you forget where you are, and what ears hear you. This is no court, or hall, or place of light amusement. Cease your fine speeches then, and remember this is the abbey of Atherston St. Clare."

"Ay, he would soon make it a ribald's den," said Sir William Arden, bluffly; "but you have forgot the priest, my lord. You should make all reverend people acquainted with each other."

"True, true!" cried Lord Chartley. "This my dear lady, is a very reverend friend of mine, called Father William, who has lived long in foreign lands. Let me recommend him to your especial care and kindness; for he has but feeble health, and will partake of your hospitality for the night, while we, I grieve to say, are forced to ride forward by the moonlight."

He laid strong emphasis on some of his words; and the abbess raised her eyes to the face of the friar, who was gazing at her with a calm and steady look. A glance however seemed enough, for she instantly turned her eyes away again, welcoming the priest in vague and general terms. She then proceeded to explain to Lord Chartley and his companions, that, as they had come so late, they must put off their meal till after compline, which would be in half an hour. The service in the chapel, she said, at which she invited them all to attend, would occupy about ten minutes, and in the mean time she gave them over to the lay officers of the abbey, who would attend to their comfort and convenience. After compline, she added, she would receive the gentlemen who had been introduced to her, to sup in the small parlour, while the rest of the party would be entertained in the hall.

Having given this explanation, she was about to retire; but Lord Chartley, following her a few steps, said something in a low voice, to which she replied:--

"Certainly, my son. You will find me at the grate in five minutes. That passage to the left will lead you."

"There now," exclaimed Sir Edward Hungerford, who had remarked his companion's proceedings. "Chartley is asking her if she can spare him one of those two fair girls to solace his moonlight ride to Leicester. 'Tis thus he always forestalls the market. Upon my life he should give us poor knights a fair chance."

"You would spoil the fairest chance on earth, with your foppery," said Sir William Arden, a strong-built dark-complexioned man of about forty. "The bargain is soon struck at all events, for here he comes;" and the young nobleman, having rejoined the rest, followed some of the servants of the abbey to the rooms allotted to them, where ewers and towels were prepared to wash before the evening meal.

A very few minutes afterwards, the young Lord Chartley crossed the court, and ascended to the grate across the parlour. There was nobody there; and he looked to the great bell, hesitating whether he should ring it or not. Before he decided, however, a light appeared on the other side; and the abbess presented herself, preceded by a nun bearing a taper, who departed as soon as she had set down the light. Lord Chartley was not a man to hesitate or stumble at any step he was inclined to take; but, for an instant, he did hesitate on the present occasion; and, as the abbess hesitated too, the conversation seemed not likely to begin very soon.

The silence indeed continued so long, that at length the young lord began to feel there was something ridiculous in it; and, bursting into a gay laugh, he said, "Pardon my merriment, lady, for I cannot help feeling that it is very absurd to stand thinking of what I shall say, like a school-boy, though the subject I wish to speak upon is a serious one. I almost hoped that you would have helped me, for I could not but think that there was a glance of recognition in your eyes, when I introduced to you one of my companions below."

"Nay, my son," replied the abbess; "it was for you to speak. I could not tell that you yourself had cognizance of what you were doing."

"Then you did remember him?" exclaimed Lord Chartley. "That is all well! One part of the difficulty is over, and the greatest. You know that his liberty, if not his life, is in peril, if he is discovered. Yet it is needful that he should remain in this neighbourhood for some days, if

possible; and he has directed me to ask if you will give him protection, and, should need be, concealment, on account of friendships long ago."

"Tell him, my lord, I would do so at peril of my life," replied the abbess; "but, at the same time, it is right he should know to what security he trusts. The walls of the abbey are strong and solid; but, alas, we have not men enough within call, to defend them in case of need; and I have been warned that King Richard's people are hunting for him shrewdly. Should they track him here, they may use force which I cannot resist."

"Then, dear lady, you will be free from all blame, if you are compelled to give him up," replied Lord Chartley. "Force cannot be resisted without force; and no one can be censured for yielding to necessity, just as a very brave dog may well turn tail at a lion."

"Nay, my good lord, not quite so," replied the abbess. "We poor women know that wit will often baffle strength; and I think I can provide for his safety, even should the gates be forced and the abbey searched. There is a way out, which no one knows nor can discover but myself and two others. By it I can convey him into the heart of the wood, where it would take an army, or a pack of hounds, to find him. I can provide guidance and assistance for him, and I trust that we can set his persecutors at nought, though there may be some peril and some anxiety. Pray tell him all this, that he may consider and choose what he will do."

"Good faith, he has no choice," answered Lord Chartley, "but this, or to go forward to Leicester, into the very lion's mouth. He is brave enough in a good cause, as you would see, if you knew amidst what perils he travels even now."

"Ay, my lord, of that I would fain inquire," replied the nun. "'Tis needful to be cautious--very cautious--in times and circumstances like these; and not even to you would I have said aught of my remembrance, had you not spoken first. Now, tell me, do your companions know aught of who it is that journeys with them?"

"Not one of them," replied the young lord, "unless it be the subtle Sir Charles Weinants; and he affects to see nothing. I have some doubts of him indeed; and if it be as I think, he and the bishop have been playing a game against each other during our whole journey for somewhat mighty stakes. If you can but give our friend security for three days he has won the game."

"God grant it," cried the abbess; "and, with the help of the Blessed Virgin, I hope we shall succeed; but I much fear, my noble son, that what we are this day doing may call down upon us the wrath of Richard of Gloucester."

"I trust not, I trust not, dear lady," replied the young lord. "Were I and my companions and all our train to stay, it might indeed create suspicion; but no one will or can know that we leave the good priest here to-night, so that, if any doubts have arisen, pursuit will follow us in the first place, rather than turn towards the abbey. This is in truth the reason why I ride on to-night. I would rather lure enmity away from you, believe me, than bring it upon you. But, I trust there is no danger. Everything seemed calm and peaceful, when we left Tamworth--no men at arms about, no appearance of doubt or suspicion."

"I do not know, my son. I do not know," replied the abbess. "I had warning of your coming last night. I had warning, too, that danger might follow."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lord Chartley, with a look of much surprise. "This is strange news. May I ask who was your informant?"

"One whom I can trust well," answered the abbess, "though he be a man of humble station; none other than our chief woodman, John Boyd. By one means or another, he learns all that takes place in the country round; and he gave me notice, not only that you were on the way hither, but that you had one with you to whom I should be called upon to give refuge, and for whose safety I must provide. It is to this very man's care and guidance, in case of need, that I must trust the bishop."

"Hush!" cried Lord Chartley, looking round. "Let us mention no names. I am called rash and careless, light and over-gay, but, where a friend's safety is at stake, I must be more thoughtful than I would be for myself. Pardon me for my asking if you are very sure of this good man."

The abbess gave him every assurance in her power, bringing forward all those strong motives for trusting the woodman, which were quite conclusive in her eyes, as they would indeed have been in the eyes of most other ladies, but which did not seem to satisfy her young but more experienced companion. He asked where the woodman lived, and mused; then enquired how long he had been in the service of the abbey; and was still putting questions when the bell for compline rang, and the abbess was forced to retire.

On descending to the court, Lord Chartley found Sir Charles Weinants and the priest, walking up and down before the chapel, not conversing together indeed, for the latter seemed somewhat silent and gloomy. With him the young nobleman much desired to speak; but he thought that it might be dangerous to connect his conference with the abbess in any degree with the priest, even by addressing him immediately afterwards; and therefore, turning at once to Sir Charles Weinants, he exclaimed: "Now, Weinants, let us into the chapel. It is quite dark; and I am

somewhat eager for our supper, to fortify us against our evening's ride."

The priest said not a word, but followed the other two as they advanced towards the place of worship, from which the light of tapers and the sweet tones of the chant were beginning to pour forth.

"I am hungry too," replied Weinants, "and agree with you, my good lord, that a good supper is a very necessary preparation for a long ride. I hope they will sing quick, for by my faith, even from Tamworth here, I find, has been a good medicine for a slow digestion. You need not look round for the others. They are all in waiting eagerly for this grace before meat--except indeed your infidel, who was lolling in the stable with his arms round his horse's neck. I should not wonder if the beast were a princess in disguise, changed into that shape by some friendly magician, in order that she might share his captivity."

"The most probable thing in the world," replied Chartley, "but undoubtedly, were I in his place, I should prefer my lady mistress with less hair upon her face; but come, let us cease our jokes; for here we are; and you will perhaps scandalize our reverend friend here."

Thus saying, they entered the chapel and placed themselves by one of the pillars while the service proceeded.

If the ceremonial observances of the Romish church are many, the services have at all events the advantage of being brief; and, on this occasion, the visitors of the abbey were detained for even a shorter space of time than the abbess had mentioned. As soon as the last notes of the chant were over, the abbess and her nuns retired from their latticed gallery; and then, for the first time, she notified to her nieces that she expected them to assist her in entertaining her guests.

"Oh, my dear aunt, pray excuse me," exclaimed Iola, while Constance submitted quite quietly. "I would rather a thousandfold sup alone in the penitential cell, than with all these men. They have frightened me out of my wits once to-night already, especially that gay gossamer-looking youth, whom the young lord called Hungerford."

"I must have it so, Iola," replied her aunt. "I have my reasons for it, so no nonsense, child. As for men," she continued, resuming a gayer tone, "you will soon find, when more accustomed to them, they are not such furious wild beasts as they seem. With them, as with bulls and dogs, they are only dangerous to those who are frightened at them. Treat them boldly and repel them sharply, and they soon come fawning and crouching at your feet. Man is a very contemptible animal, my dear child, if you did but know all. However, you shall sit beside the priest--between him and the young lord, so you will escape the other, who is but one of the empty courtiers of the day, such as I recollect them in my youth--a sort of thing that a woman of spirit could squeeze to death as she would a wasp in a hawking-glove. I dare say Constance does not fear him."

"I would rather not sit near him," replied the other quietly. "His perfumes make me sick. I would rather not live next door neighbour to a civet cat. Let me entertain the bluff old gentleman, aunt. His rough speeches are much more pleasant to my ear than all the other's soft sayings."

"Don't call him old to his face, Constance," replied her aunt, "or his sayings will be rough enough, depend upon it. Why I do not think he is forty, child; and no man ever thinks himself old till he has told up to seventy, and then he begins to fancy he is growing aged, and had better begin to lead a new life."

The two girls laughed gaily; and in a few minutes they were seated, as had been arranged, at the plentiful table which had been prepared for their aunt's distinguished guests. I will not pause upon the feast. The reader is well aware of the abundant provision which had been made by the worthy woodman, and would be but little edified to hear of the strange ways in which the various dishes were dressed, or the odd sauces with which they were savoured.

The meal, as was usual in those days, lasted a long while; and the conversation was somewhat more gay and lively than one would be inclined to imagine was common within the walls of a convent. At first, indeed, it was somewhat stiff and restrained; but there was a gay, careless, happy spirit in the bosom of the young nobleman, who sat beside the abbess, which soon banished the restraint of fresh acquaintance, and made every one feel as if they had known him for years. This was less difficult to effect with the elder lady than with Iola who sat on his other hand; but even she could not resist the current long; and a certain degree of timidity, the natural fruit of retirement from the world, gave way under the influence of his cheerful tone, till she caught herself laughing and talking gaily with him, and suffering unconsciously all the fresh thoughts of a bright pure heart to well forth like the waters of a spring. She paused and blushed deeply, when first she suddenly discovered that such was the case; and, bending down his head, for the conversation at the moment was general and loud, he said, with a kind and graceful smile, but in a low tone--

"Nay, nay, close not the casket! The jewels are well worthy of being seen."

"I know not what you mean, my lord," she said, blushing more deeply than before.

"I mean," he answered, "that, judging by your look and sudden pause, I think you have just

found out that the door of the heart and the mind has been partly opened to the eye of a stranger,--though it is but by a chink,--and I would fain have you not close it against him, with the key of cold formality. In a word, let us go on as if you had not made the discovery, and do not draw back into yourself, as if you were afraid of letting your real nature come abroad lest it should take cold."

Whether she would or not, a smile came upon her lip; and, after a minute's pause, she answered frankly--

"Well, I will not. It is but for a little time that it can take the air."

At that moment the general conversation seemed to drop; and Lord Chartley saw the eye of the abbess turned towards him.

"It is excellent good," he said aloud, "made into a pie; but, I hate pasties of all kinds, if it be but for hiding under a thick crust the good things they contain. Nevertheless, it is excellent good."

"What?" asked the abbess.

"A squirrel," replied Lord Chartley. "Oh, there is nothing like your gay clambering nutcracker, who scrambles about from branch to branch, drinking the dew of heaven, leaping through the free air, and feeding on the topmost fruits, of which he must ever crack the shell to get at the kernel. He is excellent in a pasty, I assure you. Is he not, Hungerford?"

"Exceeding good," answered the knight, from the other side of the table; "but a young pea-fowl is better."

In this sort of conversation passed the time; and Iola, to say sooth, was amused and pleased. She did not, however, forget to show kind attention to the friar on her right; and he, on his part, seemed pleased and interested by her manner towards him. He spoke little, indeed; but all that he did say was powerful and pointed. Iola, however, could not but remark that he eat hardly anything, while the others seemed to enjoy the dainties prepared for them highly; and she pressed him kindly to take more food.

"I am much fatigued, my daughter," he said aloud, "and do not feel well to-night. The less, therefore, I take perhaps the better."

Lord Charley instantly caught at the words--

"Nay, good father," he said, "were it not better for you to take a little repose in your chamber, before we ride? I have marked all the evening that you seemed ill."

"Perhaps it were as well," answered the friar, rising; "but let me not abridge your enjoyment. I will find my way to my lodging and lie down for a while;" and, thus saying, he quitted the room.

The slightest possible smile curled the lip of Sir Charles Weinants. It passed away instantly; but it had been remarked; and, being the most discreet man in the world, he felt that the smile was an indiscretion, and, to cover it, asked in a gay but ordinary tone--

"Why, what is the matter with the friar? You have knocked him up, my excellent lord, with your quick travelling. The poor man, I should think, is not accustomed to the back of a hard-trotting horse; and we rode those last ten miles in less than an hour."

"He seems, indeed, a good deal tired," replied Chartley; "but I think it was yesterday's journey, rather than to-day's, that so much fatigued him. We rode full forty miles before we met with you, and five or six afterwards. You know, I never think, Weinants, or I should have had more compassion."

Here the conversation dropped; and, after sitting at table for about half an hour longer, the whole party rose, and Lord Chartley bade a graceful adieu to the abbess, saying--

"I trust that my poor friend, father William, is by this time well enough to proceed."

"Can you not leave him here, my son?" said the abbess. "He shall be well tended, and gladly entertained."

"Oh, no, no;" replied the young nobleman. "I dare say he is well enough now; and I am bound to my own paternal castle, dear lady, and about to establish for the first time therein a regular household. I must take him with me; therefore, if it be possible, for an almoner is the first great requisite. Farewell then, with many grateful thanks for your hospitality. I will not forget the subjects on which we spoke; and they shall have immediate attention."

CHAPTER VI.

The trumpet sounded on the green beyond the walls; and by torch and lantern light the young lord and his companions mounted in the court before the chapel, and rode forth to join their attendants, after bestowing some rich gifts upon the abbey. Though the sky was not unclouded, for there were large masses of heavy vapour rolling across the southern part of the horizon, and the night was much warmer than that which had preceded, auguring rain to the minds of the weather-wise, yet the moon was bright and clear, displaying every object upon the little green as clearly almost as if it had been day. Though not very fond of deeds of darkness, young Lord Chartley perhaps might have wished the beams of the fair planet not quite so bright. At all events, he seemed in a great hurry to proceed upon his journey, without any very strict inspection of his band; for he exclaimed at once--

"Now, Arden; now, Weinants; let us on at a quick canter. We shall sleep well tonight."

But the eye of Sir Charles Weinants scanned the party by the moonlight more accurately than that of his companion; and he demanded aloud--

"Why, where is the friar?"

"He is too unwell to ride on to-night. He will follow to-morrow," said Lord Chartley, in a careless tone; and, striking his horse with the spur, he proceeded, but not before he had remarked Sir Charles Weinants make a very particular sign to one of his own attendants. The knight raised his finger to his lips, pointed with his thumb to the abbey, and then held up two fingers of the same hand. No sooner was this done than he shook his rein, and followed his companion, apparently unconscious that he had been observed.

For a minute or two the young lord seemed uneasy, riding on in silence, and frequently giving a sharp glance round to those who came behind; but he soon recovered his equanimity, I might say cheerfulness, for he laughed and talked gaily with those around him, especially when they came to that part of the road where, passing through the forest, it ascended a hill so steep that the pace of the horses was necessarily slackened. Sir Charles Weinants, for his part, joined in, with his quiet gentlemanly cheerfulness, and seemed perfectly free and unembarrassed.

The subject of their conversation, it is true, was not a very merry one; for they soon began to speak of the discovery of a dead man lying on that very road, the night before--killed, as was supposed, by a fall from his horse--an account of which they had received at the abbey, where the corpse was still lying. Light-hearted superficial man, however, rarely suffers any event which happens to his neighbours to produce any very deep or permanent impression on himself; and it is wonderful how merry that party of gentlemen made themselves with the fate of the dead man.

"See what it is to go too fast, Weinants," said Lord Chartley. "Doubtless this fellow was riding a hired horse, and thought he might ride him, up hill and down dale, as hard as he liked; and so the poor beast threw him to get rid of an unpleasant burden."

"Served him quite right, I dare say," said bluff Sir William Arden.

"Why, how can you know, Arden?" demanded Sir Edward Hungerford, who was riding his own beast in the most delicate and approved manner of the times. "He might be as virtuous as an anchorite for aught you know."

"The best man that ever lived," answered Arden, "deserves every hour to break his neck, and worse too; and there never yet was a king's courier, which they say this was, who is not worthy of the pillory from the moment he puts the livery on his back. A set of vermin. I wish I had but the purifying of the court. You would see very few ears, or noses either, walking about the purlieu of the palace; and as for couriers, I'd set them upon horseback, and have relays of men behind them, to flog them on from station to station, for two or three thousand miles, till they dropped off dead from fatigue and starvation--I would indeed. They should neither have meat, nor drink, nor sleep, nor rest, till they expired."

Lord Chartley laughed, for he knew his friend well; and Sir Charles Weinants enquired--

"Why, what do the poor wretches do, to merit such high indignation, Arden?"

"Do!" exclaimed the other. "What do they not do? Are they not the petty tyrants of every inn and every village? Do they not think themselves justified by the beastly livery they wear, to rob every host and every farmer, to pay for nothing that they take, to drink ale and wine gratis, to kiss the daughter, seduce the wife, and ride the horses to death, because they are on a king's service, forsooth--out upon the whole race of them. We have not a punishment within the whole scope of our criminal law that is not too good for them."

"Hush, hush, Arden," cried Lord Chartley, laughing again; "if you do not mind, Weinants will tell the king; and it will be brought in high treason."

"How so, how so?" demanded Sir William Arden, with a start; for the very name of high treason was a serious affair in those days, when the axe was seldom long polished before it was dimmed again with human blood.

"Why, do you not know the old proverb, 'like master like man?'" asked Chartley; "so that if you abuse the king's couriers you abuse the king himself. It seems to me constructive treason at all events. What say you, Hungerford?"

"Very shocking indeed," said the gentleman whom he addressed, yawning heartily; "but I hate all couriers too. They are very unsavoury fellows, give you their billets with hot hands, and bring a hideous smell of horse flesh and boot leather into the chamber with them. I always order those who come to me to be kept an hour in a chill ante-room, to cool and air themselves."

From the characters of all who surrounded him, Lord Chartley seemed to draw no little amusement; but still, it would appear, his eye was watchful, and his ear too; for, when they had ridden about a couple of miles through the wood, and were in a shady place, where the beams of the moon did not penetrate, he suddenly reined in his horse, exclaiming--

"Some one has left the company--Hark! Who is that riding away?"

"Faith, I know not," said Sir Charles Weinants.

"I hear nobody," replied Hungerford.

"There go a horse's feet, nevertheless," cried Sir William Arden.

"Gentlemen all, have you sent any one back?" demanded the young baron, in a stern tone.

A general negative was the reply; and Chartley exclaimed--

"Then, by the Lord, I will find him. Ride on, gentlemen, ride on. I will overtake you soon."

"Let me come with you, my good lord," said Sir William Arden.

"No, no, I will find him, and deal with him alone," replied the young lord; and, turning his head to add--"You can wait for me at Hinckley if you will," he spurred on sharply, on the road which led back towards the abbey. The party whom he left remained gathered together for a moment, in surprise at the rapidity and the strangeness of his movements.

"In the name of fortune," cried Sir Edward Hungerford, "why does he not take somebody with him?"

"Every one knows his own business best," said Arden gruffly.

"Hush! hush!" said Sir Charles Weinants. "Let us hear which way he takes."

Now at the distance of perhaps two hundred yards behind them, the road through the wood divided into two; that on the left, by which they had come, leading direct to the abbey and its little hamlet; that on the right pursuing a somewhat circuitous course towards the small town of Atherston. The footfalls of Lord Chartley's horse, as he urged him furiously on, could be clearly heard as soon as Sir Charles Weinants had done speaking; and a moment after they seemed to take a direction to the right. The party still paused and listened, however, till it became clear by the sounds that the young nobleman had gone upon the road to Atherston.

Then Sir Charles Weinants drew a deep breath, and said, in an easy tone: "Well, let us ride on. We can wait for him at Hinckley. Doubtless, he is safe enough."

Sir William Arden seemed to hesitate; and Lord Chartley's steward said in a doubtful tone: "I think we ought to wait for my lord."

"You heard what he said himself," replied Sir Charles Weinants. "Our business is to go slowly on, and wait for him at Hinckley, if he does not overtake us by the way."

So was it in the end determined, and the party proceeded at a foot pace in the direction which they had before been taking. Mile after mile they rode on without being overtaken by their companion, every now and then pausing for a minute or two, to listen for his horse's feet, and then resuming their progress, till at length they arrived at Hinckley. They entered the inn yard, just at the moment that the carriers from Ashby de la Zouche to Northampton usually presented themselves with their packhorses; and they instantly had out landlord and ostlers, and all the retinue of the inn, with lanterns in abundance.

"Stay!" said Sir William Arden, as the attendants were hurrying to dismount, and lead their lords' horses to the stables. "Please Heaven, we will see who it is that is wanting."

"No need of that," exclaimed Sir Charles Weinants. "We shall learn soon enough, no doubt."

But the good knight, who was a steady campaigner, and one of the best soldiers of his day, adhered tenaciously to his purpose, ordered the gates of the inn-yard to be closed, and the doors

of the house and of the stables to be shut and locked. He next insisted that the servants should draw up in separate bodies, the attendants of each master in a distinct line, and then made the ostlers carry their lanterns along the face of each.

"One of your men is wanting, Sir Charles Weinants," he said at length. "It must have been he who rode away, and left his company in the forest."

"More fool, or more knave he," replied Sir Charles Weinants, coolly. "He shall be punished for his pains by losing his wages. But, if I am not mistaken, there is another wanting too. Where is Lord Chartley's Moor? I have not seen him for some time, and do not perceive him now."

"He staid behind in the wood, Sir Charles," replied one of the servants, "to look after the noble lord. He said--let go who would, he would stay there."

"Perhaps my man staid for the same purpose?" said Sir Charles Weinants.

"No, sir," answered another of the servants, attached to Sir William Arden. "He left us some minutes before Lord Chartley, while we were still riding on through the forest."

"Well, gentlemen, I shall remain here till my friend comes," said Arden, in a marked tone; "for I do not altogether like this affair."

"And I shall stay, because I have had riding enough for one day; and the inn looks comfortable," said Sir Edward Hungerford.

"I shall ride on, as soon as my horses have been fed and watered," rejoined Sir Charles Weinants, in a cold resolute tone; "because I have business of importance which calls me to Leicester."

His determination did not seem very pleasant to Sir William Arden, who looked at him steadily for a moment, from under his bent brows, and then walked once or twice up and down the court, without ordering the doors of the stables to be opened.

Weinants, however, took that task upon himself. His horses received their food and devoured it eagerly; and then, just as the carriers were arriving, Sir Charles Weinants rode out of the court yard, bidding his companions adieu in the most perfectly civil and courteous terms.

Sir William Arden suffered him to depart, but most unwillingly it must be confessed, and, when he was gone, turned to Sir Edward Hungerford, saying: "I should like to skin him alive, the cold-blooded double dealer. It is very strange, what can have become of Lord Chartley."

"Strange!" said Sir Edward Hungerford, in a tone of affected surprise; "why, he has gone to say a few more words to that pretty girl at the abbey, to be sure. I should not wonder to see him arrive in half an hour, with the dear little thing on a pillion behind him."

"Pshaw!" said Arden. "You are a fool;" and he turned into the inn.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a dark night; and the appearance of the cottage or hut was, in the inside at least, gloomy enough. The large wooden boards, which shut out wind and storm, covered the apertures that served for windows; and neither lamp nor taper, nor even a common resin candle, gave light within. Yet it was only a sort of half darkness that reigned in the first chamber, as one entered from the forest; for a large fire was burning on the hearth, and a log weighing some hundredweight had just been put on. The dry unlopped shoots, and withered leaves which still hung around the trunk of the decayed tree, had caught fire first, and the flame they produced went flashing round the walls with a sort of fitful glare, displaying all that they contained.

The room was a large one, larger indeed than many, in buildings with far greater pretensions; for the chief woodman had upon particular occasions to assemble a great number of his foresters under that roof. Whole deer were often brought in to be broken and flayed, as the terms were, and prepared for cooking, before they were sent down to the more delicate hands of the abbey. Besides, the woodman's house was usually in those days a place of general hospitality; and, indeed, the good ladies of the abbey always passed right willingly the charges which he sometimes had to make for the entertainment of strangers and wayfarers on their lands.

As compared with a poor man's cottage of the present day, that of the woodman was a large but very wretched abode; but as compared with the huts of the ordinary peasantry of the time, it

was a splendid mansion. The walls were formed of large beams of wood, crossing and supporting each other in various strange directions, forming a sort of pattern or figure inside and out, not unpleasant to look upon. The interstices were filled up with mud, mingled with small gravel stones and thick loam; and the floor was of mud, well battened down and hardened, though, in spite of all care, it presented various inequalities to the foot. Ceiling, as may well be supposed, the chamber had none. Large, heavy, roughly hewn rafters appeared above, with the inside of the thatch visible between the beams. A partition wall, with a rude door in it, crossed the building at about one third of its length, but this wall was raised no higher than those which formed the enclosure, that is to say, about seven or at most eight feet; and thus, though the lower part of the building was divided into several chambers, a clear passage for air, or sound, or rats, or mice, existed immediately under the roof, from one end of the building to the other. The most solid or massive piece of architecture in the whole structure was the chimney, with its enormously wide hearth and projecting wings. These were all built of hewn stone, the same as that of which the abbey was composed; and before the cottage was raised around it--for the chimney was built first--the mass must have looked like an obelisk in the midst of the forest.

Although we have greatly abandoned that sort of building at present, and doubtless our houses are more warm and air-tight than those of that day; yet the plan of these large wooden frame-works, with the beams shown on the inside and the out, was not without its convenience. Thus nails and hooks, and shelves and cupboards, were easily fixed in, or against the walls, without any danger of knocking down the plaster, or injuring the painting. Indeed, I do not know what the woodman would have done without this convenience, for the whole walls, on three sides at least, were studded with hooks and pegs, from which were suspended all sorts of implements belonging to his craft, and a variety of other goods and chattels. There were axes, knives, saws, bills, wedges, mallets, hammers, picks; long bows, cross bows, sheaves of arrows, bags of quarrels, boar-spears, nets, and two or three pronged forks, some serrated at the edges like Neptune's trident, and evidently intended to bring up unwilling eels out of their native mud. Then again there were various garments, such as a woodman might be supposed to use, leathern coats, large boots, a cloth jerkin, apparently for days of ceremony, gloves made of the thickest parts of a buck's hide, and a cap almost shaped like a morion, of double-jacked leather, which would have required a sharp sword and strong arm to cut it through. But, besides this defensive piece of clothing, which was probably intended rather for the forest than the field, was the ordinary steel cap, back and breastplate of a feudal archer of the period; for each woodman was bound to serve the abbey in arms for a certain period, in case of need.

Hanging from the beams above, was a very comfortable store of winter provision, several fat sides of bacon, half a side of a fallow deer salted and dried, and several strings of large sausages smoked in the most approved manner. Bunches of dried herbs too were there, and a salt fish or two, to eke out the lentil soup and eggs upon a fast day.

Within the wings of the large chimney, on a coarse wooden settle, and with his foot resting upon the end of one of the iron dogs or andirons, sat the woodman himself. His arms were crossed upon his chest. His back rested against the wall of the chimney; and his eyes were fixed upon the blazing fire, as if one of those musing fits had seized him, in which eye and fancy are at work, seeing castles, and towers, and landscapes, and faces in the mouldering embers, while the mind, abstracted from the outward scene, is busy in the quiet secrecy of the heart with things of more deep and personal interest. By his side sat a large wolf dog, of a kind not often seen in England, in form like a gigantic greyhound, covered with shaggy slate-coloured hair, thickly grizzled with grey, especially about the head and paws.

His long gaunt jaws rested on the woodman's knee; and sometimes he turned his contemplative eyes upon the fire, seeming to watch it, and muse upon its nature; and sometimes he raised them with a sleepy but affectionate look to his master's face, as if he would fain have spoken to him and asked him, "What shall we do next?"

Not a look did the poor hound get for some time, however, for his master had other things to think of; but at last the good man laid his hand upon the shaggy head, and said "Honest and true, and the only one!"

He then resumed his musing again, till at length the dog rose up, and, with slow and stately steps, advanced to the door, and putting down his nose, seemed to snuff the air from without. The woodman lifted up his head and listened; but the only sounds which were audible were those produced by the footfalls of a horse at a distance; and, turning round to the fire again with a well-pleased look, the woodman murmured, "Good. He is coming this way."

He did not budge from his settle, however, nor seem to pay much attention, till the rapid footfalls of the horse seemed to cease altogether, or turn, in a different direction. Then he looked up and said, "That is strange. He cannot have missed his way after having twice found it before."

He listened attentively; but still there was no sound audible to his ear; and it was the dog who first discovered that a stranger was approaching. A low growl and then a fierce sharp bark were the intimations which he gave, as soon as his ear caught the sound of a step, and his master immediately called him to him, saying, "Hither, Ban, hither. Down to foot--down, sir;" and the obedient hound immediately stretched himself out at length beside the fire.

The woodman, in the mean time, gave an attentive ear, and at length distinguished the steps

of a man approaching, mixed occasionally with the slow fall of horses' hoofs upon turfy ground, where the iron shoe from time to time struck against a pebble, but otherwise made no noise. Nevertheless he sat still till the noise, after becoming louder and louder, stopped suddenly, as if the traveller had paused upon a small green which stretched out before the door, comparatively open and free from trees for the space of about three quarters of an acre, although here and there a solitary beech rose out of the turf, overshadowing the greater part of the space. No brushwood was there, however, and the small forest road traversed the green on its way towards the distant town, spreading out into a wide sort of sandy track, nearly opposite to the woodman's house.

As soon as the sound of footsteps ceased, the first inhabitant of the cottage strode across, and threw open the door, demanding, "Who goes there?"

The answer was as usual--"a friend;" but, before he gave him admission or credence, the woodman was inclined to demand further explanations, saying, "Every man in this day professes himself a friend, and is often an enemy. Say, what friend, and whence?"

The visitor, however, without reply, proceeded to fasten his horse to a large iron hook, which projected from one of the beams of the cottage, and then advanced straight towards the woodman, who still stood in his doorway. The man eyed him as he came near, and then, seeming better satisfied, retired a step or two to give him entrance. The traveller came forward with a bold free step, and without ceremony walked into the cottage, and took a seat by the fire.

"Now let us talk a little, my friend," he said, turning to the woodman; "but first shut the door."

The other did as he was bid, and then, turning round, gazed at the stranger from head to foot with a slight smile. After his contemplation was finished, he pulled his own settle to a little distance and seated himself, saying, "Well?" while the large hound, after snuffing quietly at the stranger's boots, laid his head upon his knee and looked up in his face.

"You are a hospitable man, I doubt not," said the visitor, "and will give me shelter for an hour or two, I trust. I have ridden hard, as you may see."

"But not far or long since supper time," rejoined the woodman: "but what want you with me, my lord?"

"You seem to know me," said Lord Chartley, "and indeed are a very knowing person, if I may believe all.--Are you alone here?"

"Yes, we are man to man," answered the woodman with a laugh.

"Is there no one at the back of that door?" demanded Lord Chartley.

"Nothing more substantial than the wind," replied the other. "Of that there is sometimes too much."

"Pray how do you know me?" demanded Lord Chartley.

"I never said I know you," answered the woodman. "Are not your silks and satins, your gilt spurs, the jewel in your bonnet, to say nothing of the golden St. Barnabas, and your twisted sword hilt, enough to mark you out as a lord? But Lord, Lord, what do I care for a lord? However, I do know you, and I will tell you how far it is marvellous. I was in Tamworth yesterday, and saw a man wonderfully gaily dressed, upon a horse which must have cost full three hundred angels, with some forty or fifty followers, all gaily dressed too; so I asked one of the cunning men of the place, who the gay man on the fine horse was, and he answered, it was the young Lord Chartley. Was not that surprising?"

"Not very," replied Lord Chartley laughing; "but what came after was more marvellous; how this cunning man should have known that the young Lord Chartley would sup at the abbey of Atherston St. Clare tonight."

"It was," answered the woodman, in the same sort of ironical tone, "especially as the Lord Chartley mentioned his purpose gaily to Sir Edward Hungerford, and Sir Edward Hungerford told it to Sir Charles Weinants, and Sir Charles Weinants to his servant Dick Hagger, who, as in duty bound, told it to Boyd the woodman, and asked if there were really any pretty girls to be seen at the abbey, or whether it was a mere gibe of the good lord's."

"The good lord was a great fool for his pains," said Lord Chartley, thoughtfully; "and yet not so much so either, for it was needful to give a prying ass some reason for going."

"Take care, my good lord," replied the woodman, nodding his head sententiously, "Take care that you don't find the prying ass a vicious ass too. Those donkies kick very hard sometimes, and there is no knowing when they will begin."

"Oh, this is a soft fool," replied the nobleman. "I fear him not. There are others I fear more."

"And none too much," replied the woodman, "though this man you fear too little."

Lord Chartley sat and mused for several moments without reply. Then, raising his head suddenly, he looked full in the woodman's face, saying, "Come, come, my friend, we must speak more clearly. If what the abbess told me be true, you should know that we are upon no jesting matters."

"Good faith, I jest not, my lord," said the woodman. "I speak in as sober seriousness as ever I can use in this merry world, where everything is so light that nothing deserves a heavy thought. Why, here the time was, and I remember it well, when taking a man's life without battle or trial was held to be murder by grave old gentlemen with white beards. Now heads fall down like chesnuts about the yellow autumn time of the year, and no one heeds it any more than if they were pumpkins. Then again I recollect the time when a man confided in his wife and she did not betray him, and might lend his purse to his friend without having his throat cut as payment of the debt. Learned clerks, in those days, sang songs and not lewd ballads; and even a courtier would tell truth--sometimes. It is long ago indeed; but now, when life, and faith, and truth cannot be counted upon for lasting more than five minutes beyond the little present moment in which we stand, how can any man be very serious upon any subject? There is nothing left in the world that is worth two thoughts."

"Methinks there is," answered Lord Chartley; "but you touch upon the things which brought me here. If faith and truth be as short-lived as you would have it, master woodman, how would you, that either the abbess or I, or a person to whom I will at present give no name, should trust you in a matter where his life, ay, and more than his life, is perilled?"

"Faith, only as a dire necessity," answered the woodman, in an indifferent tone, "and because there is none other whom you can trust. The abbess will trust me, perhaps, because she knows me; you, because it is too late to think of any other means; and your nameless person, because he cannot help it."

"I know not that it is too late," replied Lord Chartley. "You have not got the tally board so completely in your hand, my friend, as to run up the score without looking at the other side. But, in a word, I have made a good excuse to leave my friends and servants, in order to see whether I could obtain some warrant for trusting you, in a matter of such deep importance as that which may perhaps be soon cast upon you."

"The best of all warrants for a man's good faith, my lord," answered the woodman, "is the certainty that he can gain nothing by breaking it. Now to speak plainly, I knew yesterday that good old Father Morton, bishop of Ely, was housed at Tamworth under the gown of a friar. To-night I know that he is lodged in the abbey. Had it so pleased me either yesterday or to-day, I could have brought over as many of King Richard's bands from Coleshill as would have soon conveyed his right reverence to the tower, and if reward is to be got, could have got it. Therefore, it is not a bit more likely that I should betray him, were he now standing under this roof, than yesterday in Tamworth, or to-day at Atherston St. Clare."

"There is some truth in what you say," answered Lord Chartley; "and I believe the best plan is to let a good dog beat the ground his own way. Yet I would fain know how you were informed that such a person was with me."

"What has that to do with the matter?" answered the woodman. "Take it all for granted. You see I am informed. What matters how?"

"Because it is somewhat suspicious," answered Lord Chartley at once, "that you should gain intelligence having no reference to your calling or station, while others both shrewd and watchful have gained none."

"I have no intelligence," replied the woodman. "Everything is simple enough when we look at it close. I saw the bishop dismount, knew him, and understood the whole business in a minute. He was kind to some whom I loved in years long past; and I do not forget faces--that is all. But now, my good lord, you have somewhat squeezed me with examinations. Let me ask you a question or two, of quite as much moment. On what excuse did you leave your friends and servants?"

"Good faith, you know so much," replied Lord Chartley, "that methinks you might know that also. However, as I must trust you in more weighty matters, I may as well tell that too. I have some doubts of one of our party, who joined us just on the other side of Tamworth, and has adhered closely to us ever since."

"Like a wet boot to a swelled ancle, I will answer for it," said the woodman, "if you mean the knave Weinants."

"I mean no other," answered Lord Chartley; "but however to my tale;" and he proceeded to relate all that had occurred that night in the wood. "I did not follow the man, I pretended to follow," he continued, "because I knew that was in vain. He had got too far away from me; and, moreover, had I caught him, what could I have done? I have no power over Sir Charles Weinant's servants, and he had but to name his lord, and plead his orders, and my authority was at an end; but as the good lady abbess was very confident she could, by your help, insure our friend's safety, even should the abbey be searched, I came hither to make myself more sure, by talking with you

myself."

While the young nobleman had been speaking, the woodman had risen up, with a somewhat eager and anxious eye, but continued gazing upon him, without interrupting him, till he had done.

"This must be looked to," he said, at length; "there is no time to be lost. Are you sure these excellent friends of yours have gone on?"

"So I besought them," answered the other.

"Besought them!" said the woodman. "We must have better security than beseechings;" and, taking a horn that was hanging against the wall, he went to the door and blew two notes, twice repeated.

"We shall soon have some tidings," he said, returning into the hut. "I have got my deer-keepers watching in different places; for our rogues here are fond of venison, as well as their neighbours, and care not much whether it be in or out of season."

"So then you are head keeper, as well as head woodman?" said Lord Chartley.

"Ay, my lord," answered the other. "We have no fine degrees and distinctions here. We mix all trades together, woodman, verderers, keepers, rangers. 'Tis not like a royal forest, nor an earl's park, where no man ventures out of his own walk. This Sir Charles Weinants," he continued, in a musing tone; "so he joined you on the other side of Tamworth. 'Tis strange he did not betray you earlier."

"He seemed not to know there was anything to betray," replied the young lord; "looked innocent and unconscious, and talked of points and doublets, and the qualities of Spanish leather, women, and perfumes, with Sir Edward Hungerford; or of horses, and suits of armour, cannon, and such like things, with Arden; or with me of sheep, poetry, and policy, the fit furnishing of an old hall, or a great feast for Christmas Day."

"He knew his men belike," said the woodman, with a cynical smile.

"Perhaps he did," replied the young lord, somewhat sternly, "and might be sure that, if he betrayed my friend in my company, I would cut his throat without waiting for royal permission, though he had all the kings in Christendom for his patrons."

"That might have a share in his discretion, it is true," answered the woodman; "but we must not have him hear our counsels now, and must make sure that he and his, as well as your own people, have ridden on."

"How can we learn that?" demanded Chartley.

"We shall hear anon," answered the woodman; and in a minute or two after the door opened, and a man in a forester's garb put in a round head covered with curly hair, demanding--

"What would you, master Boyd?"

"How goes all above?" demanded the woodman.

"All well," answered the forester.

"Upon the road," said Boyd; "upon the Hinckley road?"

"The company from the abbey just passed, all but three," replied the man. "One rode away first, and took the Coleshill road, so Tim Harris says. The other followed five minutes after, and came hither."

"Who was the third?" asked Lord Chartley eagerly.

The man did not answer for a moment, but looked to the woodman, who nodded his head, and then the other replied--

"'Twas the tawny Moor. He is up the road there, within sight of the door."

"Let him rest, let him rest," said the woodman. "Can you trust him, my good lord?"

"Better than I could trust a king, a minister, or a lover," replied Chartley. "If ever there was true faith, out of a big dog, it lies under that brown skin."

"To Coleshill?" said the woodman, musing and turning round the horn in his hand, as if he were examining it curiously. "Ten miles by the nearest way. We shall hear more soon, but not for three hours, I wot. Go along Dick, and get two or three more upon the Coleshill road, about half a mile or so from the abbey. Set one up in a tree; and if he sees a band of men coming down, let him sound three notes upon his horn, over and over, till he is answered. You, yourself, as soon as you hear the sound, run down to the abbey, and make St. Clare's baby call out aloud. Tell the

portress to let the lady abbess know there are enemies coming near, and that she had better take counsel immediately. Then draw altogether here, as many men as you can get, for we may have work to do. Away with you! And now, my good lord," he continued, as the man shut the door, "I must have my supper, and if you like to share it, you shall have woodman's fare."

"I have supped already," replied Lord Chartley; "and methinks you eat late for a forester. They are always ready enough for their meals."

"I am ready enough for mine," replied the woodman, "seeing that no morsel has passed my lips this day. I never touch food, of any kind, till midnight is near at hand. I am like a hunting dog, which, to do its work well, should have but one meal a-day."

"Your habits are somewhat strange, for a man of your condition," said Lord Chartley, "and your language also."

"Oh," said the woodman, "as for my language, I have seen courts, and am courtly. Why, I was for several years a lackey to a great man; but my preferment was spoiled by the jealousy of other lackeys, so, to save myself from worse, I ran away and betook myself to the woods and wilds; but I can be as delicate and mincing as a serving maid should need be, and as full of courtesies as a queen's ape. I am like every widow of sixty, and like every parson in rusty black without a parish; I have had my sorrows and seen my best days, which makes me at times melancholic; but I haven't forgot my gentility, when it suits my turn, nor the choice words which one perfunctorily gathers up in courts."

All this was said in a bitter and sneering manner, as if he made a mockery of the very acquirements he boasted of; and Lord Chartley replied: "By my faith, I believe your last trade is honestest than your first, my good friend. However, get your supper, and tell me in the mean while, in plain English, what you think all this will come to."

The woodman took down a large bowl from a shelf on the one side of the room, and poured a part of the milk that it contained into an iron pot. This he suspended over the fire, by a hook which hung dangling over the blaze, and when the milk began to boil, scattered a handful of oatmeal in it, stirring it round at the same time, till it was of a tolerable thick consistency. Upon this mess, when he had removed it from the fire and placed it on the table, he poured the rest of the milk cold. But it must not be supposed that all this time he had refrained from speaking. On the contrary, in brief and broken sentences, he replied to the young nobleman's question, saying, "What will become of it? Why, simply Richard's bands will be down about the abbey in an hour or two, and will search every corner of it--or set it on fire, perchance, or any thing else that they please to do."

"They will hardly dare, I think," said Lord Chartley. "This abbey, I am told, has the privilege of sanctuary, and if King Richard has a quality on earth, on which he can justly pride himself, it is his strictness in repressing the lawless violence which has risen up in times of long and fierce contention."

"Ay, lawless violence in other men," said the woodman; "but crimes committed in our own cause become gentle failings in the eyes of tyrants. The man who punishes a robber or assassin, rewards a murder committed on the king's behalf. Was princely Buckingham the other day judged by the laws or sentenced by his peers? No, no. The king's word was warrant enough for his death, and would be for the sacking of the abbey. There is but one respect which could save it. This king would fain be thought religious; and he has respected sanctuary before now--where it served the purposes of a prison as well as a refuge; but he is cunning as well as resolute; and he will find means to hide his share in the deed he profits by. Look you here now, my good lord; suppose some band of mere plunderers attacks the abbey, as was done not very long ago; then an obnoxious bishop may fall into the king's hands, without his avowing the deed."

"But his officers would be recognised," replied Lord Chartley.

"True, if the deed were committed by regular troops under noble leaders," said the woodman; "but these bands at Coleshill are mere mercenaries, gathered together in haste when the report first ran that the earl of Richmond was coming over hither. Since then, the king knows not what to do with them; and there they lie, living at free quarters upon the people. These are men, easily disavowed. But it will be as I have said; of that be you assured. If the bishop is now within the abbey, it will go hard but they will seek him there. Then, if the abbess is wise and follows counsel, she will send him forth to me, and I will provide for his safety."

"But where? But how?" demanded Lord Chartley. "This forest is not of such extent that you could shelter him from any keen pursuit."

The woodman looked at him with a smile, and then replied: "We do not trust all its secrets to every one. They are more intricate than you imagine. There are a thousand places where he might be hid, not to mention the old castle on the hill. It was a stronghold of the family of the Morleys, taken and sacked in the civil wars, under the fourth Harry, and the lands given over to the abbey. There is many a chamber and many a hall there, which would puzzle the keenest-scented talbot of all the king's pack, to nose out a fugitive therein. You might almost as well hunt a rat through the cript of an old church as seek for any one hiding there. That is one place; but

there are a dozen others; and whither I will take him must be decided at the time. However, rest you sure that, once out of the abbey walls, and in my charge, he is safe."

"We must trust so," replied the young nobleman; "and your goodwill and intentions, I doubt not; but fate is out of any man's keeping, my good friend, and indeed we are all in hers. However, we must do as we can, and leave the rest to God's good will, who shapes all things as seems fit unto him, and often overrules our wishes and designs for excellent purposes that we cannot foresee. While you take your supper--a somewhat poor one for a strong man--I will go out and tell my good Arab, Ibn Ayoub, that I am safe and well. Otherwise, having marked me hither, he will stay watching near, till I or the sun come forth."

"Well bethought," answered the woodman. "'Tis strange how faithful these heathens sometimes are. Bring him in hither, and let him stable his horse and yours in the shed behind the cottage. He will find the way there, round to the left."

CHAPTER VIII.

Let us now return within the abbey walls for a while, and see what was passing there. The departure of the guests had left behind, at least with some of the fair inmates, that sensation of vacant dulness, which usually succeeds a period of unusual gaiety, especially with those whose ordinary course of life is tranquil if not tedious.

Iola felt that the convent would seem much more cheerless than before; and, as she stood with her cousin Constance in the little private parlour of her aunt, conversing for a few minutes, before they retired to rest, upon the events of the day, her light heart could not help pouring forth its sensations, innocent and natural as they were, to her somewhat graver and more thoughtful cousin.

"Good lack, dear Constance," she said, "I wish they would not show us such bright scenes and give us such gay moments, if they are both to be snatched away again the next minute. How heavy will the next week be, till we have forgotten all these gay feathers, and silks, and satins, and gold embroidery, and gentle speeches, and pleasant wit."

"Nay, I hope, Iola, that you did not have too many gentle speeches," replied her cousin, with a quiet smile; "for I saw somebody's head bent low, and caught the sound of words whispered rather than spoken, and perceived a little pink ear turned up to catch them all."

"Oh, my man was the most charming ever seen," answered Iola; "just fitted for my companion in a long ride through the forest, as thoughtless, as careless, as merry as myself; who will forget me as soon as I shall forget him, and no harm done to either. What was your man like, Constance? He seemed as gruff as a large church bell, and as stern as the statue of Moses breaking the tables."

"He was well enough for a man," answered Constance. "He might have been younger, and he might have been gentler in words; for his hair was grizzled grey, and he abused everybody roundly, from the king on his throne to the horseboy who saddled his beast. He was a gentleman notwithstanding, and courteous to me; and I have a strong fancy, dear Iola, that his heart is not as hard as his words, for I have read in some old book that hard sayings often go with soft doings."

"Ha, ha, say you so, Constance dear?" replied Iola; "then methinks you have been prying a little closely into the bosom of this Sir William Arden. Well, you are free, and can love where you list. I am like a poor popinjay tied to a stake, where every boy archer may bend his bow at me, and I do nothing but sit still and endure. I often wonder what this Lord Fulmer is like, my husband that is to be, God wot. I hope he is not a sour man with a black beard, and that he does not squint, and has not a high shoulder like the king, and has both his eyes of one colour; for I hate a wall-eyed horse, and it would be worse in a husband--unless one of them was blind, which would indeed be a comfort, as one could be sure of getting on the blind side of him."

"How your little tongue runs," said her cousin. "It is like a lapdog fresh let out into the fields, galloping hither and thither for pure idleness."

"Well, I will be merry whatever happens," answered Iola gaily. "'Tis the best way of meeting fate, Constance. You may be as grave and demure as a cat before the fire, or as sad and solemn as the ivy on an old tower. I will be as light as the lark upon the wing, and as cheerful as a bough of Christmas holly, garlanding a boar's head on a high festival; and she sang with a clear sweet voice, every note of which was full of gladness, some scraps of an old ballad very common in

those days.

"Nay, ivy, nay,
It shall not be, I wis;
Let holly have the mastery,
As the custom is.
"Holly stands in the hall
Fair to behold;
Ivy stands without the door
Shivering with cold.
Nay, ivy, nay, &c.
"Holly and his merry men
They dance and play;
Ivy and her maidens
Weep a well-a-day.
Nay, ivy, nay, &c.

"Holly hath berries
As red as any rose;
The forester and hunter
Keep them for the does.
Nay, ivy, nay, &c.

"Ivy hath berries
As black as any sloe;
There comes the owl,
With his long whoop of woe.
Nay, ivy, nay, &c."

In the meanwhile, the abbess herself had not been without occupation, for although the night was waning fast, the usual hour of rest long past, and the nuns in general retired to their cells, yet before she went to her own snug little room, the worthy lady saw, one after the other, several of the officers of the abbey in the great parlour. In dealing with these various personages, the worthy lady, notwithstanding her little knowledge of the world, showed a good deal of skill and diplomatic shrewdness. Her situation indeed was somewhat delicate; for she had to prepare against events, which she could not clearly explain to those with whom she spoke, and to give orders which would naturally excite surprise, without such explanation. She had prepared her story however beforehand; and she proceeded in a different manner with each of the different officers, as her knowledge of their several characters pointed out to her the most judicious course. To the porter of the great hall, a stout old man, who had been a soldier and had seen service, she said boldly, and at once; "Leave the lodging in charge of your boy, Giles, and go down directly through the hamlet, to all the tenants and socmen within a mile. Tell them there is danger abroad, and that they must be ready, with their arms, to come up the instant they hear the great bell ring. Bid them send out some lads to the vassals who live farther off, with the same news. Then come back hither, for we shall want you."

The man departed without a word, his answer being merely a low inclination of the head. The bailiff, who by right should have presented himself before the porter, but who had been impeded by the appropriation of sundry good things left from the supper table, appeared amongst the last. To him the abbess put on a very different countenance.

"Well, master bailiff," she said, with a light and cheerful smile, "have you heard anything of the bands at Coleshill?"

"Sad work, lady, sad work," replied the bailiff, casting his eyes up to heaven. "Why I understand that, last night, some of them stole Joseph Saxton's best cow, and cut it up before his face, hardly taking the hide off."

"That shows they were very hungry," said the abbess, laughing.

"Ay, lady," rejoined the bailiff, "these are not jesting matters, I can tell you. Why, I should not wonder if they drove some of the abbey lands before long; and we have not cattle to spare that I know of. There is no knowing what such hell-kites may do."

"That's very true," answered the abbess; "and so, my son, I think it will be better for you to sleep in the lodge for two or three nights; for we might want you on an occasion."

"Oh, there is no fear of their coming as far as this," answered the bailiff, who had no fondness for putting his head into any dangerous position.

"Nevertheless, I desire you to remain," answered the abbess; "'tis well to have somebody to take counsel with in time of need."

"Why, there is the friar, lady mother," replied the bailiff, still reluctant, "the friar, whom these young lords who were here left behind in the stranger's lodging. He would give you counsel and assistance."

"Ay, ghostly counsel and spiritual assistance," replied the abbess; "but that is not what I want

just now, good friend; so you will stop as I said, and remember that I shall expect a bolder face this time, if anything should happen, than when the rovers were here before. Men fancied you were afraid.--However, send the friar to me now, if he be well enough to come. I will see what counsel I can get from him."

"Well enough!" cried the bailiff. "He is well enough, I warrant--nothing the matter with him. Why, he was walking up and down in the great court before the chapel, with his hood thrown back, and his bald crown glistening in the moonlight, like a coot in a water meadow."

Part of this speech was spoken aloud, part of it muttered to himself as he was quitting the room in a very sullen mood. He did not dare to disobey the orders he had received, for the good abbess was not one to suffer her commands to be slighted; and yet women never, or very rarely, gain the same respect with inferiors that men obtain; and the bailiff ventured to grumble with her, though he would have bowed down and obeyed in silence, had his orders come from one of the sterner sex.

However that might be, hardly three minutes elapsed before the friar entered the parlour, and carefully closed the door behind him. His conference with the abbess was long, continuing nearly an hour, and the last words spoken were, "Remember rightly, reverend father, the moment the bell sounds, betake yourself to the chapel, and stand near the high altar. You can see your way; for there is always a lamp burning in the chapel of St. Clare. Lock the great door after you; and I will come to you from our own gallery."

The bishop bowed his head and departed; and the abbess, weary with the fatigue and excitement of the day, gladly sought repose. All the convent was quiet around, and the nuns long gone to rest. Even the lady's two nieces had some time before closed their eyes in the sweet and happy slumber of youth.

Sleep soon visited the pillow of the abbess also; for she never remembered having sat up so late, except once, when King Edward, the libidinous predecessor of the reigning monarch, had visited the abbey during one of his progresses.

Still and deep was her rest; she knew nothing of the passing hours; she heard not the clock strike, though the tower on which it stood was exactly opposite to her cell. She heard not even the baby of St. Clare, when, a little before two o'clock, it was rung sharply and repeatedly. A few minutes after, however, there was a knock at the room door; but, no answer being given, a lay sister entered with a lamp in her hand, and roused her superior somewhat suddenly.

"Pardon, lady mother, pardon," she said; "but I am forced to wake you, for here is Dick the under forester come up to tell you, from Boyd, the head woodman, that enemies are coming, and that you had better take counsel upon it immediately. There is no time to be lost, he says, for they are already past the Redbridge turn, not a mile and a half off, and, alack and a well-a-day, we are all unprepared!"

"Not so little prepared as you think, sister Grace," replied the abbess, rising at once, and hurrying on her gown. "You run to the porter, and tell him to toll the great bell with all his might, opening the gate to the men of the hamlet and the tenants, but keeping fast ward against the rovers. Then away with you, as soon as you have delivered that message, up to the belfry tower. The moon must be still up--"

"She's down, she's down," cried the nun, in great alarm.

"Then light the beacon," cried the abbess. "That will give light enough to see when they come near. As soon as you perceive men marching in a band, like regular soldiers, ring the little bell to give the porter notice; and, after watching what they do for a minute or two, come and tell me. Be steady; be careful; and do not let fright scare away your wits."

The nun hurried to obey; and in a minute after, the loud and sonorous alarm bell of the abbey was heard, shaking the air far and wide over the forest, with its dull and sullen boom.

Having delivered her message to the porter, the poor nun, with her lamp in her hand, hurried up the numberless steps of the beacon tower, trembling in every limb, notwithstanding the courageous tone of her superior. Upon the thick stone roof at the top she found an immense pile of faggots, ready laid, and mingled with pitch, and, lying at some distance, a heap of fresh wood, to be cast on as occasion required, with a large jar of oil and an iron ladle, to increase the flame as it rose up.

Fortunately, the night was as calm as sleep, and not a breath of wind crossed the heavens; otherwise the lamp would assuredly have been blown out in the poor sister's trepidation and confusion. As it was, she had nearly let it fall into the midst of the pile, in the first attempt to light the beacon; but the next moment the thin dry twigs, which were placed beneath, caught the fire, crackled, nearly went out again; and then, with a quantity of dull smoke, the fire rushed up, licking the thicker wood above. The pitch ignited; the whole pile caught; and a tall column of flame, some sixteen or seventeen feet high, rose into the air, and cast a red and ominous light over the whole country round. The buildings on the little green became distinctly visible in a moment, the houses of the priests and choristers, the cottages of the peasants and the labourers; and running her eye along the valley beyond, in the direction of Coleshill, the lay sister saw,

coming through the low ground, just under the verge of the wood, a dark mass, apparently of men on horseback, at the distance of less than half a mile. At the same time, however, she beheld a sight which gave her better hope. Not only from the cottages on the green were men issuing forth and hurrying to the great portal of the abbey, but, along the three roads which she could espy, she beheld eighteen or twenty figures, some on foot, but some on horseback, running or galloping at full speed. They were all separate and detached from each other; but the flame of the beacon flashed upon steel caps and corslets, and spear heads; and she easily judged that the tenants and vassals, warned beforehand and alarmed by the sound of the great bell, were hastening to do the military service they owed.

When she looked again in the direction of the mass she had seen on the Coleshill road, she perceived that the head of the troop had halted; and she judged rightly that, surprised by the sudden lighting of the beacon and tolling of the bell, the leaders were pausing to consult.

For a moment, a hope crossed her mind that they would be frightened at the state of preparation which they found, and desist; but the next instant the troop began to move on again; and remembering the orders which she had received, she rang a lesser bell which hung near the beacon, still keeping her eyes fixed upon the party advancing up the valley.

Steadily and cautiously they came on; were lost for a minute or two behind the houses the hamlet; then reappeared upon the little green; and, dividing into three troops, the one remained planted before the great gates, while the others, gliding between the cottages and the walls of the abbey, filed off to the right and left, with the evident purpose of surrounding the whole building, and guarding every outlet. The poor nun, however, fancied, on the contrary, that they were gone to seek some favourable point of attack; and murmuring to herself, "The Blessed Virgin have mercy upon us, and all the saints protect us! There will never be men enough to protect all the walls," she hurried down to make her report to her superior; but the abbess was not to be found.

CHAPTER IX.

In a small cell, of size and proportion exactly similar to those of the nuns, though somewhat differently arranged and decorated, lay a very beautiful girl sound asleep. A light coif of network confined, or strove to confine, the rich glossy curling hair; but still a long ringlet struggled away from those bonds, and fell over a neck as white as ivory. The eyes, the bright, beautiful, speaking eyes, the soul's interpreters, were closed, with the long sweeping black eyelashes resting on the cheek; but still the beautiful and delicate line of the features, in their quiet loveliness, offered as fair a picture as ever met mortal sight. Stretched beyond the bedclothes too, was the delicate hand and rounded arm, with the loop, which fastened the night-dress round the wrist, undone, and the white sleeve pushed back nearly to the elbow. One might have sworn it was the hand and arm of some marvellous statue, had it not been for the rosy tips of the delicate fingers, and one small blue vein through which the flood of young and happy life was rushing.

The dull and heavy tolling of the great bell woke her not, though the sound evidently reached her ear, and had some indistinct effect upon her mind, for the full rosy lips of her small mouth parted, showing the pearly teeth beneath; and some murmuring sounds were heard, of which the only word distinguishable was "matins."

The next instant, however, her slumber was broken, for the abbess stood beside her with a lamp in her hand, and shook her shoulder, saying "Iola, Iola!"

The fair girl started up and gazed in her aunt's face bewildered; and then she heard the sullen tolling of the great bell, and various other sounds which told her that some unusual events were taking place.

"Quick, Iola," cried the abbess, "rise and dress yourself. I have a task for you to perform in haste, my child.--There, no care for your toilette. Leave your hair in the net. Lose not a moment; for this is a matter of life and death."

"What it is, my dear lady mother?" asked Iola, trying to gather her senses together.

"It is to convey one, whom his persecutors have followed even hither, to a place of safety," replied the abbess. "Listen, my child, and reply not. The friar you saw this night is a high and holy man, unjustly persecuted by an usurping king. That he has taken refuge here has been discovered. The abbey is menaced by a power we cannot resist. It would be searched, the sanctuary violated, and the good man torn from the altar, to imprisonment, or perhaps death, had I not the means of conveying him beyond the walls--ay, and beyond the reach of danger. You must

be his guide, Iola, for I must not reveal the secret to any of the sisters; and if Constance is to take the veil, as has been proposed, she must not know it either."

"Constance will not take the veil, dear aunt," replied Iola quietly; "but I am quite ready to do whatever you will, and to help to the utmost of my power. But cannot the good man find the way himself if he be told, for I am as ignorant of it as he is?"

"He could find his way through the passage," replied the abbess, "easily enough, but not through the wood when he issues forth."

"Oh, I can guide him there, as well as Boyd's great hound Ban," answered the gay girl, "but where am I to take him, dear aunt?"

"First to the cell of St. Magdalen," answered the elder lady, "and thence by the wood walks to Boyd's cottage. If you push the door that closes the end of the passage strongly, you will find that it opens one of the panels at the back of the shrine. Mind you leave it ajar, however, till you come back; for, once closed, you will not be able to open it from that side. Then keep down the wood-road to the east, and most likely you will meet Boyd; for he will be watching. If not, go straight on to his house, and then return at once. I will let you into the chapel as soon as the men are gone.-- Now, child, are you ready?"

"One moment, dear aunt, one moment," answered Iola. "Where is my hood?--I cannot clasp this gorget."

"Let me try," cried the abbess; but her trembling hands would not perform the work; and at last Iola succeeded herself.

"There is your hood, child," cried her aunt. "Now come--come quick. We shall have them at the gates before you are gone."

Hurrying along as fast as possible, she led her fair niece through several of the long vaulted passages of the abbey, and thence, by her own private entrance, into the chapel. The door leading to the nuns' gallery was locked; but one of the keys at the abbess's girdle soon opened it; and, advancing to the grated screen, she looked down into the choir before she ventured to descend.

All was still and quiet. The glimmering light from the shrine of St. Clare afforded a view up and down the church, and no human form was to be seen. Neither was any sound heard, except the swinging of the great bell, as it continued to pour forth its loud vibrating call for assistance over the whole country round. Through the richly ornamented windows, however, came flitting gleams of many-coloured light, as lanterns and torches were carried across the court, between the chapel and the portal; and once or twice the sounds of voices were heard; but the abbess distinguished the tongue of the porter, speaking with the peasants as they hurried in.

"I cannot see him," whispered the abbess, after looking down for a moment or two into the body of the church. "There can be surely no mistake."

Iola took a step forward, and put her face to the grate. "He may be behind that pillar," she said. "Yes, don't you see, dear aunt? The light from the shrine casts the shadow of something like a man upon the pavement?"

"Let us go down, let us go down," answered the abbess. "If he be not there, nobody else is, so we need not be afraid;" and, opening the door, leading to the lower part of the chapel, she descended the spiral staircase which was concealed in one of the large columns that supported both the roof of the building, and the gallery in which they had been standing. The light foot of Iola made little sound upon the pavement of the nave, as they proceeded towards the high altar; but the less elastic tread of the abbess in her flat-soled sandal soon called from behind the pillar a figure in a friar's gown and cowl.

In a calm and not ungraceful attitude, the old man waited for their coming; and when the light of the abbess's lamp shone upon his face, it displayed no signs of fear or agitation. "I have locked the door, sister," he said, "as you desired me; but I almost feared I had made some mistake, when I found you did not come; for I have been here from the moment the bell began to toll."

"I had to wake my niece to guide you, reverend and dear lord," replied the abbess; "but now let us hasten; for no time is to be lost. I am terrified for your safety. To stay were ruin, and there is even peril in flight."

"There was as much in the flight from Brecknock," answered the bishop calmly; "but I am ready, my sister; lead the way.--And so you are to be my guide, my fair child?" he continued, as they followed the abbess. "Are you not frightened?"

"No, father," answered Iola quietly. "God will, I trust, protect me; and I think there is more danger here than in the forest."

By this time they had passed round the great altar, and through a door in the screen, which separated the choir from the lady chapel behind. Immediately facing them was a large sort of flat

pilaster, covered half way up, as was all that part of the building, with old oak panelling, in many places ornamented with rude sculptures. By a very simple contrivance the panelling, with which the pilaster was covered, was made to revolve upon hinges, concealed in the angle, where it joined the wall. The abbess found some difficulty indeed, amongst all the heads of dragons, and monkeys, and cherubim, and devils, with which the woodwork was richly but grotesquely ornamented, to discover that which served as a sort of handle. When she had found it, however, the whole of the lower part of the panelling moved back easily enough, and a door was seen behind on the face of the pilaster. It was low and narrow, suffering only one person to pass at once, and that with a bowed head. It was locked also at the moment; but the abbess took the key from her girdle, and the bishop opened the door easily with his own hands.

"And now, father, God speed you on your way," cried the abbess, "for I must go no further. There is the beacon bell ringing, which shows that these knaves are in sight. Here, take the lamp with you, Iola. The passage is long and dark."

"Heaven's benison be upon you, sister," said the bishop, "and may God protect you from all evil consequences of your Christian charity towards me. Well have you repaid the little kindness I once showed your brother in times long past, and leave me a debt of gratitude besides."

"Nay, nay, I beseech you be quick, dear lord," said the lady; and, passing through the doorway, the prelate and his fair guide found themselves in a small vaulted chamber, with the end of a long dark passage open before them. As soon as they had entered, the door was closed, and they could hear the screen of panelling which covered it roll back into its place. Iola led the way on through the passage before them; and the bishop, after gazing round the vaulted room for an instant, followed with a slower step and in silence. At the end of some fifteen or sixteen yards, a small descending flight of stairs presented itself; and Iola ran lightly down, holding the lamp at the bottom, till the bishop descended. He gazed on her beautiful face and figure with a fatherly smile, as, lifting the lamp above her head, she stood with the light falling on her fair forehead and graceful limbs.

"And so thy name is Iola, my fair daughter," said the bishop, when he reached her side; "and thou art the niece of our good sister the abbess. Which of her brothers is thy father?"

"She has but one still living, my lord," replied Iola. "My father is no more."

"Then you must be the daughter of Richard St. Leger Lord Calverly," said the bishop; "I knew him well."

"The same, my lord," replied Iola; "and methinks I have heard that your lordship once saved his life. If I understood my aunt's words rightly but now, and you are the Lord Bishop of Ely, I have heard my uncle, the present Lord Calverly, say that the bishop of Ely had saved his brother's life, what time the red rose was broken from the stalk."

"I was not the Bishop of Ely then, daughter, but merely Robert Morton," replied the prelate; "one of King Edward's privy council, but one who took no share in policy or party strife, and only strove to mitigate the bloody rigour of a civil war, by touching men's hearts with mercy, when the moment served. The time will come, perhaps, when men will marvel that I, who faithfully once served King Henry, should serve, when he was dead, as faithfully his great opponent; but I had pondered well the course before me, and feel my conscience clear. I asked myself how I might do most good to men of every faction and to my country; and I can boldly say, my child, that I have saved more subjects for the crown of England--good honest men too, misled by party zeal--by interposing to stay the lifted hand of vengeance, than were slain by any of the mighty nobles who took part with either side in these horrible wars. I never changed my faction, daughter, for I never had one. And now the hatred of the reigning king has pursued me, because he knew right well that I would raise my voice against the wrong he did his brother's children."

To a mind well versed in the world's affairs, the fact of the good bishop entering into such apologetical explanations, at such a moment, and with such a companion, would have been sufficient to show that he did not feel quite sure his conduct was without reproach; for we always put our armour where we know we are weak. But Iola was too young and simple to suspect or to doubt; and she only looked upon him as the good and kind prelate, who, in times of intestine strife, had interposed to save her father's life. Joyful then at the task imposed upon her, she walked onward by his side; and the conversation, thus begun, proceeded in a somewhat lighter tone. The bishop asked her of her state, her future, her hopes, her wishes, and seemed to forget his own perilous situation in speaking and thinking of her. He was indeed a very fearless man, not with the rash, bold, enterprising courage of some, but with that calm tranquil abiding of results which can never exist without high hope and confidence in God. He had his faults, as all men have; but still he had many virtues, and, in an age when few were religious, felt the truths of Christianity, and knew religion to consist in something more than forms.

Once their conversation was interrupted by the sound of horses' feet, beating the ground immediately above them; and Iola started and looked up with an expression of fear.

"They will not break through, my child," said the prelate, with a smile, lifting his eyes to the solid masonry above. "That arch is thick and strong, depend upon it; but I suppose, by those sounds, we are already beyond the abbey walls?"

"I do not know," answered Iola, "for I have never been here before; but the lady abbess tells me, this passage will lead us out into St. Magdalen's cell, and thence I know the way well.

"How far is it?" asked the bishop.

"Oh, a long way," answered the fair girl, by his side, "nearly a mile."

She thought only of its distance by the ordinary path, which, as I have before said, took various turnings to avoid the ravine and the rivulet; but the passage that they were now pursuing, sunk by the steps which they had descended to a level below all such obstacles, abridged the distance by nearly one half. It is true that the bottom of the bed of the rivulet itself was somewhat lower than the top of the arched vault; but nevertheless the latter had been carried straight on and cemented, so as to be impervious to the water, while broken rocks and stones had been piled up above, concealing the masonry, and forming a little cascade in the stream. Thus, when they reached that spot, the rush and murmur of the waterfall was heard, and, turning her bright eyes to the prelate's face, Iola said:

"We must be passing under the river, I think."

"It is not unlikely, daughter," replied the bishop. "In other lands, which you most likely have never seen, I have beheld vast structures for carrying rivers from hill to hill, raised on high arches, underneath which the busy world of men passed to and fro, while the stream flowed overhead."

"I have heard of such things," replied Iola; "and oh, how I long to see those lands and to dream of all that mighty men have done in former days. How strange it is that such arts have not come down to us. Here we see nothing between the huge castle with its frowning towers, or the lordly church with its spires and pinnacles, and the wood cottage of the peasant, or the humble abode of the franklin."

"The bishop smiled at her.

"You have been but little in cities, my child," he said; "but your observation is just. It is strange that the arts of other ages have not descended to us; for one would suppose, if anything on earth could be permanent, it would be that knowledge and that skill which tend to the elevation, the protection, and the comfort of the human race, especially when the wonders they have performed, and the monuments they have raised, are still before our eyes, although in ruins. But birth, life, death, and corruption are the fate of nations, as well as of men, of systems as well as of creatures, of the offsprings of the human mind as well as of the inheritors of the corporeal frame. As in the successions of the human race, however, we see the numbers of the population still increasing, notwithstanding periods of devastation and destruction; as those who are born and die give birth to more than their own decease subtracts, so probably the loss of the arts, the sciences, even the energies which one nation or one epocha has produced, is succeeded by the production of arts, sciences, energies, more numerous, if not more vigorous, in the nation or epocha which follows. But these have again their childhood, their maturity, their decay; and society with us, my daughter, is perhaps still in its infancy--I believe indeed it is."

Iola gazed at him surprised, and somewhat bewildered, for he had led her mind beyond its depth; and the good prelate read the expression aright, and replied to it--

"You are surprised at such reasonings," he said, "because you are not accustomed to them; but I believe those people above would be more surprised, if they knew that, at the very moment they are seeking me to destroy me, I am walking along calmly beneath their feet, talking philosophy with a fair young creature like yourself."

He spoke with a smile, and then cast down his eyes in a musing mood, but, still that high intelligent smile remained upon his lips, as if he found some amusement in watching the working of his own mind, amidst the strange circumstances with which fate surrounded him.

The moment after, the passage began to ascend, not exactly by steps, though the broad flat stones with which it was paved rose a little, one above the edge of the other, rendering the path somewhat rough and difficult. This lasted not long, however, and the bishop, raising his eyes, observed--

"There seems a door before us. Have you got the key?"

"It will open, on being pressed hard," replied Iola; "but I cannot think we have reached the cell yet. The way has seemed so short."

So it proved however; and approaching the door, she attempted to push it open, but it resisted her efforts. The bishop however aided; the door moved back; and, holding it open, he desired Iola to pass through into the cell which was now before them. It was a low vaulted Gothic chamber, opening on the side of the hill, by an arch with an iron grate, and having on one side a shrine and little altar. The bishop followed his fair guide into this small chapel; but Iola herself had forgotten her aunt's injunction regarding the door. The bishop let it slip from his hand, as he passed through; and it closed at once, leaving no trace of its existence in the old woodwork of the walls. Had Iola recollected the difficulty she might have in returning, she would certainly have been

alarmed; and the sudden close of the door would probably have brought her aunt's warning to her remembrance, had not a sight been presented to her, immediately on entering the chapel, which at once occupied all her attention. Through the low archway which I mentioned appeared the walls and towers of the abbey, lighted up by the flame of the beacon, and by a blaze, red and smoky as if proceeding from torches both in the great court-yard between the chapel and the portal, and on the little green before the great gates. The green itself, was partly hidden by the priest's house and the cottages; but under the walls, to the north and west of the building, were seen several groups of men on horseback; and the sounds of loud voices speaking, and of men calling to one another, were borne to the ear distinctly, for the great bell by this time had ceased to toll, and there was no other sound to interrupt the murmur of the voices from the abbey.

By a natural impulse, Iola clasped her fair hands together, and uttered a low exclamation of fear; but the bishop gazed calmly forth for a moment, and then said--

"We had better hasten on our way, my child. Extinguish the lamp--Here, set it down here. We must not show ourselves more than we can help, lest any eye should be turned this way."

"We must pass through the grate," said Iola, recalled to herself by the prelate's words; "for there is no other way out; but if we run quickly round to the back of the building, no one will see us."

"Let us go one at a time," said the bishop. "It is well to take every precaution, though I do not think the light is sufficiently strong to show us to those on the opposite side of the valley."

"Turn sharp to the right," said Iola, opening the iron grate, for the prelate to pass through; and, as soon as he was gone, she followed and rejoined him at the back of the building. "Now this way, this way," she continued hastily, anxious to lead him away from dangers, the imminence of which seemed now for the first time to strike her; and guiding him along one of the forest paths, she hurried on with a quick step, saying with one of her gay short laughs:

"They would not easily find us here. I could lead them through such a labyrinth that they would not know which way to turn to get out."

"You seem to know the forest well, daughter," said the bishop, in a good-humoured tone. "I fear me you have been fonder of rambling in the woods than conning dry lessons in the abbey of St. Clare."

He spoke in a gay and kindly manner, which conveyed no reproof; but Iola blushed a little while she answered--

"Surely! My dear aunt has not been very severe with me; and every day, when the sun was bright and the skies blue, I have gone out--sometimes with my girl Alice, sometimes alone, sometimes on foot, sometimes on a mule, sometimes to bear a message to woodman or tenant, sometimes for pure idleness. And yet not pure idleness either, my lord; for I do not know why, but amidst these old trees and upon the top of the hill, where I catch a view of all the woods and fields and rivers below, bright and beautiful and soft, it seems as if my heart rose up to Heaven more lightly than under the vault of the chapel and amongst its tall columns of stone. Then sometimes I sit beneath a spreading oak, and look at its giant limbs, and compare them with the wild anemone that grows at its foot, and lose myself in musing over the everlasting variety that I see. But hark! those voices are very loud. They cannot be coming nearer, surely."

"You are brave at a distance, daughter," said the bishop calmly; "but be not alarmed. They are only raised a little higher."

"Oh, no," she answered; "I am no coward; and you would see, if they did come near, I should not lose my wits."

Almost as she spoke, a voice exclaimed, in a one not very loud--

"Who goes there?" and Iola started, and laid her hand on the bishop's arm, as if to keep him back.

"It is Boyd the woodman's voice, I think," she said in a whisper. "Slip in behind that great tree, and I will go on and see."

"Who goes there?" repeated the voice again raised higher; and Iola, taking a step or two forward, demanded--

"Who is it that asks?"

"Is that you, Lady Iola?" said the voice, as soon as the woman's tone was distinguished.

"Yes," answered Iola. "Is it Boyd who speaks?"

"The same," answered the woodman. "Have you brought him? Where is he? Is he safe?"

"He is here, he is here," answered Iola. "Father, this is Boyd the woodman, in whom you can fully trust."

"Ah, lady, lady," murmured the woodman, coming forward, "where is the man in whom you can fully trust?"

Advancing towards him, Iola and the prelate found that he had been standing in a small open space at the angle of two roads, both of which led more or less directly to St. Magdalen's cell. The light on the spot was faint, but the woodman's tall and powerful figure was not to be mistaken; and, having resigned her charge to him, Iola turned to the prelate, saying,

"Now I will go back as fast as possible, father."

"Stay a moment, my child," replied the bishop. "May the Almighty bless and protect you, and guide you in safety unto all peace;" and he laid his hand tenderly on her head.

"Do not go in rashly, lady," said the woodman, "but stay in the little vaulted chamber at the end of the passage, till you hear matins sung in the chapel. The place will not be free of these rovers till then. If you hear not matins or prime, you may suppose that they still keep possession. In that case, you had better come away to me, dear lady--you know that I will take care of you."

"Oh, I know that well, Boyd," replied Iola. "Good night, good night--see to this reverend father's safety before all things."

"Ay, that will take two good hours at least," said the woodman, "or I would go back with you myself, dear lady; but I think you are safe enough alone."

"I have no fear," answered Iola; and she tripped lightly away, retreading the path back towards the cell.

That path led along the rising ground just at the verge of the forest, where the trees were thin and the undergrowth scanty, so that the sounds from the abbey continued to reach the fair girl's ears as she pursued it. She thought she heard the sound of horses' feet somewhat nearer, also, as if coming from the road that led up through the forest. At the same time it seemed to her that a redder glare, and a broader light spread over the sky, reflected thence upon the little footway which she trod. "They must have piled more wood upon the beacon," she thought; but yet she felt some degree of alarm.

Hurrying on, she at length reached the spot where the path passed at the back of the cell, and turning quickly round the little building, the abbey, with the slight rise on which it stood, was once more before her sight. What was her terror and surprise at that moment, when she saw the beacon light extinguished, but a still wider and more fearful glare rising up from the little green, the houses surrounding which were all in flames. Several of the wooden cottages were already down, the still burning beams and rafters lying in piles upon the ground, like huge bonfires casting up a cloud of sparks into the flickering fiery air above; and across the glare might now be seen a number of dark figures moving about upon the green, some on horseback, some on foot. From the house of the priests and choristers was rising up a tall spire of flame, sometimes clear and bright, sometimes obscured by a cloud of smoke and sparks; but the abbey itself was still unfired, and stood out dark and solemn in the midst of the blaze, with the light gleaming here and there upon the walls and pinnacles.

The first sight startled and horrified her; but she did not pause to gaze at it, till she had entered the chapel and closed the iron gate, as if for protection; but then she stood and watched the flames for a moment or two, and at length asked herself what she should do.

"I will go back," she answered, after a moment's thought. "I will not be absent from my poor aunt's side at such a moment;" and she turned to seek the door into the passage. Then, for the first time, she perceived that it was closed, and recollected the warning of the abbess to leave it ajar. She now felt really terrified; and that need of protection and help, that want of something to lean upon and to trust in, which most women experience in the hour of danger, made itself terribly felt.

"What will become of me? Where shall I go? What shall I do?" she murmured anxiously; and then, again and again, cast a timid glance at the burning buildings on the opposite side of the dell. "I will go to Boyd's house," she said at length. "I can find protection there."

But suddenly she remembered what he had said, in regard to the time he should be occupied in providing for the safety of the bishop; but her determination was at length expressed--"I shall be more safe there than here at all events. I will go;" and, without further hesitation, she crept back into the path again.

Iola now knew for the first time in life, perhaps, what it is to fear, and how the imagination is excited by apprehension. The sight of the burning buildings had shaken her nerves. She crept along as stealthily as if she feared that every tree was an enemy. She thought she heard sounds too, near at hand as she went on, and then tried to persuade herself that it was but the waving of the trees in the wind. Then she felt sure that somebody must be near; she quickened her pace to reach a path which turned suddenly to the right; but at the very entrance, when she reached it, there was standing a figure, the form of which she could not distinctly see; but it seemed tall and thin, and garmented all in white, according to the popular idea of a phantom. She recoiled in terror, and would have fled back again; but there directly in her way was another figure; and a

voice exclaimed, as she was turning once more to fly--

"Lady, lady, whither away? Stay yet a moment--stay, it is a friend."

She thought she knew the tones; but, as the stranger approached, she receded, asking--

"Who is it? Who is it?"

"It is Lord Chartley," he said. "Stay, stay! You are running upon danger."

The last words were needless; for, before they were fully uttered, Iola had not only stopped but sprung forward to meet him.

CHAPTER X.

Human fate, or rather the fate of the whole human race, is but as a web of cloth fixed in the frame of circumstances, with an unseen hand continually throwing the shuttle. The threads may be infinite, and some far apart from others; some in the centre, some at the selvage, but all tied and bound together by filaments that run across and across, and never ceasing till the piece is finished. When will that be? Heaven only knows. Certainly not till the end of the world.

We must now, by the reader's permission, leave the thread of Iola, and take up that of the abbess where we last left it.

As soon as she had closed the door and pushed to the panelling which concealed it, the abbess reascended to the nun's gallery in the chapel, and thence proceeded into the great body of the building. She found, as may be supposed, the utmost confusion and alarm prevailing; for by this time the noise of the great bell, and of the various sounds that were rising up around the walls, had roused all the nuns from their pallets, and, with consternation in their countenances, they were hurrying hither and thither, seeking something, and not knowing very well what they sought. Although a good deal alarmed herself, and unable to foresee what might be the end of all that was taking place, the abbess, whose heart was naturally merry, could almost have laughed at the grotesque accidents which fear produced; but, having more mind and character than the whole convent put together, she at once proceeded to restore order.

"Go at once to the chapel," she said to every nun she saw; "gather all the sisterhood there, and see that none be omitted. I will join you soon."

This order had to be repeated frequently; for at every step she met some one, and several required it to be reiterated two or three times, before terror would suffer them to comprehend it.

At length, passing round the end of the chapel, the abbess entered the great court, and found to her joy and satisfaction a much greater body of men drawn up for her defence than she expected; for the woodman had not been idle during the morning, and many more of the peasantry had been warned to listen for the sound of the bell than the voice of the porter could summon. Four of the inferior foresters also had somehow found their way into the building, dressed in leathern coats and iron caps, and each carried on his shoulder a sort of weapon, which none within the walls had ever seen before. This was a sort of small cannon, fastened upon a rudely constructed stock, and fitted to carry a ball of the weight of two or three ounces. There was no lock, nor any contrivance even for applying fire to the touch-hole by one movement; but round the arm of the bearer was twined a coil of match, which one of the men was as at that moment lighting at the porter's lantern.^[1]

"What is that? What is that?" cried the abbess; "it looks like a little falconet."

"It is a hand-gun, lady," said the forester. "Some of our people brought them from Burgundy; and Boyd sent in these four. When it is time to use them, we hoist them over our shoulders; and, while the men behind take aim, we fire."

The abbess mused, for the invention was quite new to her; and, strangely clumsy as it was, it seemed to her a wonderful discovery in the art of war. She even grew very valiant on the strength of it, and called aloud for the bailiff, to consult with him upon the means of defence. The bailiff could not be found, however; and the porter informed her, with a grin, that he had gone to the buttery, thinking that there must be the principal point of attack.

"Bring him hither directly," said the abbess; "bring him by the ears, if he will not otherwise come. In the mean time how many men have we here?"

"Three and thirty, my lady," replied the old porter, while one or two ran away to bring the bailiff; "three and thirty, besides the gun-men. I think we can make good the place till morning; and then we shall have the whole country up to help us. But if you would take my advice, you would lock that bailiff up in a cell. He cools men's hearts with his cowardice. I wish he were half as brave as you, my lady."

"Well then you must command, porter," said the abbess. "Let some of the men take their bows and cross-bows up to the top of the portal, while others keep watch upon the walls all round, that they may not raise ladders without our knowing it. Let the four men with the hand-cannons draw up across the chapel door for the present. They can there very well fire upon the gates, if the enemy should break them down."

The porter was venturing to remonstrate, pointing out that the gun-men would be better on the walls, when the unfortunate bailiff was dragged into the abbess's presence, with a face so pale and eyes so haggard, that his very look convicted him. He smelt strongly of wine too, so that it was clear he had been seeking to gain courage from other sources than his own heart.

"Coward!" cried the abbess, as soon as she saw him, "are you not ashamed to see women set you an example in defending the rights of the church, while you are slinking away from your duty? Take him hence," she continued, as he attempted to stutter forth some vain excuses. "Take him hence at once, and lock him up in the first cell on the left hand. Away with him, for fear his cowardice should become infectious!--Hark! They are upon the green. There is a trumpet. I will go up to the window above the gates, and speak with them. Let not the men shoot till I give the word."

Two or three of the people round besought her to forbear, especially the priest and the principal chorister; but the abbess not only persisted in her resolution, but besought them to accompany her, in a tone which did not admit of refusal; and, walking on with an air of more dignity than one would have supposed her little plump figure could display, she ascended the stairs in the left hand tower of the portal, and presented herself at the grated window just above the gates. The part of the green nearest to the abbey was now covered with armed men, principally on horseback, though some had dismounted and were approaching the gates. A group of six or seven, who were apparently leaders, were seen at a little distance on the left, and one of them was at that moment raising his voice to an armed peasant who had appeared upon the walls. The abbess, however, cut short this oratory in the commencement, by demanding, in that shrill high key which makes itself heard so much farther than even a louder voice at a lower note: "What want ye here, my masters? How come you here in arms before the abbey of St. Clare? Bid those men keep back from the gates! Else I will instantly bid the soldiers shoot and the cannon fire."

"Cannons!" cried one of the leaders with a laugh. "By my fay, the place seems a fortress instead of an abbey."

"You will find it so to your cost, uncivil churl, if you attempt to plunder here," cried the abbess. "Bid them keep back, I say, or bide the consequence!"

"Halt, there, keep back!" cried the leader who had before spoken; and pushing his own horse under the window where the abbess stood, he looked up, saying, "They were but going to ring the bell. Are you the lady abbess?"

"What need of six men to ring the bell?" exclaimed the abbess. "If you need so many hands to do small work, you will require more than you have brought here to get the gates open. I am the lady abbess, and I bid you go hence and leave me and my children at peace, upon pain of anathema, and the greater and the lesser excommunication. I know not whether ye be the same who came to plunder us some time ago; but, if ye be, ye will find us better prepared now than we were then, though it cost you dear, even at that time."

"Listen, listen, good lady," said the horseman; "for, if you do not hear, you cannot understand, and a woman's tongue is sometimes worse than a cannon."

"You will find the thunder of the church worse still," cried the lady.

"Of that we are not afraid," answered the other; "for we come not to plunder, or commit any act of violence, unless we are driven to it."

"Pardieu, this is all chattering and nonsense," cried another man, who had ridden up from behind. "Break open the gates, Sir John. If you do not, I will; for they will convey the man away, and by Heaven, if they do, I will burn the place about their ears!"

"Peace, peace!" cried the other. "They cannot convey him away. Our men are all round the walls. Listen to me for a moment, lady. We have certain information that a man took refuge here last night, disguised as a friar. Him we must have forth; and if you will bring him out and give him up, we will ride away quietly and leave you. If not, we must find our way in and take him. We should be sorry to hurt any of your people, or to do any damage; but, when a place is forced, you know, soldiers are under no command, and the consequence be upon your own head. We must have him out."

"Do you not know that this is sanctuary," cried the abbess, "and, even if he had committed parricide or treason, any man would be safe within these walls."

"Ay, but he has not committed any offence which makes sanctuary available," replied the other. "This is a deserter from his right standard, and we will have him forth, sanctuary or no sanctuary."

"There is no such man within the walls of St. Clare," replied the abbess. "I only stand up for the privileges of the place, because they are its privileges; but at the same time, I tell you that there is no sanctuary man here, of any kind or description whatever."

"Hell and damnation!" exclaimed the more vehement of the leaders. "Will you pretend to tell me that a man did not come here this very evening, habited as a friar, who never went forth again with those who brought him? On upon the gates there. This is all jugglery!"

"Hold yet a moment, ere it comes to strife," exclaimed the abbess; and the other leader also exclaimed:

"Hold, hold there! What would you say, lady? for we cannot be dallied with."

"I say," replied the abbess, "that the damnation you evoke will some day fall upon your own heads, if you pursue this course. Moreover, I tell you, that there is no such man here, nor any man at all, but the tenants and officers of the abbey. A friar certainly did come here this evening, with a goodly company of guests. He did not depart with them; but he went away afterwards, and is no longer here--hear me out! To save bloodshed, I will give you the means of satisfying yourselves, protesting, at the same time, against the act you commit, and clearly reserving my right to punish you for it, at an after time, when you shall not plead my permission as an excuse."

"We will look to that," cried one of the others boldly. "Open your gates. We shall not want excuses for anything we do."

"Nay!" answered the abbess. "I open not my gates to all your lewd band. Any six may enter, if they will, and search every corner of the abbey, from one end to the other. You will then soon see, that I have means of defence if I choose to exert them. If you accept the terms, bid all the rest of the men retire to the other side of the green. If not, I will tell the cross-bow men and cannoniers to fire."

"We must have ten with us, otherwise we shall never get through the search," said the leader, who had first spoken.

"Well, ten be it then," said the abbess. "We shall only have more in our hands to hang, if those without attempt to play us any treachery."

"You are merry, lady," said the leader. "Is it so agreed?"

"Yes!" replied the abbess; "bid your men back, quite to the other side. Then let ten advance, and I will come down and order them to be admitted."

She waited till she had seen the retreat of the band, to the far part of the green; and then descending, she gave her orders with great clearness and rapidity, directing such arrangements to be made as would display her little force to the greatest advantage, and ordering her porter as the commander-in-chief, to send two or three stout men with each party of the searchers, keeping a wary eye at the same time upon the band without, to insure they did not approach nearer to the gates.

She then retired into the chapel, where she found the nuns all gathered round the great altar, like a swarm of bees. Having quieted and re-assured them, as well as she could, she betook herself to the window, which gave light to the gallery appropriated to the sisterhood, and, opening the lattice, looked out into the court. By this time, the ten men to whom she had promised admittance were entering, one by one, through the wicket; and she flattered herself that their faces, seen by the light of the torches, showed some surprise at the numbers collected for the defence of the place. The first part of the building, however, which they chose to search, was the chapel, and hurrying down, she met them at the great altar in the midst of her nuns. No incivility was committed; for the men without, with their loaded hand-guns, and some fifteen or sixteen others, with steel cross-bows in their hands, had imposed a salutary reverence upon the intruders. The chapel, however, was searched in every part; and when this was done, the soldiers gone, and the door once more locked, the abbess again resumed her station at the window, with a heart which, notwithstanding her bold exterior, beat somewhat anxiously for the departure of the band.

She saw the buildings on either side of the court examined thoroughly; and then, dividing into three parties, the searchers proceeded on their way, disappearing from her sight. She listened for their voices as they went, and could trace them part of the way round the great quadrangle; but then all was silent again, and she judged that they had gone to the most remote parts of the building--perhaps even to the gardens--to sweep it all the way up, in order to prevent the possibility of a fugitive escaping.

All was silent for a few minutes, except the low murmurs of the abbey-men speaking in the court below; but then came some sounds which startled and alarmed the abbess; for, after a crash, as of a door forced open, she could distinctly hear a shout of "Here he is, here he is! We've got him."

A loud murmuring of many tongues succeeded; and in a state of trembling anxiety, she waited for the result, till, to her great relief and even amusement, she beheld the whole party of ten reappear, dragging along her cowardly bailiff in the midst of them, while several of the retainers of the abbey followed with a look of malicious fun upon their faces.

"Upon my life! upon my soul! by all the blessed saints, I tell you true," cried the unhappy bailiff. "Here, Giles, porter, tell them who I am, man--He can tell you--he can tell you."

"Faith, you are mistaken there, if you call me porter," said the man he addressed. "I know nothing about you. You are mistaken in me, good sir. I am the bailiff of the abbey."

"There, there," said one of the leaders of the soldiery. "It is all in vain, my good lord, so come along--there, take him out."

The abbess could not refrain from laughing, although she felt a strong inclination to interfere, and claim the poor bailiff as the especial property of the convent. Before she could make up her mind, however, the man was past the gates; but still, while one party of the searchers remained in the court, another turned back and pursued the examination, till not a hole or corner of the abbey was left unexplored.

In the meanwhile, however, a great deal of loud cursing and swearing was heard from the green; words of command were given, orders shouted forth; and at length, the porter hurriedly closed the wicket, exclaiming--

"Up to the walls! Bend your cross-bows! What are they about now?--You gunners, stand here below!--You pass not, sir, you pass not, till we know what all this is," he continued, addressing the leader who had first spoken to the abbess, and who, with three companions, now hurried into the court from the more secluded part of the building.

"I know not what it is any more than you do, my good man," replied the other; "but if you let me out, I will soon see."

"They are coming forward towards the gates, sir!" exclaimed the porter. "Shoot at them if they come too close, my men!--You are a knight, sir, it seems; and we will keep you as a hostage for the safety of the abbey."

"Nay, I cannot be answerable for that unless you let me forth," replied the other; "but if you do, I pledge my knightly word, as a gentleman and a Christian, that all the troops shall be drawn off, and the abbey left unmolested."

He spoke eagerly and hastily, evidently under some alarm but the old porter was not satisfied, and he replied--

"Here, put it down and your name to it. Here are pen and ink, and the visitor's book in the lodge." The officer hurried in, and did as was required at once; for the four unpleasant-looking hand culverins were pointed at him and his companions, and a lighted match in each man's hand ready to discharge them. "There it is," he said, when he had written, "Now let me pass."

The porter looked over the writing. Whether he could read or not, I cannot tell; but when he had satisfied himself as far as he was able, he cautiously opened the wicket, and let the intruders pass out one by one.

The commander led the way, hurrying on with a quick step; and he certainly did not arrive as soon as he could have wished.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed; "what is the matter?"

"Mort Dieu!" cried the second in command, "we have been cheated, Sir John. This man is not the bishop after all. Here is one of our own people who knows him, and says he is really the bailiff."

"I am indeed," cried the miserable coward; "and if you would have let me, I would have told you all long ago."

"He Says, the friar was there not an hour ago," vociferated the second in command, "and that they must have got him out, either into these houses, or into the wood, as we were coming up the valley."

"Search the houses," said the commander; "and send a troop up the road to the wood."

"It is done, it is done," cried the other. "The men are furious; for they will lose all share of the reward. By Satan and all his imps," he added, "I believe they have set fire to the houses."

"This will come to a serious reckoning," said the commander gravely. "Try and stop the fire there. Call off the men;" and, as promptly as might be, he did all that was possible to remedy the evil that had been done. As every one who has had the command of rude men must know, however, there are times when they become perfectly ungovernable. Such was the case at present. They were an irregular and ruthless body who now surrounded the abbey; and without attending to the orders they received, to the remonstrances or even to the threats of their commander, they set fire to every building on the right hand side of the green. Nor would the others have escaped the same fate, nor the abbey itself have been left unassailed, had not the officer, as a last resource, commanded the trumpets to sound, and ordered all who could be gathered together to march up the road, for the purpose of searching the forest.

The stragglers followed, as soon as they found that the principal part of the troop had left them; and the whole force, except three or four, who remained to complete the pillage of the priest's house, marched slowly up, till a halt was sounded under the first trees of the wood.

There, however, the officer in command selected some twenty men from his band, and rode back to the abbey green. The rest of the men halted where they stood, inquiring of each other what could be the meaning of this proceeding.

He gave no explanation even when he returned; but the next morning, at daybreak, three bodies were found hanging by the neck from poles stuck into the thatch of one of the unconsumed cottages.

CHAPTER XI.

"Oh, I am very glad!" exclaimed Iola, in a tone so confiding, so joyful, that it made Chartley's heart thrill.

There is certainly something in trust and confidence that is wonderfully winning. Even with man-fierce, bloody, all-devouring man--it is hardly possible to resist sacred confidence. The birds, the beasts which trust us, and show their trust by cheerful familiarity, we spare and cherish. The robin hops upon the window sill, and we feed it with the crumbs from our table; and--to go from the least to the greatest--we are told, that if we too trust in God, He will feed us, as we feed the bird.

Yes, there is something very winning in confidence; and Lord Chartley, though he could not see the fair face of Iola distinctly, thought her more beautiful at that moment than when she had been sitting by his side at the abbey.

"Dear lady," he said, taking her hand and speaking in a low voice, "it rejoices me that you are glad; and right glad am I too, believe me, to find you, though I did not rightly expect it. I have seen our friend the woodman but now, and him whom you wot of. They are safely across the road; but I could not be satisfied, when I heard that you had gone back alone, without following you, to assure myself of your safety. Why did you--"

"But who is that--who is that up there?" demanded Iola, pointing with her left hand, in the direction of the spot where she had seen another figure standing, but not withdrawing her right from that of the young nobleman, and, on the contrary, creeping closer to him.

"Fear not," replied Chartley; "it is only my good slave. I stationed him there, to warn you there was danger on that path, while I crept through the trees, to see you safely to the cell. Why did you turn back? Are you afraid to go through the passage alone?"

"No, no," she answered; "but, alas, the door is closed, and cannot be opened from this side."

"Unfortunate indeed!" exclaimed Lord Chartley. "What is to be done now?--Where are you to pass the night?"

"Oh," replied Iola, in a frank cheerful tone, "I fear not now when you are with me. I will go at once to the good woodman's cottage, if you will but kindly take care of me till I reach it. I shall be quite safe there."

"It would be indeed a pleasant task," replied her young companion; "but it is impossible, either for you or me, dear lady, to reach the cottage without danger, to which you must not be exposed. There is already one troop of these men upon the road; and, if I judge rightly by the trumpet I heard just now, others will soon follow. It would seem that they have discovered our good friend's escape, and are pursuing him hither. Besides, the woodman will not be at his dwelling for several

hours. I saw him across the road, just before the head of the troop came up the hill; and then, after watching for a moment, and perceiving that they sent parties forward, as if to patrol, I came on hither, fearful for you."

"You are very kind," said Iola, in a low and sweet but sad tone. "What I am to do now, I know not. I must pass the night in the wood, I fancy, like the poor children that they tell of. Would that I had brought warmer garments; for in truth it is not warm; and, what between fear and cold, I am shaking already.--What will become of me, I wonder?"

"Nay, the cold shall be soon remedied," answered the young nobleman. "This furred surcoat could not serve a fairer purpose or a fairer maid, though in truth it might hold two such slight fairy forms as this.--Nay, I insist upon it," he continued, as he wrapped the warm garment round her: "and as for fear, dear lady, tremble not for that. I will defend you with my life, and will not part with you, till I see you safely back within the walls of the abbey, or at least under your good aunt's protection. Besides, I have strong help at need, in the strength of my good Arab's arm. Woe be to the rover who meets the edge of his scimitar. Nevertheless, we must find out some place of refuge for the night, if it be but a bower of green boughs, where you can sleep while I guard you as your sentinel."

"It were better to seek some more secure hiding-place," answered Iola, "where these people will not find us. There is what they call Prince Edward's cave, I know not why; but that is on the other side of the road."

"The woodman spoke of an old castle on the hill," said the young nobleman. "I saw the keep too, towering up from below; but now I cannot tell which way it lies."

"Oh, I can find the way," cried Iola gladly. "I know every path thither, and almost every stone in the building. It lies on this side of the hill too, though it is more than a mile off."

"Then let us thither if you can find the way," replied Chartley. "Should we be pursued, we can play at hide and seek there, or, at the worst, make good some tower or staircase till help comes. Were I sure that there is any officer or man of repute with these bands, I should not fear for you, but so fair a flower must not be trusted in the rude hands of lawless soldiery."

Iola did not, or would not, notice the last words. Indeed, it is rare, when a phrase contains several parts, that more than one is attended to by any individual. She fixed at once upon what he had said regarding the old castle, and answered, "Oh, we can play at hide and seek with them there, for a year, if we can but reach it safely; and I think I can lead you thither by a path they will never dream of; for still, while approaching, it seems to be turning away from the object at which it aims."

"Somewhat like woman's wit, dear lady," answered Lord Chartley, laughing, "which I must say often takes the prettiest ways imaginable to its ends, in gay meanderings round and round. But come. There is no fear of their attempting to search the wood, this night at least, though they may try to watch all the outlets. We shall pass safe enough, if we enter upon no high roads."

"No, no," answered Iola, with a little spice of vengeance. "They shall be all crooked, narrow, and obscure, like man's policy. Here, we must turn up here, and take up your Moor by the way."

"Lean upon my arm then," said Chartley, drawing hers through his own. "You will need some support on this long journey."

"It will be like the journey of life," she answered, "where sometimes we must tread the narrow path singly and unsupported; sometimes guiding and helping each other."

Thus saying, she walked on with him, leaning lightly on his arm, but musing as she went. Chartley spoke a few words to Ibn Ayoub, bidding him follow a few steps behind, and keep a watchful ear for any sounds of pursuit; and thus he and his fair companion proceeded for about five minutes in silence, till at length Iola broke from her fit of musing, saying abruptly, "Heaven help me! What would my poor aunt think if she knew that I was wandering here alone with you, my lord?"

Lord Chartley thought he perceived in those words a certain portion of doubt and fear, which he could not but own was natural, but yet he was very anxious to remove. "I trust she would be glad," he replied, "that you had met with one, by a strange accident, in whom you and she can fully trust, to guard and defend you against all wrong. I think you know that such a one is by your side."

"Oh that I do," she answered, looking up towards his face, though she could not see it. "Do not suppose I have any fears of you, my lord; for I feel as if I had known you many a year; and, though they say we should judge no man rashly, yet I am right sure you would neither wrong me nor see me wronged, for any good the world could give. My aunt, however, might be more suspicious; for she has strange notions of the world, and I trust not true ones."

Chartley was silent for a moment or two, and then laughed gaily.

"It were easy," he replied at length, "to say as I was just going to say--Trust me, and doubt all

other men; but I had better say nothing of the kind, however, for I can neither tell you rightly why you should suspect others, nor give you a good reason why you should trust me. Happy is it, in my case, that you have no choice. Trust me you must, sweet girl, whether you will or not; but believe me," he added, thinking he felt a certain tendency to withdraw her arm from his, "believe me, that trust is not misplaced, and never will be. So now I will make no more professions. There is another blast of the trumpet; but it is farther off than before."

"It comes down the hill," answered Iola. "They have got farther on than we have; but yet we shall beat them, I trust; for the many are ever outwitted by the few, I hear, though, good sooth, I know nothing of life, and but repeat such sage sayings as an old nurse's songs, without being sure if they be to the right tune or not.--Oh, prudery," she continued gaily, "what would the dear nuns, and sister Bridget especially, say, if they could hear me thus chattering with a young lord, in a dark wood, when there is so much sad and sober earnest going on near?--You too, perhaps, think it strange; but I have had so little practice in concealing what I think, that my foolishness ever rushes to my lips before my slow wit can start forth to stop it."

"Nay, I think no such thing," replied Lord Chartley, "for, by my faith, the case is much the same with me. Besides, did we not make a bargain at supper time, that the casket was not to be closed, but all the jewels of the heart were to be left unveiled?"

"True," she answered. "It was a rash promise; but like all promises, I suppose, it must be kept; and indeed, had it not been made, I am afraid the course would have been the same; for the key of that casket which you talk of is seldom to be found when needed; and the lock is somewhat rusty, from being left always open.--Think not, however, I would act or speak thus to all men; for had you, as did the only young man I ever saw twice before yourself, talked of my beautiful eyes or my charming fingers--or even, like the friend who was with you, had you thrown out a pretty neat-turned compliment upon bright and beautiful looks, to be picked up by any one who thought it worth the stooping for, I should have been as grave and silent as a deaf canoness, or have run away from you as fast as my feet could carry me; but you spoke of better things, though gaily, and seemed to me to know what is due, from knight and gentleman, to a woman and a lady, and therefore, my good lord, I trust you as a friend, and speak to you as a brother."

Whatever were the feelings of Lord Chartley--whether he felt inclined to remain in the cool relationship of friend and brother, or whether there were not growing upon him sensations towards his fair companion of a somewhat warmer nature, he was well aware that fraternal regard is one of the very best and most serviceable trenches for attacking the citadel of a woman's heart, and consequently he thanked Iola gracefully for her trust, and did nothing in the world to scare the timidity of early confidence. Perhaps his was a character to win it more quickly than that of most men; gay, cheerful, brave, apparently thoughtless, but in reality considerate and reflective, light-hearted from strong corporeal health, fair fortunes, and self-reliance, as well as from a hopeful and sanguine heart, one seemed at once to see clear and distinct from the act to the motive, from the words to the emotions in which they originated. There was none of that misty clouded policy, none of that obscure and twilight art, which is sure to create suspicion and place the minds of others on their guard; but all was frank, open, free; and though people might judge him to be more rash than he really was, and heedless of consequences when he was in reality quite the reverse, no one ever for a moment suspected half the deep feeling that was in his heart, or the cool though rapid reflection which went on in his mind.

We are inclined to imagine that when a man acts quickly and decidedly, even in cases where there is no need of haste, that he acts imprudently and without due consideration. We say--"he might have taken time for thought."

But thought is a very different thing in the minds of different men. With one, it is the cart-horse which plods slowly along with its heavy load from one point of the road to another. With others, it is the race-horse, darting like an arrow shot from a bow to the object in view. The distance and the path are the same, but only they are travelled more rapidly in the one instance than in the other. Undoubtedly the race-horse was the illustration of Chartley's mind. It would have foamed and fretted to be restrained to the slow progress which many another man preferred; and when forced to proceed tardily, in order to keep the same pace as others, like the same horse, it would curvet and passage, showing its impatience by a thousand wild gambols.

Short specimens of conversations are enough upon all ordinary occasions; and therefore I will only say, that the young nobleman and his fair companion, followed by the Arab, at the distance of eight or ten yards, threaded their way through the wood paths, lightly and easily, talking as they went. It may seem strange that they so soon lost the sense of apprehension, and could converse on other things, while dangers were round about; but it was a part of the characters of both, to be little and but transiently impressible by any thing like fear. Hope was ever predominant in the heart of each, and hope is certainly a great element of courage. Danger was thought of only while it was actually present; and imagination was fonder of plucking flowers than looking out for thorns. True, they stopped and listened from time to time, to make themselves sure that no enemies were near. True, that when Iola had to lead the way through one of those narrow paths, where two could not go abreast, she sometimes looked back to assure herself that Chartley was near her; but when they were together, they generally conversed gaily, and often even laughed, although Iola felt some apprehensions for her good aunt and her cousin, which could not be altogether removed, even by Chartley's assurances that the burning of the houses upon the green was the strongest proof of Richard's bands not having got into the abbey.

"Besides," he said, "I am quite sure that the commanders of these men, as long as they have the troops under their own eye, would not suffer them to commit any violence in a religious house; for the king himself is devout, as we all know, and though he might wink at a violation of sanctuary, for his own purpose, he would punish severely any unnecessary injury done in effecting it."

These arguments certainly were consolatory to Iola, and left the fears which still lingered, only as passing shades, coming across her mind for a moment, and soon disappearing, like those cast by light clouds floating over the sun in a summer's day.

Onward they walked then, amidst the branches of the wood, and along the paths out in the thick underwood, still covered by the brown leaves of the preceding year. The thaw which had prevailed since the night before had penetrated even into the depths of the wood; and the grass was covered with unfrozen drops which rendered it almost as white as under the hoar frost. This was peculiarly the case upon what may be called the first step of the hill; but the path soon began to ascend, at first winding gently about upon the upland slope, and then, spreading out to a greater width, ran along under some high cliffy banks, somewhat too steep to surmount in a direct line. Here, from time to time, a beautiful view of the abbey, with the lower grounds surrounding it, might have been obtained, had there been daylight; and even in the darkness of the night, aided by a faint light from the smoking ruins of the cottages on the green, the eye could distinguish the sombre masses of the old pile, rising above all the surrounding objects.

"You see the abbey is safe," said Chartley, in a low tone; "and the fires are going out. I hear no sound.--Perhaps these troops are withdrawn."

"We could soon see," said Iola, "if we turned to the westward, for there is a little point, which commands a view of the road."

Perhaps Chartley did not very much wish to see; for, to say the truth, he had no great inclination to part with his fair companion so soon. He had made up his mind, by this time, to the not unpleasant task of passing the rest of the night with her in the old castle. There was a spirit of adventure in it--a touch of that romance which is agreeable to almost every young man's mind. Nevertheless, he thought it more proper to follow the suggestion, although the result might be to convey her back to the abbey, and send him onward on his way to Hinckley. They turned then in the direction she indicated, and, at the distance of about a hundred and fifty yards, came to a spot where a small stream welled from the high bank, and the waters were gathered, before they crossed the road, into a small clear pool; a beautiful object and beautifully situated. The rugged cliff from which the spring flowed, like a parent looking into a child's eyes, bent over the fountain, and caught the image of itself. The stars were mirrored in it; and a light birch that grew beside it bent its head down to drink.

"I will sit here," said Iola, "upon this stone, where I have often sat before, if you will run up the bank by that little path, which will lead you to a spot where a greater part of the road can be seen. Stop where the path stops; and do not be long, for I shall be frightened. I do not know whether you can see anything upon the road in this dark night; but the sand is light of colour, so as to show anything dark moving upon it, I think."

"I will leave the Arab with you," said Chartley. "You can trust him fully. Stay with the lady, Ibn Ayoub," he continued, "and guard her as you would the prophet's tomb."

The man folded his arms upon his breast, and remained precisely in the same attitude, at the distance of three or four paces, while his lord ran lightly up the path; and Iola, seating herself by the fountain, gazed down upon the limpid water, from which a dim shadowy form looked up at her again. What were her thoughts then? Perhaps, she too contemplated the result of all obstacles to her return to the abbey being removed, the consequent parting with her young and kind companion, and the probability of her never meeting with him again. It was not without a feeling of regret. She almost wished that she had not proposed to Chartley to see whether the troops were still there or not; and then she was angry with herself for entertaining such feelings. Then she meditated upon the passing the night with him in the ruins; and certainly she did not regard such a thing in the same way that he did. She felt a little alarmed, of she knew not what, a hesitation, a doubt. It would feel very strange, she thought--almost wrong. While there had seemed no other choice, such feelings had never presented themselves, but now they were strong. It would be very pleasant, she could not deny, to have his society for some time longer--with friends and companions about them; but alone, in a remote place, with the world's eye afar--that eye which acts as a bond but a safeguard, a restraint but a justification--the matter was very different. Yet--strange human nature!--when, a moment after, she heard a blast of a trumpet coming from the road, and a loud voice shouting forth some orders, it was a relief to her. Perhaps she feared the parting with Chartley so soon, even more than passing of a night with him in the old castle. Dear girl, she could not help it. It was no fault of hers. Nature taught her to cling to that which had protected her. Nature taught her to love that which came upon her hitherto dull existence like the first gleam of summer's returning sunshine into the wintry sky.

A moment after, Chartley's step was heard returning; and, running down the bank, he said:

"They are upon the road still, and moreover, preparing to surround the wood by patrols, probably with the intention of searching it thoroughly to-morrow. Let us on, sweet Iola, and seek

our place of refuge, for we have no choice left; and they may perchance push some of their parties along these broader paths to-night. I should not like to come into collision with them, if I can help it. Here, let me stay your steps;" and once more he drew her arm through his.

"I had hoped," answered Iola--little hypocrite--"that they were all gone, and that you might be spared farther trouble on my account to-night."

"Trouble!" said Chartley; and he laughed. "I know not what you feel, dear lady; but I cannot, for my life, think all this night's adventure so very disastrous. I grieve, of course, that you should be alarmed or pained in any way; but yet a few hours of such sweet society, the power of protecting, assisting, supporting you, the linking of feelings, and sympathies, and associations with yours, even for so short a space, has something very pleasant in it. Whatever may be our fate hereafter, Lady Iola, we shall both remember this night, as one of those high points of time, which raise their heads out of the ocean of the past, and glitter afar in the light of memory."

"I must tell him about myself and my fate," thought Iola; but Chartley pursued the subject no farther; and turning back upon their steps, they renewed their ascent towards the castle, winding along amongst the trees, which were there farther apart and less encumbered by underwood.

How rapidly the wild encroaches upon the cultivated, when the hand of man is once withdrawn. In former years--not very long before, certainly not a century--the detached elevation in the wood, on which the castle stood, had been covered with smooth clean-shaven green turf, without tree or shrub, which could cover an approaching enemy from the shafts of the garrison. It had its road winding round it from the principal gate, and passing, till it approached the edge of the neighbouring forest, within bow shot of some loop-hole or battlement, at every turn. Now the trees had grown over the whole mount, as thick and close as anywhere in the wood--over road and all; and nothing but a pathway remained, where bands of retainers had formerly ridden up and down on horseback. The self-sown oaks, indeed, were small and thin; but there were some enormous ash trees, and large fine elms and beeches, which no one would have supposed of so late a growth. A great number of birches--"the ladies of the wood,"--mingled their slight silvery stems with the sturdier and more lordly forest trees, and the winged seeds of the ash, wafted to the walls, had planted themselves here and there, wherever a fallen stone had left a vacant space in the mortar, and had shot up into feathery shrubs, fringing the ancient battlements and cresting the tall tower. Thus, in the early summer time, when leaves are green, the castle at a distance could hardly be distinguished from the forest.

Up the small path I have mentioned, Iola and Chartley took their way, and at length stood under the old arch of the barbican. One of the towers which had flanked it had fallen down, and, filling up the fosse, afforded a firmer path than the drawbridge, which, partly broken down, I know not whether by age or war, offered but an insecure footing. One of the long beams indeed, and two or three of the planks, still hung by the heavy chain used formerly to raise the bridge; but Iola hesitated, although she had often crossed before, fearing, in the darkness, to lose her footing on the bridge, or to stumble amongst the stones, if she chose the path over the fallen tower. Chartley instantly divined her doubt, and going on part of the way over the drawbridge, held out his hand, saying: "Let me steady your steps. It is quite firm."

Iola followed at once; and the Arab came after; but when they reached the great gate, the lady again paused, saying, "It is so dark, I fear we shall never find our way about the building, without the risk of some accident, for many of the steps are broken down, and fragments of the walls encumber the doorways, although some of the rooms in the keep are almost as if they had been just inhabited. I wonder how long it is to daybreak."

"I have not heard the bell for lauds," replied Chartley, "and therefore, probably, three or four hours may elapse before we see the face of day. Perhaps, however, we can contrive to light a fire somewhere in the court, for the high trees and walls would screen it from the eyes of the men upon the road."

"Let us find our way into the great court first," said Iola. "There is plenty of dry wood about the place, if we could but find a light."

"That will be soon obtained," answered Lord Chartley, "and, perhaps, something that may serve the purpose of a torch or candle also;" and, speaking a few words to the Arab, which Iola did not understand, he led the way forward, stretching out his hands, like a blind man, to make sure of the path he trod; for, if the night was dark without, the darkness was doubly deep under the shadow of the arch. After passing through the gateway, the great court seemed light enough by comparison. In the centre rose the large keep or donjon tower, frowning heavily over the scene below; and forth from the side of the keep came a pile of very ancient buildings, now silent and desolate like the rest.

Chartley and Iola are now alone; for the Arab had left them. But yet she did not and she would not fear, for she had great confidence in her companion, and woman's confidence is of a very capacious measure. Nor did he wrong it--shame upon him who does--but, guiding her quietly to the flight of steps leading into the keep, he made her sit down upon the dilapidated stairs, and stood beside her, talking about subjects which could awake no emotion, or a very slight one, and, informing her that he had sent the slave to seek for materials to light a fire. None of those events, however, occurred, which continually happen to people cast upon a desert island. There were

none of those appliances or means at hand, with which wandering sailors are usually supplied accidentally. No bituminous pine was found to fulfil the office of a torch; and at length after the Arab's return, the only resource of the fugitives was to light a fire, after the most ancient and approved fashion, by a flint and steel. This, however, was accomplished with less difficulty than might have been expected, the young lord's dagger supplying the steel, and flints being numerous in the neighbourhood. The old brown leaves, and the young but well-dried shoots, soon caught the flame; and in a few minutes the joyous light was spreading round the old court yard, and raising Iola's spirits by the very look.

"Ah, now we can rest here in comfort," said, the young lady gazing around her; "but the light is not yet sufficient to see the inside of the hall."

"But still you cannot sleep here, sweet Iola," answered her companion. "I and the slave will go in and light a fire in the hall, if you will tend this in the meanwhile."

"Nay," she answered, "I want not to sleep;" and she detained him gently by the arm. "Let us sit down here. See here is a stone bench bowered in the ivy. We can pass the night in telling tales; and first you shall inform me how you came hither on foot in the forest, when I thought you had gone away for Leicester."

Lord Chartley easily satisfied her on that point; and seated on the stone bench by her side, as near as possible, gazing from time to time on her bright countenance, by the gleams of the firelight, he related to her all that had occurred to him since he had left the abbey.

"As to my being on foot," he said, "your good friend the woodman judged it best that I and my Arab should leave our horses at his hut, for fear of attracting attention. All I hope is, that they will not be found there by these good gentlemen, who are watching the wood; for it might be dangerous if they were recognised as my property."

"There is a great risk indeed," said Iola anxiously. "What will you do if such should be the case?"

"As best I can," answered Chartley. "I never premeditate, dear lady; for I always remark that those who go lightly and carelessly through the world go the farthest. The circumstances of the moment determine my conduct; and as I have no ties to bind me but those of honour and truth, no ambitious schemes to be frustrated or executed, no deeds done that I am ashamed of, so I have never any great store of fears for the future, nor much need of forming plans at any time for after action."

"Happy are those," answered Iola, with a sigh, "who, as you say, have no ties to bind them."

Her reply was a natural one, springing at once from what was passing in her own heart. Something had whispered that it would be better to tell her companion, that her own fate was linked to another, that she had been contracted in fact in infancy, by her relations, to a person of whom she knew nothing. The thought of informing him of her fate, however, led her to think of that fate itself; and thence came the sigh and the answer that she made. But as soon as it was uttered, she felt that it rendered more difficult, nay impossible, the task of telling the circumstances as she had meditated. The words she had just spoken, the sigh she had just breathed, expressed too clearly the regret that she really felt; but to explain to him the source of that regret, to show him the nature of the tie that oppressed her, would, she thought, be unwomanly and indecent.

Her words, however, had not been unmarked; and Chartley, reading them wrongly, pressed her gaily for explanation.

"Nay," he said, "you have no ties to regret. Your good aunt, the abbess, told me herself, that you are not destined for the life of the convent. If you do take the veil, it must be from some fancied resolution of your own heart, against which it is the duty of every knight and gentleman to war. Fie, fie! Let those who have tasted the world and found it bitter; let those to whom it has pleased Heaven to deny beauty, and grace, and mind, and kindly feeling; let those who have sorrows to mourn, or evil acts to repent, seek the shades of the convent; but do not bury there charms of person, and mind, and heart, such as yours, intended by Heaven to be the blessing and the hope and the comfort of another. I must not, I will not have it."

He spoke so eagerly, so warmly, and his eyes looked so bright, that Iola felt glad the Arab was standing near piling fresh wood upon the fire. She knew not how to answer; but at length she said, "I am not destined for a convent; but there may be other ties as binding as the vow to the veil."

"You are not married," exclaimed Chartley, starting; and then he added, with a laugh--a gladsome laugh, "No, no. You told me yourself that you had only seen one other young man twice in life besides myself."

"No, not married--" answered Iola, casting down her eyes, and speaking in a low and sad tone. But her farther reply was interrupted; for the Arab suddenly lifted his finger with a warning gesture, and said in a low voice:

"Steps come."

"Let us into the old hall," said Chartley, rising, and taking a burning brand from the fire. "This will give us some light at least. Ibn Ayoub, stay you in the archway till I return. I will come directly; but let no one pass."

The Arab drew a long sharp pointed knife from his girdle, saying; "I will take care;" and the young lord and Iola hurried, through the gateway of the keep, into the interior of the building.

CHAPTER XII.

In a small, but rich and beautiful, Gothic chamber, splendidly decorated, and splendidly furnished, sat a gentleman, in the very prime of life, at a table covered with manifold papers. His dress was gorgeous; but the eye rested hardly for a moment on the splendour of his apparel, for there was something in his countenance which at once fixed all attention upon itself. The features were delicate and beautiful, the eyes dark, keen, and expressive. The lips were somewhat thin, and apparently habitually compressed, though when they parted they showed a row of teeth as white as snow. The long dark brown hair was of silky fineness and gloss, bending in graceful waves about a brow broad, high, and majestic, which would have been perfect in form, had not habit or nature stamped a wrinkled frown upon it, while some long lines, the traces of deep thought, furrowed the wide expanse which age had not yet had time to touch. He was in the prime of life, the early prime, for he had not yet seen three and thirty years, and not a particle of bodily or mental energy had been lost; but yet his form did not give any promise of great strength, for he was somewhat below the middle height, and the limbs seemed small and delicate. One shoulder was rather higher than the other, but not so much so as to be a striking deformity; and the left arm seemed somewhat smaller than its fellow. No means had been taken to conceal these defects; and yet he might have passed anywhere for an exceedingly good-looking man, had it not been for a certain expression of fierce and fiery passion which occasionally came into his countenance, blending strangely with the look of sarcastic acuteness which it usually bore. It was upon his face at that moment, as he read a letter before him; but it passed away speedily, and it was with a bitter smile he said--speaking to himself, for there was no one else in the room--

"Not know? He must be made to know! We will pluck the heart of this treason out;" and he wrote a few words hastily on the back of the letter which he had been reading.

Then, however, he paused, laid his finger on his temple, and thought deeply for a minute or two. "No," he said at length, "no! It must be passed over. If they catch him in the abbey, the lad's fault shall be passed over. He has served the purposes of a decoy--done good service without knowing it; and we will not kill the bird that lures the game to us, though it little thinks that it betrays its fellows--perhaps imagines it is serving them, not us. I have heard there was friendship between the bishop and his father; and we must alienate no friends just now.--Friends!" he continued, with a bitter sneer. "What are friends? I know but one, whom men can ever count upon; and he dwells here;" and at the same time he laid his hand significantly on his own broad forehead.

He then took the pen again, and struck out the words he had written on the paper, pushed it aside, raised another, and, after glancing over it, clapped his hands, exclaiming--

"Without, there!"

A servant instantly appeared; and the king, for it was Richard himself, demanded--

"Did you not tell me that this man, John Radnor, had been killed by a fall from his horse?"

"Yes, sire," answered the servant, "so the posts say, who brought your grace the news that the earls of Richmond's fleet had been dispersed. He was found dead upon the road, but with his purse and papers all secure, so that they could not be thieves who slew him."

"I trust there are few such left in the land," said Richard. "I have done something already to crush the lawless spirit engendered in this country by long turbulence and domestic strife; and I will trample out the last spark ere I have done. By Christ, the name of thief shall be unknown in the land if I live long enough.--I grieve for this man," he continued, musing. "He was a serviceable knave, and one to whose dexterity we could trust instructions somewhat difficult to write, and yet not make him an ambassador.--Send Sir John Thoresby to me," he continued, "and as soon as Sir Charles Weinants comes, give him admission."

With a low reverence, the man withdrew; and the king busied himself with the papers again, till the door opened and a gentleman in black entered the room.

"Let those be answered, Sir John," said the king, pushing some letters to him, "and take order that lodging and entertainment be prepared at York for the Princess Countess of Arran. Send off too, by a private hand, which can be trusted, a letter to the king her brother, greeting him well from us, and telling him that the secret note, sent with the letters of the countess, has been received. Bid him set his mind at ease, for that the matter is very sure, and that, search as she will, search will be fruitless, so that she can come safely.--Have you seen the queen?"

"I passed her but now, your grace, in the hall," replied the gentleman; "and she enquired if there were any news from Middleham. She seemed much alarmed on account of the prince's illness."

"Oh, it is nothing, it is nothing," answered the king. "It will soon pass. Children are well and ill in a day. The next post will bring us news that he is better; but women are full of fears. Yet it is strange we have not heard to-day. I will go and see her, while you write here;" and, with a slow pace and thoughtful air, he quitted the room.

At the end of a short corridor, Richard opened a door, which gave him admission to a large old hall, in one part of which were seated several young ladies of high family, working busily at embroidery frames. At one of the tall arched windows, gazing out on the prospect below, with a look of restless anxiety on her face, stood the fair and unfortunate daughter of the earl of Warwick, his youngest and his best beloved, whom, with the prophetic spirit of parental affection, he had endeavoured in vain to hide from the pursuit of him who never set his eyes upon an object without sooner or later attaining it. She was richly dressed, according to the mode of those times; and her slight figure and her fair face still retained many traces of that delicate and feminine beauty which had once so highly distinguished them.

The instant she heard her husband's step, she turned quickly round with a timid and inquiring glance; but Richard was in one of his milder moods. The subject of his thought and hers was one of common affection; and he advanced tenderly towards her, and took her in his arms, saying--

"I have heard nothing, Ann; but cast these fears from your mind. I trust that this is nothing but one of those sicknesses of childhood which come and pass away like spring showers."

The tears came into the queen's eyes, rising from very mingled emotions. Her apprehension for her child, her husband's tenderness, the feeling perhaps of her own failing health, the recollections of early years, all moved her heart; and yet she feared that her emotions might rouse an impatient spirit in Richard's breast.

It was not so, however; and, pressing her somewhat closer to him, he said--

"Well, well, wipe away your tears, love. If we hear not better tidings to-day, thou shalt go to Middleham, and I will go with thee."

"Thanks, my gracious lord, thanks," replied the queen. "Perhaps it is but a weak woman's fears for her only one, that so sink my spirit; but I feel to-day a sort of awe, as if of approaching fate."

"You give way, you give way," said Richard with a slight touch of impatience. "However, there is good news abroad. This rash exiled earl of Richmond, whom you have heard of, doubtless, has seen his Breton ships--which the good doating duke now bitterly regrets he lent him--dispersed and broken by a heavy tempest; and he himself has slunk back to St. Maloes; but I have already limed some twigs for this light bird, which will yet stick to his feet; and he may find conveyance into England more speedy, though not so prosperous as that which he has been contriving for himself.--How now, Lovel? You look perilous grim, as if you and your cognizance had changed countenances."

"I grieve to be the bearer of bad tidings, gracious sire," replied Lord Lovel, to whom these words were addressed, and who had entered the room the moment before. "I did not know that either of your graces were here, and was hastening to your closet."

"But the news, the news," cried Richard, eagerly. "Heavy tidings grow doubly weighty by long carrying. Out with them, man. Is there a new insurrection in the west?--Has Richmond landed?--Speak, speak at once!"

"I had better have your grace's private ear for a few minutes," replied Lord Lovel, in a low and very sad tone, at the same time giving a glance towards the queen. Her eyes were fixed upon his face, and she caught the expression at once.

"My boy," she exclaimed. "He is worse. He is hopeless--I see it there--I see it there;" and she pointed with her hand to his face.

Richard gazed at him in profound deathlike silence, with his brow knitted over his fine keen eyes, and the thin pale lip quivering fearfully. It was a terrible thing to see the traces of such deep and unwonted emotion on that powerful and commanding countenance; and Lovel felt almost afraid to proceed. Richard tried to speak, but, for the first time in life, his voice found no

utterance; and all he could do was to make a vehement sign for his favourite to go on.

"Alas, sire," said Level, in a tone of unfeigned anguish, "your worst fears are, I grieve to say--"

"No, no," cried Richard, in a broken voice, grasping his arm as if he would have sunk the fingers into the flesh. "No, no, not the worst--not the worst!--He is very ill, you would say--the physicians have no hope--but we will find more, wiser, skilfuller! There are simples of great power--there are--there are--no, not dead, not dead--no, not dead, not dead!--Oh, Jesu!" and he fell headlong to the ground.

The unhappy queen stood with her hands clasped together, her eyes bent upon the floor, not a trace of colour in her cheeks or lips. She moved not, she spoke not, she wept not, she uttered no cry, but remained standing like a statue where the words had reached her ears with all the terrible anguish of the moment concentrated in her heart.

In the meantime, the embroidery frames were cast away. Her ladies gathered round her, and drew her gently to her chair of state, in which they placed her unresisting; but there she remained, precisely as they had seated her, with her eyes still bent down, and her lips still motionless. At the same time, Lovel raised the king, and called loudly for assistance. Attendants hurried in, and amongst them the messenger from Middleham, who had brought the tidings of the young prince's death, and had been left at the door by Lord Lovel, when he undertook to communicate the sad intelligence. But it was long ere Richard could be brought to himself; and then he sat where they had placed him, rubbing his brow with his hand, and muttering broken sentences to himself. At length he looked up, and gazed with a curious wild expression of countenance--still shrewd, still cunning, but hardly sane; and then he laughed aloud, and, rising from his chair, exclaimed:

"Why, this is well. Why, this is mighty well! We'll march ten thousand men on York, to-morrow, and then to Middleham.--We'll have cannon too, ay, cannon too, lest the usurper should refuse to give up the boy. Why, he is the son of a king, a prince--a prince, I tell you, Lovel, the dog--Ha, ha, ha! That was a merry distich--"

'The cat, the rat, and Lovel, the dog,
Rule all England under the hog.'

But we paid the poet handsomely. Kings should be always bountiful to poets. Good Sir John Collingburn, he little thought that he should be hanged for the cat, drawn for the rat, and quartered for Lovel the dog--Ha, ha, ha! It is very good."

At that moment, the queen's lips moved; and, raising her eyes towards heaven, she began to sing a sweet and plaintive air, in a very musical voice:

"The castle stood on a hill side,
Hey ho, hey ho,
And there came frost in the summer tide,
Hey ho, the wind and the snow.
"A boy looked from the casement there,
Hey ho, hey ho,
And his face was like an angel's fair;

Hey ho, how the violets grow.
"The snow, it fell on his golden hair,
Hey ho, hey ho,
And the wind has blighted the flower so fair,
Hey ho, the flower's laid low."

"I think I'll go to bed, ladies. It is growing dark; but this night gear is somewhat stiff and cold, and I think it is dabbled with blood--Blood, blood, blood! Yes it is blood!" and she uttered a loud scream. [\[2\]](#)

In the midst of this distressing scene Lord Lovel stood like one bewildered; and he noted not that, while the king was speaking, another person, none of the ordinary attendants had entered the room. Now, however, Sir Charles Weinants pulled him by the sleeve, saying, in a low voice: "I ought to speak with the king immediately; but he seems in no fit state, my lord. What is all this?"

"Hush, hush," said Lovel, in a whisper. "Go into the closet. I will come and speak with you, for I have full instructions. The king is indisposed, with the sad news from Middleham. He will soon be better. I will join you in a minute. Your business will bear no delay."

Thus saying, he turned to the king again; and Sir Charles Weinants, with a slow and quiet step, crossed the hall, and, proceeding through the short corridor I have mentioned, reached the king's closet. He there found Sir John Thoresby, writing diligently; and the latter merely raised his head for an instant, gave a brief nod, and resumed his occupation. Sir Charles Weinants, ever discreet, walked to the window, and looked out; for, as I have before said, there were manifold papers and letters on the table, and he knew that it was dangerous even to let the eye pause

upon any of Richard's secrets. He waited there with persevering patience, saying not a word to Sir John Thoresby, and never turning round his head, till Lovel entered the room, at the end of about ten minutes, and boldly dismissed the secretary for a few moments.

"Now, Sir Charles," said the king's favourite. "His grace, thank Heaven, is somewhat better, and will soon be well. We have persuaded him to let blood; for his spirits are too much oppressed. This is a severe blow, the death of the young prince, and will make many changes in the realm. You received the king's letter?"

"In safety, my good lord," replied Sir Charles, "but not the letter which was to have followed, informing me whether the Duke of Bretagne would receive me on this errand or not."

"How is that?" exclaimed Lord Lovel. "We sent it to York, thinking to find you there;" and he laid his hand upon his brow and thought. "Ratcliff, in his last letter, received but this morning, assured me that he had sent it on to you at Tamworth, by a trusty messenger, who was passing from Scotland to the king. Now it should have reached you some days ago, for Ratcliff thought we were at Coventry, and his letter to me has gone round."

"It never reached me, my lord," replied Sir Charles Weinants, "and yet I made known my name and quality wherever I came, and bade my servants watch well, in order that no news from the court might miss me."

"It must be inquired into," replied Lovel; "but in the mean time you must hasten your departure; for I have seen the reply from Bretagne, and you will be received with all favour. Monsieur Landais is fully gained; and all that is required is some one to confirm the king's promises, and give an earnest of his goodwill towards the duke. You must set out this very night. I trust by that time his grace will be well enough to see you himself and give you his last instructions; for his is not a mind to bend long, even under the burden cast upon it."

These words seemed intended to conclude the conversation; but Sir Charles Weinants still stayed and mused. At length he looked up in Lovel's face with a smile, saying, "I always love to be successful in my negotiations; and methinks this young vapouring earl may take fright when he hears of my coming. Were it not better to go with the most perfect secrecy?"

"Nay, that would be hardly possible," answered Lovel; "but we have been thoughtful. You must go in some sort as a fugitive. A report has already been spread that you are suspected by the king. Measures will be taken to strengthen the belief; and, while you bear full powers as his envoy, and the money for Landais, you must quit the court suddenly by dark; and with a small train affect to seek refuge in Brittany. The news of your disgrace has gone before; but good Monsieur Landais is made aware of the truth, and prepared to receive you."

Sir Charles Weinants was not altogether well pleased with the arrangement; but he was discreet--very discreet; and he did not think fit to make any objection. However, he knew there could be no harm in establishing a claim where none previously existed; for he was well aware that great men are ever ready enough to deny a claim, whether it exists or not. He therefore said quietly, "The king's will, of course, I submit to without a murmur, my good lord; but it is a very unpleasant sort of reputation for an ambassador to appear with, that of a fugitive and a traitor; and I trust that his grace will, remember that I take upon myself such a character solely in obedience to his commands."

"You shalt not be forgotten, Sir Charles," replied Lovel, entertaining, but not uttering, precisely the same sentiment which was afterwards boldly propounded by a vast-minded but little-spirited man namely, that "to submit to indignities is the way to rise to dignities."

"The king never neglects," he said, "those who place themselves in painful situations for his service. And now, Sir Charles, prepare, prepare--but quietly; never forgetting that your preparations are to be those of a fugitive. The ambassador is to come after, you know. When you have Harry of Richmond firm in your grasp, the splendour of your train shall efface the memory of its scantiness now. Hark! There is the king's voice, and his step coming hither. Do not wait or take any notice. I dare say the barber is here to bleed him."^[3]

The next instant Richard entered the closet, and Sir Charles Weinants passed him, bowing low and reverently. But the king took no farther notice of him than merely by giving a slow and inquiring glance, from under his bent brows, at the face of his envoy; and then seating himself in a chair, he suffered one of two persons who followed him into the room to withdraw his arm from his doublet, the barber-surgeon, who was close behind, directing the valet particularly to give him the left arm, as that was nearest to the heart. The servant then held a silver basin, while the operator made his preparations and opened a vein. During all this time Richard uttered not a word, but sat with his brows contracted, and his dark thoughtful eyes fixed upon vacancy, till the sombre red bleed began to flow forth from the vein; and then he turned his look upon the stream, and seemed to watch it curiously. At length, he lifted his right hand to his head, saying, "I am better--open the window. Give me air;" and the servant instantly hurried to obey his commands. The barber suffered the blood still to flow on, for a little while, and then bound up the king's arm.

"I am better," said Richard. "I am better;" and, stretching forth his hands, he added, in an imperative tone. "Leave me--all leave me! I am better--I would be alone."

The whole party hastened to obey, and, as soon as they were gone, Richard, the iron-spirited relentless Richard, placed his hands before his eyes, and wept. It is a terrible sight to see a man weep at any time. What must it have been to see tears forced from such a heart as Richard's!

CHAPTER XIII.

Let us take up the history of the woodman, after he and the bishop of Ely had quitted Lord Chartley. They crossed rapidly over the road, hearing the sound of horses advancing, and of men speaking, as they did so. Neither uttered a word; and the prelate was hastily directing his steps towards a spot where, by the dim light, he saw what seemed a continuation of the path he had just quitted, but the woodman seized his arm, and drew him on a little way up the road to a place where the bushes seemed so thick as to afford no passage through them. Putting aside the branches, however, with his sturdy arm, Boyd dragged rather than led Morton forward; and, for some way, the good bishop fancied that they should never find a path again, so thick and difficult seemed the copse. It extended not fifty yards, however; and, though somewhat scratched by the brambles, which clung round his feet and legs at every step, Morton, at length, found himself emerging into an open part of the wood, where the ground was covered with thick fern, out of which, every here and there, rose an old hawthorn or the bushy shoots of an oak or beech felled long ago.

"'Tis a rough road," said the woodman, in a low voice, as he relaxed his hold of the prelate's arm.

"So are all the ways of life, my son," answered the bishop.

"And the roughest often the safest," answered Boyd. "I know it by experience. Smooth paths end in precipices."

At that instant something started up before them out of the fern, and a quick rush was heard through the neighbouring brushwood. The bishop started, and drew a little back, but Boyd said with a laugh,—

"'Tis but a doe, my lord. If she find her way amongst the soldiers, there will be more chases than one to-night. Fear not, however. I will answer for your safety, though not for hers."

"I do not fear," answered the prelate. "Indeed, I am little given to fear; but, as you doubtless well know, my son, the mind has not always that command over the body which can prevent the mere animal impulse from starting at dangers, which calm consideration could meet unshrinking."

"True," replied the woodman. "So long as life is happy it may be so; but with the loss of all that makes existence valuable, the body itself loses its sensibility to all signs of danger. Hope, dread, anxiety, and the struggle with the ills of life, make us vibrate as it were to the touch of all external things; but when hope and fear are dead, when there is neither care nor thought of existence, 'tis wonderful how this blind horse of the body, ridden by that plodding wayfarer, the mind, learns to jog on, without starting at anything that glistens on the way.—But come on, my good lord, for I must take you first to my cottage, and then send you forward some miles upon your journey."

Thus saying, he walked forward; and the good bishop followed through the more open space, musing as he went; for, to say the truth, he was pulled different ways by different inclinations. Self-preservation, was, of course, one great object, and that led him to desire immediate escape; but yet there was another object, which he had much at heart, and which would have bound him to remain. Nor was he a man who would suffer the consideration of personal safety alone to make him abandon what he considered a duty; but, as yet, he knew not fully what were the risks, and what the probabilities; and, as the only means of obtaining information, he, at length, after some consideration, determined to have recourse to the woodman. Boyd was striding on, however; and it cost the prelate two or three quick steps to overtake him, so as to be able to speak in that low tone which he judged necessary in the existing circumstances.

"You think you can insure my safety," he said.

"Beyond a doubt," replied the woodman, laconically.

"But only, I suppose, by instant flight," said the prelate.

"By flight before daylight," replied Boyd.

"But if I tell you," continued the bishop, "that it is absolutely necessary, for a great purpose I have in view, that I should remain in this immediate neighbourhood for some few days, do you think it possible for me to lie concealed here, till I receive the intelligence I am seeking? Remember, I do not heed a little risk, so that my object be attained."

"That is brave," answered Boyd; "but yet 'tis difficult to weigh nicely in the balance, for another man, the estimation of his own life. If I knew what you sought, I could judge better. However, I will say this: the risk were very great to stay, but yet such as any one of courage would encounter for a great and noble object."

"Then I will stay," replied the bishop, firmly. "My object is a great and, I believe, a just and holy one, and life must not be weighed in the balance against it."

"Would that I knew what it is," said the woodman, "for methinks I might show you that more may be gained by going than by staying. Of that, however, anon. Let me see if I can divine your object."

The bishop shook his head, saying--

"That is not possible. You are keen and shrewd, I see; but this you could not discover by any means, without information from others."

"I may have more information than you fancy," answered Boyd; "but at all events you must tell me fairly if I am right. You were once esteemed and promoted by Harry the Sixth. The house of Lancaster gave your first patrons."

The bishop winced a little--

"True," he said, "true!"

"The house of Lancaster fell," continued the woodman; "and, after the king's death, you continued in office under the opposite faction--I do not blame you, for the cause seemed hopeless."

"Nay, but hear me," said the bishop, in a louder tone than he had hitherto used. "You speak somewhat authoritatively; and I must explain."

"I speak plain truth," replied the woodman. "At this hour of the night, and under these grey boughs, we are upon a par. Elsewhere, it is, Morton, Lord Bishop of Ely, and Boyd the woodman. But I have said, I blame you not. What need of explanations?"

"Yes, there is need," answered the bishop. "I had my motive for doing as I have done, and that motive sufficient for my own conscience. As you say, the cause of Lancaster had fallen, and hopelessly fallen. All efforts in its favour could but produce more bloodshed, and protract a desolating civil strife. By yielding to the conqueror, by giving him the counsel of a christian man, not unversed in affairs of state, I did believe--I do believe, that I could, and did, do more good than if I had withdrawn from the counsels of the ruler of the country, and joined with those who sought to throw him from his seat. I never advised in those affairs where York and Lancaster opposed each other. It was part of my compact with him, that I should take no share in acts or councils against a family I once had served. Yet in my humble way I could do good, in moderating the fury of men's passions, and the rancour of party strife."

"You plead, my lord, to an indictment I have never laid," replied the woodman. "I blame you not. I never thought of blaming you. But hear me on! You became attached to a prince who favoured you greatly--a man of many high qualities, and also of many great vices; brave, courteous, graceful, and good-humoured; lewd, idle, insincere, and cruel; a consummate general, a short-seeing statesman, a bad king, a heartless kinsman, a man of pleasant converse, and a devoted friend. You loved him well; you loved his children better, and would not consent to their murder."

"Nay, nay, not their murder," cried the bishop; "no one ever ventured to speak of their death. Even now, we know not that they are really dead; but I believe it. If you had said, I would not be consenting to their deprivation of their rights, you had been justified."

"'Tis the same thing," answered the woodman; "deposed princes live not long, where they have many friends in the realm they lose. However, committed to the Tower, and then to the custody of Buckingham, you found means to make of your jailor your friend, choosing dexterously a moment of disappointment to turn him to your purposes. I speak now only from hearsay; but, I am told, you two together framed a scheme for choosing a new king from the race you first served, and uniting him to the heiress of your second lord. It was a glorious and well-devised plan, worthy of a great statesman--ay, and of a christian prelate; for thereby you might hope to end for ever a strife which has desolated England for half a century--but rash Buckingham lost all at the first attempt. The scheme still lives however, I am told, though one of the great schemers is no more. The other walks here beside me, returned in secret to his native land, after a brief exile, and the question is, for what? Money, perhaps, or arms, or friends, I may be told. Yet he would linger still for some intelligence, even when his life is staked! Has he heard of machinations going on in Brittany, for the overthrow of all his plans, by the betrayal of him on

whom their success depends? Has he heard of secret negotiations between the usurper and a feeble duke or his mercenary minister? Does he wish to obtain the certainty of such things? and is he willing to stake his life upon the chance of discovering the truth?"

He paused as if for an answer; and the bishop, who had been buried in deep thought--considering less the questions put and the tale told, for all that was speedily digested, than the character of his companion--replied at once--

"You are an extraordinary man, sir, and must speak from something more sure than a mere guess."

"Assuredly," replied the woodman, "I speak from calculation. He who, in the calm retirement of a lowly station, removed afar from his fellow men, has still a fair view of the deeds they do, can often, by seeing things hidden from the eyes of those who are near the scene of action, judge of the motives and the result, which the one part of those engaged do not know, and the other do not perceive. I once stood upon a high hill, while a battle raged at my feet, and could I have directed, with the prospect of the whole before me, I could have made either army win the field; for I saw what neither saw, and understood what neither understood. Thus is it with a man who stands afar from the troublous strife of human life, with his eye above the passions, the prejudices, and the vanities which more or less interrupt each man's vision on the wide plain of the world where the combat is going on. But yet you have not answered my question. Have I divined rightly or not?"

The bishop paused for another instant, and then replied--

"Why should I not speak? My life is in your hand. I can trust no greater thing than I have trusted. You are right. I have heard of these machinations; and I have laid my plans for frustrating them, or at least discovering them. My faithful servant, companion, and friend, who has accompanied me in all my wanderings, has gone on with Sir Charles Weinants even now; for that is the man who has been entrusted with many a secret negotiation between England and Brittany. He, my servant, will return in disguise to seek me at the abbey; and, if I should go before he arrives, I carry no definite information with me."

"You must go before he arrives," replied the woodman, "or 'tis likely you will not go at all; but you shall not go bootless.--Now let us be silent and cautious, for we are coming near more dangerous ground."

The hint was not lost upon the bishop, who, though bold and resolute, as I have shown, did not think it necessary to sport with life as a thing of no value. While this conversation had been taking place, they had traversed that more open space of forest ground, which has been mentioned, and were approaching a thicker copse, where sturdy underwood filled all the spaces between the larger trees. It seemed to the bishop, in the dimness of the night, that there would be no possibility of penetrating the vast mass of tangled thicket which rose sweeping up the side of the hill before his eyes; but still the woodman bent his step straight towards it, till at length he paused at a spot where there seemed no possible entrance.

"We are now coming near one of the wider roads of the wood," he said, in a whisper; "and the little path by which I will lead you runs within a hundred yards of it, for more than a mile. We must therefore keep silent, and even let our footfalls be light."

"If we have to force our way through all this brushwood," answered the bishop in the same tone, "the noise will instantly betray the way we take."

"Fear not," replied Boyd, "only follow me close and steadily. Leaders make bad followers, I know; but it must be so just now."

Thus saying, he pushed aside some of the young ash trees, and held them back with his strong arm, while the bishop came after. Three steps were sufficient to bring them, through the thick screen, to the end of a small path, not above three feet in width, but perfectly clear and open. It was drawn in a line as straight as a bowstring, and had probably been formed for the purposes of the chase; for arrow or bolt sent along it could not fail to hit any object of large size, such as a stag or fallow deer, at any point within shot. The bishop, it is true, could not see all this, for the boughs were thick overhead, though cleared away at the sides; and he followed slowly and cautiously upon the woodman's steps, setting down his feet with that sort of timid doubt which every one feels more or less when plunged in utter darkness.

Steadily and quietly the woodman walked on, seeming to see his way as well in the deep night as he could have done in the full day; and at length, after having proceeded, for what seemed to his companion much more than one mile, he again stopped, where the path abruptly terminated in another thicket. As no sign would have been effectual to convey his meaning, in the profound darkness which reigned around, the woodman was fain to whisper to his companion, to remain for a moment where he stood, while an examination was made to ascertain whether the great road was clear. He then forced his way forward through the boughs; and a moment after the bishop heard the whining of a dog, followed by the voice of the woodman, saying, "Down, Ban, down. Seek, boy, seek. Is there a strange foot?"

A short interval elapsed; and then was heard the sound of a low growl, very close to the spot

where the prelate himself was stationed.

"Nay, that is a friend," said the woodman, in a low tone. "Come in, Ban! To heel, good dog."

The sound of the stout and stalwart form of his companion, pushing its way once more through the brushwood, was then heard; and Boyd again stood by the good prelate's side.

"All is safe," he said; "and now you must force your way forward, at the risk of tearing your gown. But never mind that, for you must not travel in this attire;" and he led the way on.

After a struggle of some difficulty with the brambles and thin shoots of the ash which formed the copse, the bishop found himself in the midst of a small open space, with the road running across it, and the woodman's cottage on the other side. The door was open; and a faint glare, as from a half-extinguished fire, came forth into the air, showing the tall sinewy form of the woodman, and the gaunt outline of his gigantic hound. The cottage soon received the whole party; and, closing and barring the door, Boyd pointed to the threshold, saying to the dog, "Down, Ban! Watch!" and immediately the obedient animal laid himself across the door way, and remained with his head raised, his ears erect, and his muzzle turned towards the entrance, as if listening for the sound of approaching footsteps.

"Now, reverend father and good lord," said Boyd, "we must not dally. You must throw away that gown, and put on this common waggoner's frock. You must cover the tonsure with this peasant's bonnet, and take part in driving a load of wood a stage on the way to Litchfield. You will be met with by those who will see you safely to the coast; and you will have one with you who will in reality perform the office--unworthy of your profession and name--which you must seem to fulfil only for the sake of security. I will bring you the garments in a moment; but first," he continued, "let me place in your hands this letter, which you must conceal with the greatest care, and contrive to convey it to the earl of Richmond. How it fell into my hands matters not; but, if you run your eye over it, you will see that it contains all the information for which you were inclined to wait.--Stay, I will give you a light;" and, stirring the fire into a blaze, he lighted a lamp at the flame.

"Ha, from Landais, himself," exclaimed the bishop, as he read the letter, "with a promise to arrest the earl and all his companions, as soon as Richard's ambassador has arrived, and the money is paid!--The money is paid! What may that mean?"

"Can you not divine, good father?" asked the woodman. "In this good world of ours, there is a price for everything. We are all merchants, traders with what we make, or with what we possess. One man sells his barony, another his honour, another his conscience, another his soul. One acquires for himself power and sells the use of it, another gains a reputation and trades on that, as others do on learning or on skill. There is a difference of prices too; and the coin in which men require payment is various. A kingly crown is the price which some demand; a high office the price of others. The crosier or the triple crown is one man's price; the smile of a fair lady is another's; the sordid soul requires mere money; and this Landais, this Breton peasant, risen to be the minister and ruler of his imbecile prince, sells the duke's honour and his own for hard gold, Ha, ha, ha! He is quite right; for, of all the things which go to purchase such commodities, gold is the only solid permanent possession. What is honour, fame, power, or even woman's smile, but the empty, transitory, visionary deceit of an hour. Gold, gold, my lord bishop, untarnishable, persisting, ever-valuable gold is the only proper payment, when honesty, honour, feeling, and character are to be sold--Upon my life, I think so!--But there is the letter. Let the duke have it; show him the toils that are around him; and bid him break through before they close upon him."

"This is important, indeed," said the bishop, who had been reading the letter attentively; "and it shall be in the hands of the earl as soon as it be possible to deliver it. One question, however, let me ask you. Who, shall I tell the earl, has procured and sent to him this most valuable information? for I do not affect to believe that you are that which you seem to be."

"Nothing is what it seems to be," replied the woodman; "no, nothing in this world. It is a place of unreal things; but yet you might have satisfied yourself at the abbey, that Boyd the woodman is a faithful servant of the good abbess and nuns of St. Clare, and has been so long enough for them to have great confidence in him. However," he continued, in a somewhat changed tone, "tell the earl of Richmond, you have had it from a man who may ask his reward hereafter; for we are all mercenary. That reward shall neither be in gold, nor estates, nor honours, nor titles; but, when the struggle before him is accomplished, and he is successful, as he will be, then perchance Boyd the woodman may ask a boon; and it shall be but one.--Now I bring you your disguise;" and, passing through the door in the back of the room, he disappeared for a moment or two, and then returned, loaded with various pieces of apparel. The bishop smiled as he put them on; and the transformation was certainly most complete, as the frock of the carter was substituted for that of the monk, and the peasant's bonnet took the place of the cowl.

"We must get rid of your sandals, my lord," said the woodman; "and that is the most difficult part of the matter; for my foot is well nigh twice as large as yours, so that my boots will fit but ill."

"We will manage it," answered the bishop, "for I will thrust my feet in, sandals and all, and that will fill them up."

The woodman laughed; but the plan seemed a good one, and was adopted.

"Here is a little Venice mirror," said the woodman. "Now look at yourself, my good lord. I will not ask, if your best friend would know you, for dear friends always forget; but would your bitterest enemy recognise you, though hatred has so long a memory?"

"I do not think he would," answered the bishop, smiling at his own appearance; "but yet I fear, if we should be met in the wood by any of these people, and detained, they may discover me by the tonsure."

"We will not be met," answered Boyd. "Now, follow me; but first stick this axe into your girdle, which may serve, both as an ensign of your new trade, and a means of defence."

The woodman then led his companion through the door in the back of the room into another large chamber behind. Thence, after locking the door, he took his way through a shed, half filled with piles of firewood; and then, proceeding through an orchard, surrounded on three sides by the forest, he entered a little garden of pot-herbs, at the farther end of which was a fence of rough-hewn oak.

On approaching the paling, the bishop found himself standing on the edge of a very steep bank, at the bottom of which he could catch the glistening of a stream; and, after a warning to take good heed to his footing, the woodman led him down a flight of steep steps, cut in the bank, to a small path, which ran along by the side of the water. The dell, which the stream had apparently channelled for itself, and which was flanked by woody banks, varying from twenty to forty feet in height, extended for nearly a mile through the wood, and at length issued forth from the forest screen, at the edge of a rich and well-cultivated tract of country.

At this spot there was a bridge, over which ran one of the roads from the abbey; but the little path, which the woodman and his companion were following, passed under the bridge by the side of the river; and Boyd continued to pursue it for two or three hundred yards farther. He then ascended the bank, which had by this time become low and sloping, and took his way across a field to the right, so as to join the road at some distance from the bridge. A few yards in advance was seen a lantern, and a wood-cart with its team of horses, and two men standing by its side. To one of these the woodman spoke for a few moments in a low voice; and then, turning to the other, he said, "You understand your orders, David. Here is the man who is to go with you--Now, my lord," he continued, in a whisper; "you had better get up on the front of the waggon. I must here leave you; for I have the security of some others to provide for."

"I trust my fair guide from the abbey has met with no peril on her return," said the bishop in a whisper. "It would be bitter to me indeed if any evil befel her in consequence of her charity towards me."

"I trust not," said the woodman; "but yet I now find she could not return to the abbey, and has taken refuge elsewhere. There were eyes watching her she knew not of, and help at hand in case she needed it. But I must go and provide for all this; for a fair girl like that ought not to be trusted too long with a gay young lord. He seems a good youth, 'tis true, though wild and rash enough."

"Oh, he may be fully trusted," replied the prelate. "I will be his sponsor, for he was brought up under my own eye, and I know every turn of his mind. His rashness is but manner, and his light gaiety but the sparkling of a spirit which has no dark thought or memory to make it gloomy. If he is with her, she is safe enough; for he would neither wrong her nor see her wronged."

"Nevertheless, I must see to the safety of both," replied the woodman; "so now farewell, and peace attend you--Stay, let me help you up."

Thus saying, he aided the bishop to mount upon the front of the cart; and at a crack of the waggoner's whip the team moved slowly on.

CHAPTER XIV.

The lighted brand which Chartley carried in his hand hardly remained unextinguished till he and Iola had passed through the deep gateway into the large hall; but there they found much more light than they had expected, for the fire in the court-yard threw a broad glare over the two large windows, and served, in some degree, to illuminate the interior. It was one of those vast old halls, of which but few are now remaining, though at that time no great baronial residence was without one of them. Some indeed were of greater extent than the one I now speak of; but few, if

any, had a bolder sweep of arch than was displayed by the vaulted roof which now covered the young nobleman and his companion. Time had spared it; and ruin had not as yet laid any hand upon it, so that the eye could roam through the framework of richly carved oaken beams above, without detecting any flaw in the slating which overspread the whole. No columns or obstructions of any kind interrupted the sight from one end to the other; and, by the flickering of the fire-light, Chartley could perceive two doors opening out of the opposite end of the hall, one upon the right hand and another upon the left. To the door upon the right, two or three stone steps led up from the pavement; and he inquired at once, remembering that Iola had boasted a thorough knowledge of the building, if she could tell him whither that entrance led.

"To the great square tower," she replied, "by a staircase in the little turret that you might see at the side of the keep. It is very narrow, but quite good and perfect still."

"If the door be still there and sound," replied Chartley, "it will be as good a place of refuge as any; for the mouth of a narrow staircase is no bad spot for defence."

"I think the door is there," replied Iola; "but we can soon see."

"Thanks to the fire without, we can, sweet Iola," replied Chartley, walking forward by her side; but, as he did so, his foot struck against something lying on the pavement, which he sent rattling to the other side of the hall. "Why, what is here?" he exclaimed, stooping down. "Some one has been lighting a fire here, not very long ago. And on my life here is a lamp too, seemingly not very long extinguished; at all events, there is oil in it."

"Oh yes, it is long ago," answered Iola, "as long ago as Christmas. I remember all about it now. The nuns come up here every year, on the morrow of Christmas, for there is still a mass kept up once a-year in the chapel; and, the last time, sister Bridget left her lamp behind her, which she brought to light the tapers on the altar. It may now serve us in good stead; and I do not see why we should not light a fire here too; for they do so every Christmas day, and heat a flagon of Malvoisie, for the priest who says the mass."

"Would to Heaven we had a flagon of Malvoisie to heat," replied Lord Chartley, laughing. "I know few things better, on a cold night or in a doubtful hour. Strange, sweet Iola, that so spiritual a thing as hope should go up and down, burn more faintly or more brightly, for the want or the possession of a few drops of grape juice."

"It may be so with men," answered Iola; "but I do not think it is so with women. Hope with me never burns brighter than in a fine clear summer morning, when I hear the birds sing. There seems, in the sweet sounds and in the sweet sights, a world of promises from a voice that never lies."

"Oh yes, but Malvoisie is good too," answered Chartley gaily, "especially when summer mornings are not here, when no sweet bird gives music, unless it be the hooting owl; and even Iola's eyes do not afford light enough to show one this great thick door, the hinges of which seem somewhat rusty."

As he thus spoke, with his foot upon the second step, he swung the heavy door backwards and forwards, with a grating sound, which seemed, to make the old hall shake.

"Come," he continued, "I will go light sister Bridget's lamp at the fire, and see what good Ibn Ayoub is about. His watch has been undisturbed, or we should have had his Arabic gutturals finding their way into the hall, and echoing round and round as harshly as this rusty hinge. You shall stay near the other door, till I return; but mind, if there should be anything like a fray, you run up here and shut yourself in. I am bound by knightly courtesy to take you back to the abbey safe and sound; and so if I am killed you must take the task upon yourself, in justice to my reputation."

"Killed! Oh do not talk of such a thing!" exclaimed Iola. "I beseech you, my noble lord, think not of risking life in such a case."

"To protect and serve you," answered Chartley, "I would risk more than life, sweet girl, if I had any thing more than life to lose. A man's life is worth very little in these days; for there is so little certainty of its continuing from one hour to another, that, good faith, I am fain to shake my head every morning when I rise, to see that it is upon my shoulders. Buckingham and Hastings, Vaughan, Grey, and others, besides some hundreds more, would have done better to have died in the field, or in defence of some fair lady, than to have waited for the headsman's axe. I trust, whenever my hour comes, that it will find me sword in hand. It is the only way I ever could make up my mind to look upon death complacently. I suppose I am a sad coward, for the thought of a sick bed, and feverish pillow, and lamentable friends, and the grave doctor with a potion in his hand, frightens me immensely. Nor is the axe much better for it usually has its dull antecedents of trial, condemnation, gaping fools, and blocks and scaffolds; whereas, on the battle field, or in the lists, lance to lance, for a lady's honour, with stroke for stroke, and clanging trumpets, and charging horse, and shouts of victory, the spirit springs forth triumphant through the wounds of the flesh, and soars away to glory, with the light of renown upon its wings."

Iola sighed, she knew not why; but still the enthusiasm touched her, and she felt a thrill run through her veins at his high words, which made her almost fearful of the sensations which were

creeping over her heart.

"You do not make me brave," she said; "and therefore I will come with you under the arch, for I shall feel frightened if I lose sight of you."

"Oh, I will willingly live ever in your eyes," answered Chartley; "and he who reaches you must first pass over my corpse."

Iola started; for it is not to be supposed that, in that age, she, or any one, was without superstition; and she read a sort of double sense in his words, which seemed to her almost to have the force of prophecy. She followed him closely, however, and only paused when she again got sight of the court-yard, with the Arab still standing quietly by the fire, upon which he had piled some more wood.

"Has no one come?" demanded Chartley. "Have you heard the steps again?"

"I have heard the steps," answered the Arab; "but no one has come. They seem to wander round and round the court; but the eye sees not the walker. 'Tis most likely an Afrit, watching this old castle. There may be treasures buried here."

"There is a treasure hidden here," replied the young nobleman, speaking to himself but thinking of Iola. "As to Afrits, they never cross the sea. However, good Ibn Ayoub, as we have not men enough in the garrison to man all the walls or guard all the gates, we will withdraw into the great hall, light our fire there, and close the door, though we cannot drop the portcullis. Bring as much of the embers in as you can contrive to carry, without burning your garments, and a quantity of wood, of which there seems a great store there in the corner."

"'Tis an old gate broken to pieces," said the Arab. "'Twill soon burn, for it is as dry as camel's dung."

Chartley waited and listened, while his slave performed the task he had set him about; and then returning to Iola, after he had lighted the lamp, he said--

"I can hear no sound. It was good Ibn Ayoub's fancy, I suppose, though his ears are as sharp as those of a page in a fairy tale. He traced me through the forest to-night, by the sound of my horse's feet, as surely as a hound traces the deer by the scent.--Nay, cheer up, sweet Iola, or we shall both grow sad and fanciful in this old pile. What though we have no Malvoisie, there is better wine than ever flowed from the grape, or was imprisoned in a bottle--the wine of the heart, dear lady, of the heart unconscious of evil, the bright gay spirit, the cheerful contentment with the event of the hour, the fearless trust of the morrow. 'Tis but a little time weaken be together. Let us make the moments pleasant as they fly; for to me they will fly all too soon. Come, let us look round the hall, and see what it contains;" and he held the lamp high up above his head, gazing round, but unable to see the whole of the vast extent of the chamber.

"Oh, there is nothing here," answered Iola. "It has been stripped of every thing, long, long ago. But there are some things in the chambers above, which the plunderers did not think it worth while to bring down, I suppose--settees and stools, and a huge bed, which they say was made in the room where it stands, and cannot pass the door."

"Come, we will go and see them," cried Chartley. "Sitting on these cold stones is not made for those delicate limbs; and perchance we may find something which we can bring down. But first let the Arab light the fire here; and then we will try and close the great door."

No great difficulty occurred in either process; for the Arab contrived, on two broad pieces of wood, to bring in a sufficient quantity of embers speedily to kindle a large fire on the wide hearth of the old hall, and the ponderous door, though it had one or two large holes in it, and groaned most desperately at being forced to turn upon its hinges--a process which it probably had not undergone for more than half a century--nevertheless swung to easily enough, and the heavy bolt was forced into the deep hole made for its reception in the stone-work.

When the young lord turned round, after aiding the Arab in this work, the aspect that the hall presented was cheerful enough. The pile of wood on the hearth had caught fire at once; and, mingled with the smoke which was rushing up the wide chimney, were thick columns of many coloured flame, which cast a warm and flickering glow over the ancient stone walls and upon the painted glass of the windows, where knights, and priests, and angels, and apostles, were grouped in somewhat strange confusion. In the bright blaze of the fire, on the opposite side of the hearth, stood the fair form of Iola, wrapped indeed in the earl's surcoat, which veiled, without altogether concealing, the beautiful outline of the figure. The long sable-lined sleeves, trailing upon the ground, seemed to form a sort of train behind her as she stood, while the beautiful neck and shoulders rose from the furred collar, lightly fastened over her chest, and the fair and speaking countenance, turned towards those who were closing the door, was now shown in bright light, now cast into shadowy indistinctness as the flame rose and fell.

Chartley gazed at her, and thought it was the fairest sight he had ever seen; and sensations rose up in his breast, which he took no pains to master. He was young, free, trustful, full of happy confidence in the future, and he said to himself--"Why not? Roam the world over, can I find anything more lovely than she *is*, more gentle, more sweet, more full of noble feelings and bright

thoughts, than she *seems*. In marriage one always cuts one's fate upon a die, the fall of which is uncertain.--Why not?--But not now, not now," he continued, the spirit of gentlemanly courtesy coming to guide him instantly; "I must wait till she is free from danger, and then seek her when she is safe and in the midst of her friends again. I must not agitate or alarm her now."

Though the resolution was a strong one, as well as a good one, it was difficult to keep the feelings which were busy at his heart from influencing his manner in some degree. Nor, to say truth, did he keep them in such subjection. He would have liked very much to make her sit beside him, and, with his arm cast around her, pillow her beautiful head upon his bosom, while she took the repose so needful to her. He would have liked to stand before that open hearth, with her hand clasped in his, and their eyes fixed upon the faces and landscapes in the fire, talking of love and dreaming of happy days. He did none of these things; but yet there was a softness and a tenderness in his manner and his tone, every now and then, which went thrilling through Iola's young fresh heart, and creating dreads for herself and for him, which might have shaken her terribly, had it not been for the gay and sparkling spirit which broke forth in his conversation from time to time, and carried away all heavier thoughts upon its wings.

"Now come," he said, taking up the lamp after he had paused by her side for a moment, "let us go up to these chambers above, and see if we can find some seat or another, that we can bring down. You have been walking and standing a long long while; and those beautiful little feet will be sadly tired, unless we can discover some means of resting them. I would rather walk a hundred miles than stand an hour. I have always thought that a bird's life must be a sad wearisome one, except when it is on the wing, to stand all day on a bare bough with those thin shanks of its, and nothing to do but trim its feathers."

"And sing its songs," said Iola, following him. "It must have its consolation there."

Chartley went first, lighting her by the way; and the stairs, narrow and worn with many feet, soon afforded a fair excuse for taking her hand to lead her up. When once it was in his, it was not easy to part with it; and, as he held it neither very loosely nor very tightly, there seemed no plea for withdrawing it, so that it remained where it was, even after they had reached the top of the stairs, and had entered a low-roofed stone corridor, and a large old-fashioned vaulted chamber, which had probably been the state bedroom of the former possessors of the castle. There, still, remained the great bedstead which Iola had mentioned, probably of the reign of Edward III., formed of dark black wood, apparently ebony, richly carved and inlaid with ivory upon the lower cornices. The rich hangings, with which it had been at one time adorned, had all been torn down and carried off with the bedding; but the framework was so artificially joined, that no means of removing it were apparent, without breaking it all to pieces; and it is probable that the rude soldiers, who had sacked the castle, were not disposed to burden themselves with any heavy booty. Marks on the floor showed where three truckle beds had stood, but not one now remained; and the only seat to be seen was a large chair, of the same materials as the bed, with a footstool, from which the embroidery that once covered it had been ripped.

"These will do," cried Chartley. "The chair must have come up, and so it can go down the stairs. Then we will set it by the fire; and it shall be your throne, queen of the May, while I sit on the footstool at your feet, and Ibn Ayoub crouches, as is his wont, upon the dry hearth. But you must be my lamp-bearer, or I shall never get them down;" and, giving the light to Iola, he raised the chair in his strong arms. "It is as heavy as iron," he said, "but it shall come down, if it were made of adamant."

As he spoke, an extraordinary sort of sound, like a low groan, echoed through the room, so clear and distinct, that there could be no doubt their ears deceived them not. Iola started, and well, nigh dropped the lamp, while Chartley set down the chair, and laid his hand upon his sword.

"It is some door, moving on its rusty hinges," he said, after listening for a moment. "The wind is blowing it backwards and forwards;" and taking up the chair again, he bore it into the corridor, while Iola went before with the light, gazing timidly around.

Nothing occurred to disturb them however; and at length, though not without difficulty, Chartley got the cumbrous seat down the narrow stairs. The Arab was now standing in the midst of the hall, gazing towards the door, with his naked scimitar in his hand.

"What is the matter, son of Ayoub?" asked Chartley. "What have you heard?"

"Feet, and a groan," answered the Arab, with his dark eyes glaring in the fire light.

"Pooh, 'tis some rusty hinge," said Chartley, "and the feet of rats or martins, driven to take shelter here by this long continued wintry weather.--Seat yourself here, sweet Iola. Put your feet to the fire, and dream of pleasant things, while I go up again and bring the stool."

Thus saying, he took the lamp from her hand, and re-ascended. He was not long absent; but Iola listened anxiously for his returning step. She felt safe while he was near her, but fearful the moment he was away.

Chartley was soon at her side again, and placing the stool close to her feet, he seated himself thereon, and, leaning upon the arm of her chair, gazed up into her face with a gay smile.

"Now this is comfortable," he said. "We may pass the remaining hours of night cheerfully enough here; and if you doze, sweet Iola, your little head will but fall upon Chartley's shoulder, where it may rest as securely, though not so softly, as on your own pillow in the abbey. There, seat yourself there, Ibn Ayoub, in the nook of the chimney, or your southern blood will be frozen in this cold northern night. Think no more of groans and footfalls. These are all tricks of the imagination--It is wonderful," he continued, turning to Iola, "what wild fancies superstition will beget, ay, and sad as well as wonderful, when one thinks of the horrible cruelties which reasonable men will commit upon the strength of stories that a child should be whipped for believing. When I was in Flanders a few years ago, a poor woman was burned alive, in the public market place; and what do you think was the crime of which she was accused?"

"Nay, I know not," answered Iola; "but, it should be a terrible crime indeed to draw down so terrible a punishment."

"The tale is simply this," replied Chartley. "There was a poor woman in one of the towns of Flanders, who gained her bread by the work of her needle. One of those who employed her was the wife of the bailiff of the black monks of that town; but when her work was done, the bailiff and his wife refused to pay the wages promised, and, being poor and distressed for money, she was naturally importunate. Obtaining no redress, she applied to the curate of the village, where she was born; for advice and assistance. It happened, however, that the good man had been entangled in a lawsuit with the bailiff of the monks, and whatever was the advice he gave to the poor woman, their conference resulted in evil to both. The woman sent her daughter to demand a part of that which was due, if she could not obtain the whole; and the poor girl arriving, while the bailiff and his family were at dinner, stood beside the table for some time, petitioning for payment in vain. Several days after, one of the family was taken ill and died. The disease, it would seem, was infectious; and before its ravages ceased, the bailiff and two others were dead. The rest of the family took it into their heads to accuse the poor woman, her daughter, and the curate, of having bewitched them; and fools and knaves enough were found to relate, and to believe, that the curate had baptized a toad, and had administered to it the blessed sacrament, at the instigation of the poor needlewoman. The toad, cut in four pieces, was said to have been thrown under the table, where the bailiff dined, by the woman's daughter; and upon this fabricated charge, the unhappy creature was cast into prison, put to the torture, and afterwards burned to ashes."

Iola shuddered.

"It is very horrible," she said, "and one can hardly believe that such cruelty can exist in the breasts of human creatures."

"Or such folly either," answered Chartley, "as to suppose that the quarters of a baptized toad could bewitch to the death three innocent people. If there be charms and periapts, they must be produced by other means than that."

"But do you doubt there are such things?" asked Iola. "We read of them continually."

"Ah, fair Iola," answered Chartley, "we read and hear of many a thing which, tried by the strong tests of reason and religion, vanish away like empty dreams. If we but ask ourselves, thinking for one moment of the goodness and majesty of the Almighty, is it probable, is it possible, that God can suffer such things, there will be found an answer in our own hearts, which will banish all such imaginations."

Iola mused; and Chartley, laughing at the grave subject he had introduced, was proceeding to change it for some lighter topic, when the Arab suddenly rose up from the spot where he had seated himself, and lifted up his finger as a warning to listen.

"I hear something move," he said, "and not far off. Hark! You will hear."

Even as he spoke, a strange kind of whining sound, and then a dull groaning, came upon the air; and Chartley, starting up, exclaimed--

"This is indeed very strange."

The sounds had ceased almost instantly; but a sort of long-drawn sigh seemed to follow, and then a heavy rattling fall, as if a part of the wall had rolled down.

"Whatever that is," exclaimed Chartley, "it is in the court-yard. I will go out and see."

"Nay, nay, I beseech you," cried Iola, clinging to his arm, "do not, dear lord, do not rush into needless danger. Let us go up to the rooms above, and look forth from the windows there, as these are too high."

"Stay, I can reach them by the chair," said Chartley; and, placing the heavy seat underneath the window, the sill of which was a few inches above his eyes, he mounted upon it and looked out in silence, while Iola crept to his side, and raised her eyes towards his face. After gazing for a few moments, Chartley held out his hand to her, saying--"Come up hither beside me, sweet Iola, and see what is here. Be not afraid. There is no danger."

Iola gave him her hand, and, setting her light foot on the seat beside him, rose till her eyes just came above the window sill.

Her first impulse, had she not repressed it, when she obtained a view through the dim small pane into the ruinous court, would have been to utter a cry of terror and surprise; for certainly such were the sensations which she felt. The fire which she and her companion had left nearly extinguished had been relighted and piled up with fresh wood, which was sending forth a volume of flame, higher than a man's head; but the object which most struck the fair girl, as she gazed forth, was a dark black-looking figure, sitting between the window and the fire, crouched up in the position often assumed by an ape, and seemingly holding its hands, to warm them at the blaze. The attire, as far as it could be seen, which was very indistinctly, for the back being turned towards them was in deep shadow, appeared to be quaint and strange; and, rising straight up, though somewhat on the left side of the head, appeared a long thin object like a horn. Chartley continued gazing on this apparition in silence; but one glance was enough for Iola; and, springing down, she covered her face with her hand, saying in a low terrified voice--

"Oh, come down, come down!"

CHAPTER XV.

To the surprise of Iola, and certainly not less to that of good Ibn Ayoub, though with Mahommedan gravity he gave no voice to his wonder, Chartley burst into a violent fit of laughter.

"Good Heaven, what is it?" exclaimed Iola, looking up; and at the same moment Chartley sprang down from the chair, still laughing.

"Forgive me, dear Iola," he said, taking her little hand and kissing it, "but did you ever see the devil play on a bag-pipe?"

"I never saw the devil at all," replied Iola, with a bewildered look; "but I do not understand what you mean."

"I mean, sweet friend, that this is evidently a piper, and, if I mistake not much, 'tis man I saw in Tamworth this very morning and yesterday also. He seemed the life and soul of the people round, a merry happy-hearted fellow, whom they call Sam the Piper, with a breast without guile, if one may judge by his face, which bespeaks him no one's enemy but his own. Strange to say, he would drink neither wine nor ale, though I offered him either, and though his face betrayed many a potation past, if not present. Stay a while. I will go out and see. If it be the man I mean, I will bring him in; for by all means we will have the piper of our faction."

"But are you sure that it is safe?" said Iola, timidly, but holding his arm to detain him.

"Oh, he will not betray us," exclaimed Chartley; "and besides we can keep him here as long as we like."

"But if it should prove to be the--the--" said Iola, adding, after a moment's pause, "some evil being."

Chartley laughed again; and gently putting his arm round her for a single instant, he said--

"Fear not, Iola. With the angels in those eyes upon my side, I would undertake to protect you against all the evil spirits in the universe."

Iola dropped the eyelids over the lustrous orbs below; and a blush spread over her cheek like the crimson light of the setting sun. Chartley instantly withdrew his arm; and repeating--"Fear not," he opened the door and went out of the hall.

A few words were then heard, spoken without; and a moment after he re-entered, followed by Sam the Piper, with his beloved instrument still tight under his arm. The good man's steps were not quite steady, and certainly it was not natural feebleness that caused their vacillation. Yet his eye was clear and bright; and his merry voice seemed not in the least thickened by any liquor he might have imbibed.

"Gad ye good night, lords and ladies, gad ye good night," he said, as he entered, making a low obeisance, and producing at the same time a lamentable squeak from his chanter. "Gad ye good night, tawny Moor. I did not think to see your beautiful black face again for many a day. Gad ye good night, fairest of ladies. To see you and his dark lordship here, one would think one's self

upon the confines of the upper and the nether world, with angels on the one side and devils on the other."

"Meaning me for one, knave," said Chartley, giving him a good-humoured shake.

"Ah, mercy, mercy, noble sir," cried the piper in a pitiful tone. "Shake me not; for my legs are not made of iron to-night, and my stomach is as full as my bag when well blown up."

"But your stomach has something stronger than air in it, if I mistake not," said Chartley, laughing, "Come tell me, sirrah, how it happens that you, who would take no strong drink yesterday, are well nigh drunk tonight."

"There's no contradiction in that," replied the man, "though I take no liquor, liquor may overtake me; and if a man is overtaken in liquor, the fault's in the liquor, not in him."

"Still, if the fault's in the liquor, and the liquor in him, the fault is in him," answered Chartley; "for learned doctors say that the thing which contains another contains all that it contains."

"But, then," replied the piper, who, like many of his class, was exceedingly fond of chopping logic; "if the fault's in the liquor, and the liquor in him, he cannot be in fault, for the thing that contains cannot be in the thing contained. But marry, my good lord, the truth is, I made a promise to good sister Alice at the convent, not to get drunk at Tamworth fair, and gloriously I redeemed my word, and gloriously I got drunk afterwards."

While this dialogue had been proceeding, Iola stood by, marvelling greatly at all she heard; for it was a scene altogether new to her, and one of which, in her simplicity and ignorance of the world's ways, she could have formed no conception. In her ramblings hither and thither, which her good aunt had permitted pretty liberally, she might indeed have seen, now and then, a drunken man, for alas, drunkenness is a virtue of no particular age; but she had never met with the merry reckless wine-bibber--one of the peculiar character of the good piper--who has an excuse for his sins always ready, by which he does not impose upon himself.

After a few more words of the same kind, Chartley moved her chair for her back to the fire, seated himself as before on the stool by her side, and, while the Arab resumed his place, pointed to the opposite side, saying to the piper, "There, sit you down, and tell us what you've seen in the forest to-night."

"Good faith, I have seen nothing," answered Sam, "for the night's dark, and I have been somewhat dark too. After I had been to the abbey for the morning dole, to show good sister Alice that I had kept my word and was quite sober, I went away to the first tavern, and, with all the pence I had collected in the fair, bought myself a stoup of small wine, and a farthing's worth of sugar. Your lordship's groat helped me wonderfully. Then, not liking the thought of a forcible division of my property, I brought my wine up here, ensconced me in the doorway of the little tower, and went on sipping till I fell asleep. When I woke, it was black night; but there was still something left in my wine-pot, and I set to again to gain courage, and to keep out the cold. When I looked abroad, however, I soon saw that somebody had lighted a fire in the court; and I crept round and round on the walls, to see who it was, saying Paters and Aves all the time, and thinking it might be the devil had done it; for he, it is said, keeps up the best fire in his house of any man."

Lord Chartley gave a meaning and merry glance to Iola; and Iola smiled in return.

"At length, seeing no one there," continued the piper, "I ventured down into the court to warm myself, when suddenly your lordship came upon me, and took me prisoner. I suppose it was my mad pipes betrayed me, for, like a chattering wife, they are always talking where they should not, unless I am careful to blow all the wind out of the bag. However, I am never much afraid of robbers, plunderers, camp-followers, or anything, for nobody meddles with a piper. You cannot have more of a cat than her skin, nor of a piper than his pipes, and neither the one nor the other is of much use to those who do not know how to handle them."

Chartley mused for a minute or two, and then said in a low tone to his fair companion:

"Do you not think, dear lady, that we could make use of this merry ribald, to communicate our situation here to those who could give us intelligence--ay, and even help in case of need. It is very sweet," he continued, tenderly, "to sit here by your side, whiling away the livelong hours of night, with one so fair and gentle. But I must not forget your comfort in my own happiness. You have passed a weary and an anxious night, and the sooner I can restore you to your friends, to tranquillity and repose, the better. I must find some other moment," he added rapidly, "brighter and calmer, to say more of myself--I think that we may use this man, who will not be stopped by the soldiery, to bear tidings of where you are----"

"Oh yes," exclaimed Iola, "let him go as quickly as possible to the abbey. My aunt will be sadly anxious about me."

"I fear that would be dangerous," replied Chartley. "Rather let him go to the woodman, tell him where we are, request him to send us information and advice, and, if possible, to communicate to the abbess, that you are quite safe. That I think is the best course to pursue."

"Perhaps it is," answered Iola; and then in a lower tone, she added, "if you can quite trust to this man--he seems a libertine and a drunkard."

"You must not judge him too harshly," replied Chartley. "Most men, especially of his class, have their peculiar vices; but, though it may seem strange, from those vices you must not imply others of a different class and character. Nay, more, there are faults which are almost always accompanied by certain better qualities; and, from what I know of the world, I am inclined to think, that this man's good faith might be better trusted than that of many a sanctimonious friar or smooth-spoken propriety-loving trader."

"But is he fit?" asked Iola. "To me he seems hardly sober."

"Oh fit enough," answered Chartley. "With daily tipplers a certain portion of good wine is needful to sharpen their senses. That gives them wit which takes away the wits of other men; and he is not likely to find more drink in the forest unless he apply to the pure stream.--Hark ye, good master piper. Tell me how much discretion is left in that noddle of yours?"

"Enough to prevent me running my head against a post, or leading another into a ditch," answered the piper. "Now, good my lord, did I not come down the stairs, from the little turret into the court-yard, with every stone step as frail and moveable as the rounds of ambition's ladder?"

"And thou art trustworthy, methinks," said Chartley, in a musing tone.

"Else have I drunk many a butt of good liquor to no purpose," replied the piper.

"How should that make thee trustworthy?" demanded the young lord.

"Because the liquor was sound and honest, my lord," replied the piper; "and as by this time it must have penetrated every part, I should be sound and honest too. Moreover, it was best half drunk in secret, so that secrecy's a part of my composition also."

"Well, I will trust thee," replied Chartley, "and if thou wilt win a gold angel, thou shalt have the means of doing so."

"I will not debate upon the question long," said Sam, starting up. "I am always ready to go upon a pilgrimage, and far readier to worship a gold angel than a painted saint. Let me see, six stoups, at one shilling and two pence the stoup, would be--soul of my body, there's drink for a week in a gold angel."

"There, there, cease your calculations," cried Chartley; "first win the angel, and then use it discreetly afterwards."

"So shall it be my better angel," said the piper, laughing, and winking his eye. "But how is the celestial coin to be obtained, my lord?"

"Listen, and you shall hear," replied the young nobleman; "and be serious now, for this is a matter of importance. Do you know Boyd, the head woodman of the abbey?"

"Do I know the great oak of Ashton?" exclaimed Sam. "Do I know the old tower of Tamworth? Do I know anything that men frequenting this neighbourhood see every day? Why, Boyd has given me both a beating and a breakfast, at times, has made my back groan under a cudgel and under a bacon. That last was a good deed, for it saved my boy, who is now over the sea with the Marquis of Dorset, from starving, when he was hid away in Mount Sorel wood. Oh yes, we all know Boyd; the roughest tongue, the hardest hand, the clearest eye, and the kindest heart in the country."

"Well then," said Chartley, "I wish you to find him out, and to tell him for me, that I am here in the old castle, and have a lady with me whom he wots of. My name I suppose you have learned from the horse-boys, by your be-lording me so often; and he will divine who the lady is; if you tell him that she is with me, and safe, but that we dare not venture forth without further information, while these soldiers are watching the wood. Let him send word to the lady's friends that she is in security, but, above all, give us intelligence and help if he can."

"Soldiers watching the wood?" said the piper, in a tone of surprise.

"Ay, even so," answered Chartley. "Thou, hast been like one of the seven sleepers, my friend, and hast dozed, unconscious, while great events were going on around thee. Half the houses on the abbey green have been burned; and there are bands now upon all the great roads of the wood. Does that frighten thee?"

"Not a whit," cried the piper. "How should it frighten me? They could but slash the sow's stomach under my arm, or my own; and neither the one nor the other is worth the sharpening of a knife. They'll not harm me; for all your mud-splashing, sheep-stealing, wench-kissing, big-oathed, blaspheming horse troopers are fond of a minstrel; and I will strike up my pipes when I come near the high road, to let them know who I am. It may be a signal to old Boyd too, if he's wandering through the wood, as most likely he is; for, like a ghost, he goes about more by night

than by day.--Burned half the houses on the abbey green! That's serious. By my pipes, some necks'll be twisted for it, I think."

"I trust there will," answered Chartley; "but now set out upon your errand, my good man, and when next you see me, my message being delivered, claim of me a gold angel; but if you say a word of it to any one else but Boyd himself, when next I see you, you shall have another sort of payment."

The piper laughed, and, giving the bag under his arm a squeeze, made his pipes squeak in a very ludicrous manner. Then quitting the hall, with a steadier step than that with which he had entered, he took his way down through the wood which had often been his home during many a warm summer night. Most of the paths were familiar to him; and trudging on, he entered one of the broader ways, which led directly to the high road that divided the forest into two unequal parts. After he had gone on for about half a mile, he heard voices speaking, and paused for an instant to consider. "I will be very drunk," he said to himself. "Drunkness is often as good a cloak as hypocrisy. All men make their garments out of the skins of beasts, and the smoothest are not always the thickest. Here go I then;" and, assuming a reeling and unsteady step, he blew up the bag of his pipes, and soon, from the various stops, produced a gay wild air, which would have been pretty enough, but for the continued dull squeaking with which it was accompanied.

"Ha, who goes there?" cried a voice, a minute or two after, as he emerged upon the road; and two mounted men were immediately by his side.

"Sam the piper, Sam the piper," he answered, in drunken accents. "And who are you, jolly boys? What do you keep the king's highway for? Are you looking to see if any man has dropped his purse? If so, I cry shares; for by St. Dominic, there's nothing in mine. Now, marry, if a fat priest were to fall in your way, I would rather be his mule afterwards than before."

"Why so, knave?" asked one of the men.

"Marry, because he'd ride lighter, I've a notion," replied Sam.

"Ha, say'st thou so, knave?" cried one of the men, lifting up his hand to strike him; but the other interposed, saying--

"Nay, nay, 'tis Sam the piper. He has a fool's privilege, and means no harm. Besides the man is drunk."

"Come, tell me, knave," exclaimed the other, "whither thou hast been wandering in the wood?"

"Nay, Heaven knows," answered the piper, "wherever wine and destiny led me. I have been asleep half the time; and since I woke, I have been walking about in the cool, to clear my complexion, and get the fumes of Tamworth fair out of my head; for I felt my knees weaker than they ought to be, and a solemn sort of haziness of the wits, just such as the preaching parson at Ashton must have after writing one of his sermons, and his congregation do have after hearing one."

The two soldiers laughed, and the fiercer of the two demanded--

"Did'st thou meet any man in the forest?"

"Not till I met your reverences," replied the piper. "I do not know what any man should do here, unless it were to sleep off a tipsy fit, lose his way, or pick up a purse, though the last has grown a rarity since the wars came to an end. In former times men might gather purses like blackberries upon every bush. That was when I was a soldier. But that whorson poke with a pike I got at Barnet crippled my crupper joint for life, and made me walk unsteady, which causes the poor fools to say I am drunk, though all the world knows that I live like an anchorite, eat herbs and roots, when I can get no flesh, and drink pure water, when there's neither wine nor ale to be had. Give you good den, my masters--What's the time o'day?"

"Night, you drunken dolt," replied one of the men. "It's matins by this time, but are you sure that you have not seen a man in a friar's gown? If you lie to me, your ears won't be safe for the next month."

"A man in a friar's gown?" said the piper with a hiccup, "ay, to be sure I did."

"When? Where?" cried the soldiers eagerly.

"Why, in Tamworth, yesterday morning," answered the piper; and one of the men, giving him a smart blow with his fist, told him to go on his way, with no very commendatory valediction.

Playing his part admirably well, the piper reeled down the road, passing two other patrols, each of which stopped and interrogated him, as the other men had done; somewhat more briefly, however, when they found he had been stopped and questioned before. At length, sitting down by the road side, as if his legs refused to carry him farther, when two of his interrogators had just passed on, he waited till they had gone to a little distance, and then plunged into the wood. He soon forced his way on, to one of the lesser paths, but there he stopped to consider, saying to

himself--"How shall I make Boyd hear, if he be roaming about? I'll go straight to his house; but this forest is for all the world like a rabbit burrow; and I may be popping out of one hole while he is popping into another, if I cannot contrive to send some messenger to his ears, that will run a few hundred yards on each side of me, at least. I must not try the pipes again, but I will make the belling of a deer. If he hears that at this season of the year, he will be sure to come up to see what's the matter."

Accordingly, by placing his fingers after a fashion of his own upon his lips, he contrived to produce a very accurate imitation of the peculiar call of the deer at certain periods of the year; he continued to emit these sounds from time to time, as he walked on, till at length he heard a rustle in the brushwood near.

"Now that's either a stag," he said to himself, "who, like a young gallant of nineteen, makes love at all times and seasons, and I shall have his horns in my stomach in a minute; or else it is Boyd or one of his men, and I have hit the mark. I must risk the horns, I fancy."

A moment after, a low voice said--

"Who goes there?"

"Sam the piper," answered our good friend, "looking for what he cannot find;" and the next moment, pushing through the shrubs, the tall and powerful form of the woodman stood before him.

"Ah, Sam," said Boyd, "what are you seeking, you drunken dog?"

"Seeking you, master Boyd," answered Sam in a very different tone from that in which he had addressed the soldiers. "I have news for you."

"Ay, and what may that be?" demanded Boyd, with the utmost indifference of manner; "some of the gossip of Tamworth I suppose. The bailiff has beat his wife, or the mercer's daughter has gone off with the smart apprentice; but I have other things to think of, master Sam, to-night. Have you heard that the rough bands from Coleshill have burnt the houses on the abbey green?"

"Yes, I've heard of it," answered Sam; "and there has been a great fire up at the old castle too."

The woodman started.

"At the old castle! What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "Who should burn the old castle?"

"I didn't say it had been burned," replied the piper. "I only said that there was a great fire there; and very comfortable it was too, considering the cold night and the good company."

"Speak out, man! What do you mean?" demanded the woodman sternly. "This is no time for fool's play."

"I think not," answered the piper; "and so the plain truth is, that I was ordered, by a certain young lord, to tell you, that a certain young lady is up there safe with him and his tawny Moor, and that they are afraid to stir out while the wood is watched by the soldiers, without farther information and advice; and they look to you to give both, and moreover to send intelligence to her friends, that she is quite safe. There, I have delivered my message, better than ever message was delivered before, for I have given it word for word, and you may make the best of it."

"Up there, with him alone throughout the night!" said the woodman, in a tone of no very great approbation. "Yet he may be trusted, I think--but still 'twere better not. What will the other feel, when he hears of it?--No matter. It cannot be helped. There is nothing else to be done."

"Oh yes, there is," answered the piper; "if you could take them up a stoup of wine, or a black jack of good strong beer, you would do more; for, if I judge rightly, they have nothing to keep up the spirits, or support the body; or amuse the time, unless it be making love, and that is cold work without meat or drink."

"Listen to this fool now!" said the woodman, "how he hits the nail aright--I will go up myself."

"They will not thank you if you come empty-handed," answered the piper; "and you had better take me with you, to show you the way; for the forest is changed since you last saw it, and there are living trees on the high road, which stop up the paths, and move to and fro."

"I understand thee, piper," answered the woodman. "Thou art a shrewd knave with thine enigmas. Come along with me then. I will try to make thee useful, for the first time in thy life."

"Not useful!" said the piper, as the woodman moved on, taking a branch of the path that led away to the right. "I am the most useful man in the whole hundred. What would weddings be without me, or baptisms either? How many quarrels do my sweet notes allay? How often do I make peace between man and wife, by drowning her shrill voice by my shriller notes, and outroaring him with my drone? Go to, you would never get on without me--Useful, quotha? But where are you going, now? This is not the way to the castle."

"I am going to take thy sage advice," replied the woodman, "which on ordinary occasions is not worth a groat. But we may as well carry up some provisions; and for that purpose, as well as others, I must take my cottage by the way. But now hold thy peace, man, for I would have my thoughts clear."

Thus saying, he strode on before, the piper following, till they reached the broader road, which passed the cottage, and came in sight of the little green.

"Hist, hist," said the piper. "There is some one before the door. It may be one of the soldiers who set fire to the houses."

"Then I will cleave his skull with my axe," answered the woodman, lightly; "but, 'tis only David. Go on--get thee into the house. I want to speak, to him;" and striding forward, he approached the man, and spoke a few words to him, of which the piper could only distinguish a few, though he was all ears.

"By half-past five," said the woodman, "as many as you can, and well armed."

"At the old castle?" asked the man.

"Yes," answered the woodman, "under the gateway. The sky will be grey by that time. Quarrel not with the soldiers, if you can help it. Say you are but doing your needful service; but keep to it sturdily. Nay, now I think of it, 'twere better to gather in the wood upon the hill before the castle, especially if the soldiers follow you. There, begin hewing down the young trees which we marked for cutting out, and run up to the gate if you should hear my horn. Now away, and bring all you can; but mind you send Adam up on his pony at once to the abbey."

The man replied not, but ran away with a peculiarly quick but easy trot; and Boyd entered the hut, where he found the piper standing very near the door. He felt inclined to ask him why he had not gone in, feeling sure that he had lingered to listen; but there, just before him, stood the great deer-hound Ban, neither growling nor attempting to seize the intruder, but gazing at him with a very fierce and formidable expression of countenance, which might well daunt even a stout heart in the breast of an unarmed man. The moment the dog saw his master, however, he dropped his stiffened tail and raised ears; and the woodman said, "Now, Sam, come you with me, and we will load ourselves with food for the nonce. Here, sling this great bottle under your right arm, to balance your bag-pipes, and take this loaf upon your back. I will carry the rest; but I must leave my right hand free, in case of need, to use my weapon."

"But how am I to use my weapon, if you load me so?" asked the piper, making his instrument give a squeak.

"The less you use it the better," answered the woodman.

"I say the same of all weapons," rejoined Sam. "But never mind, put on the load, and let us go."

Their arrangements were soon complete, and with a rapid pace they gained once more the edge of the high roads and there paused under the trees, to watch the proceedings of the enemy. The same vigilant patrol was kept up; but the woodman marked it with a smile.

"They think the person they seek must have taken refuge there," he said in a whisper to his companion, "because he could not pass by the hamlet or the lower road, without falling in with them; but if they keep their parties so loose, I would pass a hundred men across, one by one. I will go first, and you follow. He waited till the next couple of soldiers had ridden slowly by, and then with a silent step crossed to the opposite side of the road, where he paused for his companion; but the poor piper had nearly brought himself into a dangerous situation, by a hankering for the great bottle which hung under his arm. In extracting, with his stout finger and thumb, the cork from the mouth, he produced a sound loud enough to make two of the soldiers stop, and then ride up to the spot; but his bagpipe once more saved him; for squeezing the bag hard, and running his fingers over the pipe, he produced a series of sounds only to be equalled by those of two cats in a gutter; and one of the soldiers exclaimed:

"It is only that drunken piper again. Cease your squalling, knave, or I'll break your pate."

The sound of the pipe instantly stopped; and the moment the two men had gone on, the piper passed the road and joined his companion. The rest of the way was speedily accomplished, and, a little before five, the woodman approached the gates of the old castle. There he paused, and, after a moment's thought, turned to his companion, saying:

"It would be a great advantage to us, my good friend, Sam, if we could get some information of the movements of these bands."

"I'll undertake it," said the piper, whom success had made bold. "You shall have tidings of any change in their dance. But you must give me something to wet my mouth first, Master Boyd."

"Well, well," answered the woodman, set the bottle to your lips, but only drink to the peg, do you hear? Stay, I'll hold my hand upon it, and stop you; for you must leave some for others, and

not take too much yourself.

The piper took a deep draught, and was only stayed by his companion snatching the bottle from him. Then followed a consultation as to what was to be done in the many contingencies which might arise. It was agreed that, if the piper did not return within half an hour after day-break, the party in the castle should conclude he had been detained by the soldiery; that if he came back without being followed, and having remarked no movement of importance, he should play a low and quiet air upon his instrument; while, on the contrary, if the soldiers were at his heels, and danger menacing, he should come on with a quick loud march.

This being settled, he departed on his errand; and, passing over the frail remains of the bridge, the woodman entered the great court, where the embers of the fire were still gleaming in the ashes, like the eyes of a wild beast through a thicket. Approaching the door of the hall, he paused and listened, not knowing what might have occurred since the wandering musician had quitted the place. But all was silent; and, bending down his head a little, he looked forward into the interior of the hall through one of the rifts which had been made violently in the door at the former siege. The party were nearly in the same position as when the piper had left them, the Arab crouching upon the ground near the fire, which he seemed lately to have supplied with wood, and his dark face resting on his darker hand. Chartley was seated on the footstool, with his feet stretched towards the fire, and his left side leaning against the arm of the chair. In the chair was Iola as before, but her eyes were closed. Her hand rested upon Chartley's arm; and her head drooped upon his shoulder, while her balmy breath fanned his cheek, as she slept, tired out by emotions and fatigues.

CHAPTER XVI.

In the course of this work I have mentioned several roads, the direction of each of which will be very easily understood by those who have an acquaintance with the locality, even in the present day. For those who have not, however, I must add a few words of explanation. One road, passing over the abbey green and between the houses on the western side, descended the slope, on the top of which the buildings stood, and then, running through the lower part of the wood, ascended the higher hill, cutting straight across the heart of the forest. At the bottom of the slope, however, just under the abbey, and at the distance of, perhaps, a quarter of a mile, this road was entered by another, which, coming through the lower ground from the hamlet at Coleshill, and joining the valley and the stream at the distance of about a mile from that place, followed all the meanders which the little river chose to take, till it reached the spot I have mentioned. At the point where the two roads met, Sir John Godscroft, after distributing his men around the wood, fixed his temporary head quarters, and took the measures which he thought necessary for obtaining information. Two messengers were also sent off in haste in different directions; and every peasant who could be brought in was strictly interrogated, as well as the bailiff of the abbey, who was subjected to more than one cross examination. The information of the bailiff was peculiarly valuable, not so much because it was eagerly and minutely given, both from motives of revenge and apprehension, as because it afforded the most perfect and detailed account of every part of the abbey, as far as it was known to the coward himself. From it, Sir John Godscroft satisfied himself completely, first, that no part of the abbey where a man could be concealed had escaped search, and, secondly, that the fugitive must have taken refuge in that portion of the forest lying to the right of the road as you ascended the hill. With this conviction he established a line of patrols all round the wood, too close, as he thought, for any man to pass unnoticed, and then wrapping himself in his cloak, with a saddle for his pillow, he gave himself up to sleep. Twice he woke during the night, and, mounting his horse, rode at a rapid pace round the whole of that part of the wood which he was watching so eagerly, and ever, as he went, he encouraged the men on duty, by reminding them that a reward of a thousand marks was promised for the capture of the bishop of Ely.

"Be vigilant till morning," he said, "and then we will search the wood. In a few hundred acres like this, it is impossible he can escape."

He once more stretched himself on the ground, when it wanted about an hour to dawn, and had slept for somewhat more than half an hour, when he was roused by the return of one of his messengers.

"Up into the saddle, Sir John, up into the saddle!" said the man; "Sir William Catesby is at my heels with full five hundred spears. He rose and mounted at once, as soon as he got your message; and his men say that he has a warrant under the king's own hand for the arrest of the bishop and several others."

Godscroft looked somewhat grim at this intelligence, imagining, perhaps that the reward he anticipated was likely to be snatched from his grasp by another. What he might have done in these circumstances, had there been time for deliberate thought and action, I cannot tell; but before he could well shake off the effects of sleep, the head of Catesby's troop came down from the green; and the crafty and dissimulating minister of Richard sprang to the ground by his side.

Catesby took Sir John Godscroft by the hand, and divining, perhaps, what might be the impression produced by his coming, said in a loud frank tone, "Sir John, you and your brave companions have done the king good service, which will not be easily forgotten. Think not that I come either to share or take away your reward, but simply as a loyal subject and a good soldier, to do my duty to my prince and my country, without any recompense whatever. We must have this traitor before noon to-morrow."

"That shall we, beyond doubt, Sir William," replied the other, while a good number of the soldiers stood round and listened. "With the force which you have brought, one body can surround the wood while the other searches."

"I must detach a considerable troop," replied Catesby, "to pursue the party of Lord Chartley to Hinckley; for I have authority to attach every one who has contributed in any degree to the escape of this proclaimed traitor, the bishop of Ely."

"Then I have a notion you must attach the abbess of St. Clare," said Godscroft, "for she has certainly sheltered him and favoured his evasion, since the young lord left him there."

"How many men has Chartley with him?" demanded Catesby, not appearing to notice the suggestion regarding the abbess.

"Well nigh upon fifty," answered Godscroft, and then added, returning to the point: "Had you not better secure the abbey first?"

"No, no," answered Catesby; "we must not violate sanctuary, nor touch the privileges of the church;" and, taking Godscroft's arm, he said in a low voice, "What is the meaning of those houses I see burned upon the green? I hope your men have not done it."

"Good faith but they have," answered the other; "altogether contrary to my orders though; and I have hanged several of them for their pains."

"Better keep this from the king's ears," said Catesby, musing. "However, we must have the bishop, Sir John, and this young Lord Chartley too, who has been clearly privy to Morton's visit to England, which makes it a case of misprision of treason, for which disease the axe is the only remedy I know."

After uttering these bitter words in a somewhat jocose tone, he returned to the head of his troop, and gave some orders, which immediately caused a party of forty-eight or fifty men to ride on, with all speed, upon the same road which had been taken the night before by Chartley and his companions. The rest of Catesby's dispositions were soon made; for, in order not to disappoint Sir John Godscroft and his companions of their prey, he reserved to the regular soldiers the simple task of guarding the wood, while it was searched by Godscroft's band. Nothing, however, could be done till day-break, beyond a few preliminary arrangements; and the rest of the time was spent by the two leaders in walking up and down, and conversing over the events in which they took an interest.

"If we had but known an hour or two before," said Sir John Godscroft, "we should have caught the bishop in the abbey. We lost no time by the way, nor in setting out either; for we were not five minutes out of the saddle after Sir Charles's messenger arrived. 'Tis marvellous he did not send before; for his man tells me he was more than a whole day in the bishop's company, and knew him from the first."

"He could not help it," answered Catesby. "He wrote at once to the king and to myself; but it was agreed on all hands that it would be better for Weinants to follow him till he was lodged somewhere for the night; for, if we had attempted to take him in Tamworth yesterday morning--not having known soon enough to seize him in his bed--he would have escaped to a certainty, in the confusion of the fair. Then to catch him on the road would have been difficult, for Chartley's party is large; and a very little resistance on their part would have given him time to fly. No, no, Weinants is wonderfully shrewd and discreet; and he calculated to a nicety, that this traitor prelate would either stop here upon some pretence, while the rest rode on to Hinckley, or go on with them to Hinckley, where he could be taken without trouble.--Is not the sky turning somewhat greyer, think you?"

"Methinks it is," replied the other.

"Well then, let us to our work," said Catesby. "You must dismount your men, and let two or three enter at the mouth of every path, pursuing it through its whole track, till they meet somewhere in the centre of the wood. Have you any one who knows the forest well?"

"But few," replied the other. "However, I have remarked, when riding by on the other road, the towers of an old castle rising up, about the middle of this part which we have surrounded.

They can all direct their steps thither--"

"Ay, and search the castle too," said Catesby. "He must have some one to guide him, depend upon it. The ruin will be a good place for refuge."

"If we find him not at the first essay," responded the other, "we can afterwards take the wood in separate portions, and beat through every thicket, as we should for a stag."

"Away then, away!" answered Catesby. "It will be well day before we have commenced."

CHAPTER XVII.

The opening of the door of the hall startled Iola from her slumber; and when she found where her head had been resting, a bright warm blush spread over her fair face. Though the lamp was by this time glimmering low, the form and face of the woodman were instantly recognized by all the party in the hall; and an expression of gladness came over all their faces. He was instantly assailed by many questions which he could not answer; but he told all he knew; and one piece of information was at all events satisfactory to both Chartley and Iola, namely, that the bishop had escaped. "There," he continued, setting down the food and wine which he carried, "there is something to refresh you, young people, though good sooth, lady, I thought you were by this time safe within the walls of the abbey, and would rather it had been so."

"And so would I," answered Iola, though, perhaps, her heart was at that moment a little doubtful; "but it could not be, Boyd, for the door in the cell was closed when I went back--I fancy the bishop had let it slip from his hand--and I could not return to the abbey without passing through the midst of the armed men. Then as I was hurrying towards your cottage for shelter and protection, I met with this noble Lord, who told me the soldiers were upon the road----"

"And proved a pleasanter protector than an old woodman, I doubt not," replied Boyd, with a cynical smile.

Iola's face reddened again; but she replied frankly: "a noble, a kind, and a generous one certainly, to whom I shall ever feel indebted."

"One does not choose in a thunderstorm, my good friend," said Chartley, in his usual gay tone, "whether one will take refuge in a palace or a hermitage. The nearest place at hand is the best; and this fair lady, I doubt not, cared not much whether it was a lord or a woodman that came to her aid, so that she got help at need. But now let us think of what is to be done. Morning will soon be here, and some course of action must be determined."

"What course do you propose?" asked Boyd.

"Nay, I know not," answered Chartley. "The only thing I can think of is to take the lady by the hand, and walk straight through these men back to the abbey with her. They cannot prove me to be a bishop, nor her either, I suppose."

The woodman mused, and then, pointing to the provisions, he said, "Eat and drink, eat and drink; you can do that and think too--They cannot prove either of you to be the bishop. I wish you were anything so good; but they can, perhaps, prove that you have, both of you, helped the bishop; and they can make treason out of that, I doubt not, after the proclamation. 'Tis an awkward case," he continued; "but if you wait awhile, the piper will bring us intelligence. The best spies in the world are pipers, horse-doctors, and mendicant friars. Perhaps the tidings he brings may save you the trouble of decision."

"That is always something gained," replied Chartley; "for decision is sometimes the hardest work we have to do; but yet I think any plan may be the best after all; for they can prove but little against me, and nothing against this sweet lady. They can but suppose that I am conducting her back to the abbey from some visit or expedition, with which they have nought to do."

"Ha!" exclaimed the woodman, sternly; "thou would'st not risk her name and fair fame, young lord? Some visit! What, in this garb, without coif, or veil, or mantle--on foot, with no attendants? No, no. If she were to be met and questioned, she must e'en tell the truth, for to suffer prison, or to lose life itself, were such a thing probable, were but light to a taint upon her name."

"And who would dare utter such an insinuation in my presence?" exclaimed Chartley, his eye flashing at the thought. "By Heaven, if any man did, I would cram it down his throat with my sword."

"So hot!" said the woodman, with a laugh. "If they did not utter it in your presence, they might utter it behind your back, which were as bad. They might say--and how could you deny it?--that this lady had been out of the abbey with you, roaming about no one knew whither, without motive, without cause, without excuse. No, no! That will not do. Lord Chartley cannot fight or frighten two hundred men; and they will have a reason for all this, depend upon it. If not, they'll make one. 'Tis most unlucky that I knew not of these events before, or I would have found means to send to the abbey, and have the door from the cell opened; but it is now too late, I fear, and, at all events, we must wait for further intelligence. But fear not, lady, fear not. We will find resources, which are many here, though not quite so plentiful as the acorns on the trees."

"I am not afraid," answered Iola. "The king, I do not think, would kill me for guiding the bishop into the wood."

"But he might prevent your marrying the man of your heart," answered the woodman, with one of his grim smiles.

Iola's colour rose a little; but she replied boldly: "I have no man of my heart, Boyd; and therefore he could not do that either."

Chartley's eye had turned rapidly to Iola's face, as the woodman spoke, with an anxious and inquiring look; but her frank reply seemed to relieve him, and he said, gaily: "Nevertheless, we must not risk anything where there is risk to you, dear lady. Methinks you are one who would find even gesses of silk or gold cord difficult to wear; and we must give Richard no excuse for putting them on, if we can help it."

"Women are born to wear gesses of some kind or another, noble lord," replied Iola; "and unhappy is the woman who cannot, content herself with them; but I trust you will consult your own safety without heeding mine."

"Not I, in faith!" answered Chartley, in a determined tone. "I will see you back to the abbey, and safe in the hands of your friends, come what will--that is to say, if I have power to do so. They may take my life or my liberty, but no man has power to make me break my word, or fail in my devoir."

"Well, well," said the woodman; "let us think of these things no more. Come, take some bread, good friend," he continued, speaking to the Arab. "There is salt in it, and you can e'en taste the bottle too, I dare say, for you cannot tell what are the contents."

He then leaned his head upon his hand, as he lay stretched out by the fire, and seemed to fall asleep, while Iola and Chartley conversed in low tones. But, though his eyes were closed, it was not with slumber; and at length, after an hour or somewhat more had passed, he and the Arab both started up at once, the woodman exclaiming: "Hark! there is our messenger! Come forth with me, my lord, and meet him. Your trusty infidel can stay and protect the lady."

Chartley followed at once, and the woodman strode rapidly across the court, but suddenly stopped, under the old arch of the gateway; and, laying his hand upon Lord Chartley's arm, he said, in a low serious tone: "Are you aware, my lord, that the Lady Iola St. Leger is contracted in marriage to Arnold Lord Fulmer?"

Chartley stood and gazed at him in silence, with his brow contracted and his lip quivering. He could not or he would not reply, and the woodman went on saying: "I am sorry, you did not know this. It should have been told you before."

"It should, indeed," replied Chartley; and then, after a pause, he added: "But it matters not, she is not to blame. More than once I have seen something hanging on her lips as if seeking utterance but afraid to venture forth. If I had told her what was growing upon my heart, she would have spoken."

"Most likely," answered the woodman; "for hers is a heart very soon seen through. 'Tis like a clear well, where one can trace all the pebbles in the bottom--their shape, their colour, and if anything obscures them, it is but a light ripple from a passing wind."

"And yet she said but now that she had so love," replied Chartley, moodily.

"And that is true also," answered the woodman; "contracted in infancy, how can she love a man she does not even recollect?"

"Well, 'tis no matter," answered Chartley; "the vision of happiness will pass away, and it is something to have served, protected, comforted her. Hark, the man is drawing near with a low and solemn dirge, as if we were all to be slain and buried ere noon. There is the dawn too, coming in the east, if I mistake not. Let us go on, and stop the piper's melancholy squeaking."

"'Tis but a sign he is not followed," replied the woodman, detaining him. "Let us stay here, we might miss him in some of the turnings; I will whistle, however, to show him that we hear, and then perhaps he will stop."

But the inveterate piper droned on, till he was within sight of the gates, and Chartley and the

woodman went down to meet him.

"What news, what news?" they both demanded, eagerly.

"Bad tidings," answered the piper, shaking his head. "First, my lord, you owe me a gold angel."

"There are two," answered Chartley, sharply. "Now for the rest."

"Why then, it is but this," answered Sam. "The rogue, Catesby, has come down with five hundred horse. He has sent on fifty to arrest your lordship at Hinckley, before you are out of bed in the morning. The rest he keeps here to surround the wood, while good Sir John Godscroft searches every nook and corner of it and the old castle and all, to find the bishop and any one who may have aided in his escape from the abbey. They will not leave any stone unturned, depend upon it; and they swear by their beards, God bless them, that every one who has had any hand in it is a foul traitor, worthy of gibbet and post."

"Then are we in a strait indeed," exclaimed Chartley; "for with four hundred and fifty men to watch the wood, and two hundred to search it, there is but little chance of escape. I care not for myself, woodman, if you can but save the lady without scaith or ill construction."

"On my life 'tis that that puzzles me most," answered Boyd; "there may be help at hand, for I have provided some. Your own people, too, will be back soon, for I have sent for them; but we have no force to cope with such a number."

"Nay," answered Chartley; "give me but ten men, and I will break through their line, at least so as to lodge the lady in the abbey. Then as for my own fate, fall what may, I little care."

"Ten men you can have," answered the woodman; "but tell me first, my good lord, what you intend to do?"

"Make at once for the nearest door of the abbey," replied Chartley. "Their line must be thin around the wood, and on that side, perhaps, the thinnest. Grant that we fall in with some of Catesby's men, as most like we shall, we can make head against them for a time, and insure the lady's reaching the gates of the abbey."

"It were better," said Boyd, after thinking for a moment, "that while one part keep the king's men engaged, two or three of the others carry the lady quickly across the dell to the little gate. We have no other chance that I see; but remember, my good lord, that you will be overpowered and taken to a certainty."

"What matters it?" exclaimed Chartley. "Even were one to act on mere calculation, 'tis better to lose one than to lose two. Here we should be both taken together, there we insure her escape. Let us waste no more time in talking. How can we get the men?"

The woodman threw his eye over the edge of the hill on which they were standing, and replied, "You can have them at once." Then putting his horn to his lips, he blew a low and peculiar note; and, in a moment after, several men were seen running up from amongst the trees and bushes which covered the descent. "We must lose no time," said the woodman, "but forward with all speed, or we shall have the search begun and be cut off. You bring the lady forth while I speak to the men."

Chartley turned to go; but, pausing suddenly, he said: "Remember, my good friend, it is on you that I rely to bear the lady safe to the abbey, while I engage the troopers. Think not on my safety for one moment; but take some whom you can trust, and away with her at once. I would fain have seen her safe myself, but it must not be. The dream is at an end."

The woodman gazed at him with a well-pleased smile, which made his stern countenance look bright and sweet; and Chartley, without waiting for further words, hurried away into the ruin.

"There goes a nobleman indeed," said the woodman; and then, striding forward, he met the men who were advancing upon the hill.

"How many men have you got, David?" he continued, addressing the first man who came up.

"There are twelve of us," replied the man. "Three are wanting. I suppose they have stopped them. Most of us slipped through unseen; and the rest got through in different places, on telling their calling."

A short consultation then ensued, which, brief as it was, had hardly ceased when Chartley again came forth, bringing Iola with him. Her face was pale, and she was evidently agitated and alarmed; but she did not suffer fear or hesitation to embarrass in any degree the proceedings of the others. Holding tight by Chartley's arm, with the woodman and one of his men close behind them, and preceded and followed by the rest, divided into two bodies, she was led on, through one of the narrowest paths, down to the bottom of the little rise on which the castle stood. They then crossed a somewhat wider road, running by the bank and fountain I have mentioned before, and then plunged again into the thicker part of the wood. Hardly had they done so however, when the sound of a horn was heard upon the right; and, turning back his head towards the

woodman, Chartley said in a low voice, "The hunt has begun."

"Wary, wary," said the woodman. "Keep a sharp ear there in front, and halt in time."

With a somewhat slower step they walked on for a couple of hundred yards further; and then the two men at the head of their little column suddenly stopped, one of them holding up his hand as a signal to those behind. The sun had not actually risen; but yet the grey morning light had spread over the whole sky; and, though the path was somewhat dark and gloomy from the thick copse on either side and the manifold naked branches of the trees overhead, yet, the motions of each of the little party could be seen by the rest. All stopped at once; and a dead silence succeeded amongst themselves, through which, the moment after, the sound of voices and footsteps could be heard, at the distance of a few paces from them. The woodman laid his finger on his lips and listened; but there was a smile upon his face which gave courage to Iola, although the sounds seemed to be approaching fast. So distinctly were they heard indeed, the moment after, that it seemed as if a space of not more than five or six yards was left between the fugitives and the searchers; and Iola clung closer to Chartley's arm, and looked up in his face, as if asking what would come next. He did not venture to offer any consolation, but by a look; and still the steps and the voices came nearer.

"'Tis as thick as a hay stack," one man was heard to say to another, apparently close by.

"And we are set to find a needle in the pottle of hay," replied his companion. "Why he may lurk here without our finding him all day."

"But if we find him we shall get a good reward," replied the first.

"Do not reckon upon that, or you will cheat yourself," said his companion, in a scoffing tone. "At the best, the reward is but a thousand marks. Then Sir John takes two tenths, and the captain one tenth, and the other head men two tenths more amongst them, so that there are but five hundred marks left for two hundred men, even if Catesby and his people were out of the way, and, depend upon it, they'll share, so there wont be ten shillings a man."

"What a head you have for reckoning," said the other; "but go on. I wonder where, in hell's name, we are going. Can you see the castle?"

"Not I," answered the other; "but we must follow this path to the end any way. There goes the horn that is to lead us."

And they seemed to proceed upon their way.

"Now, forward," said the woodman, in a low voice; and moving rapidly on, they came to a large holly bush which concealed the mouth of the little foot track they were following from the very path which the soldiers had taken. Cutting straight across it, they entered a somewhat thinner and more open part of the wood, from which the castle was occasionally visible, so that any one above could have seen them without much difficulty; but it extended not far; and the danger was soon past.

"I know where wo are now," said Iola, in a whisper. "We are close to the cell."

"Hush!" said the woodman. "Hush!" But the unfortunate piper, who was in the rear, stumbled over the root of a tree, and his pipes emitted a melancholy groan.

The woodman turned, and shook his fist at him; and the whole party halted to listen. No sound was heard however; and turning away to the right, by a gentle descent, they approached the spot where the forest stretched furthest into the valley.

"I will go forward and look out for a moment," said the woodman at length, speaking to Chartley in a low voice. "As ill luck would have it, I had the brushwood on the verge cut down last autumn, to prevent rascals lurking about there, little thinking I should need it myself;" and creeping on from bush to bush and tree to tree, he at length got a view along the whole side of the wood fronting the slope on which the abbey stood. It was no pleasant sight that he beheld; for, at a distance of not more than a hundred and fifty yards apart, were stationed horsemen, watching every point of the wood. With his right shoulder resting against a tree, and secured on the left by a thick holly, he remained for about a minute, carefully examining the proceedings of the soldiery. They moved not from the spots at which they had been placed; and the path which he had been hitherto following, wandering in and out amongst the trees upon the slope, passed at some little distance between two banks, till it reached the bottom of the descent, not a hundred and fifty yards from the little postern gate in the abbey wall, over which hung the bell profanely called the Baby of St. Clare.

Boyd saw at once, from the distance at which the men were stationed, that there was a great chance of the whole party reaching the entrance of the lane between the two banks, before more than two of the soldiers could come up with them; and that if this were effected, Iola at least was safe.

After finishing his contemplation quietly, the woodman returned to his party in the same manner as he had left them, taking perhaps even greater precautions, and stooping almost to his

knees, lest his great height should carry his head above the bushes. When he reached the others he commanded, rather than explained, saying--

"Now, all upon the path as fast as possible. Robin lead the way to the passage between the banks. Then follow me, wherever I go, and guard me from attack; let all the rest halt at the mouth of the lane, and keep it with a strong hand against pursuers. Now on! Quick, quick!"

The whole party rushed forward, except the piper, (who remained under cover of the wood,) much in the same order as that in which they had hitherto proceeded. Iola was hurried on in the midst, with her heart beating and her head confused, yet gazing round from time to time, and catching with a quick and hurried glance the scene which immediately followed. She beheld the horsemen watching the forest; but, till she had nearly reached the edge of the woodland, the party, which bore her along amongst them, did not seem to attract any attention. Then, however, the two soldiers on each side put spurs to their horses, with a loud shout; and she felt herself instantly caught up in the arms of the woodman, carried along with extraordinary swiftness down the descent, and into the hollow between the two banks.

Iola gazed back over her bearer's shoulder; and the last sight she saw was the party of foresters occupying the mouth of the lane, while three or four armed horsemen were galloping upon them; and Chartley, with his drawn sword in his hand and the Arab beside him, stood a little in advance of his companions, as if to meet the soldiers at their first onset. They were close upon him; and, with a painful shudder, she closed her eyes. When she opened them, the bank hid the scene from her view; and the next moment she heard the bell of the abbey ring sharply.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Keep back, my men!" exclaimed Chartley, as the two first soldiers rode down towards him; "keep back, or the peril be upon your own heads."

The foremost of the pursuing party put his horn to his lips, and blew a loud long blast, drawing up his horse at the same time.

"Yield you, yield you!" he exclaimed, turning then to the young nobleman; "'tis vain to resist. We have men enough to take you all, were you told ten times over."

"Call your officer then!" cried Chartley, "I yield not to a churl."

"Ay, and in the mean time the others escape," cried the man; "that shall not be, by ---! Round, round! Over the banks," he continued, straining his voice to the utmost, to reach the ears of his companions, who were galloping down, "cut them off from the abbey!"

But the others did not hear or understand the cry, and rode on towards Chartley and the rest, whom they reached, just as Iola was borne to the postern gate.

"Hold back, sir!" shouted the young nobleman; "mark me, every one. I resist not lawful authority! But marauders I will resist to the death. Show me a warrant--bring me an officer, and I yield at once, but not to men I know not. As to those who are gone to the abbey, you can yourselves see that they are but a lady and two of the foresters to guard her--"

"The lady is safe within the gates, noble sir," said one of the woodmen, speaking over his shoulder.

"Thank God for that!" cried Chartley.

"We are not seeking for women," answered the soldier, "but there are two men there; and we will know who they are."

"They are coming back. They are coming back," cried one of the men from behind.

The soldiers perceived the fact at the same moment; but their number was now becoming so great, one horseman riding down after another, that they seemed to meditate an attack upon the little pass which Chartley defended; and some of them rode up the bank, to take the party in the flank.

"Mark you well, good men," said the young nobleman, raising his voice to its highest tones; "if one stroke be struck, the consequences be upon your own heads. I refuse not to surrender to a proper warrant, or any officer of the king; but, as a peer of England, I will not give up my sword to any simple soldier who asks it; and if I am attacked, I will defend myself to the uttermost."

"Halt, halt!" cried one of the men, who seemed to have some command over the rest. "Ride away for Sir William Catesby. He is on the road just round the corner."

"There he comes, I think," cried another of the soldiers, pointing to a large party, riding at a rapid rate down the course of the little stream.

"No no," exclaimed the other. "I know not who those are. Quick, spurs to your horse, and away for Sir William. These may be companions we shall not like. He is round the corner of the wood, I tell you."

The man rode off at full speed; and the soldiers who were left drew somewhat closer round the little party in the mouth of the lane, while one or two were detached to the right and left, to cut off the woodman and the man who had accompanied him, in case they endeavoured to escape on either side.

Boyd, however, confirmed to walk slowly and quietly down from the abbey, towards the group he had left below, casting his eyes from one side to the other, and marking all that was taking place, till at length, descending between the banks again, the scene upon the open ground was shut out from his eyes, and he could only see his own foresters, Lord Chartley, and the party in front.

A few steps brought him to the side of the young nobleman; and he gazed at the ring of soldiers round the mouth of the lane, with a smile, saying,

"What do these gentlemen want?" and then added: "Here are your friends and servants, coming down from Hinckley, my lord, so if you have a mind to make a Thermopylæ of the lane, you may do it."

"Not I," answered Chartley. "Would to God, most learned woodman, that the time when Englishmen spill Englishmen's blood were at an end. Besides, I could not make it a Thermopylæ, for the only Orientals on the field are on my side;" and he glanced his eye to the good Arab, who stood gazing upon the scene, with his arms folded on his chest, apparently perfectly indifferent to all that was taking place, but ready to strike whenever his master told him.

While this brief conversation was going on, the troop which had been seen coming down on the right approached nearer and nearer; and at the same time a gentleman, followed by eight or ten horse, came up from the road which entered the wood opposite to the abbey green, riding at a light canter over the green sward that covered the hill side. The two parties reached the end of the lane very nearly at the same moment, Catesby indeed the first; and his shrewd, keen, plausible countenance, notwithstanding the habitual command which he possessed over its expressions, displayed some sort of trouble at seeing so large a body of men, over whom he had no controul.

"What is this, my good lord?" shouted Sir William Arden to Chartley, before Catesby could speak. "We got news of your jeopardy, strangely enough, and have come down at once to help you."

"I have ordered my knave to bring you a furred dressing-gown, and a bottle of essence of maydew," cried Sir Edward Hungerford, with a light laugh; "supposing you must be cold, with your forest lodging, and your complexion sadly touched with the frosty air. But what does the magnanimous Sir William Catesby do, cantering abroad at this hour of the morning? Beware of rheums, Sir William, beware of rheum! Don't you know that the early morning air is evil for the eyes, and makes a man short-breathed?"

"This is no time for bantering, sirs," exclaimed Catesby. "Are you prepared to resist the royal authority? If so, I have but to order one blast upon a trumpet, and you will be surrounded by seven hundred men."

"We come to resist no lawful authority, but merely to help a friend," replied Sir Wilhelm Arden; "and, in doing so, I care not whose head I split, if it comes in my way."

"Peace, peace, Arden," cried Chartley, "Let me answer him. What do you want with me, Sir William? and why am I assailed by your men, if they are yours, while peaceably pursuing my way?"

"Pooh, pooh, my lord," answered Catesby. "Do not assume unconsciousness. Where is the bishop? Will you give him up?--or, if you like it better, the friar who rode with you from Tamworth yesterday?"

"As for a bishop," answered Chartley, laughing, "I know of no bishops; and as for the friar, if he be a bishop, it is not my fault; I did not make him one. Friar I found him, and friar I left him. He remained behind, somewhat sick, at the abbey."

"Then what do you here, my lord?" demanded Catesby, "tarrying behind in the forest, while all your company have gone forward?"

"In truth, good Sir William," answered the young nobleman; "whenever I am brought to give

an account of all my actions, you shall not be my father confessor. I will have a more reverend man. But you have not yet answered my question; why I am menaced here by these good gentlemen in steel jackets?"

"You shall have an answer presently," replied Catesby; and, stooping down over his saddle bow, he conversed for a moment or two with one of the men who had been first upon the ground, and who now stood dismounted by his side. Then raising his head again, he said: "There were three people left your company, my lord, a moment or two since. Two have returned, I am told, and one was received into the abbey. Who was that person?"

"You must ask those who went with her," replied Chartley. "They have known her longer than I have, and can answer better. My acquaintance with her"--he added, as he saw a meaning smile come upon Sir Edward Hungerford's lip--"my acquaintance with her has been very short, and is very slight. I have acted as was my devoir towards a lady, and have nought farther to say upon the subject."

"Then your would have me believe it was a woman," rejoined Catesby.

"Ay, was it, master," answered the woodman, standing forward and speaking in a rough tone; "or rather, as the lord says, a lady. She was sent out by the lady abbess, as the custom sometimes is, to the cell of St. Magdalene, there upon the hill; and when she would have gone back, she found the houses on the green in a flame, and all the wood surrounded by your soldiers. I wish I had known it in time, and I would have contrived to get her back again, in spite of all your plundering thieves. But the king shall know of all you have done, if I walk on foot to Leicester to tell him."

"If it was a lady, pray, goodman, who was the lady?" demanded Sir Edward Hungerford, laughing lightly.

"What is that to you?" exclaimed the woodman, turning sharply upon him. "If she was a lady, forsooth!--I might well say when I look at you, 'If you are a man,' for of that there may be some doubt; but nobody could look at her face, and ask if she were a lady."

A low laugh ran round, which heightened the colour in Sir Edward Hungerford's smooth cheek; but Catesby, after speaking again to the man beside him in a low tone, fixed his eyes upon the woodman, and demanded--

"Who are you, my good friend, who put yourself so forward?"

"I am head woodman of the abbey," answered Boyd, "and master forester; and by the charter of King Edward III. I am empowered to stop and turn back, or apprehend and imprison, any one whom I may find roaming the forest, except upon the public highway. I should have done so before this hour, if I had had force enough; for we have more vagabonds in the forest than I like. But I shall soon have bills and bows enough at my back; for I have sent, to raise the country round. Such things as have been done this night shall not happen within our meres, and go unpunished;" and he crossed his arms upon his broad chest and gazed sternly in Catesby's face.

"Upon my life you are bold!" exclaimed Richard's favourite. "Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"I neither know nor care," answered the woodman; "but I think I shall be able to describe you pretty well to the king; for he will not suffer you, nor any other leader of hired troops, to burn innocent men's houses and spoil the property of the church."

Catesby looked somewhat aghast; for the charge, he knew, put in such terms, would not be very palatable to Richard.

"I burned no houses, knave," he said, with a scoff.

"'Tis the same thing if your men did," answered the woodman. "You are all of one herd, that is clear."

"Shall I strike the knave down, sir?" demanded one of the fierce soldiery.

"I should like to see thee try," said the woodman, drawing his tremendous axe from his girdle; but Catesby exclaimed--

"Hold, hold!" and Chartley exclaimed--

"Well, sir, an answer to my question. We are but wasting time, and risking feud, by longer debating these matters here. For your conduct to others this night, for the destruction of the property of the church, and the wrongs inflicted on innocent men, either by your orders or with your connivance, you will of course be made responsible elsewhere; but I demand to know why I, a peer of England, going in peaceable guise, without weapons of war; am pursued and surrounded, I may say, by your soldiery?"

"That question is soon answered," replied Catesby. "I might indeed say, that no one could tell that you were a peer of England when you were found a-foot walking with foresters, and such like

people, below your own degree. But in one word, my lord, I am ordered to apprehend your lordship, for aiding and comforting a proclaimed traitor. Do you surrender to the king's authority? Or must I summon a sufficient force to compel obedience?"

"I surrender at once, of course, to the king's authority," answered Chartley; "and knowing, Sir William, your place and favour with the king, will not even demand to see the warrant. But I trust my servants will be allowed to ride with me to Leicester, where I appeal the immediate consideration of my case to the king himself."

"So be it, my lord," answered Catesby; "but if I might advise for your own good, you would not bring so many men with badges of livery under the king's eyes; for you know the law upon that subject, and that such displays are strictly prohibited."

Chartley laughed.

"Good faith!" he said; "I am not the thoughtless boy you take me for, Sir William. I have a license under king Edward's hand for these same badges and liveries, which has never been revoked. Methinks it will pass good even now."

"Be it as you will, my lord," replied Catesby. "I advised you but as a friend. Nay, more; if you can find any other gentleman to be bound with you for your appearance at Leicester, within three days, I will take your lordship's parole to deliver yourself in that city to the king's will. I do not wish to pass any indignity upon a gentleman of worth, though lacking somewhat of discretion mayhap."

"I'll be his bail," cried Sir William Arden at once. "I am a fool perhaps for my pains, as he indeed is a fool who is bail for any man; but the lad won't break his word, although leg bail is the best bail that he could have, or any one indeed, in this good kingdom of England, where accusations are received as proofs, and have been for the last thirty years, whichever house was on the throne. There was nought to choose between them in that respect."

"You should be more careful, Sir William," answered Catesby with a grim smile. "The house which is on the throne is always the best. However, I take your pledge, and that of Lord Chartley; and now I will back to my post, taking it for granted, my lord, that this was really a woman who was with you, and that, even in such a case as this, a lie would not sully your lips."

"I am not a politician, Sir William," replied Chartley, somewhat bitterly; "so I have no excuse for lying. The person who just now entered the abbey was a lady, seemingly not twenty years of age; and I pledge you my word of honour, that her chin never bore a beard, nor her head received the tonsure, so that she is assuredly neither man, friar, nor bishop."

"Give you good day, then," said Catesby; and turning his horse he rode away, followed by the soldiers, who resumed their post around the wood.

"There goes a knave," said the woodman aloud, as Richard's favourite trotted down the slope. "Had it not needed two or three men to guard you, my good lord, your parole would have been little worth in the Cat's eyes."

"On my life, Boyd, you had better beware of him," rejoined Lord Chartley. "He does not easily forgive; and you have spoken somewhat plainly."

"Humph! I have not been the only one to speak my mind this day," said the woodman. "I did not think there was anything in the shape of a lord, at the court of England, who would venture to show such scorn for a minion--unless he was on the eve of falling."

"No hope of such a thing in this case," answered Chartley; "he is too serviceable to be dispensed with. But now I must have my horse. By good fortune, 'tis on the other side of the wood; so they will let us get it without taking it for a bishop."

"And who is this bishop they are seeking?" asked Sir William Arden, as he walked down on foot at Chartley's side, by a somewhat circuitous path, to the cottage of the woodman.

"The only bishop whose name is proclaimed," replied Chartley, avoiding a direct answer to the question; "is Doctor Morton, bishop of Ely; but I trust and believe that he is far out of their reach. However, I would have you take care, Boyd," he continued, turning towards the woodman, who was following; "and, if you should meet with the bishop in the wood, give him no help; for these men will visit it savagely on the head of any one against whom they can prove the having succoured him--I would fain hear how this hunting ends," he continued; "for I have seldom seen such a curious chase. Can you not give me intimation at Leicester?"

"And pray add," continued Sir Edward Hungerford, in a low tone, "some information concerning the sweet Lady Iola. Her beautiful eyes," he added, as Chartley turned somewhat sharply towards him, "have haunted me all night, like a melodious song which dwells in our ears for days after we have heard it."

"Or a bottle of essence," said the woodman, "that makes a man smell like a civet cat for months after it is expended."

"Drown me all puppies," exclaimed Arden. "A young cat that goes straying about with her eyes but half open, and her weak legs far apart, is more tolerable than one of these orange flowers of the court, with their smart sayings, which they mistake for wit;" and imitating, not amiss, the peculiar mode of talking of Hungerford and his class, he went on, "Gad ye good den, my noble lord! Fore Heaven, a pretty suit, and well devised, but that the exceeding quaintness of the trimming is worthy of a more marvellous furniture.--Pshaw! I am sick of their mewing; and if we have not a war soon, to mow down some of these weeds, the land will be full of nettles."

"Take care they don't sting, Arden," said Sir Edward Hungerford.

The other knight looked at him from head to foot, and walked on after Lord Chartley, with a slight smile curling his lip.

The party met no impediment on the way to the woodman's cottage. Chartley's horses were soon brought forth; and after lingering for a moment, to add a private word or two to Boyd, the young nobleman prepared to mount. Before he did so, however, he took the woodman's hand and shook it warmly, much to the surprise of Sir Edward Hungerford; and then the whole company resumed the road to Hinckley, passing a number of the patrols round the wood as they went, and hearing shouts and cries and notes upon the horn, which only called a smile upon Chartley's lips.

When they had passed the wood, however, and were riding on through the open country, Sir Edward Hungerford fell somewhat behind, to talk with a household tailor, whom he entertained, upon the device of a new sort of hose, which he intended to introduce; while Sir William Arden, naturally a taciturn man, rode on by Chartley's side, almost in silence. The young nobleman himself was now very grave. The excitement was over. All that had passed that night belonged to the past. It was a picture hung up in the gallery of memory; and he looked upon the various images it contained as one does upon the portraits of dead friends. He saw Iola, as she had sat beside him at the abbey in gay security. He felt the trembling of her hand upon his arm, in the hour of danger. Her cheek seemed to rest upon his shoulder again, as it had done, when, weary and exhausted, she had slept overpowered by slumber. Her balmy breath seemed once more to fan his cheek. The time since he had first known her was but very short; but yet he felt that it had been too long for him. That, in that brief space, things had been born that die not--new sensations--immortal offspring of the heart--children of fate that live along with us on earth, and go with us to immortality.

"She cannot be mine," he thought. "She is plighted to another whom she knows not--loves not." He would fain have recalled those hours. He would fain have wiped out the sensations they had produced. He resolved to try--to think of other things--to forget--to be what he had been before. Vain, vain hopes and expectations! Alas, he sought an impossibility. No one can ever be what he was before. Each act of life changes the man--takes something, gives something--leaves him different from what he was. He may alter; but he cannot go back. What he was is a memory, and never can be a reality again; and more especially is this the case with the light careless heart of youth. Pluck a ripe plum from the tree--touch it as tenderly as you will; the bloom is wiped away; and, try all the arts you can, you can never restore that bloom again, nor give the fruit the hue it had before. Happy those buoyant and successful spirits who can look onward at every step, from life's commencement to its close, and are never called upon to sit down by the weary way side of being, and long for the fair fields and meadows they have passed, never to behold again.

CHAPTER XIX.

Clouds roll over the sky; the large rain drops descend; the lightning flashes; the thunder rolls along the verge of heaven; darkness and tempests rage above; and ruin and desolation seem to reign below. They have their hour, and pass away. Often the clouds roll on to some distant bourn, leaving the sky clear, the sun smiling brighter than ever, the blades of grass gemmed with the diamond drops, the earth all fresh, and the birds all singing. But there are other times, when, although the fierceness of the tempest is over, the streaming deluge suspended, the torch of the lightning quenched, and the angry voice of the thunder hushed, a heavy boding cloud remains behind, hiding the brightness of the face of heaven, and threatening fresh storms to come.

Thus it is too with the human heart. In the spring-tide of our life--in those gay early years, when the merry rays of the sunshiny heart dance gleam-like with the storms and clouds of life, the tempest of passion or of sorrow is soon swept away, and the universe of the heart resumes its brightness. But there comes a time when the storm falling upon life's decline--I speak not of mere years, but at the epoch of each man's destined change--the spirit cannot cast off the shadow of the cloud, even when the eyes are dried, and the lightning pang of anguish or the terror speaking

thunder of retribution are staid for the hour.

Thus was it with Richard. His son, his only son, his beloved, was gone. The fountain of hope and expectation was dried up. For him, and for his future, destiny, he had laboured, and thought, and striven, and calculated, and sinned, and offended God and man, and won a dark and fearful renown, tainted a mother's fame, violated trust and friendship, usurped the patrimony of the orphan, spurned every tie of nature and affection, trampled upon gratitude, and imbrued his hands in blood. Strange that the brightest and the purest of human affections, when mingled in our nature with the darker and the more violent passions, instead of mitigating their influence, should prompt to deeper crimes, and plunge us into more overwhelming guiltiness--as the most precious medicines, mingled chemically with some foreign matter, will, in a moment, become the most dangerous poisons. He was gone; the object of all his fond imaginings, his daily labours and his nightly thoughts. The hopes that had been built up upon his life were all thrown down. The line between the present and the future was snapped asunder. The pang had been suffered--the terrible pang of the rending of a strong manly heart from its closest ties and its dearest expectations. The effect had been awful, terrible. It had for a time unseated reason from a throne where she had ruled with sway almost despotic. But that pang had been conquered. Reason had regained her rule. The tempest of the heart had passed away, and had left the sky calm--but not bright. No! Dull, dull, heavy, leaden, threatening, was the aspect of all around. The pure light of day was extinguished, never to dawn for him again; and all the light that was left came from the dull torch of ambition.

Richard sat in the room of the royal lodging at Leicester, where we have before seen him. There was a gentleman by his side, with head slightly bent, reading, from a long slip of paper, some notes of all the different pieces of intelligence which had been received during the day.

"What next?" demanded the king, in a dull and almost inattentive, tone.

"The letter which your grace proposed to write to your royal sister-in-law," replied the gentleman.

Richard started, "Ay," he said, thoughtfully; "ay, it must be done;" and, rubbing his temple gently with the fingers of his right hand, he seemed to give himself up to meditation. After a short space of time, it would appear, he partly forgot, if I may use such a term, the presence of another; and he murmured words to himself, which he might not have done had he been acutely conscious that they were overheard, "Shall the son of Clarence succeed?" he asked himself, in a long gloomy tone; "for him have I done all these things?--To make him King of England? That fair inheritance, for which I have toiled and laboured, and thought, and desired, and watched by night, and acted by day, shall it be his?--No, no! And yet there is a fate that overrules man's policy, and thwarts his best-devised schemes.--No child for me, if Ann lives; and it all goes to another race.--What then?" And he paused, and thought once more very deeply.

The busy movements of his mind during that reverie who shall scrutinize? But at length he said: "No, no! She was the love of my youth, the partner of my early cares and joys.--No! Grief will soon do its work on her. She is of that soft and fragile-hearted nature, which crumbles at the first rude touch, like the brittle sandstone. I am of granite, which the chisel may mark, but which no saw will touch--hard and perdurable. We must bide the event. The canker is on the frail flower, and it will fall soon enough! In the mean time, 'tis well to be prepared;" and, turning to the man beside him, he added, "I will write that letter with my own hand. Have a post ready by six this evening. What next?"

"The young Lord Chartley waits your grace's will, in ward," replied the secretary; and, seeing that Richard seemed plunged in thought again, he added, "suspected of aiding the escape of Morton, bishop of Ely."

"Ha!" cried Richard, with an angry start; "he shall--" But he paused suddenly, laid his hand upon his brow for a moment or two, and then added in a calmer tone, "No. He is a foolish boy. This man was his tutor. We love those who were the guides and conductors of our youth. But I will make sure of him. Give me those letters--No, not those, the packet on the left;" and, having received what he demanded, he examined the despatches carefully, and then said, "What next?"

The secretary looked at the paper in his hand, and then replied:

"Arnold Lord Calverly craves your highness's gracious sanction, to complete the marriage already contracted between his niece, the Lady Lola St. Leger, and the Lord Fulmer. He craves audience on this score, and is, I believe, even now in the great hall below."

Richard meditated for a moment or two.

"He is a stanch and steady friend," he said at length; "yet, this Lord Fulmer--I love him not. I doubt him. He is a man of high-toned fantasies, and grave imaginations--moveable with the wind of passion, and notions of what he believes fine thoughts. I love not your men of emotions. Give me the man of firm calm deeds, who sets a mighty object before him, and cleaves a way to it through all impediments. The inheritance is large; his own power great; united, they may be dangerous. But we must temporise and see. 'Tis wise to keep expectation on the wing. When we have given all, we have no more to give; and, by St. Paul, gratitude is a poor bond, compared with

desire.--But I must see the Lord Calverly. Go, give him admission. We will hear the rest afterwards."

The secretary departed; and Richard remained with his brow resting on his hand, till a door again opened, and a stout elderly gentleman was admitted, with an expression of countenance indicating no slight opinion of his own importance, but no very great profundity of intellect. The king instantly rose, and took him by the hand.

"Welcome, welcome, my noble lord," he said. "You have come to me at a moment of deep grief and pain; but your presence is none the less acceptable, as, indeed, what can afford greater consolation than the society of a true friend?"

The cordiality with which he was received might have surprised any other person than Arnold Lord Calverly; for Richard was not a man of a cordial nature, and displayed little warmth of manner to any but his mere familiar tools, or to those whom he intended to deceive or to destroy. The worthy lord, how, ever, was quite satisfied that he deserved the utmost kindness and consideration; and taking it for granted that the monarch really received him joyfully, he proceeded to comfort him with such common places as men of inferior intellect mistake for the dicta of wisdom.

"Alack, my lord the king," he said, "you have indeed suffered a great deprivation. But, you know, this is merely to share the common fate of all men, from which the king is no more exempt than the peasant. Death respects not the young or the old, the high or the low. We are all subject to his power; and, perhaps, those he takes soonest are the happiest. I would have your highness consider what a troublous life it is that man leads here below; and how many sorrows the young prince, God rest his soul, may have escaped; and, in your own knowledge of life, you will find consolation for his having lost it."

"True, very true," replied Richard, with a grave and thoughtful look. "That is sound philosophy, my dear lord, as indeed is all that you say on all occasions. Yet one cannot help regretting, if not the poor boy's release from earthly suffering, at least the extinction of one's own succession, and especially where a crown is a part of the heritage."

"Nay, now, sire, in this you judge not altogether wisely," replied the old nobleman. "Pardon my boldness in so speaking. But why should a man desire to transmit his possessions to a child of his own, rather than to the child of any other man. I speak in the abstract, mark me--I speak in the abstract--for, if a man have children of his own, of course he would rather that they succeeded. That's very natural. But if he have none, why should he desire posterity? His eyes must be closed before his child can take the succession. He cannot therefore see the enjoyment of it by his child."

"Very true," said Richard. "Very true."

"Besides," continued Lord Calverly, "we cannot tell that our children will use what we leave them better than the children of other men. It is but a prejudice, my lord the king, to wish for posterity; and, indeed, I are inclined to think that those men are happiest who have never had any children."

"If they have minds so full of philosophy as yours, my lord," answered Richard; "and you can judge well, for you are yourself childless, and yet happy in yourself."

"Perfectly, your highness," replied Lord Calverly. "I would not change with a patriarch. Indeed, the presence of children and our love for them often betrays us into dangerous weaknesses, against which we should guard with care, if Heaven should inflict them on us. I have been always watchful--very watchful, your highness, against such foibles. Even in the case of my niece, my poor brother's child, who was left to my charge and guidance a mere infant; as soon as I found I was becoming too fond of her, and that, when she was well I was too careful of her, when she was ill I thought too much about her, I sent her away at once to my sister, the abbess of St. Clare. Women's minds being, weak, cannot be injured by such softnesses; but they suit ill with a philosopher, a soldier, or a statesman. But it is upon this subject that I came to speak with your highness."

"What, regarding the abbess of St. Clare?" said Richard, with a start.

"Of her presently," replied Lord Calverly; "but first of my niece. I wish to crave your highness's permission to complete the marriage of this little Iola with my friend, and the son of my friend, Arthur Lord Fulmer."

"You shall have it right willingly," replied Richard, in the frankest tone possible. "It shall be drawn out in due form, and receive our own sign manual. Can I refuse anything to so tried a friend?--Nevertheless, my most dear lord, I will beseech you not to proceed hastily," he continued with a significant nod of the head. "Delay the marriage a little, at my request. We would be present at it ourselves, I and the queen; and, moreover, I have intentions--I have intentions----"

He paused, looking in Lord Calverly's face, with a bland smile, and then added: "Who knows what name you may be called upon to write, my lord? It may not be Calverly then. Coronets will change their forms sometimes; and we do not bind our brows always with the same cap. Delay a

little, delay a little! At the present moment sad thoughts possess me, and I have not your philosophy to combat them. There are many important matters to do. The succession to the crown must be settled; and we shall need all your wise counsels, in graver things than marriages and merrymakings. Delay a little, delay a little, my right good friend."

"Your highness is too gracious," replied Lord Calverly, with a shining and radiant look. "Your commands are law but there is one other subject I must bring before you, a matter touching your royal throne and dignity."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Richard. "What may that be?"

"All men know, my royal lord," said the old nobleman, in an oratorical tone, "that your highness's devout reverence for the church is not to be questioned, that religion, as one may say, is not in you, as in other men, a matter acquired by mere learning and meditation, but a part and principle of your own royal nature. Now my sister, the abbess of St. Clare of Atherston, whose conduct in her high charge has deserved and received the praises of all men, and especially of our holy father, has commissioned me to state to your highness, the fact, that the abbey--an abbey of nuns be it remembered, filled with young and delicate women, vowed to seclusion and prayer--was surrounded on the night of Wednesday last by a body of rude soldiery, under the command of one Sir John Godscroft, who, upon pretence of seeking for a deserter, insisted upon admission, notwithstanding her warning that the place was sanctuary. The whole building was searched; and not only that, but the priest's house and many of the cottages on the green, belonging to the servitors of the abbey, were burned to the ground."

Richard's brow grew as black as night; and, setting his teeth hard together, he rose and walked up and down the room, muttering to himself--

"This must be repressed. This must be repressed."

"Let your highness conceive," persisted Lord Calverly, following him a step or two behind, "only conceive what a condition these poor nuns were in, roused out of bed by these rude men, in the middle of the night."

A grim smile came upon the king's handsome face; and he replied--

"Grey gowns are soon put on, my lord. Nevertheless this shall be looked into severely--Ha! Let me see--The abbey of St. Clare;" and, taking some papers from the table, he ran his eye hastily over them, and then exclaimed, with a frowning brow, "It is so! 'Twas not a deserter whom they sought, my lord, but a traitor; no pitiful trooper fled from his colours, but Morton, bishop of Ely, the instigator of Buckingham, the counsellor of Dorset, the friend and confidant of Richmond."

"But, my lord the king, the abbey is sanctuary," replied Lord Calverly; "and--"

"Were it God's altar, with his hand upon the horn, I would tear that man from it," thundered Richard, his whole countenance working with passion.

The moment after he cast himself into his chair, and covered his eyes with his hands, while the pompous old nobleman stood as one thunderstruck before him. After a dead silence of nearly a minute, the king looked up again, and the cloud had passed away from his brow.

"I have been moved, my lord," he said. "I have been moved. This man, this Morton, is my deadliest enemy, a reviler, a calumniator, the stirrer of every trouble in the realm; and he has escaped me. Doubtless it was not your good sister's fault; and even if it were, these men have exceeded their commission. I will have no such acts of violence within this kingdom. Rich and poor, strong and weak, shall know that the sword of justice is not trusted to my hands in vain. Nor will I suffer my name and my service to be used as pretexts for acts so criminal. It shall be inquired into and justice done."

He paused, casting down his eyes; and Lord Calverly, frightened out of his wits at the storm he had raised, was retreating towards the door, when Richard called him again, saying--

"Stay, stay. I may have a charge to give you, my good lord. A very noble gentleman brought up in the court--I may say under my own eye--has somewhat failed in his duty. To what extent I know not yet. I would fain not deal with him harshly; for he is young and rash, and lately come from foreign lands, so that he may not know the full extent of his fault. I will examine him however in your presence. If I find he has acted with malignant purpose, he shall go to York for trial. If it be but a rash prank of youth he has committed, although it galled me somewhat closely, I will place him in your lordship's ward, assigning you one third of his revenues while he remains there."

As he spoke he rose, and called in one of the attendants saying, briefly--

"Summon Lord Chartley hither."

"I trust he may clear himself in your highness's opinion," said Lord Calverly, while the attendant proceeded to obey the king's commands. "I have heard him highly spoken of as one more than ordinarily learned, and a complete master of exercises. Good Lord, I have often patted his head as a boy; and such a curly head as it was too, all wavy and silky, like a Spanish dog's. I

little thought it would be filled with philosophy."

"Perhaps some slipped in from the tips of your fingers," said Richard, with a slightly sarcastic smile; and in a moment or two after the door of the cabinet opened.

With a free light step, though a somewhat grave countenance for him, Chartley entered the king's presence, and advanced to the side of the table, opposite to that at which Richard was placed. The king gazed at him, not sternly, but with that fixed, attentive, unwinking eye, which is very difficult for conscious guilt to bear.

Nevertheless Chartley sustained it firmly; and, after maintaining silence for a full minute, with his lips compressed, Richard said--

"I have sent for you, my lord, because there are heavy charges against you."

"Will your highness state them?" said the young nobleman. "I will answer them at once boldly and truly."

"I will," answered Richard. "The first is--and all the rest are secondary to that--that you have aided and comforted, contrary to our proclamation, a known and avowed traitor, Morton, bishop of Ely; that you took him in your train disguised as a friar, and carried him with you from Tamworth to the abbey of St. Clare of Atherston, for the purpose of facilitating his escape, well knowing him to be a traitor. How say you? Is this charge true?"

"In part, my lord the king," replied Chartley; "but in part also it is false."

"In what part," demanded Richard.

"In that part which alleges I knew him to be a traitor," replied Chartley, "and in that which implies that I had seen said did know your royal proclamation. I never saw it, nor knew the terms thereof, till yesterday; nor did I know or believe that the bishop was a traitor. Yet let me not say one word that can deceive. I was well aware that he had incurred your highness' displeasure; but on what grounds I was not informed."

"And, knowing it, you aided his escape?" said Richard sternly.

"I did, my lord," replied Chartley; "but, if you will hear me speak a few words, I may say something in my own excuse. I never gave you cause before, wittingly or willingly, to doubt my loyalty. I have trafficked with none of your personal enemies, nor with those of your royal estate. I have taken no part in plots or conspiracies; but this was a very different case. I found the friend, the guide, the instructor of my youth, flying from danger; and my first thought was to succour him. I know, my lord the king, that I have put my head in peril by so doing; but what man would consider such peril to save a father? and this man I looked upon as a second father. I will ask you, sire, if you would not have done a hundred times as much, to rescue the noble duke of York?--I loved Morton as much."

He touched upon a tender point--perhaps the only really tender point in Richard's heart. There are spots in the waste of memory ever green--according to the beautiful figure of the poet--oases in the desert of life. The burning sun of ambition cannot parch them, the nipping frost of eager avarice cannot wither them. The palm tree of early affection shades them for ever; the refreshing fountains of first love keep them ever verdant. They are few with most men; for all bright and beautiful things are few; but rarely as there a heart so rugged in its nature, so scorched by earthly passion, or so faded from dull indulgence, as not to have one (if not more) of those spots of brightness, which, when the eye of remembrance lights upon it, refreshes the spirit with a vision of the sweet calm joys of youth. The memory of his great father, and of the love which he had borne him, was the purest, perhaps, the only pure thing for Richard, in all the treasury of the past; and he felt the allusion with sensations, such as he had not experienced for many a long year. They were tender, deep, almost too deep; and, turning away his head, he stretched out his hand with a gesture, which seemed to command the speaker to stop.

"Pardon me, your highness," said Chartley, seeing the emotions he had aroused, and then was silent.

Richard remained musing for several minutes. His mind was busy with the past; but he had the peculiar faculty of all great and resolute spirits, that of casting from him rapidly all impressions but those of the present. He looked up again; and it was evident that the emotion was at an end. Still it would seem that it had produced some effect in its passage, for his next words were in a milder tone.

"I am willing, my lord," he said, "to believe that you have acted indiscreetly, but without evil intentions. I will make allowance for youth, and for affection; but still, this must not go altogether unpunished. Are you willing to abide by my decision?"

"Needs must, my lord the king," replied Chartley, almost gaily. "I am in your hand, and it is a strong one."

"Nay!" answered the king. "You have a choice, if you like it better. I can send you for trial by

your peers."

"Good faith, no!" cried Chartley. "That were worse a thousand-fold. In a word, sire, I know my danger. Ignorance, youth, friendship, were no defence before the stubborn rigour of the law. You have the power to mitigate it, and, I believe, the heart. I leave my cause with you."

"Well then," said Richard, "by St. Paul, you shall not have cause to repent. As you have put yourself in the king's will, we will put you in ward with this noble lord, till our further pleasure; assigning him one third of your revenues, for the guard and maintenance of your person, and making him responsible to us for your conduct. He will not deal harshly with you, methinks. Does this satisfy you?"

"Since better may not be, my lord," replied Chartley. "I would as gladly be in the hand of this noble lord, who, if my memory fail me not, is the Lord Calverly, as any one. Give a bird the choice, whether yon shall put it in a gilded cage or wring its neck, and doubtless it will prefer the wires; and yet it can scarcely be said to be satisfied, when it would fain use its wings in freedom, though for no evil purpose."

"I seek not that his imprisonment be very strict, my lord," said Richard, turning to Lord Calverly. "You will take such securities as you judge needful, but do nought with rigour; for, even by the light way in which he fronts his danger, one may judge that he did what he has done in careless ignorance rather than in malice. Now take him with you, and bestow him as you think fit."

"Ay, young heads are too hot for cool judgment," said Lord Calverly, as they walked towards the door. "It is a marvel to me how boys ever grow men, and how men ever reach maturity; for, not contented with the perils of life, they are always making new dangers for themselves."

"Stay," cried Richard. "Stay! There is yet one question I would ask before you go, Lord Chartley. Was the abbess of St. Glare privy to your bringing this turbulent bishop within her walls? I hear you sent forward a messenger."

The question was a perilous one; but Chartley fixed upon the latter words of the king for his reply, and thus avoided the danger. "My messenger bore a letter, your highness," he answered, "which letter the abbess doubtless still has and can show you. You will there see, that I only told her I was coming to crave her hospitality with some friends. The bishop I presented to her as a friar travelling with my train. Nor was there one amongst the friends who were with me, nor amongst my servants, who was made aware of our companion's quality. There is a proverb, very old, that fine feathers make fine birds; and I do not believe that any one saw the bishop's robe through the friar's gown."

Richard smiled, thinking of Sir Charles Weinants, but bowed his head in signal of the conference being ended; and the two noblemen withdrew together.

CHAPTER XX.

I know not whether the architecture of the middle ages--that peculiar architecture, I mean, which existed in different varieties in England, from a little before the commencement of the reign of the Conqueror, till the end of the reign of Henry VII.--can be said to have advanced or retrograded from the time of Edward III. to the time of Richard. Every one will judge according to his particular tastes of the merits of the style; but one thing is certain, that, although the houses of the lower orders had remained much the same, the domestic arrangement of the baronial residences had greatly improved. Notwithstanding that long period of contention, which succeeded the accession of Henry VI., notwithstanding constant wars and the frequent summons to the field, men seemed to have looked for comfort in the laying out of their dwellings; and the feudal castle, although still a castle, and well fitted for defence, contained in it many of the conveniences of a modern house. Perhaps it was, that the struggle of great parties had taken the place of private quarrels between the great barons themselves and struggles between mere individual conspirators and the crown. Thus great towns were attacked more frequently than fortified mansions; and, during this period, we meet with very few instances of a simple baronial fortress being subjected to siege.

However that might be, the chambers in a great nobleman's house, the halls, the lodging chambers, the ladies' bower, were now all more commodious, light, and airy, than at that former period of few, small, narrow and deep windows, when light and air were excluded, as well as the missiles of an enemy. Not only in monastery, convent, and college, but even in private dwellings, the large oriel was seen here and there, suffering the beams of day to pour freely into the hall,

and casting the lines of its delicate tracery upon the floor; and, raised somewhat above the general level of the room, approached by two steps, and furnished with window seats, it afforded a pleasant and sun-shiny sitting-place to the elder and younger members of the family.

There was one of these oriel windows in the lesser hall, of Chidlow castle; and round the raised platform, within the sort of bay which it formed, ran a sort of bench or window seat of carved oak, covered with a loose cushion of crimson velvet. The lattice was open, and soft air and bright light streamed in. The winter had been remarkably long and severe. The snow had lain upon the ground till the end of March; and, even then, when one bright day had succeeded, and withdrawn the white covering of the earth, it was only to be followed by a week or ten days of sharp frost, which reigned in its full rigour during some of the events which we have narrated in the previous chapters. Now, however, winter had departed, and spring commenced with that sudden and rapid transition, which is often the case in more northern countries, and is sometimes seen even in England. The air, as I have said, was soft and genial; the blue skies were hardly chequered by a fleecy cloud; the birds were singing in the trees; the red buds were bursting with the long-checked sap; and snowdrop and violet seemed running races with the primrose and the anemone, to catch the first smile of their sweet mother spring. The little twining shrubs were already green with their young leaves; and the honeysuckle strove hard to cast a verdant mantle over the naked brown limbs of the tall trees which it had climbed. The scene from the lattice of the oriel window was one of those fair English landscapes on which the eye loves to rest; for the castle was situated upon a height, and below spread out a rich and beautiful country, waving in long lines of meadow and wood for fifteen or sixteen miles, till sloping uplands towered into high hills, which glowed with a peculiarly yellow light, never seen anywhere, that I know of, beyond the limits of this island. Gazing from that lattice, over that scene, sat two young and beautiful girls, with whom the reader is already acquainted. Very different, it is true, was their garb from that in which they were first presented to you whose eye rests upon this page; for the more simple garments of the convent had given place to the splendid costume of the court of that time; and the forms, which required no ornament, were half hidden in lace and embroidery. But there was still the beautiful face of Iola, with the bright beaming expression, which seemed to pour forth hope and joy in every look, but now somewhat shaded with a cloud of care; and there, the not less fair, though somewhat more thoughtful, countenance of her cousin Constance, with her deep feeling eyes poring over the far prospect, and seeming to search for something through the thin summer mist that softened all the features of the landscape.

They were both very silent, and evidently busied with their own thoughts. Some attendants passed across the hall, and others lingered, to arrange this or that article of furniture. Others entered to speak with them and the two girls, from time to time, turned an inquiring look at those who came and went, showing that they were in some sort strangers in the home of their fathers.

At length, the hall was cleared of all but themselves, and Constance said in a low voice, "I wish, dear cousin, that my aunt would come. We should not then feel so desolate. I think our good lord and uncle might have left us at the abbey till he was at home himself."

"He would not have made the place much more cheerful," answered Iola, with a faint smile; "for wisdom is a very melancholy thing, dear Constance; at least if it be always like his. I fear me, too, even my good merry aunt would not make this place feel anything but desolate to me, just at present. She might cheer and support me a little, it is true; but I have got terrible dreams of the future, Constance. I try not to think of them, but they will come."

She paused and bent down her eyes, in what seemed painful meditation; and Constance replied, in a gentle tone, saying: "Why, how is this, Iola? You used not to look upon the matter so seriously."

"Alack, it gets very bad as it comes near," answered Iola, with an uncheerful laugh. "It is something very like being sold for a slave, Constance. However, the poor slave cannot help himself, nor I either, so do not let us talk any more about it. I suppose I shall soon see my purchaser. I wonder what he is like. Do you recollect whether he is white or black?"

"Good faith, not I," answered Constance; "but he is not quite a negro, I suppose. I have heard people say he was a pretty boy."

"A pretty boy!" cried Iola, raising her eyebrows. "Heaven defend me! What will become of me if I am married to a pretty boy? Somewhat like Sir Edward Hungerford, I suppose, lisping lamentable nonsense about essences, and bestowing his best thoughts upon his tailor."

"Nay, nay! Why should you conjure up such fancies?" said Constance. "You seem resolved to dislike him without cause."

"Nature, dear cousin," said Iola. "Nature and the pig's prerogative, to dislike any road we are forced to travel. Yet, it is bad policy, I will admit; and I will try to shake it off, and to like him to the best of my ability. The time is coming fast when I must, whether I will or not; for I think the oath I am about to take is to love him. I do think it is very hard that women should not be allowed to choose for themselves, and yet be forced to take an oath which they do not know whether they can keep or not. Well, the worst of all the seven sacraments is matrimony, to my mind. Extreme unction is a joke to it--how can I tell that I shall love him? I don't think I can; and yet I must swear I will."

"You are making a rack of your own fancy," said Constance. "Wait till you have seen him at least, Iola; for, after all, you may find him the very man of your own heart."

Iola started, and then shook her head mournfully, saying, "of my own heart? Oh, no!"

Constance gazed at her in surprise; and for the first time a suspicion of the truth crossed her mind. She said not a word, however, of her doubts, but resolved to watch narrowly, with that kind and eager affection which two girls brought up from youth together often feel for each other, where no rivalry has ever mingled its bitter drop with the sweet current of kindred love. She changed the subject of conversation too, pointing to some towers in the distance, and saying, "I wonder whose castle that is."

"Middleham, I dare say," answered Iola, in an absent tone. "It is somewhere out there--but yet it cannot be Middleham either. Middleham is too far."

"There is something moving upon that road which we see going along the side of the hill," said Constance. "I dare say it is my uncle and his train."

"No, no, Leicester lies out there," answered Iola; "you never can find out the country, dear cousin; and I learn it all in a minute, like the leaf of a book. I dare say it is some wild lord, riding to hawk or to hunt. Heaven send it be not my falcon, just towering to strike me before my uncle comes. I'll not look at them. They seem coming this way;" and she turned from the window and went down the steps, seating herself upon the lower one, and resting her cheek upon her hand.

Constance did watch the approaching party, however, till it became evident that those whom she saw were coming direct towards the castle. They were now seen and now lost among the trees and hedges; but every time they reappeared they were nearer.

At length Constance turned her eyes to Iola, and said, "they are coming hither, whoever they are; and my uncle is certainly not one of the party. They are only five or six in all, and seem young men. Had we not better go away to our own chamber?"

"No," answered Iola, starting up. "I will stay and face them. Something seems to tell me, that I know who is coming. You shall see how well I can behave, Constance, wild as you think me, and untutored in the world's ways as I am."

"They may be mere strangers after all," said Constance; "but here they are; for I can hear the dull sound of their horses' feet upon the drawbridge."

Iola sprang up the steps again with a light step, and twined her arm in that of her cousin. Both movements were very natural. We always like to stand upon a height when we meet those of whom we have any fear or any doubt; and Iola felt the need of sympathy which the very touch of her cousin's arm afforded her. A pause followed, during which Constance sought to say something and to look unconcerned; but words she found not; and her eyes as well as Iola's remained fixed upon the door. At length it opened; and, preceded by one of the officers of the castle, but unannounced by him, two gentlemen entered with a quick step. One was instantly recognized by both the fair girls who stood in the oriel, as Sir Edward Hungerford. The other was a stranger to them both. He was a dark handsome-looking young man, of some two or three and twenty years of age, dressed in somewhat of a foreign fashion, which, had they been much acquainted with such matters, they would have perceived at once to be the mode of the Burgundian court; but Iola's eye rested not upon his dress. It was his face that she scanned; and Constance felt a sort of shudder pass over her cousin's frame, as she leaned upon her arm, which pained and grieved her much. She saw nothing disagreeable, nothing to dislike in the countenance or air of the stranger. His step was free and graceful, his carriage dignified and lordly, his look, though perhaps a little haughty, was open and frank. In fact he was a man well calculated to please a lady's eye; and again Constance said to herself--"There must be some other attachment."

The stranger came on at an equal pace with Sir Edward Hungerford; but it was the latter who first spoke.

"Permit me," he said, "dear ladies, to be lord of the ceremonies, and introduce to you both my noble friend Arthur, Lord Fulmer."

The other seemed not to hear what he said; but, mounting the steps into the oriel at once, he took Iola's hand, saying--

"This must be the Lady Iola."

With a cheek as pale as death, and an eye cold and fixed, but with a firm and unwavering tone, the fair girl answered--

"My name is Iola, my lord. This is my cousin Constance. We grieve that my uncle is not here to receive you fittingly."

"I bring you tidings of your uncle, dear lady," replied Fulmer, still addressing her alone. "A messenger reached me from him at an early hour this morning, telling me that he would be at

Chidlow during the evening, with a gay train of guests, and bidding me ride on and have everything prepared for their reception. He spoke indeed of sending a servant forward himself. Has no one arrived?"

"No one, my lord," replied Iola, "at least no one that we have heard of. But, having lived long in close seclusion, we are, as it were, strangers in my uncle's house, without occupation or authority. I pray you use that which my uncle has given you, to order all that may be necessary. As for us, I think we will now retire."

"Nay, not so soon," exclaimed Fulmer, eagerly. "This is but a brief interview indeed."

Sir Edward Hungerford too, in sweet and persuasive tones, besought the two ladies not to leave them, but to stay and give their good advice, as to the delicate preparation of the castle for the expected guests; but Iola remained firm to her purpose; and Constance, when she saw that it would distress her to remain, joined her voice to her cousin's; and, leaving the two gentlemen in the hall, they retired to Iola's chamber.

With her arm through that of Constance, Iola walked slowly but firmly thither; and it was only as she approached the door that anything like agitation showed itself. Then, however, Constance felt her steps waver and her frame shake; and, when they had entered the room, Iola cast herself on her knees by the side of the bed, hid her face upon its coverings, and wept.

CHAPTER XXI.

When Iola and her fair cousin were gone, Lord Fulmer gazed for a moment from the window, with a thoughtful and absent look; and then, descending the steps, walked once or twice up and down the hall. At length, turning to Sir Edward Hungerford, he exclaimed:

"She is beautiful, indeed! Is she not, Hungerford?"

"Yes, exceedingly," replied the young knight; "although, methinks, the upper lip might be a trifle longer; but you would think her fairer still if you beheld her as I first saw her, with a colour in her cheek, like that of the morning sky. Now, I know not why, she is as pale as one of those marble statues which we see at Rome."

"Emotion!" said Fulmer, thoughtfully. "Perhaps it was wrong to take her thus, by surprise. Come, Hungerford, let us give these orders with which I am charged;" and, advancing to the door, he called for the attendants.

The orders were not so difficult to give as to execute; for they implied immediate preparation for the accommodation of at least twenty honoured guests besides the usual inhabitants of the castle, together with all their attendants, and for a splendid repast, to be ready for supper at the unusually late hour of nine. Special directions were added, to prepare one of the numerous detached buildings, which were frequently to be found within the walls of the fortified houses of those days, for the reception of the Lord Chartley and his train; and a portion of the immense range of stabling, which lay, strange to say, immediately at the back of the chapel, was to be set apart exclusively for his horses. Sir Edward Hungerford listened in polite silence, till Fulmer had delivered himself of his commission to the chief officer of Lord Calverly's household; but he could not suffer the good man to depart, without putting in a word or two, as advice to the master cook, concerning the dressing of cygnets, and the absolute necessity of immediately seeking a young heron of last year, or at least a bittern, as heron poults were not to be obtained.

"Porpoises are hopeless," he said, "at this distance from the sea, and squirrels in the spring are lean and poor; but, I have known a large luce, quaintly stewed with lard, supply the place of the one, while a coney may do well instead of the other; only I fear me it is somewhat late in the year."

The major domo bowed reverently at this discourse; and, as soon as he was gone, Fulmer exclaimed: "Come, Hungerford, let us walk upon the battlements, this sunshiny afternoon. Perchance these two fair girls may come down to breathe the air."

"Stay," replied Sir Edward Hungerford. "I will go and put on my green and sable surcoat; if they see it, it may attract them."

"Pshaw!" cried Fulmer. "Do you think they are bulls, which, men say, will run after a piece of cloth of a particular colour?"

"Nay!" replied Hungerford, with perhaps a little spice of malice; "but this surcoat of mine is, point for point, the very model of Chartley's."

"What has Chartley to do with the matter?" demanded Fulmer, turning full upon him, with some surprise.

"It shall be on in a moment," replied Sir Edward, without answering his question. "I hate this orange tawny colour, though it be now worn by every one. It does not at all suit my complexion. 'Tis a sort of jealousy colour. I will no more on't;" and away he went.

Lord Fulmer paced up and down the hall. "Her greeting was mighty cold," he thought. "Well, perhaps 'twas natural; and yet 'twas less troubled than chilly. She seemed firm enough, but yet as icy as the grave. What can this man mean about Chartley? Nothing, nothing. He has no meaning in him. I wish her greeting had been somewhat warmer--and in his presence too. He smiled, when he talked of Chartley."

He had not time for any long meditations, for he was very soon rejoined by his friend, habited in the most extravagant extreme of the mode, with the sleeves of his surcoat actually trailing on the ground when not fixed back to his shoulders by small loops of gold cord, and ruby buttons. The two gentlemen then found their way to the battlements, and walked round nearly their whole extent; Hungerford looking up, from time to time, at the principal masses of the building, in the hopes of ascertaining, by seeing some sweet face at a window, in what part of the castle Constance and her cousin were lodged. He said no more upon the subject of Iola and Chartley; and Fulmer did not choose to inquire further, though, to say the truth, the mere casual words he had heard, implying in reality little or nothing, rested on his mind more than he wished. Wrapped up in the thoughts of his own glittering person, Sir Edward Hungerford walked on by his friend's side in silence, and might perhaps have said nothing more for the next half hour, if Fulmer had not begun the conversation himself. Of course, it was begun from a point quite different from that at which he proposed to arrive.

"This castle is pleasantly situated," he observed, "and commands all the country round."

"Good faith, I like your own better," answered Sir Edward Hungerford. "Sheltered as it is, by woods and higher hills than that on which it stands, you have no dread of north winds there. Here, let it blow from east, west, north or south, you meet with every gust of heaven that is going; and, unless a man's skin be as tough as a horse's hide, he will ruin his complexion in a fortnight."

"I like it better," said Fulmer. "I love to have a free sight round me, to look afar, and see what comes on every side, to catch the rays of the sun in their warmth, ay, and sometimes to give the sharp wind buffet for buffet. Were both mine, I should choose this for my residence."

"Well, it will soon be yours," answered Sir Edward Hungerford; "for, I suppose your marriage is to take place speedily, and this old lord cannot live long. He is worn out with wisdom. You can then inhabit which you like. Every man has his tastes, Fulmer. Some, as you know, delight in orange tawny. I abominate the hue. You dislike your own place, and prefer Chidlow; I the reverse. You, doubtless, judge Iola the most beautiful. I admire little Constance, with her thoughtful brow."

"Because you have no more thought yourself than would lie in the hem of a silk jerkin," replied Fulmer. "Yet, methinks she were too grave for you."

"Nay! She can be merry enough when she is with those who please her," replied Hungerford, with a self-satisfied nod of his head. "That pretty little mouth can dimple with smiles, I assure you."

"Why, how know you all this, Hungerford?" asked Fulmer, in as light a tone as he could assume. "You seem to be wondrous well acquainted with these ladies' characters."

"Ay, ay," replied Sir Edward, with a mysterious and yet laughing look. "Constance and I passed that self same evening side by side; and, in one evening, a man may learn and teach a great deal."

"What evening?--What do you mean?" demanded Fulmer, sharply; but his companion only laughed, replying:--

"Ha! ha! Now, I could make you jealous--but, hush! No more just now. Some one is coming; and look, here is a party riding up--there, over that hill, upon the Leicester road."

The person who approached along the battlements was Lord Calverly's master of the household, come for some explanation from the young lord, whom he knew right well; and, while he spoke with Fulmer, Sir Edward Hungerford threw himself into a graceful attitude by one of the embrasures, and fell into thought--ay, reader, even into thought; for he was somewhat different in reality from that which he has hitherto appeared to you. I have only depicted him in certain scenes, and recorded his sayings and doings therein; and, if you judge other men, in your actual commerce with the world, by such partial views, you will make a great mistake--unless indeed you possess that instinct, the gift of few, which enables some to pierce through all the

various veils with which men cover themselves, and see their real characters at once in their nakedness. Notwithstanding all the trifling, and the foppery, and the folly of Sir Edward Hungerford, there was no lack of brain beneath that frivolous exterior. I do not mean to say that his apparent tastes and pursuits were altogether assumed. He had a real fondness for splendour and delicacy of dress, for refinements in cookery, and softness and smoothness of demeanour. He was inordinately vain too of his person; and these were certainly defects, ay, and defects of intellect; for they showed a misappreciation of the worth of things; but, if you set down every fop for a fool, you will commit an egregious error. Every man has his weak point, they say, and foppery is certainly a very great one; but there may be a many strong points behind, and such was the case with this young knight. He was a man of undoubted courage, notwithstanding all his care for his fine person; by no means eager in quarrel, who could hear a jest, or a taunt, or even a reproach, with great patience, provided it did not become an insult; but then no one was more ready with his sword. The man, in short, who wished to fight him, he was ever prepared to fight; but he never showed any of that assassin-like love of mere fighting, which has gained many a man, very unjustly, the reputation of great courage. Not, however, to make him appear better than he really was, I must say a few words more upon his character. Though he could think deeply, and sometimes well, upon any subject placed before him, yet he had no value whatever for the power of thought. His great fault was a miscomprehension of what is precious and what is valueless in man; and this affected his estimation of his own qualities as well as those of others. Whether from a strange but not unusual philosophy, he thought the trifles of every day life more important to man's happiness, from their frequent occurrence, than the weighty things of the heart and mind, or whether the mocking persiflage of the court in which he had been brought up, had sunk, as it were, into his spirit, and made him look upon all things equally as trifles, I cannot tell; but certainly he would have prided himself more upon the cut of a doublet, which would have secured a multitude of imitators, than upon the wisest saying he could have uttered, or upon the profoundest reflections that could have passed through his mind. But this philosophy, or whatever it was, had its dangers and its evils. He looked upon morals with the same distorted vision as upon all other matters; even laughed at restraints which other men held sacred, and regarded every course of conduct as perfectly indifferent, because all things were equally empty and idle. To the punctilios of honour, as to the ceremonies of religion, he submitted with a good grace, merely because it was not worth while to contest them; and, if he did not injure a friend, or betray a cause he had espoused, or violate his plighted word, it was merely--I will not say by accident--by some slight impression received in youth, which he would have scoffed at in his own mind, if any one attempted to erect it into a principle. He seldom argued indeed, and never combatted other men's opinions, because he thought it quite as well that they should have them as not; and the only thing he thought it worth while to reason upon for five minutes was the fashion of a point, or a cloak, the design of a piece of embroidery, or the composition of an essence. These matters indeed rose into some importance with him; but the cause was, that he had talked himself into a vanity upon the subject, and other men had given value to his decisions by following them as law.

He thought then, while his companion was engaged in conversation; and his mind rested naturally upon things which had just passed.

"How some men trouble themselves about vain fancies," he said to himself. "Here is this good friend of mine would soon be in a flame of jealousy, if he knew all; not considering how very foolish and unlike a gentleman it is to be jealous at all. It is quite a gone-by mode, a faded suit, since good King Edward's days, and is as bad as a pale yellow doublet with a crimson cloak. Yet this man would wear it, and make himself as ridiculous as a Turk, with fifty wives, and jealous of them all. It would be amusing enough to see him, with all the wonderful graces of such a condition, now writhing like a saltimbank, yet grinning all the while to hide his pangs--then with a moody air walking apart with crossed angry arms, and thundery brow, and now affecting the gay and jocular, and dealing blows right and left, under the colour of sportive playfulness, only waiting to cut some one's throat, till he got the proof positive, which never comes. But I will not do it. It is not worth the while. Trouble would grow out of it; and nothing on earth is worth trouble but a dish of lampreys or a pair of new-fashioned hosen.--They are coming on fast," he continued aloud, looking from the walls. "On my life I believe it is the old pompous lord coming at the full gallop as if he were following a falcon. Come, Fulmer, come; let us down to the gates. Here is that most honourable peer, Arnold Lord Calverly, with two or three score in company, riding as fast as if King Richard were behind him. Pray Heaven the good nobleman's horse stumble not, or what a squelch there will be."

Thus saying, he began to descend one of those little flights of steps, which, in castles such as that of Chidlow, led from the battlements into the court-yard. Fulmer followed with a quick step; but the words of Sir Edward Hungerford had already planted doubts and apprehensions, which were not easily to be removed.

CHAPTER XXII.

"It was discreet, my lord, it was discreet," said Lord Calverly, as he walked up into the hall with Fulmer by his side; "and take my word for it, that discretion is a quality which every man should prize in a wife. She meant you no offence, depend upon it, but with maidenly modesty retired till she had the sanction of her guardian's presence."

"I made no complaint, my dear lord," replied Fulmer, for the first time aware that, in telling how soon Iola had left him, his tone had displayed some mortification; "I merely said that, after a moment's interview, the dear girl withdrew; and you may easily imagine that I should have better liked her stay."

"Nay, nay, not so," answered the old peer. "That is a boyish fancy. We should always prefer lengthened happiness to present pleasure. Now her retiring was a sign of that frame of mind which will be your best happiness hereafter, therefore you should have been well pleased."

Fulmer set his teeth tight together, bearing the lecture with impatience, to which he did not choose to give utterance; but the next moment the old lord continued, saying--

"Thanks for your diligence, my dear lord. I see the people are all in a bustle of preparation. My noble friend Lord Chartley will be here anon; for, good sooth, it gave me some trouble to outride him; and I would not have him find anything in disarray; for his own household, I am told, is the best ordered in England."

The words galled their auditor. He asked himself why it should be so; and he had nothing to reply; for the movements of the human heart, deep, subtle, and intricate, conceal themselves constantly more or less, not only from the eyes of the outward world, but from the sight of the mind, which is affected by their impulses. As the ship leaves no permanent trace in the ever closing waters, as the arrow marks not its path through the sky, so do feelings often pass through the human heart, leaving no trace of the way by which they came and went.

Fulmer could not prevent a frown from gathering on his brow; but, though marked by Sir Edward Hungerford, it passed unnoticed by old Lord Calverly, whose coming somewhat earlier than had been expected set the whole household of the castle in movement. Orders had to be given; rooms to be assigned; new preparations to be ordered; old preparations to be undone; servants, attendants, guests hurried here and there; and a great deal of bustle, and not a little confusion, prevailed, when, at length, Iola and Constance appeared in answer to a summons from their uncle. The former was still very pale; and the keen and marking eye of Fulmer detected--or he fancied that he detected--the trace of tears upon her beautiful cheek.

All passed unnoticed by her self-occupied uncle. He had not seen her for nearly two years, and he did not remark any change in her appearance. She might have been pale before, for aught he knew; and besides he was too busy to take any note of such trifling things as paleness or tears. He saluted both his nieces, and welcomed them to Chidlow in fewer words than was his wont; asked why their aunt, the abbess, had not come with them at his summons; but waited for no answer; and, committing them to the care of Lord Fulmer and Sir Edward Hungerford, with some gentlemen, of inferior fortune and station who had accompanied him from Leicester, he proceeded to reiterate orders given twice before, and confuse his servants with manifold directions, often somewhat contradictory.

Left in the hall with her cousin, and her uncle's guests, Iola felt some relief in the numbers who were present. Fulmer would fain have enacted the lover's part; nor was he indeed at all unfitted to do so; for his heart was naturally warm and impetuous, and Iola's beauty and grace might well have kindled the flame of love in a colder breast than his own. Strange human nature, too, would have it, that the doubts and apprehensions which had arisen in his mind should render him only the mere eager to overcome anything like coldness upon her part; and he strove, with soft speeches and low-toned words, to win her ear to himself alone.

The result was not favourable. Iola listened calmly, coldly, and ever replied aloud, in words which all the world might hear. She did so, not upon any plan or system indeed, but from the feelings which were busy in her own heart, and the impressions which his words produced. She was contrasting them all the time with those of Chartley; and to her mind, at least, the comparison was unfavourable. The frank gay manner, the lively half-careless answer, the want of all study and formality, the shining forth of a heart that, like a gay bird, seemed made captive in spite of itself, which had all pleased, excited, won her in Chartley, was not to be found in the conversation or demeanour of Lord Fulmer. Between her and him there were but few subjects in common; the only one, indeed, being that from which she shrunk away with apprehension. He could but have recourse to the common places of love and admiration; and they were not at all fitted to win her. It was his misfortune indeed, and not his fault; but yet we often aggravate our misfortunes by our faults; and so it was in some degree with Fulmer. He had dreamed bright dreams of their meeting; and, little knowing woman's heart, he had fancied that she would do the same, that she would look forward with the same hopes to their union, that her heart unwooed would spring to meet his; and he was disappointed, mortified, somewhat irritated, to find that it was not so.

Worse, in the end he showed such feelings in his manner, and by an impatient look and tone, caused Iola to shrink from him still more coldly.

It was just at that moment that old Lord Calverly returned, saying aloud--

"Our other guests are coming. They are just at the castle gates. Now, Constance," he continued, for his lordship would sometimes venture an insipid joke, "now, Constance, if you would win a rich and noble husband, put on your brightest smiles."

"Who may he be, my lord?" asked Constance, who as well as Iola was ignorant of the names of the persons expected.

"Nay, nay, you will see," said Lord Calverly. "Did not his young lordship tell you?"

"No, indeed!" answered Constance quietly; "but I can wait in patience, my good lord. Time brings all things to light."

Through the open windows came the clattering sound of horses' feet from the court-yard, and then of orders given and voices speaking. There is something very strange in our memory of sounds. How long, how clearly we remember, how definitely we can trace back those intangible footprints of things that we have loved or dreaded, on the pathway of the air. A tone which has once awakened strong emotions is never forgotten. Iola's heart thrilled as she heard those sounds from the court.

There was then a pause of a minute or two, during which no one spoke. Then came steps upon the short wide staircase; and then the door opened. Fulmer fixed his eyes upon Iola's face; but she remarked not that he did so; for her own look was bent forward upon the door. He saw a clear light rise up in her eyes, a soft warm glow spread itself over her cheek and forehead, a bright but very transient smile, extinguished as soon as lighted, beam upon her beautiful lips. The next instant she was calm and pale again; and, turning his head, he saw Chartley approaching.

The wound was given. His doubts, his apprehensions, his suspicions were confirmed. Yet there was nothing tangible; nothing that could justify him in saying a word, or acting in any way except as before. But that was the greater torture; and now he resolved to watch for some occasion to speak or do. In the mean time Chartley advanced rapidly, followed by good Sir William Arden. He was somewhat changed since Iola had seen him. He looked graver, sterner. His cheek had grown pale too. There were care and thought written on his brow.

"He has suffered also," thought Iola; and her heart sunk more than ever.

"Oh, would that I had told him all at once!" she said in her own heart. "Yet how could I do it? Alas, that I should make him unhappy too."

Chartley's manner however showed no agitation. He had been prepared by his conversation with Lord Calverly to meet those whom he found there; and, at once addressing the old nobleman, he said:

"I here redeem my parole, my good lord, and surrender myself to your ward, according to the king's will, and to my word given this morning when you left me."

Then turning to Iola, he took her hand with a frank but grave air, and bent his head over it, saying, "dear lady, I rejoice to see you once again, and trust that you have been well since the evening when we met."

With a degree of haste, which was the only sign of emotion he showed, he next saluted Constance, almost in the same words; but then, with a kindly and sincere tone, inquired after her aunt, the abbess, trusting that she had not suffered from the alarm and anxiety she must have felt on the night when he last saw her. He listened too attentively to Constance's reply; but he could not prevent his eyes from wandering for a moment back to the face of Iola; and then, with a sort of start, he turned away, looking round the circle, and exclaimed, "oh, Hungerford, I did not expect to meet you here. When you left me at Leicester, I thought you were bound for London, and believed you, even now, plunged in a sea of green Genoa velvet."

"Nay, you forget," replied Sir Edward Hungerford; "summer is coming on. No one could venture to wear velvet for the next eight months, except a lord mayor or an alderman."

"Faith, I know not much of such matters," answered Chartley; "but that is the most reasonable piece of tailorism I have heard, which gives us warm clothing for our winter wear and lighter garments for our summer use. However I thought you were in London."

"So had I been," answered the young knight; "but I was stopped by a delicate epistle from my friend Lord Fulmer, here, containing an invitation not to be refused."

"Let me make you acquainted, any good lords," said Lord Calverly, advancing between the two young noblemen, and presenting them to each other. Each bowed with a stiff and stately air; and Chartley paused for a moment, as if to see whether Fulmer would speak or not; but, finding him

silent, he turned on his heel; and, seeing Sir William Arden talking bluffly to Iola, he took his place by the side of Constance, and once more spoke of the night of their meeting.

The entrance of the young nobleman and those who accompanied him had caused one of those pauses which are very common in--I might say peculiar to--English society. Amongst foreigners in general, a stranger can enter, glide in amongst the other guests, speak with those he knows, pass those who are strangers, and be introduced to this person or to that, without interrupting the occupations or amusements going on. If his rank be very high, or his character very distinguished, a slight murmur, a hardly perceptible movement, and a few seconds of observation, form all that is produced by his appearance; but here such is not the case; and, unless the conversation going forward be very entertaining indeed, or the amusement in progress very exciting, a long silence follows the introduction of any personage worthy of note, during which he is well aware that every body is observing and commenting upon him. Such had been in a great degree the case in the present instance. For the first five minutes, nobody had spoken but Chartley, Iola, Constance, their uncle, and Sir Edward Hungerford. But, at the end of that time, each of the many guests resumed his conversation with his neighbour; and Chartley had a better opportunity of saying a few words, which he did not wish heard, to Constance, while the busy buzz of tongues prevailed around.

"I am happy, dear lady," he said, as soon as he had made sure of the moment, "to see you looking so well. I wish I could say the same of your sweet cousin. She looks pale, anxious, and thoughtful."

He paused as if for an answer, but Constance merely replied, "she does not look well indeed."

"I fear," continued Chartley, "that terrible night she passed in the forest, with all the alarm that she must have felt, was too much for her fair and delicate frame. I did my best, believe me, to comfort and protect her; but my best was but little, and she must have suffered much."

"I do not think that had any effect," replied Constance. "Her health has ever been strong and unimpaired--" she stopped for an instant, fearful of being led on to say more than she intended, and then added; "but she certainly looks ill. She speaks, however, my lord, with great gratitude of the kindness which you showed her, on that terrible night, which I shall never think of without dread."

"Gratitude!" said Chartley, with a smile. "Kindness! Dear lady, she must have formed a very unfavourable opinion of mankind, if she thought there was any gentleman who would not do the same."

"But it may be done in very different ways, my noble lord," answered Constance; "and she assured me that you treated her as if you had been a brother."

Chartley murmured to himself in a low tone, "Would that I could have felt as one!" The sounds were hardly articulate; but they caught the ear of his companion, and the whole secret was revealed at once. She cast down her eyes in painful thought, from which she was roused the moment after by Chartley saying, almost in a whisper,

"Will you give her a message for me, dear lady? for I may never have the opportunity of saying what I wish myself."

"What is it, my lord?" demanded Constance, timidly, with a glow of agitation coming into her cheek.

"It is merely this," replied the young nobleman. "Tell her, that he for whom she risked so much--I mean the bishop of Ely--is safe in France. I have received intimation of the fact from a sure hand. Tell her so, and add that, if the deepest gratitude and the sincerest regard can compensate for what she underwent that night, she has them."

"I will," replied Constance. "I will repeat your words exactly. There can be no harm in that."

She laid some emphasis on the last words; and Chartley gazed in her face as if to learn the interpretation thereof, "There can, indeed, be no harm in that," he rejoined: "nor in telling her any thought of my mind towards her."

Constance was about to reply; but, looking up, she saw the eyes of her uncle fixed upon her, with a meaning smile upon his lip, as if he thought she had already made a conquest of Lord Chartley. The conversation between them then paused; and Lord Calverly, crossing to where they stood, proposed to lead the young nobleman, who was partly his guest, partly his prisoner, to the lodging which had been prepared for him, his friend Sir William Arden, and their attendants. Chartley followed in silence, and found everything done that it was possible to do to render his residence at Chidlow pleasant.

The old lord was all courtesy and kindness. In his usual pompous tone, he excused what he called the poverty of the furniture, though it was in reality of a very splendid description. He declared the bed was not half large enough, though it would have afforded room to turn in, to at least six well-grown persons. The plumes of feathers too, at the top of the posts, he declared were in a bad fashion, as well as the hangings of the bed, and the tapestry of the bedroom somewhat

faded. The antechamber and the chamber adjoining were well enough, though somewhat confined, he said; but he excused their narrowness, on account of that part of the building being the most ancient of all, the tower having been built by William the Bastard.

"Our Norman ancestors," he said, "thought more of defence than convenience; but we have larger apartments in the main building, where Lord Chartley will always be received as an honoured guest. And now, my dear young lord," he continued, "though I grieve in some sort to be made, as it were, your jailer, yet in some sort I rejoice; for I can lighten your captivity, or, to call it by a better name, your wardship. I would fain have it as mild as may be, and, though I am responsible to the king for your person, yet I would only secure you by bolts and bars of words, and fetters of air. Give me your promise, as knight and nobleman, as you did this morning, that you will make no attempt to escape, and then roam whithersoever you will. I will set no spies upon you. You have then only to fancy yourself a guest in my poor mansion, and all the pangs of imprisonment are gone."

"A thousand thanks, my noble friend," replied Chartley. "My promise I freely give; but it were better for both you and me that your forbearance and my engagement should have a limit. Let it be from month to month. Thus, the first of every month I present myself as your prisoner, and then you can renew your kind permission if you please, or not."

"Agreed, agreed," cried Lord Calverly. "It is a marvellous good arrangement. The rooms of your friend, Sir William Arden, an exceedingly good and valiant knight, though somewhat more familiar with the battle field than with bower or hall, are immediately above you; the rooms of your own attendants below. The truckle beds in the antechamber are somewhat small, but will serve two of the knaves well enough. And now I leave you, with a warning that our repast will be upon the board within the hour.--Ha, here comes Sir William Arden across the court, conducted by my cousin John. I will tell him of our supper hour as we pass; but he does not spend much time on his apparel, I should think."

"Good faith, he is well apparelled in his own high qualities," replied Chartley, "however he be dressed. The wool of a sheep and the entrails of a silkworm make but a poor addition in my eyes to a man's own worth--but," he added, not willing that his bluff friend should be undervalued, even by one who esteemed wealth as a high quality, "the plainness of Arden's apparel is from choice and not necessity. Doubtless, you know, my lord, that in worldly wealth he is as well furnished as in qualities of heart."

"Nay, nay, I did not know it," said Lord Calverly, with a look of much interest. "I thought he was but one of the knights of your household."

"My mother's first cousin," replied Chartley, "which is the cause of his attachment to myself."

"Nay, nay, your own high merits," said Lord Calverly, with a sliding bow, and took his leave.

In a few minutes more, Sir William Arden entered Chartley's room, with a gay air.

"Well, boy," he exclaimed, "here you are a prisoner. Think yourself happy that you have not been gored by the boar's tusks. Good faith, he wounds deep where he strikes. That old fool, our host, has stopped me for five minutes in the court, with a panegyric on your merits, and looked much surprized when I told him the plain truth, to wit, that you are a foolish mad-headed boy, who will need fifty such hard lessons as you have received, before you get some grains of common sense beaten into you."

Arden threw himself on a seat in the window, as he spoke, and gazed out, little attending to Chartley's answer, which consisted but of some words of course. He remained silent, even for a minute or two after; but then, turning sharply round, he said--

"Tell me, Chartley, what has happened to that sweet girl, Iola? She that was bright is dull; she, who was gay, is sad; she, whose cheek was like the rose, is now like a lily bending amongst its green leaves, bowed down with drops of dew."

"Nay, I know not," answered Chartley, leaning his head upon his hand, and bending his eyes upon the table.

"Then, what's the matter with you, my lord?" rejoined Sir William Arden; "for yours is the same case as hers. You are sad where you were gay; you are stupid where you were sharp; you look like a pipped hen instead of a rosy bumpkin."

"Methinks my present situation were enough to account for all this," replied Chartley.

"Come, come. That will not do, my lord," answered his friend. "I have seen you in much worse plight, when we were taken by the brown fellows at Tripoli, and you were then as gay as a lark. Better you should have some one to consult with. Tell me in a word, then. Were you making love to this dear little lady, when you were out with her the whole night in the forest? It was a great temptation, truly. I was half inclined at supper to make an old fool of myself, and say sweet things to pretty Constance, just to console her for the empty babbling of Ned Hungerford."

Chartley still leaned his arm upon the table, and remained in thought. It was not a usual mood

with him; for, generally, the first emotions of his heart soonest found utterance; but new passions will produce new conduct. For the first time in his life, he felt inclined to be angry at his acts being inquired into, even by a friend, for the purposes of friendship. But he felt that it was foolish and wrong; and, being a very imperfect creature, after a brief struggle, he went into quite the opposite extreme.

"You are too sharp a questioner, Arden," he said, with a laugh, which had somewhat of his old gaiety in it; "but I'll answer your question manfully. I do not think the name of love ever passed my lips during that whole night."

"Ay, ay," cried the bluff knight; "but talking of love is not making it."

"Perhaps not," answered Chartley; "but, if I did make it, it was without intention. One thing, however, I feel too well, that, if I did not make love, I learned to love; and that is much worse. But it were worse still, Arden, should I have taught her to love too."

"Why so?" asked Sir William Arden, with a start.

"And yet I cannot think it," said Chartley, pursuing his own course of thought. "No, no, God forbid! This paleness, this sadness, may have a thousand other causes."

"But how now? What's the matter?" asked Arden, again. "Why should you wish yourself unloved? Remember, young man, when once put on, you cannot strip off love like a soiled jerkin. The honest man and true seeks no love that he cannot wear for ever--at least, till the garment drops off of itself."

"You do not know. You do not understand," said Chartley, impatiently. "The lady is contracted, I tell you, to this Lord Fulmer--ay, contracted in infancy, by every tie but the mere last ceremony of the church."

"And did she not tell you?" demanded Arden. "That was wrong, very wrong."

"'Tis you who are wrong," replied Chartley. "Why should she tell me? How should she tell me, when I never spoke to her of love? What my manner said, I know not; but there was not one word uttered by me which could give her a plea for relating to me all her private history. I thought I should have plenty of opportunity of speaking boldly, at an after time; and, alarmed and agitated as she was, I would not for the world have said or done aught that could add to what she felt. Since then, I have learned that she was contracted, when a child, to this Lord Fulmer; but that, educated as he has been at the court of Burgundy, they have never met from infancy till now."

"Damnation!" cried Sir William Arden, striding up and down the room. "This is the most unpleasant thing I ever had to deal with! And you forced to live in the same house with him too. In fortune's name, what will you do, my dear boy?"

"As best I may," answered Chartley. "Perhaps 'twere as well, Arden, to resume the appearance, at least, of all my old light spirits. At the worst, she will then but tax me with levity; and, if the feelings she has taught me have been at all learned by herself, she will soon be brought to believe that I am unworthy, because careless, of her affections, and feel the less regret at the sacrifice she must make."

"Don't resume, or assume anything, my dear lord," answered Sir William Arden. "Be what you are, seem what you are at all times. Confound me all men that walk in vizards! The best result always comes of the most straightforward course. But I will go and change these travel-soiled garments, and think of it all while I am getting the dust out of my eyes.--By the Lord that lives," he continued, looking out at the window, "there comes the abbess of St. Clare into the court, with Heaven knows how many more people. The castle will be too full, and I shall have to share my room with her. Well, thank Heaven for all things. She is a merry little fat soul, and will help us to laugh care away."

Thus saying, he turned and left his friend, who was not ill-satisfied, on the whole, at having been forced into making a confidant of one, on whose honour, integrity, and good sense he could firmly rely.

CHAPTER XXIII.

There was a man walking in the woods, with a slight limp in his gait. He was coarsely but comfortably dressed, and had something very like a Cretan cap upon his head. His face was a

merry face, well preserved in wine or some other strong liquor; and, from the leathern belt, which girt his brown coat close round his waist, stuck out, on the one side a long knife, and on the other the chanter of a bagpipe. The bag, alas, was gone.

He looked up at the blue clear sky. He looked up at the green leaves, just peering from the branches over his head; and, as he went, he sang; for his pipes had been spoiled by Catesby's soldiery, and his own throat was the only instrument of music left him.

SONG.

Oh, merry spring, merry spring!
With sunshine on thy back, and dew upon thy wing
 Sweetest bird of all the year.
 How I love to see thee here.
 And thy choristers to hear,
 As they sing.
Oh happy time, happy time!
When buds of hawthorn burst, and honeysuckles climb,
 And the maidens of the May,
 Hear the sweet bells as they play.
 And make out what they say
 In their chime.
Oh jolly hours, jolly hours!
Of young and happy hearts, in gay and pleasant bowers,
 Could I my spring recall,
 I'd be merrier than all;
 But my year is in the fall
 Of the flowers.
Still, I feel there comes a day
Far brighter, than e'er shone upon this round of clay,
 When life with swallow's wing,
 Shall find another spring,
 And my spirit yet shall sing.
 In the ray.

Thus sang Sam the piper, as, with his rolling gait, but at a good pace, he walked on from the high road, running between Atherston and Hinckley, down the narrower walk of the forest, which led, past the cottage of the woodman, to the bank of the stream. His was a merry heart, which sought and found happiness wherever it could be met with, and bore misfortune or adversity as lightly as any heart that ever was created. Oh, blessed thing, that cheerfulness of disposition, which makes its own sunshine in this wintry world--blessed whencesoever it comes, but most blessed when it springs from a fountain of conscious rectitude, a calm unspotted memory, and a bright high hope!

I cannot say that this was exactly the case with our good friend Sam; but he had a wonderful faculty, notwithstanding, of forgetting past pains and shutting his eyes to coming dangers. His wants were so few, that he could entertain but small fear of their not being satisfied; and, though his desires were somewhat more extensive, yet the rims of a trencher and a pottle pot were sufficient to contain them. Apprehensions, he entertained none; cares he had long before cast to the winds; and by circumscribing his pleasures and his necessities, within the smallest possible limits, it was wonderful how easily he walked under the only pack he had to carry through the world. Other men's sorrows and misfortunes, the strife of nations, intestine wars, portents, or phenomena, acts of violence and crime, I may say, afforded him amusement, without at all impugning poor Sam's kindness of heart or goodness of disposition; for all I mean to say is, that they gave him something to gossip about. Now gossiping and singing were Sam's only amusements, since a brutal soldier had cut his bag in twain. Drinking was with him a necessary evil, which he got over as soon as possible, whenever he had the means.

He was now on his way from Hinckley, to disgorge upon the abbey miller, who lived near the bridge, all the budget of news he had collected at that little town, and other places during the last fortnight or three weeks. He would willingly have bestowed a part of the stock upon Boyd the woodman; but he did not venture even to think of doing so, inasmuch as Boyd had always affected to be as great an enemy to gossip as the miller was a friend.

The summer sunshine, however, coming a month or two before its time, had lured Boyd to his door; and there he sat, with a large strong knife in his hand, and sundry long poles of yew and other wood, fashioning arrows with the greatest possible skill. It was wonderful to behold how straight, and round, and even, he cut them without compass or rule, or any other implement but the knife. Then too, how neatly he adjusted the feathers to the shaft, from a bundle of grey goose quills that lay on his left hand. Heads indeed were wanting; but Boyd thought to himself, "I will bring six or eight score from Tamworth when next I go. At all events it is well to be prepared."

As he thus thought, the step of the piper, coming down the road, met his ear, and he looked up; but Sam would have passed him by with a mere "good morning," for he stood in some awe of Master Boyd, had not the woodman himself addressed him, in a tone that might be called almost kindly, saying:

"Well, Sam. How goes the world with you? You have got a new coat and hosen, I see."

"Ay, thanks to the young lord's gold pieces," answered Sam. "He paid well and honestly; and I took a mighty resolution, and spent it on my back rather than on my belly."

"Ay, some grace left!" exclaimed Boyd. "But what has happened to thy pipes, man? They used always to be under thine elbow, and not stuck into thy belt."

"Those rascal troopers slit my bag," answered the piper; "and I shall have to travel through three counties ere I get another. I lost a silver groat, I am sure, by the want of it this very morning; for there was a bright company at Hinckley, and some of them speaking the Scottish tongue. Now every Scot loves the bagpipe."

"But not such pipes as yours," answered Boyd. "Theirs are of a different make. But who were these people, did you hear?"

"Nay, I asked no names," replied Sam; "for Scots do not like to be questioned. But there was a fair lady with them--very fair and very beautiful still, though the spring tide of her life had gone by--and the people called her Highness."

The woodman mused, and then inquired: "Were they all Scottish people?"

"Nay, some were English," answered Sam, "gallants of the king's court, I judge, and speaking as good English as you or I do. But there were Scottish persons of quality too, besides the lady who was so, I am sure--for what English princess should she be?"

"And were they all so gaily dressed then?" asked Boyd, in the same musing tone.

"Some were, and some were not," replied the piper; "but the lady herself was plainest of them all, more like a nun than a princess. But you can see them with your own eyes if you like; for they will pass by in half an hour, if they keep to the time at which they said they would set out. They are going to offer at St. Clare; and you may plant yourself at the gate, or under a tree by the roadside, and they will all pass you like a show."

"I will," replied the woodman; and, rising from his seat, he put his hat, which had been lying beside him, on his head, and was striding away, when suddenly, seeming to recollect himself, he turned back, saying to the piper, "I dare say thou art thirsty and hungry too, Sam. Come in with me, and thou shalt have a draught of ale, and a hunch of ewe-milk cheese."

It was an invitation not to be refused by the piper, to whom meat and drink rarely came amiss. He accordingly followed, and received what was proffered gratefully. The woodman waited not to hear his thanks, but, having seen him drink a moderate quart of ale, sent him away with well nigh half a loaf of brown bread and a lump of cheese as large as his two fists. Then, leaving his huge dog to watch the house, he, himself, took his departure, and walked with a rapid pace to the road which the piper had mentioned. There he stationed himself under the very tree by which he had been standing on a night eventful to him, when he had slain one of the king's couriers or posts. One would have thought the memory must have been painful; but it seemed to affect him not in the least. He stood and gazed upon the very spot where the man had fallen; and, had there not been rain since then, the blood would have been still upon the stones; but, if there was any change in his countenance at all, it was merely that his brow somewhat relaxed, and a faint smile came upon his lip. "It was the hand of justice," he said to himself. "Yet 'tis strange there has been no inquiry. I went in and touched the body; but it did not bleed. The inanimate corpse recognised the hand of the avenger, and refused to accuse."^[4]

He waited for some time, every now and then looking up the road, and sometimes bending his head to listen. At length he caught the sound of horses' feet coming at a slow pace, and making but little noise; for, as I have said elsewhere, the road was sandy. He then looked up the hill, and saw, coming slowly down, in no very regular order, a party of from twenty to five and twenty persons, male and female. Without waiting for anything but the first casual glance, he withdrew a little further from the road, amongst the high bushes which skirted the forest all round, intermingled with a few taller trees. There, where he could see without being seen, he paused, and crossed his arms upon his chest, looking intently through an aperture in the young green leaves, which afforded a good view of a considerable part of the road. At the end of some three or four minutes after he had taken his station, the cavalcade began to appear. It was headed by a lady on a fine grey horse, which she managed well and gracefully. The description given of her appearance by the wandering musician was quite correct, so far as it went. She was very beautiful, and her skin, most delicately fair and soft, without a wrinkle. Her hair, braided across the forehead, in a mode not usual in England, seemed once to have been nut brown, but was now somewhat streaked with grey. Her figure too was exceedingly fine, though not above the middle height; but it had lost the great delicacy of youth, and assumed the beauties of a more mature age. Her dress was exceedingly plain, consisting of a grey riding-gown, cape, and hood, which had fallen back upon her shoulders; but there was an air of graceful dignity in her whole figure which was not to be mistaken. The expression of her countenance was dignified also; but it was exceedingly grave--grave even to melancholy.

A number of much gayer-looking personages succeeded, and some of their dresses were

exceedingly beautiful and even splendid; but the eye of the woodman--as that of most other people would have done--fixed upon that lady alone, was never removed from her for an instant, and followed her down the road till the trees shut her from his sight. Then, after pausing for a moment or two, with his gaze firmly fixed upon the ground, he cast himself down in the long grass, and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The hall was as light as day; for Lord Calverly was fond of a glare. The feast was as delicate as he could have desired, and even the critical taste of Sir Edward Hungerford found nothing to criticise. The arrangement of the guests, however, was not altogether that which best suited their several inclinations. There were many, with whom we have little or nothing to do, who might, or might not, be placed as they would have placed themselves; but, certainly, with regard to Iola and Chartley, such was not the case; for she was seated between her uncle and Lord Fulmer, while Chartley was at some distance from her, on the opposite side of the table. Let the mind say what it would, the heart told her she would rather have had him near. Her ear thirsted for the tones of his voice, and her eye wandered for a moment, from time to time, to his face, with a glance withdrawn as soon as given, but with an impulse she could not controul. She was very young, and very inexperienced, and some excuse must be made for her. She wished to do all that was right, to avoid all that was wrong; but the heart was rebellious, and would have its own way.

Constance, too, could have wished something changed in her position. Sir William Arden, it is true, had contrived to place himself on her left; and with that part of the arrangement she was very well satisfied; but Sir Edward Hungerford occupied the other side, and there was hardly any one in all the hall whom she would not have preferred.

"Be merry, be merry, my friends," said excellent Lord Calverly, who perceived that, for some reason or another, his guests were not as cheerful as they might have been. "Let us all be gay; for in these troublous times, when one sits down to the merry evening meal, with friendly faces round us, it is never possible to tell when we shall all meet again."

"By St. Paul, that's a topic well calculated to promote hilarity!" said Sir William Arden in a low voice to Constance; "and, to say truth, dear lady, the castle hall does not seem to me so gay a place as the abbey refectory."

"I begin to think," said Constance, "that the calm shade of the cloister may, upon the whole, contain more cheerfulness than the laughter-loving world."

"Pooh! We must not let you think so," said Sir William Arden. "Cannot Sir Edward Hungerford persuade you of the contrary? He has been trying, I think."

He spoke in a whisper, and his words produced a slight smile, but no blush, upon Constance's face, and her only reply was:

"Hush, hush!"

"Nay, then, if he can't succeed, I must try," continued Sir William; "though, to say truth, it would be somewhat like an old suit of armour dancing a quick step. But why should you not be happy in the world, as well as your fair cousin?"

"Is she happy?" asked Constance, with a sigh.

"Ay, that is a question, in regard to which I have some doubt," answered the good knight; "but, no more at present; the popinjay is turning round. Now, I'll warrant, he has discussed the whole question of the superiority of cendel over laid silk, with that pretty little thing on his right, who seems to have as many ideas as he has; and, I will answer for it, half an hour's talk would make them both bankrupt, so that they have stopped payment for lack of coin."

"It is marvellous hot to-night, sweet lady Constance," said Sir Edward turning towards her. "My cheek burns, till I am sure I must be rosy as a country justice's serving-man."

"Better that than white and yellow, like a lump of tallow," replied Sir William Arden, across her. "These people, with their delicate complexions, drive me mad, as if they thought a man, to be a courtier, should look like a whey-faced girl, just emptied from the nursery. And then they must blush too, and find the air oppressive; but there is one way of banishing the red rose from your cheek. Faint, Hungerford, faint outright! Then you'll be as pale as usual."

"Did'st thou ever hear, fair lady, such a blustering old son of Mars as this?" demanded Sir Edward Hungerford. "He thinks no one can fight but himself, unless he be full of big oaths, with a face like ebony, and a skin like a rhinoceros."

"Nay, I know thou can'st fight, Hungerford, like a man," answered Sir William Arden. "More shame for thee to talk like a woman, and dress like a mountebank. If thou didst take as much care of thy pretty person in the field, as thou dost in the hall, thou wouldst be a worse soldier than thou art."

"Gallantly said!" replied the other knight; and, turning again to Constance, he continued the conversation with her, saying: "He is not bad at main, this worthy man. Though, to hear him talk, we might suppose him one of the devils; but it is all talk, dear lady. He is at heart as gentle as a lamb, except when he is in the field; and then, of course, he fights for company; but, polish is impossible with him. His mother forgot to lick him when he was young, I suppose; and so we have the bear in his native state."

Sir William Arden laughed, though he was the object of the sarcasm; and, looking round at Constance, he said:

"It is all quite true, lady, as true as what I said of him. We are famous for drawing each other's characters. So now, you have heard us described each by the other, say which you like best."

"Good, mighty good!" exclaimed Hungerford. "That is an offer of his hand and heart."

"Well, so be it," answered Sir William Arden, with a laugh. "That is something solid at all events. He can offer nothing but a shadow in a slashed doublet, a mere voice and a walking suit of clothes. Echo is nothing to him, in respect of thinness; and I should fear his undergoing Narcissus' fate, but that he loves himself better than even Narcissus, and would not part with his own pretty person for anything else whatsoever, be it substance or shadow. He will never pine himself either into a flower or a water-course, as those young gentlemen and ladies did in days of old."

"I should be a great fool if I did," replied Hungerford; "but if you were to begin to melt, Arden, all the world would thaw; for it is difficult to say whether your head or your heart is the hardest."

"Why, gentlemen, you are using very bitter words," said the pretty lady, on the other side of Sir Edward Hungerford. "Really I must appeal to my good Lord Calverly."

"Nay, rather let me appeal to you," said Hungerford, in a tender tone; and thenceforth he continued to talk with her till the supper was over, which was all she wanted.

"That shaft is shot," said Arden, resuming the conversation with Constance, but speaking in a lower tone than before. "You asked but now, 'Is she happy?' and, good faith, she does not look like it. Her lips have hardly moved since we sat down to the board; but methinks that question might be put of every one round. It is not the gay smile, or the cheerful laugh, that shows a happy heart within; and I doubt much, if you could see into every bosom along these two ranks of human things, whether you would not find some hidden care, or some sorrow that flies the light."

"That is to say," replied Constance, "that every one who mingles with the world finds unhappiness in it; a fine argument to keep me out of a convent, truly. Either your gallantry or your wit halts, Sir William; for, to my knowledge, there is many a happy heart beats in the cloister."

"Are there no masks there?" asked the stout knight. "If not, there are veils, fair Constance; and, take my word for it, sooner or later, there come regrets and repinings, longings to see the world that has been renounced, and pluck some of the fruit of the pleasant tree of knowledge, that bitter sweet, the pleasant berries of which tempt the eye from afar, although there is now no serpent hid amongst the foliage."

"But look at my good aunt, the abbess," answered the young lady. "She has none of these regrets and repinings that you mention. She is always merry, cheerful, contented."

"Ay, but hers is a case by itself," answered Arden. "She can get out when she likes; and a good creature she is. Her life is as easy as a widow's. No, no. Take my advice, and think not of a convent."

"Why, what would you have me do in the wide world?" asked Constance, half gaily, half sadly.

"Why, marry to be sure," replied the good knight, "and have a score of cherub babes, to cheer you with their pleasant faces. Let me tell you, it is like having heaven round your knees, and you are not a whit the less likely in the end to reach the heaven overhead."

"But suppose no one would have me," answered Constance, with a smile.

"Try all the young fellows first, and then try me," answered Sir William, bluffly, but with a light laugh at the same time, which softened the point of his words; and Constance answered--

"No, no. A woman can try no one. I must be wooed and won."

"On my life, if I thought you could," murmured Arden to himself, "I think I would try;" but the words did not reach Constance's ear; and, after a short pause of thought, the old knight said abruptly, "I don't like your fair cousin's looks."

"And yet they are fair looks too," answered Constance.

"Ay, so are my cousin Chartley's," said the knight; "but I don't like his looks either."

"They are gay enough, surely," replied Constance. "See, he is laughing even now."

"Did you ever see a will-o'-the-wisp?" asked Sir William.

"Yes," said Constance. "What of that?"

"They flit over deep morasses and dangerous spots," answered the knight. "Don't you let Chartley's laugh mislead you. See how he holds his head in the air, with his nostril spread, and his lip curling. Be sure, when he laughs with such a look as that, there is something very bitter at his heart."

"But they say he is half a prisoner here," rejoined Constance. "That is enough to make him sad."

"Would that were all," replied Arden; "but let us talk no more of him. It is your fair cousin I am thinking of. When she sat opposite to me at the abbey, a week or two ago, her eyes were like stars that glistened up instead of down. Her brow was smooth and clear. Her lip played in smiles with every thought. I would fain know what it is has clouded that ivory brow, what it is weighs down that rosy arch, and sinks the sweeping eye-lashes to her cheek."

"I cannot tell," answered Constance, with a little mental reservation; "but I suppose great changes coming, when they are foreseen, will make the heart somewhat pensive."

"Pensive, but not sorrowful," answered Arden. "Well, well," he added, "I see your uncle moving in his seat, as if we should not be long side by side. Let me see--when you were a little smiling child, just toddling about your nurse's knee, I was in arms, dealing hard blows in more than one stricken field. There is a mighty difference between our ages, some four and twenty years perhaps--Nay, do not be afraid. I am not going to ask you--but, methinks, a young thing like you may place some confidence in a man old enough to be your father; and all I can say is if you, or your fair cousin, need counsel of a head that has had some experience, or help from an arm none of the weakest, you may rely upon a heart which has been ever believed true to friend and foe, to man or woman. There, my dear child, I have said my say. It is for you to act upon it, as you think fit."

Sunk almost to a whisper with much emotion, the voice of Constance answered--

"I thank you deeply;" and the next moment, according to a bad custom, even then prevalent, the ladies of the party rose, and left the gentlemen to pursue their revel unchecked.

We must go back a little, however; for during the meal we have followed only one little group at that long table. What was the conduct, what were the thoughts of Lord Fulmer, while all this was passing? He sat beside Iola in anguish, the anguish of doubt and jealousy; and, conscious that his mood was not fitted to win or please, he struggled with it sorely. He determined to use every effort, both to conquer himself, and to gain her love; but it is difficult to conquer an enemy without when there is an enemy within; and the very effort embarrassed him. If he sat silent for a minute or two, he was revolving what he should say. When he did speak, it was not the tone or the words of the heart which came forth; the whole was studied; the effort was too evident. He felt it, yet could not help it; and Iola's reply did not generally aid or encourage him. It was courteous but cold, civil but not kind--very brief too; and the moment it was uttered, she fell into thought again. It was clear there was a struggle in her mind, as well as his, and the only difference was, that she did not strive to conceal it. He was angry with her and with himself; with her, because she did not put on at least the semblance of regard she did not feel; with himself, because he knew that his own want of self-command was every moment betraying the interests of a passion which was growing upon him more and more, even under doubt and disappointment. Still he struggled, still he strove to please, or, at least, to amuse; but it was in vain. His words were cold and formal, and Iola was grave, absent, thoughtful, so that no conversation lasted more than a minute. At length he gave it up. He struggled no more. He yielded to the feelings within; but they impelled him in a very different course from that of Iola. She saw, heard, marked, very little of what passed at the table. Buried in her own thoughts, she only roused herself from time to time, to reply to her uncle, who sat at her side, or to answer the abbess, who was placed opposite, or to give a momentary timid look towards the face of Chartley.

Fulmer, on the contrary, was full of eager observation, quickened by the passions in his heart. "I will know all," he thought. "I will force Hungerford to tell me all--ay, this very night. I cannot live in this torture any longer? and if I find it as I think, that man shall answer me with his heart's best blood. What right had he to win the affections of my contracted wife. He must have known that she was so. Every one knew it; but I will be satisfied. Hungerford shall explain his words before he lays his head upon his pillow."

He could not be content to wait for that explanation, however; and, as I have said, he watched, in order to ascertain, as far as possible, how far the evil, which he suspected, had gone. Three times he saw the eyes of Iola raised for an instant to Chartley's face, and then as speedily withdrawn. Oh, what would he have given, in some mysterious glass, to have seen a picture of the emotions which were passing in her breast. The first time she looked at him, her colour was heightened the moment she withdrew her eyes. He could not tell why, and he puzzled himself to divine the cause. Was it that Chartley was talking with another, and that his tone was gay? Or was it that she found the eyes of the abbess upon her, and, blushed from consciousness. The second time she looked that way, a slight passing smile followed--the mere shadow of a smile. Was it that Chartley, fallen into a fit of absence, committed some strange error, which made those around him laugh. The next glance she gave left her in deeper thought than ever; and to him her eyes seemed to swim in bright dew; but she dropped the deep veil of long silken lashes over the glistening drop, and it was hidden.

In the mean time, what marked he in Chartley's conduct? It was the same in some respects as Iola's, but different in others. He often looked to the spot where she was seated; but it was in a calmer, firmer, less timid manner. Once or twice his gaze was earnest, intent, full of deep thought. There was no levity in it, none of the confidence of knowing that he was loved. It was a look of almost painful interest, deep, tender, grave; and once he fixed his eyes upon Fulmer himself, and gazed at him long, notwithstanding an angry expression which came upon the young lord's face. Busied altogether with what was passing in his own mind, Chartley saw not that irritable look, never fancied that it was called up by his own. He scanned every feature of his face, as if he were scrutinizing some inanimate object which could not perceive or comprehend the examination it was undergoing. And yet that gaze almost drove Fulmer mad; and even the way in which it was withdrawn, the fit of thought which succeeded, and then the start, and the resumption of conversation with those around, all irritated the young man more.

Fortunately, some time elapsed before the gentlemen there present were left without the restraint of ladies' presence; for Fulmer had time to recover himself; and, though still highly irritated, to recollect what was due to Iola, to himself, and to his entertainer. He resolved to bridle his passion, and to guide it; and, could he have kept the resolutions which he formed--he did not, as the reader will see--though not altogether good ones, they were much better than the wild impulses of passion.

"There must be no quarrel *about her*," he thought. "I must not mingle her name in our enmity--I have no right to do that. 'Tis easy to provoke him upon some other subject; nor will I too hastily do that, for the good old lord's sake. I will irritate him by degrees, till the actual offence comes from him; and then to justify myself with my sword is a right. I can do it with all courtesy too, and I will."

If man's resolutions are generally rendered vain and fruitless, by the force of circumstances, when they affect things over which he has no control, it is sad to think that they should be so often rendered ineffectual, by passions, when they refer only to his own conduct, over which he should have the mastery. So, however, it is often--almost always--I had well nigh said, ever. It was not otherwise with Fulmer. His resolutions passed away, under the heat of his temper, like the shadowy clouds of morning. Ere five minutes were over, he was in full career to irritate, if not to insult, Chartley. His resolutions to be courteous, to be moderate, were forgotten, and his tone was very offensive.

But the calm indifference of manner on Chartley's part, while it provoked him, frustrated his purpose. His rival, for as such he now fully looked upon him, heard any words he addressed to him calmly, replied to them briefly, and then seemed to withdraw his thoughts from him altogether. It was impossible to engage him in any irritating conversation, his answers were so short, so tranquil, so conclusive; and Fulmer, driven at length to seek more plain and open means of offence, began to touch upon the cause of Chartley's having fallen under the king's displeasure, thinking that thus, at least, he should draw him forth from his reserve. But here old Lord Calverly at once interposed.

"Nay, nay, my noble friend," he said. "These are subjects that are never spoken of, except when they are matters of mere business; but methinks it is time to seek repose. My noble Lord Chartley, I will once more conduct you to your lodging. After to-night, you will be able, methinks, to find your way yourself;" and he at once rose from the table.

CHAPTER XXV.

Each of the guests retired to his chamber; but, for some little time, there was a considerable

degree of bustle and movement in the castle, pages and servants hurrying to and fro in attendance upon their masters, and serving men clearing away the dishes from the hall, while scullions scraped the trenchers, and the pantry-men cleaned out the cups. Such operations however were not long in the performance; and gradually the whole building resumed its quiet. A light might be seen in a window here and there; and a lamp, which burned all night long in the high tower, served as a sort of beacon to any traveller wandering in the darkness, showing him afar where Chidlow castle stood. The battlements all around were dark and solitary; for there were very strict laws at that time in force, against collecting what might be considered a garrison, in the fortified houses of the nobility, or maintaining, except in a few special cases, watch and ward within the old baronial castles. The policy of Richard, indeed, seems to have been somewhat similar to that which was pursued in France, nearly two centuries later, by the famous Cardinal de Richelieu; and he evidently aimed at breaking down the feudal power, which had often rendered the great barons such formidable enemies of the crown. He lived not long enough, indeed, to carry out his object, or to enforce his laws; but still the proclamation was in force against giving badges and liveries to retainers, or, in other words, against maintaining a regular armed force, arrayed and organised under certain symbols, and independent of the crown. This law, it is true, was openly violated by many. Every great house in the land was filled with armed men; badges were retained, and displayed, in various instances; and many a castle was as strictly guarded as if it had been a royal fortress. But all who sought favour or courtly advancement were scrupulous to observe the king's will; and, as Lord Calverly was one of these, all outward signs of military precaution had been given up. The chief cannonier had become the master porter; and the warders were now called porter's men. The great gates, however, were still closed, bolted, and locked, the drawbridge raised, and the portcullis let down at the hour of ten; and the posterns were shut an hour earlier; but, in every other respect, defensive measures, and, above all, military display, were abandoned, and an appearance of security was assumed, which, in truth, no one felt in England during the short reign of Richard III.

All then was tranquil and quiet in Chidlow castle by half an hour before midnight; and, although it was evident that some were still watchers within its walls and towers, yet the greater part of the guests were sound asleep, and almost all the others preparing for repose.

At about a quarter to twelve, however, Lord Fulmer, with a lamp in his hand, issued forth from his sleeping-chamber, and walked along the exceedingly narrow passage into which it opened. Our ancestors of that age, and of the ages before them, were not very careful to provide broad corridors or staircases for their guests. The greater and the lesser halls, the gallery, if a castle had one, several nameless chambers--which were frequently to be found in what poetically would be called the lady's bower, but which about that time was more generally denominated the lady's lodging--and, in short, all rooms of state were spacious and magnificent enough; but many of the bed-rooms were exceedingly small; and, where they were on a larger scale, for the reception of more distinguished guests, the neighbouring passages were curtailed in proportion.

Along this passage then walked the young nobleman, with a slow and thoughtful step. He had had time for meditation, and passion had somewhat cooled down. His irritation had taken a more gloomy and stern character, but it was not the less persisting. "I will know all," he thought, "and then judge and act."

Turning sharply to the right, at the end of the first ten or fifteen yards, he entered and crossed a large sort of vestibule, occupying one half of the space in one of the flanking towers.

It had two windows in it, through one of which the moon was shining brightly, marking the stone floor with the chequered shadows of the leaden frame-work. He passed on, however, and then, turning to his left, paused and opened a door, which admitted him to a little ante-room. Two or three small beds were ranged around, of that kind called by the French "*lit de sangle*;" but they were not occupied, for their intended tenants, consisting of a page and two ordinary attendants, were seated at a little table in the middle of the room, gambling with dice. They all started up, however, when the young nobleman entered; and, in answer to his question, whether Sir Edward had retired to sleep, replied:--

"Oh, dear no, my lord. He will not go to bed for some time;" and the page, stepping forward, opened the door of the inner chamber, saying aloud, "Lord Fulmer, sir."

On advancing into the room, while the boy held back the tapestry, Fulmer found Sir Edward Hungerford, with another person, standing before a table, on which was spread out a large piece of violet-coloured satin, whereunto were being applied, by the inferior personage, an enormous pair of shears. The entrance of the young nobleman made them both start; and the first exclamation of Sir Edward was, "My God, you've cut it askew. Heaven and earth, what shall we do now? There will never be enough in that corner to purple the sleeves."

"I beg your worship's pardon," replied the other, without taking any more notice of Lord Fulmer than his master had done. "There will be quite enough. If I cut it slant so, from the corner to the middle, it will just leave what is needful for the bands."

"I want to speak with you, Hungerford," said the young nobleman. "I pray you, send this fellow away."

"Wait a moment, wait a moment," replied the knight. "This is the most important thing in life.

You can't imagine what trouble it has given us to devise.--Now, cut away, Master Graine, and let me see how you will manage it?"

"Oh, quite easily," answered the other; and, delicately using his shears, he cut the satin straight across, and then divided one part of it into two, from which he again pared two long strips, pointing to the whole in triumph, and saying, "There, worshipful sir, I told you--"

"Yes, yes, I see, I see," said Hungerford, in a meditative tone. "It is a great question settled. Now, take them away; and, remember, I shall want it by to-morrow night."

The man bowed and withdrew; and then, for the first time, Sir Edward turned to Lord Fulmer, and invited him to be seated, saying, "That was a momentous business, Fulmer; and your imprudent entrance so suddenly had well nigh spoiled all."

"I did not know that you were engaged upon matters of life and death," replied Fulmer, bitterly, lifting up the tapestry at the same time, to see that the tailor had closed the door behind him.

"I have somewhat of less importance to say," he then continued, seating himself, "but still of some moment to me."

"What is it, my dear lord?" asked Hungerford, taking a chair opposite. "I can conceive nothing very important, when compared with the cutting out of a surcoat. However, I have seen that you have been uneasy--or to speak more accurately, nearly as hot in your skin as a poor devil of a lollard, whom I once beheld, when I was a boy, burned in a pitch barrel. He looked just as uncomfortable as you did at supper, when one could get a sight of his face through the flames. I wish you could bear as easy a mind as I do, and see the little value of things that men make themselves uncomfortable about--and angry about into the bargain, it would seem."

"Nay, I am not in the least angry," replied Fulmer, who believed he was speaking truth. "I merely want to hear some simple facts to which you alluded somewhat mysteriously this morning. Marriage, you know, Hungerford," he continued, affecting a light and jesting tone, the better to conceal the bitter feelings within, "marriage, you know, is a matter of destiny; but, when a man is about to unite his fate to a fair lady, it is quite as well that he should be made aware of all previous passages, in order that he may take his measures accordingly."

"Upon my word, I disagree with you," answered Hungerford, with a smile. "No man should ever do anything that can make him uneasy. Calm and perfect indifference to all things in life is the only means of obtaining that greatest blessing in life--tranquillity. If we have a stock of enthusiasm, which must be spent upon something, it is much better to spend it upon what you call trifles, because, if any misadventure happens, the evil is easily repaired. Now, if when you came in just now, you had made Master Graine irremediably damage that piece of satin, which I should have considered the greatest misfortune in the world, I could send a man on horseback to London or York, to get me another piece, and thus the evil is cured. But, if a man cuts another man's throat, or makes his wife hate him by black looks and cold words, he cannot give his friend a new throat, or send to York for a new love."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Fulmer, sharply. "I wish to Heaven you would be serious but for a moment."

"I am perfectly serious," replied Hungerford. "The only question is, which is the best philosophy, yours or mine? However, each man knows his own nature. What do you wish to ask me?"

"Simply this," answered Fulmer. "What is the previous acquaintance to which you alluded with a sneer, this morning, between my contracted wife, the Lady Iola St. Leger, and that very noble and excellent gentleman, the Lord Chartley?"

"With a sneer, my dear lord!" exclaimed Hungerford. "See what it is to be of an imaginative disposition. I sneered not at all."

"Then the simple question," rejoined Fulmer, restraining his feelings with a great effort, "what know you of their acquaintance?"

"Mighty little, my good lord," replied Sir Edward Hungerford, who was, to say the truth, a little amused by the eager impetuosity of his companion, and somewhat inclined to spur him on, merely for the joke's sake; but, knowing that the affair might have very serious consequences, he kept to the strict truth, and even within it, though he could not refrain from playing a little with Fulmer's impatience. "Be it known unto you then," he continued, "that somewhere about a fortnight ago--let me see. It was on Monday----"

"The date matters little," said Fulmer, moodily. "All I want are the facts."

"Well, about a fortnight ago, then," continued Hungerford, "as I was riding from London, I chanced to stumble upon my good friend Lord Chartley, at the little inn at Kimbolton. The whole place was occupied by himself and his people; but he kindly made room for me, and gave me an excellent good supper, prepared by his own cook. The snipes were excellent; and there was an

aloud of salmon, I never tasted anything better--"

"Well, well, what then?" said Fulmer, quickly.

"Why, I thought him too good a companion to be parted with easily," said Hungerford. "So we passed the evening in talking of Bohemia, where we had last met, and drawing savoury comparisons between the cookery of that rude land and good old England. Finding we were travelling the same way, I joined myself to his train, which was discreet and well ordered, having a friar to bless the meat, and a cook to cook it. Good faith, it was a pleasant journey; and I put myself in mind of the gentleman who gave crumbs to Lazarus; for I took care to be dressed in purple and fine linen, and with him I fared sumptuously every day. At length, one evening, after having dallied away some time at Tamworth, we stopped to sup at the abbey of St. Clare--an abbey of nuns, you know--"

"Yes, yes. I know all about it," replied Fulmer. "Go on."

"I had no inclination to go on, when I was there, I can assure you, my good lord," said Hungerford, laughing; "for right happily did the merry little abbess entertain us, and not only supped with us herself, in the strangers' refectory, but brought a prioress as deaf as a post, and the two pretty cousins, her nieces, Iola and Constance. The Lady Iola sat next to my noble friend; and, as a courteous gentleman, he did his best to entertain her, and, to my thinking, succeeded. I could have made up my mind to lodge there for the night; but Chartley was peremptory to go forward to Hinckley. So, after supper, we rode on. The friar, indeed, remained behind, pretending to be sick; and, when we had got some two miles through the wood, Chartley suddenly perceived--how, I know not, for it was dark enough amongst the trees--that some one had left the train. It turned out to be one of Sir Charles Weinant's men; for that smooth gentleman was with us--playing the traitor, if I mistake not. However, Chartley set spurs to his horse to catch the deserter, telling us to ride on, and he would overtake us. We good people did as he bade; but we got to Hinckley before him, and were roused early the next morning from our beds, by news that his lordship was in danger, and needed our instant help. Arden was in the saddle in a moment; and away we went pell mell, getting what intelligence we could, till we came to the wood which covers the hills over the abbey. There we found the whole place full of soldiers, searching a bit of the forest ground, for whom or what we could not learn; and, at length, riding round between the wood and the abbey, we found Chartley, his tawny Moor, and half a dozen woodmen, keeping a pass between two banks against Catesby, and a good number of the king's soldiers."

He paused, and rubbed his temple, till Lord Fulmer exclaimed:--

"Well, what then?"

"Why, that is all I know, of my own knowledge," answered Hungerford, "except that Chartley's coat seemed somewhat worse for a night's lodging in the forest."

"There is something more, Sir Edward Hungerford," said Fulmer, in a low, stern, bitter tone. "I must know it."

"Perhaps it is better to tell the rest," said the knight; "although, you must remember, my good lord, that I now speak only what I have gathered from other people's conversation. Of course, Chartley had not planted himself there, and embroiled himself with the king's troops, for nothing; and I made out, that his resistance was offered to cover the retreat of a lady into the convent. She had, by some chance, been out in the wood at night, and was cut off by the soldiers, who were searching, it seems, for good old Doctor Morton, the bishop of Ely. Chartley had met with her, and gallantly escorted her through the midst of the men; but, to do him all justice, he spoke of her with knightly reverence; and moreover, I should have told you before, that this friar of his, who, as I said blessed the meat, was none other than the good bishop himself, in effecting whose escape Chartley had the principal share. Thus, he had a personal interest in the whole matter."

Fulmer pressed his hand upon his brow, and murmured: "Alone with him in the wood all night!"

"Nay, nay, my good lord, do not so disturb yourself," said Hungerford. "Chartley is a man of very peculiar notions, and doubtless----"

"Pshaw!" said Lord Fulmer. "I do not disturb myself in the least, Doubtless, he is full of courtesy, and a man of high honour--All night in the wood with him!--I will go out upon the ramparts and walk. The moon is shining clear."

"You had better keep out of the moonlight, my good lord," said Hungerford, carelessly. "Stay, I will throw on a hood and come with you."

"I would rather be alone," answered Lord Fulmer; and, taking up his lamp, he left the room.

Hurrying along the narrow passage, he soon reached that large open sort of vestibule, which I have mentioned, in one of the square flanking towers; and there he paused, and stood for a moment or two with his eyes fixed upon the ground in deep thought. After a while, a sound, as of voices singing, came upon his ear. At first it did not wake him from his reverie; but gradually it seemed to steal upon his senses and call his thoughts, at least in some degree, from that which

had previously occupied them. There were seats on either side; and, setting down the lamp on one of them, he opened the window which looked to the south west, and through which the moonlight was streaming. The music then became more distinct, though it evidently proceeded from a great distance. It was calm, and sweet, and solemn; a strain of exquisite melody, not so rich and full in the harmony, indeed, as the anthems or masses of the Roman church, but yet apparently of a religious character. It seemed a hymn; and, after listening for a moment, Fulmer said:--

"This is strange! What can it mean? I will go forth and listen. It seems to come from the wood, there. I shall hear better on the battlements."

Descending the narrow winding staircase, which terminated the passage about ten yards beyond the door of his own apartments, he entered the inner court, and thence, through a tall archway, reached the outer court, beyond which lay the ramparts. Then ascending by the steps to the top of the wall, he walked round, till he had reached a spot exactly below the window in the square tower. The music, however, had ceased; and he listened for some minutes in vain, though he thought he heard a murmur of many voices speaking or reading altogether.

The momentary excitement of curiosity passed away; and, sitting down upon a stone bench placed for the warders' temporary repose, he leaned his arm upon the battlement, and returned to his dark thoughts. Still, the calm and solemn scene around, the grey landscape lying stretched out afar in the moonlight, the waving lines of hill and dale faintly traced in the dim obscurity, the light mist lying in the hollows, a bright gleaming line in the distance where the rays fell upon some sheet of water, the tall dark towers of the castle rising by his side, the blue sky overhead, flooded in the south west with silver radiance, and in the north and east speckled with gemlike stars, the motionless air, the profound silence, seemed to calm and still his angry feelings, if not to soften or remove them. There are things in life, which, like frost, harden while they tranquillize. Such was not altogether the case with him, but still the root of bitterness was in his heart.

He paused and thought; but, before many minutes had passed, the music burst forth again, rising and falling in solemn swell and cadence, evidently many voices singing some holy song. It came from far; no articulate sounds reached his ear; but music is a language--a language understood by the whole earth--speaking grand truths to the heart; wordless, but more eloquent than all words. If he was not softened before, he was softened now; if his spirit before had been tied down to earthly passions, it was now, for a time at least, elevated, above himself.

I have said "for a time;" for Richard had described him rightly. He was a man of varying moods, naturally generous, high-minded, kind, but subject to all the impulses of the clay, and in whom there was an everlasting warfare between the mortal and immortal. He thought of Iola, and her beauty, and the dreams which in his imaginative heart he had dreamed of her; and still that wild and thrilling strain sounded in his ears amidst the solemn scene, raising his feelings up, above selfishness, and worldly lessons, to generous feelings and noble aspirations. He thought what a grand though melancholy joy it would be to give her happiness even by the sacrifice of his own. Something of pride might mingle with it too; for, in the picture of the mind, Iola was seen confessing that she had misunderstood him, and admiring where she could not love; but still it was not a low pride; and he felt more satisfied, more at peace with himself. His eyes wandered over the space before him, and he recollected how he had seen it that very day, as he rode towards the castle, lighted up with sunshine, bursting forth into green life, and full of the song of birds. Now it was all grey and still, with no sounds, but that faint echo-like hymn, pouring on the air like the dirge of departed hopes. It seemed a picture of his own fate, so lately lighted up with bright expectations, and now all dark and cold.

Suddenly, on the green slope beyond the walls, he saw a figure--a woman's figure, clad in white. With a quiet gliding motion, it walked quickly on; and, ere he had recovered from his surprise, it had disappeared amongst the first trees at the nearest angle of the wood. He thought it looked like Iola, that its movements were like hers, so easy, so effortless, so graceful. He turned towards the place where he knew her chamber was, and gazed up. There was a light still burning there, and, as he gazed, a female figure passed across the window.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Had he been chief warder of a beleaguered fort, Lord Fulmer could not have examined every gate and sally port of the castle more carefully than he did, when he descended from the walls. The figure which he had beheld had evidently seemed to come from the castle; but how it had issued forth he could not divine. Every postern was barred, bolted, and chained; and the porter,

and the porter's men were all snoring in their dens, of which he had ocular proof before he retired. The fat old porter, whom he had roused and informed of what he had seen, treated the matter lightly, saying, half sleeping, half waking, it was impossible: it must have been the moonlight on the bank, or a white thorn coming into flower. But, when Fulmer reminded him that the month of May was still far off, and told him he had seen the figure move for some distance, he quietly replied--

"Then it must have been a spirit. There are plenty hereabout;" and, lying down on his pallet again, he was asleep before the young nobleman had quitted the lodge.

Fulmer almost felt inclined to believe that the porter's last supposition was correct, and that the music he had heard was a strain of unearthly melody. Perhaps there have been few ages in the world's history more grossly superstitious than those which immediately preceded the reformation. The process of darkening the human mind, by which alone the errors of the church of Rome can be maintained, had been going on for so many centuries, that it had almost reached completeness; and the art of printing, the precursor of Luther, had not yet fulfilled its mission; and though here and there a few great minds were to be found which shook off the garment of superstition with which the papal church had liveried the world--though Wicliffe and John Huss had given the first terrible blow to Rome, yet her partizans laboured but the more strenuously to retain for her the shadowy empire she had created. At this very time new saints were made, and their days appointed to be honoured; and the festivals of old saints were, in many instances, ordered to receive double celebration. In England, especially, every false, abominable, and idolatrous dogma was more sternly and clearly defined, in order to prevent the escape of the Wicliffites through any ambiguity of language. It was solemnly declared that not one particle of the sacramental bread remained bread after consecration, that every drop of the cup was blood. Pilgrimages, the worship of saints, the adoration of the cross and of relics, were enjoined under the penalty of fire; and everything that could lead or tend to superstition was encouraged and upheld. Taught to believe so much of the supernatural within the church, it is not wonderful that the great mass of the people, high and low, should believe in much of the supernatural beyond the church, and that the priest should encourage them in so doing.

Nevertheless, Lord Fulmer was by no means one of the most superstitious of his class. To doubt the occasional apparition of spirits, or even devils, he would not have ventured; but to believe that he had seen one was very different; and, not knowing what to think, or what solution to give to the mystery, he retired to his chamber, and lay down to rest. Sleep did not visit his eyes for some hours; but still he rose early, roused his attendants in the antechamber, and dressed for the day. He then gazed forth from the window for a moment or two; but, as something passed before his eyes, he turned round with a sudden start, and a flushed cheek, and went out.

He passed quickly, through the courts, towards the walls; but, at the foot of the steps, he paused and thought, for a moment or two, and then mounted to the battlements with a slower step and more tranquil air.

About fifty yards in advance was Chartley, the man he sought, walking tranquilly towards him, with his arms folded on his chest, and his eyes bent down in meditation. They were now alone together on the walls; and Fulmer thought that there could be no better time for saying what he proposed to say than that moment. His mood, however, had varied from that of the night before; and, at first, he addressed Lord Chartley courteously enough.

"Good morning, my lord," he said "Summer is coming on us with a swallow's wing;" and he turned to walk back with his companion.

"It is indeed very warm," answered Chartley, mildly; "and the air here seems temperate and fine."

There the conversation halted for a moment, for Lord Fulmer made no answer, and walked on in silence, till they had nearly reached the angle of the wall. There was a struggle going on within--a struggle for calmness; for he felt agitation growing upon him.

At length, however, he said--

"I find, my lord, that you are well acquainted with the Lady Iola St. Leger, and that you rendered her some service a little time ago."

"Service of no great importance," replied Chantey; "and which any gentleman would render to any lady."

"You are, I suppose, aware that she is contracted to me as my future wife," said Lord Fulmer, turning his eyes full upon Chartley's face.

"I was not aware of it at the time," answered Chartley, holding his head very high. "I am now."

"That near connexion," continued Fulmer, "not only gives me a right, but requires me, my good lord, to inquire into the nature of the service that you rendered her, that I may"--he added with a sort of sarcastic smile, "that I may proportion my thanks to its degree."

"I require no thanks," answered Chartley, coldly. "Of what is required of you, my lord, I am no

judge. Your right to make the inquiry, I am not called upon to consider; and the lady herself will doubtless give you what information she thinks fit upon the subject."

Fulmer strove to put down the wrath which was rising up in his bosom; but yet there was a great degree of sharpness in his tone as he replied--

"My right to make the inquiry, my good lord, you are called upon to consider; for I make that inquiry of you."

"Then I refuse to answer it," replied Chartley. "If a gentleman have rendered a lady service in any way, it is not his business to speak of it. She may do so, if she thinks proper but his part is different."

"Then, my lord," replied Fulmer, "if you give me not account in one way, you must in another;" and he set his teeth hard, as if to keep down the more violent words which were ready to spring to his lips.

Chartley laughed.

"On my life," he said, "this is the strangest sort of gratitude which it has been my lot to meet with in this wonderful world! Here is a man comes to give me thanks, and then calls me to a rude account, because I will not tell him why! What is the meaning of all this, my lord? Your strange conduct certainly requires explanation--far more than any part of mine, which has always been very open and simple."

"Oh, if you think it requires explanation," exclaimed Lord Fulmer, readily, "I am quite ready to yield it, after the fashion that I hinted."

"Is that a worthy answer, Lord Fulmer?" demanded Chartley. "You seem determined to find cause of quarrel with me, and can meet with no more reasonable pretext than that I once did some slight service to a lady affianced to you."

"Exactly so," replied Lord Fulmer, dryly.

"Well, then," cried Chartley, tossing back his head, "I answer, I will not quarrel with you on such ground. Charge me fairly--accuse me of any wrong that I have done you, or any mortal man, or woman either, and I will either clear myself or make reparation with my person at the sword's point; but I will not bring a lady's name in question, by quarrelling with any man on such a plea as this you bring. If you have aught to say against me, say it boldly."

"Have you not already brought her name in question, by passing one whole night with her in the woods of Atherston?" demanded Fulmer, sternly. "Have you not made it a matter of light talk with lighter tongues--"

"Stay, stay!" exclaimed Chartley, "I do not rightly understand you. Do you mean to say that I ever have lightly used that lady's name--that I have ever made it the subject of my conversation at all?"

"No," answered Fulmer, gravely. "That I cannot say; but I aver that you have given occasion for its being talked of by others, in remaining with her one whole night, as I have said, in the woods of Atherston."

Chartley laughed again.

"He would have had me leave her to her fate, in the midst of the wood!" he exclaimed; "or else have had her fall into the hands of Catesby's rude soldiery, or the ruffian mercenaries of Sir John Godscroft, who were, even at the moment I met her, daintily engaged in burning down the buildings on the abbey green! By St. Peter, the man seems to have a rare notion of courtesy towards a lady! Let me tell you, Lord Fulmer, that had I left her, she must have encountered those who would have treated her somewhat more roughly than I did. Stay, stay, a moment. I have not yet done. You say that I have given occasion for people to talk lightly of her. Give me the name of one who has dared, even by a word, to couple her name to mine in aught that is not pure--ay, even in a jest--and I will make him eat his words or send him to the devil a day before his time."

Fulmer gazed down upon the ground in moody silence. "There may be words," he said at length, "which, separate from the tone and manner, imply but little, but which, eked out with nods and smiles and twinklings of the eye, would go far to blast the fairest reputation. In a word, Lord Chartley, I will not have it said, that the woman I make my wife has passed the whole night alone, in a wild wood, with any living man."

"Then do not make her your wife," answered Chartley. "That is easily settled."

"There is another way of settling it," replied Lord Fulmer, bitterly, "by cutting the throat of him who has done so with her."

"So, so, are you there?" answered Chartley, now made angry, in spite of himself.

"If such be the case, my lord, I will not baulk you. I might refuse your appeal, as a prisoner in ward. I might refuse it, as having no reasonable grounds; but I will not do so; and satisfaction you shall have of the kind you demand; for no earthly man shall say I feared him. But this, my good lord, is not without a condition. It shall be fully and entirely known, how and why you have forced me to this--what is the quarrel you have fixed upon me--and why I have consented. All this shall be clearly stated and proclaimed, for my own character's sake. This I have a right to demand."

"But the lady's fair name!" exclaimed Fulmer, alarmed at the condition.

"Who is it that blackens it?" demanded Chartley, fiercely. "Not I, but you, Lord Fulmer. I proclaim her pure, and good, and true, to you, to me, and all men; and you, if any one, shall stand forth as her calumniator, in forcing this unjust quarrel upon me. I cast the responsibility upon you; and now I leave you."

"Stay, sir, stay," exclaimed Fulmer, driven almost to fury. "You have called me calumniator; and you shall answer for that word, or I will brand you as a coward in every court of Europe."

"Methinks you would get but few to believe you," replied Chartley, proudly; "but let me tell you, if you dare venture to use that term to me, before any competent witnesses, I will punish you on the spot as you deserve. You think, my lord, by taking me here in private, to gratify your malice while you conceal your own weakness, and to leave, perhaps, the blame upon me; but you are mistaken, if you think you have to do with a feeble-minded and passionate boy like yourself."

Fulmer lost all command over himself; and drawing his sword at once, though close before the castle windows, he exclaimed, "Draw! I will bear no more."

But Chartley was comparatively cool, while his adversary was blind with passion; and, springing upon him with a bound, he put aside the raised point with his hand, and wrenched the sword from his grasp, receiving a slight wound in doing so. Then, holding his adversary in a firm grasp, he cast the weapon from him over the castle wall.

"For shame," he said, after a moment's pause, "for shame, Lord Fulmer Go back, sir, to the castle; and, if you have those honourable feelings, those somewhat fantastic and imaginative notions, which I have heard attributed to you, think over your own conduct this morning--ay, think over the doubts and suspicions, unjust, and base, and false as they are, in which such conduct has arisen, and feel shame for both. I am not apt to be a vain man; but when I scan my own behaviour in the events which have given rise to all this rancour on your part, and compare it with your conduct now, I feel there is an immeasurable distance between us; and I regret, for that sweet lady's sake, that she is bound by such ties to such a man."

"You have the advantage, my lord, you have the advantage," repeated Fulmer, doggedly. "The time may come when it will be on my part."

"I think not," answered Chartley, with one of his light laughs; "for we are told God defends the right, and I will never do you wrong."

Thus saying, he turned upon his heel, descended the steps, and walked back into the castle.

Fulmer followed with a slow and sullen step, his eyes bent down upon the ground, and his lips, from time to time, moving. He felt all that had occurred the more bitterly, as he was conscious that it was his own fault. He might feel angry with Chartley; his pride might be bitterly mortified; he might have every inclination to cast the blame upon others; but there was one fact he could not get over, one truth, which, at the very first, carried self-censure home. He had violated all his own resolutions; he had given way to passion, when he had resolved to be calm and cool; and this conviction, perhaps, led him some steps on the path of regret for his whole conduct. At all events, passing through his ante-room without speaking to any of his servants, he entered his own chamber, and cast himself down upon a seat, to scrutinize the acts he had committed.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Let us return to the close of supper on the preceding night. The abbess and her two fair nieces, with some other ladies who had been congregated in the castle, retired, first, to a little hall, above that where they had supped, and then, after a short conversation, separated into various parties, and sought the chambers where they were to take repose. Iola, Constance, and their aunt, retired to the bed-room of the former, before they parted for the night, and sat and talked for a few minutes in a calm tone.

"My dear child, you look sad," said the abbess; "has any thing vexed you?"

"No, dear aunt, nothing more than usual," answered Iola, forcing a laugh. "I suppose a man may be merry enough, when he knows he is to be hanged at the end of a year; but the case alters when he finds himself at the day before the hanging."

"A hang dog simile, my child," said the abbess. "But fie, Iola, put away such thoughts. Marriage is an honourable state, though it lacks the sanctity of devotion; and I doubt not it is a very comfortable condition, though, good lack, I have never tried it, and never shall now;" and she laughed a little at the thought. "Well, well, methinks you ought to be content," she continued; "for, certainly he is a very fair and handsome young man."

"Is he?" said Iola, in an indifferent tone. "I thought he was dark."

"Well, his hair and eyes are dark," replied her aunt, "and his skin somewhat brownish; but what I meant was, that he is good-looking and manly. I do not think your fair men, with pink cheeks, handsome for my part, though I take but little heed to men's beauty--why should I? However, I say he is as handsome a young man for a husband as woman would wish to choose."

"I must have him for a husband whether I choose or not," answered Iola; "so, handsome or ugly, it comes to the same."

Constance thought for a moment, and then said, in a quiet tone, "I do not think he is so handsome as Lord Chartley;" and she gave a quick glance towards her cousin's face as she spoke.

Iola's cheek was crimson in a moment, but she said nothing; and the abbess exclaimed gaily, "Oh, this world, this world. I see it will steal your heart away from us, Constance. No more vows and veils for you now. Well, do as you like, my child. I have found a convent life a very happy one--perhaps, because there was no choice, and I resolved to make the best of it; and, if Iola would take her aunt's advice, she would look upon marriage as much the same, and make the best of it too."

With this piece of exceeding good counsel, the worthy lady rose and left her two fair companions; and, no sooner was she gone, than Constance moved closer to her cousin, and, laying her hand upon Iola's, looked tenderly into her face.

"Give me your heart, Iola," she said. "You have withdrawn your confidence from me, and your heart must have gone with it."

Iola bent down her forehead on her cousin's shoulder, and wept without reply.

"Nay, dear cousin," continued Constance, "if not for my sake--if not for old affection's sake, and for love, which, unlike the love of the world, can never weary or wax old--for your own sake, give me your confidence as in days of yore. Tell me your heart's feelings and your mind's thoughts; for, be sure that there are few, if any, situations in life, in which counsel cannot bring comfort."

"I will, I will, Constance," said Iola, wiping away the tears. "These foolish drops," she continued, "spring but from a momentary weakness, my Constance. I have borne up and struggled hard till now. It is kindness that shakes me."

"But then tell me," said her cousin, "tell me whence they spring, Iola. I see you are unhappy--miserable. I would fain help you, or, at least, console you; but I know not how."

"What would you have, dear Constance?" said Iola, mournfully. "You must see it--I love him not--I can never love him; and yet in a few days, I know not how soon, I must vow at the altar to love him for ever. Is not that a hard fate, dear Constance?"

"It might be worse," answered Constance. "How worse?" demanded Iola in surprise. "If you loved another," said her cousin, slowly and sorrowfully.

Again the crimson glow spread over Iola's brow and cheek, followed by a warm gush of tears; but Constance twined her arms round her saying:

"I have your secret now, dear Iola. That is over. Let us speak freely of all things. But first, for some comfort--though it be but a reprieve. My uncle told me, just before supper, that the king's consent to the celebration of the marriage has not been obtained; that Richard begs him to delay, till he and the queen can be present. It may be long first; for poor queen Ann, they declare, is gone mad upon the death of the prince. It must be some months; for they cannot be present at a marriage in mourning. But, what is very strange, my uncle seemed well satisfied with the delay."

Iola sat and gazed at her as she spoke, with a look of wonder, as if the tidings were so unexpected and incredible, even to hope, that she could hardly comprehend what she heard. The next instant, however, she started up and clapped her hands with a look of childlike joy.

"A reprieve!" she cried. "Oh, it is everything. It is everything. It is comfort. It is life. It is hope!" and then, casting herself upon her cousin's neck, she wept again, sobbing as if her heart would break.

Constance tried to calm her, but her words seemed not to reach Iola's mind; for, when the tears had had their way, she sprang up, clasping her hands again, and crying, with the same radiant look, "Months, did you say? Oh, moments were a blessing--who can tell what months may bring forth? They have sometimes swept away empires. Now, we shall have time to think, and speak, and act. Before, I thought it was useless to take counsel even with you, dear Constance; for what could counsel avail, when the event was hurrying on with such terrible rapidity. It seemed like one of those mountains of snow, which I have heard of, falling in the Alps, where, though they be seen thundering down, 'tis vain to fly, or move, or think; for their coming is too rapid, their extent too wide; and all that remains is to call upon the name of God and die."

"Good Heaven, what an image!" exclaimed Constance; "and have you really suffered all this, my poor Iola?--But now tell me what has passed between you and Lord Chartley?"

"Nothing," replied Iola; and, be it remarked that, at every word she uttered, her spirits seemed to revive more and more, as if nothing but the intolerable burden which had been cast upon them had been able to keep them down, and that, as soon as it was removed, they sprang up again fresher than ever. "Nothing at all, but what I have told you, dear Constance. For the world, I would not have told you a falsehood."

"Then, nothing has been said to make you think he loves you as you love him!" asked Constance.

Iola blushed a little, and looked down; but, there was an expression of arch meaning about her smiling lips; and she replied:--

"Nothing has been said, it is true, dear Constance; but a good deal has been looked. How the tone, how the eyes change the whole meaning of cold words: I have not loved, unbeloved, I hope--I trust--I believe. Men are deceivers, you will say, and in nought more deceitful than their looks. Perhaps you will tell me too that Chartley, this very night, was gay and joyful, that he laughed and talked with those around him, not at all like a disappointed lover. But he was not joyful at his heart, Constance. I watched and saw it all. I saw that the laugh was forced, the merriment unreal. I marked the sudden fit of thought, the gloomy look that chequered the smile, the head held high, and the curling lip which scorned the words the tongue uttered."

"Alas, that you should have watched so closely," answered Constance; and, after a moment's thought, she added; "but, as we are to have confidence in each other, dear Iola, I must feign nothing with you; and I do believe that it is as you say. Nay, more. There is another, who knows him better than I do, who thinks so too."

"Who? Who?" demanded Iola, eagerly.

"None other than good Sir William Arden," answered Constance; and she went on to give her cousin a sketch of the conversation which had taken place between herself and her companion at supper.

"I saw you talking very busily," replied Iola, with a smile; "but in truth, dear Constance, I almost fancied you and the good knight had better subjects of conversation than the fate of Iola and Chartley. Well, thank Heaven, we have got another in the plot, who can give us good help too, in the hour of need, perhaps."

"A plot!" said Constance, with a look of apprehension. "What plot do you intend to form, Iola?"

"Now she is frightened out of her wits!" cried Iola, laughing as merrily as ever. "No plot, dearest cousin. I spoke in my wild way, and gave it a wild name. Only this, Constance, be sure of, that if there be a means of escape--and what may not this respite produce--I will not give my hand to Lord Fulmer--no, even though a convent should be my only refuge, though Heaven knows, thinking as I think, that would be bad enough."

"Thinking as you think--I do not understand what you mean, Iola," said her cousin in some surprise.

Iola thought gravely for a moment or two, before she spoke; but at length she replied:

"Perhaps I am not so devout as you are, Constance, and yet, in some things more devout. There is another enigma for you; but I know a convent would not suit me. You will say, I seemed happy enough in one; but yet I have come to the belief that they are not truly holy or good institutions. To take the vows I should have to take, were I to enter one, to live according to all the rules and ordinances, to go through all the ceremonies, and to make all the professions, I should be a hypocrite, Constance. But to marry this Lord Fulmer, to vow that I will love him when I love another, would make me worse than a hypocrite."

Constance gazed at her with a bewildered look; for, though her words were not very plain, yet they created doubts.

"I do not know what to think of your language, Iola," she answered. "Holy men, fathers of the church, successors of the apostles, have founded convents, and blessed them. Surely they cannot be evil institutions with such a sanction."

Iola laughed, seeming not inclined to grapple with the question; and then, with a playful gesture of the hand, she asked abruptly--

"Would you like now, now as you sit here, to devote yourself for life to one of them?"

"That is not a fair question," answered Constance, with a blush and a smile; "but now, let us think, Iola, of what must be your conduct between these two men. To one you are bound by a contract, valid it seems in the eye of the law, and from which you cannot escape, although it was entered into when you had no power to assent or to refuse. To the other you are linked by ties of affection, which are even less easily broken, I do believe."

"Most mathematically put, dear cousin," answered Iola, in her old gay tone; "but yet I can hardly reply. I must seek advice of some one who knows more of the world's ways than either you or I do."

"My aunt?" suggested Constance. "She will say, there is but one thing to be done--to yield, and make the best of it."

"No, no. Not to her will I apply," said Iola. "Of the world's ways, dear Constance, of its laws and rules, she knows but little--hardly more than we do. She can deal with foresters and bailiffs, sell timber or wheat, collect the abbey dues, regulate its expenses, rule her nuns wisely, though not strictly, and make devotion cheerful, without depriving it of reverence; but there is a wide, wide circle beyond all this, of which she knows nothing--nor I either, but that it exists."

"Then to whom can you apply?" asked Constance; and Iola, rising, laid her hands upon her cousin's, with a grave smile.

"I will apply to one who will advise me well," she said; "but here, dearest Constance, I must--however unwillingly--hold back a part of my confidence from you. Were it my own alone, you should have it all, fully and at once; but there is another, whose confidence I must not break. Rest satisfied with this, that, as far as Chartley and I are concerned, every secret of my heart, every act that I perform, propose, or think of, shall be told to you at once. You shall see into my breast, as if it were your own."

"But yet there will be one dark spot," said Constance, almost reproachfully.

"Not concerning myself," answered Iola. "I tell you I am going to seek advice. What that advice is, you shall know. Where I ask it, who gives it, you must not know. This shall be the only reserve."

"And you will not act in anything without speaking to me?" asked Constance anxiously.

"Certainly not," replied Iola; "but, you must promise in return, Constance, that my confidence will never be violated, that no notions which you may have imbibed of duty or propriety, or anything else on earth--no, not of religion itself--shall make you ever betray to man or woman that which I shall tell you."

Constance seemed to hesitate; and Iola added, firmly, but sadly--

"You must promise, Constance, or there can be no confidence. My heart must hide itself from you, as from the rest of the world, unless I know that its secrets are as safe with you as with myself. Will you promise, without any reservation, remembering, that I shall look upon no consideration of 'my own good,' as it is called, as an excuse for your violating that engagement. I know you will keep your promise when you have given it."

"Assuredly I will," replied Constance; and, after a moment's thought, she added; "and I will give the promise too, Iola. If I did not, you could easily withhold your confidence from me; and I do think that it will be better for you to have some one, of whose love you can have no doubt, to consult with and rely on. Remember I do not know and cannot divine who this secret adviser is, nor how he or she should have followed you hither, to give you counsel on any sudden occasion. Surely you would not rely upon your maid, in preference to your cousin."

Iola laughed gaily.

"Nay, Heaven forbid," she cried, waving her hand. "Besides, what knows she of the world? Poor Susan's utmost experience reaches but to know, that Harry Smith, the abbey gardener's son, bought her pink ribbons at Tamworth fair, and asked her to marry him at Shrovetide next. No, no, dear Constance. All my confidence you shall have--that is to say, all my own. I will only keep from you the confidence of others; and now your promise is given, is it not--fully and without reservation?"

"It is," answered Constance. "I know you have always hated that doctrine of mental reservation, and called it unchristian and uncandid. I do not like it, and will never act upon it, though very good men say that it is sometimes needful."

"Fie on them!" cried Iola, warmly. "Those who would teach that would teach any other kind of falsehood. But now, my own dear cousin, now for a petition. Will you help your Iola to seek this

advice?"

"How can I help you? What would you have me do?" asked Constance.

"'Tis but to endure imprisonment for an hour," said Iola, "to stay here and watch till I come back, and, if any one comes to the door, merely to answer, 'You cannot come in!'"

"That is easily accomplished," replied her cousin; "and I may as well perform my devotions for the night here, as in my own chamber hard by."

"Quite as well," answered Iola, with a smile. "But now I must clear the way;" and, opening the door into the ante-room, she said--"Here, Susan. Have the guests left the hall?"

"Oh yes, lady," replied the rosy country girl, who appeared in answer to her summons. "They did not sit long to-night. They have all gone to their chambers some time."

"Well then, I shall not want you for an hour," said Iola; and she added, with a laugh--"I know there is some one whom you want to talk with. But be discreet, Susan; and you shall have a present on my marriage, to furnish house with."

The girl blushed, and simpered, and retired.

"And now," said Iola, "I must cover over these gay robes;" and, opening one of those large cupboards, which, from the use that they were sometimes applied to, retained, for many years, and still do in some parts of Europe, the name of armoury, she drew forth a white serge gown and hood, which she threw over her other apparel.

"But where are you going?" demanded Constance, in a tone of alarm. "Surely not beyond the castle walls. Your wanderings round the abbey used to frighten me sometimes, when the broad daylight shone upon you; but now you make me fear still more."

"Fear not, and ask no questions," answered Iola. "I shall not be without protection in case of need."

"Oh, Iola, Iola, think well of what you are doing!" exclaimed her cousin, detaining her by the hand.

"I have thought," answered the lady. "See how the moon shines; and, hark, there is my summons."

Constance looked out and listened; and, faint upon her ear, the closed casement dulling the sound, came the same strain of music which Fulmer had heard from a different part of the castle. Gently disengaging her hand, Iola glided into the ante-room, and opened the door leading into the passage. She returned the moment after, however, saying--

"There is some one moving. I must wait a little;" but, ere two minutes more were over, she went out again, and closed the doors behind her.

Constance remained where her cousin left her, listening with anxious ears, for several moments, but Iola returned not; and, locking the door, her cousin cast herself upon her knees, and prayed fervently.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

We must give a glance beyond the waters. "What waters?" The reader may ask, "the waters of time?"

No, alas, that we cannot do. Let the eager eye stretch as it will, aided by whatever glass the ingenuity of man can devise, or his presumption use, that wide horizon will never present any object distinctly. A mirage may raise the images which lie beyond the scope of natural vision; but, after all, it is a fading picture, where everything is indistinct, uncertain, and confused.

No, the waters that I speak of are those which flow between the white cliffs of England and the shores of France; and I leap over no particle of time; for the day and hour were the same as those of which I have just been speaking; and it is to keep up the perfect synchronism of my narrative that I am obliged to change the scene, and travel all the way to France, carrying the unwilling reader with me.

It was in a small room, lined with shadowy tapestry and ceiled with black oak, carved in a strange and peculiar fashion--in the form of pentagons, piled one upon the other, and each centred with a little gilded star--that there was seated, towards the first hour of the morning, an elderly man of dignified though quiet aspect, habited in the robes of a bishop. Near the door stood two ecclesiastics, with a boy of some fourteen years of age between them, apparently equipped for a journey.

"And you are sure you know every step of the way, my son?" said the bishop, fixing his eyes upon the boy, and speaking in French.

"As well as I know the steps to my mother's door, my lord," answered the boy.

The bishop mused, and motioned one of the ecclesiastics to come nearer. The good man approached, and bent down his head, till his ear was on a level with the prelate's lips; and then, in reply to a whispered question, which the other seemed to ask him, he exclaimed--

"Oh, I will be his surety, my lord; for he ran between the armies, in the times of the late troubles with Brittany, and never betrayed his trust in a single instance."

"Well then, take him away for the present," said the bishop; "and I will write the letter at once; for there is no time to be lost, Entreat him kindly, and feed him well before he goes. I will call when I want him."

The two priests and the boy retired; and, when left alone, the bishop took some little time for thought.

"So far all is safe," he said to himself. "Once more I am upon these hospitable shores of France; and my escape is well nigh a miracle. I trust no evil has befallen those who were, under God, my kind preservers. That dear child, I trust she got safely back to the arms of her good aunt, the abbess. 'Tis very strange, how often, by the merest seeming accidents, a kindness shown to a fellow creature returns to bless us after many years. Nor has man's gratitude any great share in it; for how rarely do we find anything like gratitude, especially amongst the high and noble. Often too, those whom we have served have gone away from earth, and cannot show gratitude, if they would; yet still the good deed rises up, in after years, to shelter us, as a tree against a storm. Little did I think, when I entreated for St. Leger's life, and not only won it against all odds, but obtained that his estates should be not confiscated to the crown, but transferred for life to his brother, with a provision reserved for himself--little did I think that his sister would shelter me at the peril of all worldly good, and his daughter would guide me to escape in safety."

"Now for another act," he continued, drawing a sheet of paper towards him. "I pray God this may be for the benefit of my country. Gratitude, in this instance, I want not, expect not, and shall not obtain. It is not in his nature--well, if he turn not and rend me! It matters not; it is right and shall be done. Better a cold and greedy prince upon the throne, than a murdering usurper. This man must labour for a people's good, for his own interest's sake; and then a marriage with the heiress of York will cure all divisions, and heal the wounds of my bleeding country."

He still seemed to hesitate, however; for although he had drawn a sheet of paper to him, and taken pen in hand, he did not write for several minutes.

"It must be done," he said at length; and, when he began, his letter was soon finished.

"There," he said, when it was completed. "Now he can act as he sees meet. If he be wise, and occasion serves, he will say no word to this weak duke of Brittany, even should he be in one of his lucid moments, but will fly at once to France, where, thanks to my efforts, all is prepared to give him friendly reception. If revenge get the mastery--and he has no small share of it in his nature--he will endeavour to strike at Peter Landais, and be given bound into the hands of Richard. Then farewell to England. Stay, I will add a few words more of caution and advice; for I must needs enclose the despatch obtained by my good friend, the woodman, to let him see the extent and nature of his danger."

The postscript to his letter was soon written, the paper, which the woodman had given him, enclosed, the letter tied with the silk, and sealed; and the boy was then recalled and charged with the packet. Manifold were the directions given him, as to how he was to conceal the dangerous despatch; and the youth, who seemed quick and active, retired furnished with a packet of ordinary letters, addressed to the Marquis Dorset, and several other English noblemen then living in exile at the court of Brittany.

His weight was light, the horse prepared for him strong and active; and, mounting in the court-yard, he set out upon his way, passing through the heart of Normandy in perfect security. Séez, Alençon were reached; and, shortly after, the peril of the enterprise began; but he knew all the roads well, and, after sleeping at a small village on the confines of Normandy, he rose some hours before daylight, and made his way through narrow lanes into the duchy of Brittany, under cover of the darkness.

It is rare that a journey is performed with so little difficulty, even when there are much fewer dangers; but the messenger met with no impediment till he reached the town of Rennes, where his horse was detained for several hours, on the pretence that so fine an animal could not fairly

belong to a youth of his appearance. But the letters he produced, addressed to the Marquis Dorset, accounted for his possession of the animal; and, though there was not wanting inclination on the part of Landais' officers to seize it, for their own or their master's use, they did not venture to do so; for it was a part of the treacherous minister's policy to lull the English exiles into security by seeming kindness, till he could deliver them into the hands of Richard.

The letters, however, were strictly examined, and, when returned to the boy, had evidently been opened; but the secret despatches, concealed in the large wooden boot which he wore, passed undiscovered. The contents of the letters, which had been read, only served to convince Landais that his meditated treachery was unknown to the friends of the exiles in England.

Hastening on with all speed from Rennes to Vannes, the boy nearly accomplished the distance of more than twenty leagues in one day; but he arrived at night, and was forced to remain till morning at a small inn in the suburb, on the right bank of the river Marle. He there gathered intelligence, however, of some importance. A strong body of archers, he learned, had entered Vannes the day before, and the earl of Richmond, with many of his chief friends and followers, had sought hospitality at the fine old abbey of St. Gildas, situated on a little peninsula in the neighbourhood. Thither then, on the following morning, he took his way; but he did not arrive in the court of the abbey till the earl and his companions were just mounting their horses to set out upon some early expedition. The boy's shrewd eyes instantly detected, amongst those present, several who were not Englishmen; and, with the keen good sense for which he had been selected for that mission, he determined at once upon his course. The earl of Richmond he had never seen; but, perceiving that to one particular person there present, a spare but somewhat forbidding-looking man, all the others paid much reverence, he walked up to him with a letter in his hand, and asked if he were the Marquis Dorset.

"No," answered Richmond, who had his foot in the stirrup, to mount. "Yonder he stands. Is that letter for him?"

"Yes, my lord," replied the boy; "but I have several others from England."

"Have you any for me, the earl of Richmond?" asked the other; and, dropping his voice to a low tone, the boy replied:

"I have a word for the earl of Richmond's private ear."

"Deliver your letters, and then come back to me," said Richmond, in the same low tone; and then he added, aloud, "Here is a little courier from England, my lords and gentlemen, with letters from home, for most of you, but none for me. Take them and read them. We can well afford to put off our ride for half an hour. In the mean time, I will question the boy as to the news of our native land--Here, Bernard, hold my horse. Boy, give them their letters, and then come with me."

"Why, this has been opened," cried the marquis of Dorset, looking at the epistle which he received from the boy's hands.

"I know it has, noble sir," answered the boy aloud. "All my letters were taken from me at Rennes, and, when they were returned, I could see they had been read."

"Out, young cur," cried one of the Landais' officers, who was present. "Say you the people of the duke of Brittany would open your letters? Doubtless you opened them yourself."

"Not so, noble sir," answered the lad; "for, alas, I cannot read."

"Well, well, come with me," said Richmond, seeing that the nobles crowding round him had taken the packet, which the boy had held in his hand, and were distributing them amongst themselves, according to the superscription. "This way, lad--permit the boy to pass, reverend father;" and entering the abbey by a small door, at which appeared an old monk, he walked onward, followed closely by the boy, till he reached his bed-chamber.

"Now, what have you to say to me?" he exclaimed eagerly.

But the boy, before he answered, closed the door behind him, and pushed the bolt.

"I have a packet for you, noble lord," replied the boy; "but I was ordered to deliver it to your own hand in private, and I have kept it concealed from all eyes, here in my boot."

"Then the people at Rennes did not find it?" asked Richmond, sharply.

"No one has ever seen it, from the moment I received it," answered the boy. "That I will swear to; for I have slept in my boots; and, when I took them off for ease, I kept them always in my sight."

The boots of an unarmed courier or post of that day were of a kind, I believe, now utterly banished from use, but which might still be seen in France, amongst postilions, at the end of the last war. They consisted of an inner covering of leather, with large and rudely-shaped pieces of light wood, fastened round them with straps of leather, to guard the leg against any blow or accident. Out of these cumbrous appendages, the boy had withdrawn his feet while he was

speaking; and now, unbuckling the wooden cases from the leather, he opened a little sliding lid in one of the former, and drew forth the packet which Morton had entrusted to him. Richmond took it eagerly; but, with his usual cool observing spirit, before he opened it, he looked carefully at the silk and the seal, to ascertain that it had not been examined previously. Satisfied on that point, he cut the fastening, broke the seal, and read the contents. His countenance, though the boy's eye fixed upon it while he read, gave no indication of what was passing in his mind. It was cold, quiet, resolute. When he had done, he thought in silence for a moment or two; and then looking at the lad, he said--

"Thou hast performed thy task well. There is gold for thee. Were I richer it should be more. Now tell me how it came that they chose one so young to carry tidings of some import?"

"Because I knew every inch of the country well," replied the boy; "because I had carried many letters between the armies in the time of the war, and because my mother, and father Julien, said that I was honest."

"Good reasons," said Richmond; "knowledge, experience, honesty. I think you deserved your character. Do you know the country between this and Tours well?"

"Every part of it," replied the boy.

"And between this and Angers?" asked Richmond again.

"As well as the other," answered the boy.

"Well, then," said Richmond, "open the door and call one of my valets. I retain you in my service, if you are free."

"Oh yes, my lord, I am free and willing," replied the boy; for there was that in the manner of the future king of England which, though dry and cold, and somewhat stern, inspired respect; and the boy's character was peculiar too. The man who knows how to command will always find those who are willing to obey; and the attachments inspired by the strong-minded and the stern are often more rapid, generally more permanent, than the affection excited by the weak and gentle.

The boy's nature was brief and laconic; and, as soon as he had made his answer, he went out into the passage, and sought one of the attendants of the earl, with whom he returned to his presence.

"Take care of that boy," said Richmond, to the man, "and bring him to me as soon as I return. Treat him well, and let him have whatever he wants; for he has rendered me service."

"Thus saying, he walked out into the court again, assuming a moody and somewhat discontented air. The reading of his letters and his conversation with the boy had not occupied five minutes; and some of the English gentlemen were still studying the epistles they had received in the court."

"You have been very brief, my lord," said the Marquis Dorset, thrusting his letter into his pocket. "What news did the boy give you? I have little or none."

"I have none at all," answered Richmond. "The boy only came from Rouen, I find. The English messenger stopped there. So I must wait for another long tedious fortnight before I get intelligence. I am glad to hear from Rennes, however, my Lord of Morlaix," he added, addressing one of the Breton gentlemen, who had been placed with him more as a guard than an attendant, "that your noble duke is perfectly recovered, and gone towards Maine for better air, to give him strength again."

"Indeed, my lord. I had not heard it," answered the gentleman he addressed.

"It is true, notwithstanding," answered Richmond. "Come, gentlemen, let us mount;" and, springing on his horse, he rode forth, followed by his whole train.

As he went, he continued to talk of the duke of Brittany's recovery, in a public and open manner, addressing some of his observations to the Bretons who accompanied him.

"I fear," he said at length, "that his highness may think me somewhat remiss if I do not go to compliment him on his recovery."

He remarked a slight frown come upon the face of Morlaix, as he spoke; and that gentleman ventured to say--

"Perhaps, my lord the earl, it might be better to send a messenger first, giving some intimation of your purpose; for his highness, if you recollect--"

"I know what you would say," replied Richmond, as he paused and hesitated. "His highness assigned me my residence at Vannes; and I am well aware that observance of a prince's wishes is of more importance than any mere point of ceremony. You, Dorset, are in the same case; but, in this instance, happily we can do both; remain at the spot assigned us, and yet show our gladness

at our princely friend's recovery. We will send every man, not tied down to this spot as we are, to offer our sincere congratulations, and to show that we do not come ourselves solely front respect for his commands."

"That, my lord, is indeed obviating all difficulties," said Morlaix, with a smile; "and doubtless," he added hypocritically, "you will soon receive an invitation to the court, to receive the honours due to your station."

Richmond's face expressed no satisfaction at this answer; and, turning to the rest of the English exiles, he merely said--

"Well, gentlemen, we will not ride far or fast to-day, as you will need your horses for a longer journey to-morrow. I will write a letter of compliment to his highness, which you shall deliver for me, and explain that I only regret I could not be my own messenger. Monsieur de Morlaix, if you will do me the honour of breaking your fast with me, at an early hour to-morrow, we will see these gentlemen depart."

The other bowed with all due reverence, and, with much satisfaction, seeing that the arrest of the earl of Richmond, and his delivery into the hands of Richard's emissaries, which he knew was meditated by Landais, would be much more easily effected, during the absence of so large a body of the earl's friends and followers, than it could be while they so closely surrounded his person. It was necessary however for the Breton to obtain distinct directions as to how he should act; and, as soon as he returned to the abbey of St. Gildas, he despatched letters to Landais, informing him of the proposed movements of Richmond's friends, and requiring orders for his guidance.

While he was thus occupied, the young messenger from the bishop of Ely was again brought into the earl's presence, and the door closed and bolted. Richmond eyed him for a moment attentively, and then said--

"What do you know, lad, of the contents of the packet you brought me?"

"Nothing, my lord," replied the boy.

"What do you guess?" demanded Richmond, who seemed to comprehend and be comprehended at once.

"That your lordship is in peril from something," replied the other.

"Why do you guess that?" asked Richmond.

"Because I was told to be secret and swift," answered the boy, "to destroy the packet if there was danger of its being taken, and to find means of telling you, if I should be prevented from delivering it, to be upon your guard against enemies. Moreover, I heard last night that three hundred archers had marched into Vannes in the morning."

"Ha!" said the earl. "I heard not of that. They are rapid, it would seem. Now, young man, are you willing to serve me well?"

"Right willing," replied the boy.

"Can you guide me, by the shortest and most secret ways, hence to the town of Angers?" demanded Richmond.

"None better," said the boy.

"Well then, you shall do it," said Richmond; "but be silent and secret. Utter no word of what I say to you, even to those who seem my dearest friends. I have an expedition to make to Angers, to take counsel with persons much in my interest there; but none must know of my going. That is all. Stay, a word or two more," he continued, thoughtfully. "It were as well that none should remark your staying here, or know that we hold private conference together. It may seem as if the news you brought from Rouen was of sufficient import to justify suspicion. I will send you into Vannes. Stay there at the suburb at the Golden Dolphin, and mind you chatter not."

"I chatter little, my lord," said the boy.

"I trust so and believe it, my good lad," replied Richmond; "but it sometimes happens that youths like you, when speaking to persons of superior station, are silent and discreet enough, and yet find a noisy and loquacious tongue when with their fellows. But I will not doubt you. You must have been proved, ere Morton trusted you. Only remember, that if you are not now discreet, you may lose a good master, who will make your fortune should you prove worthy."

"I will not lose him," said the boy.

"To-morrow night I will speak with you more," said Richmond; "do you know a place near Vannes called Carnac?"

"What, where the great stones lie?" asked the lad. "Many a time I have played amongst those stones, when I was eight years old."

"Then meet me there with your horse, just at the hour of sunset, to-morrow evening," the earl replied. "Set off upon the road to Rennes. Turn round by the great fish-ponds, and wait between the first and second line of stones till I arrive--though I may tarry a little, still wait."

"I will, my lord," replied the boy, and left the earl's presence.

He kept his word to the letter; for, though he laughed, and jested, and talked with the people of the little cabaret where he put up, the name of the earl of Richmond never escaped his lips. He talked of the long journey he had had, and of how tired his horse was, and complained a little that the Marquis Dorset had not paid him for his services.

"Doubtless you are well paid before," said the landlord of the inn, to whom he spoke. "You seem a sharp boy, and not one to go without payment."

The lad laughed, and said nothing, confirming the man's suspicions, that he had desired somewhat more than his due. Upon the pretence of his horse needing repose, he continued to linger where he was during the whole of that day and great part of the next, always talking of going back to Rouen, till, at length, when evening approached, he paid his score and departed. The landlord remarked, as he went away, "Ay, there goes a young truant, who will be scolded roundly, I will warrant, for lingering so long, and yet will not want an excuse for his tardiness."

Slowly jogging on his way, the boy rode even somewhat farther than Richmond had directed him. But, to say the truth, he knew the country better than the earl himself; and he knew also the habits of the place, which brought to the point at which Richmond had told him to turn off, a considerable number of the country people, going into Vannes, at that hour, to hear the evening service, at the church of St. Paterne. Passing completely round the large tank or fish-pond there, he approached the great Druidical temple of Carnac--the most remarkable, perhaps, in the world--just as the sun was setting; and, dismounting from his horse, he stood and gazed forth at the bright sky, with interest very different from that which he might have felt had he known where he stood. The boy was ignorant indeed of all the historical associations connected with the place. He had never heard of Druids, or Celts, nor of any other religion but the Roman Catholic; but yet there was a curious sort of solemn grandeur in that scene, with the thousands and thousands of tall stones, most of them then standing upright in their five curious ranges, with the rosy coloured light of the evening sky pouring in amongst them, which produced a sensation almost akin to awe in his young though not very imaginative heart.

"This is a strange place," he thought. "I wonder what it means? These stones must have been put here by somebody. Perhaps they intended to build a church here long long ago. But why should they spread them out so far and set them all on end. It can't have been for a church either. But they are all dead and gone, that's clear, and the stones remain;" and his mind being then led on from point to point, by some process within himself, he said, "I wonder what will become of me. It is very droll, one can never tell what is to happen to oneself afterwards. That earl said he would make my fortune. What will that fortune be, I wonder?"

The sun gradually sank, and all was darkness; but shortly after a pale gleam, coming upon some clouds to the eastward, showed that some other light was coming; and the moon soared up in time, and shed her light over the same scene. The boy looked round him somewhat timidly. He began almost to fancy that ghosts of the dead might haunt those solemn places. All remained still and quiet, however, till at length he heard the sound of horses' feet, and ventured to look out. The riders were not near enough for him to see anything, however; for the night was so still that he heard them afar. At length they came nearer and nearer; and, taking his stand at his horse's side, he gazed along the line of stones till four horsemen rode in and approached him.

"Mount and come on," said the voice of Richmond; and the boy sprang into the saddle at once. The earl had not stopped to speak the words, and, ere the lad was mounted, he had ridden on some hundred yards, as it seems in a wrong direction, for he speedily heard a low voice, saying, "To the right, my lord. It is safer and shorter."

"But this is the road to La Roche Bernard," replied Richmond, turning, and eyeing him by the moonlight.

"But you must not go by La Roche," replied the lad, "but by Redon and Nozay. We will cross the Villaine near Redon. Then there is nothing to stop you till you get to Nozay, neither towns nor castles, but sandy tracks through the bushes. There is the castle of Furette, indeed; but it was burnt in the last war, and there is no one in it."

"Play me not false," said Richmond, in a threatening tone, but turning his rein at the same time in the direction the boy pointed out. "Ride here," he continued, "between me and this good lord. Now tell me, how far is it to Angers by this road?"

"Some twenty-six leagues, my lord," replied the lad, "and by the other more than thirty."

"You are right there," said the Marquis Dorset.

"And what will one find on the other side of Nozay?" asked the earl.

"Nothing to stop you, sir," said the boy; "between it and Angers there is the little village of

Conde, where you can bait your horses; and there is a good road thence to Angers, with nothing but hamlets or scattered farm-houses, till you reach the town. No one would be able to take you from Redon to Nozay but myself--at least, nobody at Vannes; but from Nozay to Angers you could go by yourself if you liked."

"You seem to know it well," said Richmond.

"I was born at Nozay," replied the boy.

There the conversation stopped; and they rode on in silence for some time, going at a very quick pace, till at length the Earl said,

"We must spare our horses a little, or they will hardly bear us out. Twenty-six leagues; think you we can do it in one day, boy?"

"Oh, yes, my lord," replied the boy, "if your beasts be strong and willing. The night is fresh, and the ground soft; and we can afford to stop and feed the horses at Nozay, for, if any one comes after us, a thousand to one they will take the other road."

"That is one recommendation to yours at all events," said Dorset, laughing; "and the ground is soft enough indeed, for it seems to me as if we were entering a morass."

"So we are," answered the boy, coolly. "We had better ride one by one. Then if I make a mistake, I shall be the first to pay for it."

Thus saying, he rode on boldly and rapidly, till, at the end of about half a league, the swampy ground ceased, and the country began to rise a little. Ascending by gradual slopes the road which they now followed, and which was clearly enough defined by its sandy colour, gained a considerable elevation above the sea; and Richmond was just in the act of observing that they must have got at least eight miles from Vannes, when they heard the distant report of a cannon boom upon the air, and Dorset exclaimed:

"What may that mean?"

"That they have found out you are gone," said the boy, laughing.

"Did it seem to come from Vannes?" demanded Richmond.

"To a certainty," answered the boy. "The wind sets this way; but it is our own fault if they catch us now."

No other indication of pursuit reached their ears as they pursued their way, till at length the boy, pointing forward with his hand, said:

"There is Redon. You can either go through the town or by the ford. The ford is shortest."

"And safest too, in all probability," replied Richmond.

"I think they could hear that gun," said the boy, "if they could but make out what it meant."

"Then take the ford, by all means," said Richmond; and, pursuing a narrow path to the left, which ran some way up the river, the lad led them to the bank of the stream, and passed safely through, though the water rose to the horse's girths. The rest followed; and, turning over the shoulder of the hill, at the end of a few miles, they entered a wild and desolate track, where woods and bushes seemed scattered over a wide extent of shifting sand, amidst which all vestige of a road seemed lost. Straight on went the boy, however, without pause or hesitation, appearing to be guided, in finding his way back to his native place, by the same sort of instinct which is possessed by dogs and some kinds of pigeons.

All seemed so dark--for the moon had by this time gone down--so wild, so trackless, that Richmond at length exclaimed, with anxious sternness:

"Are you sure you are right, boy?"

"Quite sure," replied the boy; and on he went, leading the way through one wide patch of bushes, round the angle of a little wood, down a little dell, across a rivulet, up a slope, into another track wilder than before, as if not a tree had been cut down or a bush grubbed up since last he was there.

"There comes morning," he said at length. "We shall reach Nosey just at break of day."

"And right glad will my horse be to get there," said Dorset; "for he is well nigh knocked up. He has been stumbling at every step for the last hour."

"Food will set him up," said the boy, "and that he can soon have. There is Bohalard and its windmill, to the right, peeping through the dusk, like a great giant with his arms stretched out to catch us."

The sight of the windmill, and the boy's instant recognition of it, relieved Richmond a good deal; for he had not been able to divest his mind of some doubts as to his young guide's accuracy; for the country had been so wild and trackless, that it seemed impossible to him for any one accurately to remember every step of the way, and one mistake must have been irretrievable in the darkness. A few minutes more set him at rest completely; for as the air grew lighter every moment, he perceived at no great distance in advance a tower upon an elevated spot, and a little beyond that again, but lower down, the spire of a church.

"What is that tower, boy?" he asked, as they rode on.

"It is called Beauvais, my lord," replied the lad; "and that is the church of Nozay."

"Then let us slacken our pace a little," said Richmond, and, according to the boy's prediction, they rode into the small town just as the sun was rising.

"Here, stop here," said the boy, drawing in his horse's rein before a house, which seemed somewhat like an inn of the second or third class; "this is not the best cabaret, but the landlord is the honestest man;" and, by thundering with his fists at the large gate, he soon brought forth some of the inmates from their beds.

"Ah, petit!" cried the landlord, who was amongst the first; "is that you again, Pierre la Brousse? and so you have brought me some guests."

"Who must have food for themselves and horses, in a minute, father," replied the boy, "for they want to be in Angers before mass."

"They'll hardly manage that," said the landlord, looking at the horses; "however we must do what we can. Come in, come in. Jacques tend the horses. Come, in, Pierre."

"No, I must up to the top of the church," said the boy, "to see who comes after; for Maître Landais is no friend of mine, and, if his people catch me, I shall taste hemp. So keep my horse saddled while he feeds. The gentlemen can do as they like, for they can find their way now; but I'll be away as soon as I see any one coming over the *landes*."

This was said aloud, and Richmond answered--

"No, no. We will go with thee, lad."

"Stay, stay; my son shall go up the steeple," cried the landlord; "he is quick enough in all conscience, and his eyes are good. You stay and feed, Pierre."

Such was then the arrangement. The son of the landlord was sent up to the top of the church to watch, while the whole party of travellers halted at the little inn, to rest, feed their horses, and partake of what coarse refreshment the place afforded. The horse of the Marquis of Dorset, however, would not feed; but, by the mediation of Pierre la Brousse, that nobleman procured another very fair animal to carry him on, and the furniture of that which he had been riding was transferred to the back of the fresh steed. The other four horses took their provender willingly enough; and, having seen this most necessary point settled, Richmond and his companions entered the house, and soon had some eggs, meat, and wine set before them. They had time to make a tolerable meal, but no more; for, just as they had finished, the landlord's son came running in to say, that he saw a party of horsemen coming over the *landes*, at the distance of about three miles.

"How many are they?" demanded Richmond, in a calm tone.

"A good number, sir," replied the young man, "but I did not stay to count them."

"How can they have tracked us?" cried the boy.

"They had something running before them which looked like a dog," said the landlord's son. "It was too far to see exactly what it was; but it might be a blood-hound."

"My dog for an hundred angels!" said Richmond, in a low tone; "we must to horse at once. Were they coming quick?"

"No, slow enough," answered the young man, following the strangers to the court-yard.

"Thank Heaven, their horses must be as tired as ours," said Dorset; and, paying the reckoning, the party of fugitives mounted in haste to depart.

"There is a gold crown for thee, young man," said Richmond to the landlord's son, before they set out; "and if thou and thy father can contrive to delay those who come after for one hour, I promise, on the word of an English nobleman, you shall have ten such sent to you by some means. If I reach Angers in safety, you may come and claim the reward. Now, on gentlemen, as fast as whip and spur will carry us."

On they went then; and, for fully twenty miles more, their horses bore them up well; but evident symptoms of failing strength began to manifest themselves about nine o'clock, and before

ten it became clearly necessary to seek some fresh beasts. The houses were now, however, beginning to appear more frequently; the boy Pierre knew every place where a horse was likely to be obtained; and the four which were wanted were at last procured, some being found at one place, and some at another. It was none too soon, however; for while yet at the distance of some three miles from Angers, a large stag-hound with a silver collar bounded up to the side of the earl of Richmond, and almost sprang upon his horse.

"Ah, my poor Taker," said Richmond. "Thou hast unwittingly betrayed me, I fear.--Look back, look back," he added to his followers; "they must be near at hand now."

Nothing was to be seen, however; for the dog had outrun the pursuers; and, for a mile farther, they did not come in sight. Then, however, they were seen coming over a hill not very far off; and, from that spot, the journey became in fact a race. Those who followed had evidently hired fresh horses likewise; or rather, armed with the authority at the duke of Brittany, they had taken them wherever they found them; and they gained perceptibly upon the fugitives. Now they were lost sight of in a hollow, as the road rose up and down; now they came in sight again, and each time nearer than before. At length, however, a glimpse of the winding Mayenne was obtained, and then towers and steeples were seen over the trees.

"Angers, Angers!" cried the boy, with renewed hope.

On they dashed; and, when they reached the gates of the city, the horsemen of the duke of Brittany were not three hundred yards behind them.

There, however, both parties reined in their horses; and Richmond presented his letters of safe conduct to the guard at the gates. The pursuers did not venture to follow any farther, for they were already within the pale of France; and, wearied in frame, but relieved in mind, the earl rode on into the town.

As, now in security, Richmond cast off his clothes at the inn, and prepared to take some repose, his mind rested upon the events of the eight and forty hours just past; and his last thought, ere his eyes closed in sleep, was--"It is strange that I should owe my escape from imprisonment--ay, and from death, to a woodman in a distant part of England." He might have said, "and that England should owe him a king;" but all the coming time was dim to the eyes of the earl; and he only added--"I vow to the blessed Virgin Mary, if ever I should sit upon the throne of England, as some men think likely, I will find out that man and reward him."

CHAPTER XXIX.

There was a hand laid upon the latch of the door; for doors, even in great houses, had latches to them, dear reader, in that age of simple contrivances; and Constance asked, "Who is there?"

"Open, Constance, open," said the voice of Iola; and her cousin gave her instant admission, holding out her arms to her, and pressing her to her heart, as if she had thought that the companion of her youth was lost to her for ever.

"Have you been disturbed, Constance?" asked her cousin, kissing her cheek.

"Only by your girl, Susan, about a quarter of an hour ago," replied Constance. "I bade her come again in half an hour, and tell my maiden not to sit up for me."

"I have been long, dear cousin," said Iola, "and kept you waiting; but I could not help it; for there was much to say."

"And you have been far," said Constance, gazing at her with inquiring looks; "for your gown is wet with dew--and torn moreover!"

"And my feet too with the brambles," answered Iola, sitting down, and uncovering her fair delicate feet and ankles. "My path has been almost as rough and thorny as that of the world, Constance. See how they have scratched me."

"But what did he say? What advice have you obtained?" demanded Constance, looking with no very serious commiseration at the scratches which streaked the pure white skin of her cousin.

"You don't pity me," said Iola, laughing. "You are a cruel girl."

"If the wounds of the world are not more serious than these, you will not deserve much pity," answered Constance. "I am anxious about graver things, Iola; but you are so light."

"Well, well, I will tell you," answered Iola. "Let me but put on these slippers, and get a little breath; for my heart has been beating somewhat more than needful. What counsel has he given, do you ask? How do you know that it was a man at all?--Well, I will own. It was a man, but an old one, Constance; and now I will tell you what he said. He said that a marriage contracted between infants was not lawful. That it was a corrupt custom which could not be justified, for that a reasonable consent was needful to make a marriage valid, consequently, that I am not bound at all by acts to which I gave no consent--the acts of others, not my own. He says moreover that religion itself forbids me to promise what I cannot perform."

Constance gazed at her with wonder and surprise. The view thus suddenly presented to her was so strange, so new, so contrary to the received notions and opinions of the time, that, at first, all seemed mist and darkness to her.

"This is extraordinary indeed!" she exclaimed. "This is extraordinary indeed! Who can it be, Iola, who thus ventures to set at defiance not merely the opinions of the world at large, but that of lawyers and fathers of the church, who have always held such contracts binding?"

"He says that it is not so," answered Iola. "He gave me many instances in which such contracts, especially between princes and high nobles, have been set at naught, where the church has treated them as things of no value, and lawyers have passed them over with little reverence. But I could tell you more extraordinary things than this, Constance. Men are beginning in this world to look with keen and searching eyes into these received opinions which you talk of, and to ask if they are founded on justice and right, or on ignorance, superstition, and craft. Light is streaming in upon darkness; and there is a day rising, of which I see the dawn, though I may never see the noon."

"I can understand nothing of all this," said Constance. "Dearest Iola, I think your wits must have been shaken by all you have undergone. You speak so wildly and so strangely."

"Nay, nay," said Iola. "I am as calm as you are; and these ideas which I give you, under the promise you have made, never to reveal one word that I tell you, I have long held and shall ever continue to hold."

"I have never had any hint of them before. I have never seen any sign of them," replied Constance; "and yet we have been like sisters from our infancy."

"During the last year, Constance," asked Iola, in a grave and solemn tone, "have you ever seen me kneel down to worship picture of saint, or of virgin, relic, statue, or crucifix?"

Constance put her hand upon her forehead, and gazed at her cousin with a look of bewildered dismay. "I do not know that I have," she said, after a moment's thought; "but I have seen you tell your beads. I have known you confess and receive absolution."

"I have told my beads, Constance," said her cousin; "and at every bead I have said a prayer; but it has been to God the Father, through Christ the Saviour, and I have ever prayed for direction in the right. I have confessed, because there can be no harm in confessing my sins to the ear of a priest as well as to the ear of God; and, if he has pretended to absolve me from sins which God alone can absolve, it is his fault and not mine. I have thought myself little benefitted thereby."

Constance started up, exclaiming, "I will go and pray for you, Iola. I will go and pray for you!"

"Stay yet a while, dear cousin; and then gladly will I ask your prayers," said Iola; "but let them, dear Constance, be addressed to God alone, and not to saints or martyrs. You will ask why. I will show you in a moment. God has himself forbidden it. Look here;" and she drew a small closely written book from her bosom. "This, Constance, is the word of God," she continued, "the book from which priests, and bishops, and popes, pretend to derive their religion. Look what are its injunctions here."

Timidly and stealthily, as if she were committing an act of very doubtful propriety, Constance looked over her cousin's shoulder to the page which Iola held open in the book, and read on with eager and attentive eyes.

"Does it say so?" she asked at length. "Does it say so? What can this mean, Iola? Why should they so deceive us?"

"That I cannot tell," answered Iola; "for no good purpose, doubtless; but that matters little. It is sufficient for me to know that they do deceive us; and, in a matter that concerns my soul's salvation, I will not be deceived. We spoke just before I went, Constance, of mental reservation. You own--you know, that it is neither more nor less than deceit. It is promising without performing, clothing a lie in the garb of truth. What does not follow from such duplicity! Will not they who cheat us, and make a profession of cheating, in one thing, cheat us in many?--Will they not cheat us in all? Often have I thought, before I saw this book, that it was strange man should have the power to forgive sins. We are told that our sins are against God and against man. If against man, the only one who has power to forgive them is the man whom we have offended; if against God, then God only has the power. But all sins are against God, for they are all a violation of his law, and therefore he only can remit them perfectly."

"But he may depute the power to his priests," said Constance.

"What, the Almighty, all-seeing God, depute his power to blind impotent mortals!" exclaimed Iola. "What, depute his power of pardoning me to a drunken, luxurious, sinful priest! You may say that such a man has not the power, and that absolution from him is of no avail. But if you do, dear cousin, you are a heretic; for we are told that it is of avail. But what must be their idea of the great Searcher of all hearts, who believe that he has need of such instruments, chooses them, or uses them. Such is not the picture of Him given in this book. Here, God is God; the Saviour, man and God; the Holy Spirit, the comforter and guide of man from God. There is no other intercessor between man and God but the one, who is man and God, no other guide but the Spirit, proceeding from both Father and Saviour, no other atonement but the death of Christ, no other sacrifice but his."

"I am bewildered," said Constance, bending her head down to her hands and covering her eyes in thought. The next moment, however, she looked up, asking, "Then why do the clergy forbid us to read this book, if it teaches so to know God?"

"Because it is that which condemns them," answered Iola; "they profess that the religion they teach is founded upon this book, and in this book I find the frequent command of God, to search the scriptures. The priests say, I must not search them. Then, either they are not from God, because they contradict him; or the book is not from God, because it contradicts them. Now in this book I find innumerable proofs that it is from God; and they themselves declare it to be so. They are self-condemned to any one who opens it; and therefore have they sealed it, lest men should read and know them for what they are."

"And yet," said Constance, "who was so eager as you to save the good bishop of Ely--who rejoiced so much at his escape?"

"I say not that there are no good men amongst them, dear Constance," replied her cousin; "for I believe that there are many; but all human beings have their weaknesses. I believe doctor Morton to be a good man; but of course he teaches nothing but the doctrines of the church to which he belongs--he dare teach nothing else; for who would venture to incur, not only the loss of every worldly good, but death itself--a burning and a terrible death--when perhaps he thinks he can do as much good, by following the ways of those who went before him, as by any other path?"

"But truth is beautiful," said Constance; "and would a good man teach falsehood, when the very book of his religion shows him that it is so?"

"Did he ever read that book? Did he ever study it?" asked Iola. "Did he ever examine its pages closely, seeking no gloss or comment of those who would pervert it, but merely asking the aid of the Holy Spirit? Many a man is unwilling to examine too closely, when all his earthly happiness depends upon his shutting his eyes. Many a man is too timid to stand by his own judgment, however right, when there are a multitude of decisions, however corrupt, against him."

"But perhaps," said Constance, "the book may be so obscure and difficult, that it cannot be understood without an interpretation."

"It is clear and simple as the unclouded sky," replied Iola; "as easy as the words which we address to babes. It was given to, and transmitted by, unlettered fishermen. It made all clear that was dark, and removed every cloud and every shadow. This book contains but one mystery, instead of the thousands which they teach us; and that mystery is explained, so that we cannot but believe even while we do not comprehend."

"But what does it teach, then?" asked Constance.

"It teaches that we are to worship God alone," answered Iola. "It teaches that to bow down before any creature, statue, or image, is to offend the Creator, and is idolatry against God. It teaches that there is no mediator, no intercessor but one, Christ, and that the office of saints and martyrs is to praise God, not to intercede for mortals. It teaches that the only atonement, the only sacrifice needful to expiate the sins of the whole world, was that of Christ; that it was complete, full, and sufficient, and that to look to any other for pardon, is to rob God of his glory. It teaches that man can be pardoned by God alone, and will be pardoned through faith in Christ. It teaches, moreover, that, if any man keeps the whole law of God, even to the smallest point, he has done no more than he is bound to do, and therefore that his good works have no power to save him from the original curse--how much loss to help or to save any other. It teaches too, dear cousin, that repentance is needful to every one--the deep, heartfelt, sincere repentance of the spirit; but that, to seek, by inflicting pains upon our body, to atone for the evils we have committed, is to rest upon a broken reed, to presume upon our own strength, and to deny the efficacy of God's mercy in Christ."

Constance listened with deep attention, till her cousin had done.

"I would fain read that book," she said, in a hesitating tone; "but the priests have always forbidden it."

"God says, 'read it!'" said Iola. "Who shall set up the words of man against the words of God?"

"Will you lend it to me, then?" asked Constance, timidly.

"Oh, joyfully," answered Iola; "but it must be upon one condition, dear Constance. I have bound you, by a promise, never to repeat anything I say to you. I must now have another promise, never to let any eye but your own see this little volume. When you read it, lock the door. When you have done, hide it where no one can find it. I need give you no motive, dear Constance," she added, throwing her arm round her neck, and gazing affectionately into her eyes; "but yet let me remind you, that my life is at stake, that the least imprudence, the least indiscretion would give me over to a death by fire; for they hold those who worship God as God himself has taught to be heretics. We are not called upon either to be teachers or martyrs. We may be permitted to hold on our own way, without offending others, so long as we worship not things of stick and stone; but, should it be discovered what my real thoughts are, that moment I should be dragged before those who would force me to declare them. I would never renounce my opinions or deny my belief; and the only fate before me would be death."

"God forbid!" said Constance earnestly. "God forbid I will be very careful, Iola--more careful than if my own life was at stake."

"I know you will, sweet sister," replied Iola, putting the book into her hands. "Read it, Constance, read it and judge for yourself. Try to cast from your mind everything you have heard on religion not contained in this book; and, if you do that, this book will as certainly lead you right as there is truth in Heaven."

Constance took it, and retired to her own chamber, where she sat down for a few moments' thought. Her first meditation, however, was not of the book, but of Iola.

Was this the same creature, she thought, whom she had known from infancy--sweet, gay, playful Iola? Was this she whose heart she used to think the lightest in the world, whose deepest meditations seemed to break off in a sportive jest? At first it seemed strange, almost impossible. But yet, when she called memory to her aid, and recollected many of the circumstances of the past, especially during the last two years, she saw that it might well be. She felt that her own graver and somewhat slower spirit might not reach those depths of thought into which Iola's seemed to plunge with bold and fearless courage. She remembered many a gay speech, many a half-reply which had appeared all sportiveness, but which, when examined and pondered, proved to be full of mind and matter.

"Yes," she said, at length. "I have loved her, but not esteemed her enough. I have known her well, but not the depths. She is all that I thought her; but she is more. Yet it was not she deceived me, but myself. She hid nothing; but my eye was too dim to penetrate even the light veil with which her happy nature covered her strong mind. It is strange, what an awe I feel in looking at this little volume!" and she gazed at it, as it lay upon her knee. "It must be that I have so often heard that we ought not to read it, that I have yielded my judgment to mere assertions. Yet I have heard the very men who bade me forbear call it the word of God. I will read it. That word must be a comfort and blessing. But I will pray first;" and kneeling down she began, "Oh, blessed Saint Clare--"

But then she suddenly stopped, and meditated for a moment, still kneeling. She seemed puzzled how to frame her appeal. At length, however, she bowed her head upon her hands, and repeated in English the Lord's prayer. She added nothing more, but, rising from her knees, unclasped the book, drew the lamp nearer, and began to read.

The clock struck four, and found her reading still.

CHAPTER XXX.

One by one, the guests assembled in the hall of Chidlow castle, for the first meal of the day which, as the reader well knows, was in those days a very substantial affair. People in high station usually dined, as it was called, at a very early hour; for, in all the mutations of fashion, nothing has changed more than the dinner hour in Europe. The labouring classes indeed, of all countries, consulting health and convenience alone, have varied very little. It was then about the hour of ten, when two or three of the guests appeared in the hall. Then came the lord of the castle himself, with his sister, the abbess, on his arm. Sir William Arden and two or three other guests followed; then Lord Fulmer and some others, then Chartley, then Sir Edward Hungerford.

A great change had come over Lord Fulmer's aspect. He was calm, though very grave, courteous and attentive to all, though somewhat absent in his manner, and falling into frequent fits of thought. Even to Chartley, whose demeanour was perfectly unchanged, he showed himself

polite, though cold, conversed with him once or twice across the table, and by no allusion whatsoever approaching the subject of their rencounter in the morning. The meal passed off cheerfully, with most of those present; and, after it was over, the party in general separated to prepare for the sports and occupations of the day.

"Now, gentlemen," said Lord Calverly; "all who are disciples of St. Hubert, prepare your horses; for, though the month of May is not come, I am determined we will force a buck before the day is over. My good sister, here, notwithstanding holy vows and pious meditations, loves well to see a falcon fly or a dog run; and she will accompany us on her mule. Take care that she does not outride us all; for the best barb in my stables, except at the full gallop, will hardly outrun that mule of hers."

These words were followed by much hurrying away from the room; and, in the moment of confusion, Lord Fulmer lightly touched Chartley's arm, saying in a low tone--

"My lord, before we set out, I have a word or two for your private ear, if I may crave audience."

"Assuredly!" replied Chartley. "You can take it, my lord, when you think fit."

"Then I will join you in your apartments, as soon as I am booted," answered Fulmer.

In somewhat less than five minutes, after Chartley had reached his own chamber, he was joined by Fulmer prepared for the chase. As usual, where men have a resolute inclination to cut each others' throats, all sorts of ceremonious courtesy took place between them; and, after Fulmer was seated, he leaned across the table, saying:

"I have come, my Lord Chartley, to speak to you both of the past and the future. As for the past, I have had time to think, not only of what occurred between us this morning, but of my own conduct towards you; and I do not scruple to avow that I feel I have been wrong."

"Then, think of it no more, my good lord," replied Chartley, holding out his hand to him frankly; but Lord Fulmer did not take it.

"I have not yet done," he said. "I have owned that I was wrong, that I behaved uncourteously and rashly, both last night and to-day, under the influence of strongly moved passion, which has now passed away. I apologize for it, and pray you to accept my excuse. So much for the past; and now for the future, my lord. I trust I shall not forget myself again; but thus are we circumstanced. You have become acquainted with a lady contracted to me; you have had an opportunity of rendering her service; and I have no doubt did so in the kindest and most courteous manner. I mean not to say that you have done aught that is wrong, or that, knowing she was pledged to be my wife, you have striven to win her from me; but unwittingly, perhaps, you have learned to love her yourself, and deprived me of a share of her affections. Deny it not; for it is evident."

He paused for an instant, as if the words he spoke were very bitter to himself; and Chartley remained perfectly silent, with his eyes fixed upon a spot on the table, as if waiting to hear what this commencement would lead to.

"Now, my lord," continued Fulmer, with a sigh, "to my mind, two men cannot love one woman and both live. Such is the case with you and me. I grant that you have as much right to love her as I have. I am willing to look upon it as if we were merely two rivals for the same hand; but still I say, there is but one way of terminating that rivalry; for her faith is already plighted to me, and therefore the question cannot and must not be submitted to her decision."

"I understand your meaning, my good lord," said Chartley, seeing that he paused, "and think that your view is wrong--"

"Hear me out," said Fulmer, interrupting him. "I have yet a few words more to say. My views can never be changed. They are based upon my own nature. I cannot live, Lord Chartley, in doubt or jealousy. I cannot live unloved by her I love. I cast myself upon your generosity then, to yield me compensation for an injury, even unintentional, in such a manner as will in no degree compromise the fair name of her who is to be my wife or yours."

"Upon my life, my noble lord," replied Chartley, in his usual frank tone, "I do not think the right way for me to win her would be to cut your throat, nor for you to cut mine."

"Perhaps not," replied Lord Fulmer; "but so it must be; for it is the only way open to us."

"I think not," answered Chartley. "If I understand right, the Lady Iola is formally and fully contracted to you. I will not deny, Lord Fulmer, that this was painful news to me; but, I knew it was an ill without remedy; and I never even dreamed, from that moment, of seeking to win one thought of the lady, from her promised--her affianced husband. So help me, Heaven, I would never have seen her again willingly. I am not here of my own will, my lord. I am a prisoner, and would willingly remove myself to any other abode, to cause no pain or disquiet here. I do not believe, I never have believed, that there is any occasion for such disquiet. The Lady Iola may have won my regard; but I have no reason to suppose that I, in the slightest degree, have won hers. No words of affection have ever passed between us; no suit has been made on my part, no

acknowledgment on hers. As you have taken a more frank and courteous tone than you assumed this morning, I will not now scruple to say how we first met, and explain to you all that can be explained, without dangerously affecting another. You doubtless know that I am here under the king's displeasure, for aiding my good and reverend friend, the bishop of Ely, to escape from the perils which menaced him. He travelled disguised in my train, till we arrived at the abbey of St. Clare of Atherston, where he had appointed a servant to meet him with intelligence of importance. I sat next the Lady Iola at supper, but parted with her there, and left the good bishop in the strangers' lodging. Having cause to suspect that some one had left my train--a servant of Sir Charles Weinants--for the purpose of giving intimation of the bishop's place of refuge to those who might apprehend him, I turned my horse in the forest, bidding my comrades ride on. Various events detained me in the forest during the whole night."

"But how came she in the forest too?" demanded Fulmer, gravely; for the frankness of Chartley's manner had produced some effect.

"I must pause one moment to consider," replied Chartley, "whether I can answer that question without a breach of faith to others.--Yes, I can. The Lady Iola it was who guided the bishop from the abbey, when it was surrounded and attacked by the king's soldiery; and, in so doing, her return was cut off."

"But how came that task to fall upon her?" again demanded Fulmer.

"That, my good lord, I can hardly tell you," answered Chartley; "for, to say the truth, and the mere truth, I do not rightly know. There is some secret communication between the abbey and the wood. Stay, I remember; I have heard the bishop say, that many years ago, he saved the life of the last Lord Calverly, petitioning for his pardon, and obtaining it, when he was taken in one of the battles of those times. This is most probably why the task was assigned to the lady, and why she undertook it."

Fulmer mused gloomily.

"Perhaps so," he said at length; "but yet, my lord, methinks some warmer words than mere courtesy must have been used, to induce the stay of so young and inexperienced a lady, alone in the forest, for a whole night, with a gay nobleman such as yourself."

"Warmer *things*, if your lordship likes," cried Chartley, indignantly; "for, by the Lord that lives, the thing that kept her there was seeing the houses burning on the abbey green. That was warm enough. For shame, Lord Fulmer! Have you consorted with people who teach men to think there is no virtue in woman, no honour in man? But let me do the lady justice. She was not alone with me. My Arab servant was with us all the time--followed us close--sat with us in the old castle hall; and I do not think ten sentences were spoken which he did not hear. But, my good lord, since such is your humour, I will not baulk you. I have borne this long enough. Be it as you say. Wait but a few days, to let your conduct of last night pass from men's minds, and I will afford you cause of quarrel to your heart's content, in which this lady's name shall bear no share. Then we will void our differences in the eye of all the world, as soon as I am no longer a prisoner in ward. There is my hand on it."

Fulmer took it and grasped it tight, with a feeling of rancorous satisfaction, which he could hardly conceal.

"Then for the present we are friends, my good lord," he said; "and I will take care that nothing in my manner shall betray our secret, while waiting your good pleasure."

"As you will," answered Chartley. "Put on what seeming you may like. I wear no vizard. But hark, there are the horses in the court-yard; and here comes Sir William Arden, just in time to go with us."

"In order to do what?" asked Sir William Arden, looking from the one to the other, with an inquiring glance.

"To hunt," replied Chartley. "Are you not going?"

"Oh yes," answered the knight. "Though 'tis somewhat early in the year. Yet I suppose my good Lord Calverly's bucks are always fat, so let us to horse."

Descending the stairs of the tower, they speedily reached the court-yard, and found all prepared for their expedition. The abbess was already on her mule, Sir Edward Hungerford in the saddle, looking down the length of his leg and thigh, in evident admiration of his own fair proportions, Lord Calverly by the side of his horse, and huntsmen and grooms, a goodly train.

Iola and Constance stood together to witness the departure of the party, having declined to join the hunt; and Sir William Arden paused for a moment or two, by the side of the latter, while the rest mounted their horses.

The morning was fine, the scent lay well upon the dewy ground; a fat solitary buck had been marked down in a covert, about two miles off; and he was soon found, and the dogs put upon his steps. He took straight across the chase, towards some other woods, at the distance of four or

five miles; and it was a beautiful sight to see the noble beast darting along across the open country, with the dogs in full cry behind him, and the troop of gay lords and ladies following. Chartley gave way to all the spirit of the hunter, and galloped on, sometimes talking to Lord Calverly, or Sir William Arden, and sometimes to Lord Fulmer. To the latter his manner was courteous and easy; nor did the slightest embarrassment appear in it, although he caught the eyes of his elder friend fixed upon him, with a suspicious expression, whenever any conversation took place between him and his rival. When the buck was slain, however, and the morning's sport over, Sir William Arden took the first opportunity of riding up to his young friend's side, and saying, in a low tone, "I hope, my lord, you are not going to play the fool."

"Not more than usual, Arden," replied Chartley. "Have I shown by any signs that the disease is aggravated?"

"Not that I perceive," answered Sir William Arden; "but, just as I was coming away, that dear little girl said something to me, I could not very well understand, about quarrels between you and that young lord there."

"Oh no," replied Chartley. "I will not quarrel with him; quarrels we have had none since an early hour this morning. A few civil words only have passed since; and of them more anon. But who comes here, spurring so sharp to meet us? He seems to have a tabard on."

"Nay, how should I know?" demanded Sir William Arden, almost sharply; "if it be a herald, I trust he does not come to defy Lord Calverly in the king's name."

Almost as he spoke, a splendidly dressed pursuivant rode up, and demanded aloud which was the Lord Fulmer.

"I am he!" replied the young nobleman, spurring forward his horse. "What want you with me, Master Pursuivant?"

"Merely to bear you his majesty's commands," said the pursuivant, "to join him at York, where he now lies, without any delay. Not finding your lordship at the castle, I rode on to seek you, as the king's commands were urgent; and I must return with you."

Lord Fulmer's countenance fell. "Am I to understand then that I go as a prisoner?" he demanded.

"Not in the least, my lord," answered the officer. "I believe it is in order to consult you upon some affairs, that the king sent for your lordship; but he ordered me strictly to find you out, wherever you might be, and to return in your lordship's train to York."

"Well then, for York, if it needs must be so," said Lord Fulmer, with an expression of much discontent upon his face. "I could have wished the command had come at some other time. Perhaps, I had better ride on before," he continued, turning to Lord Calverly, "in order to prepare my people for this unexpected journey."

"Perhaps so, my dear lord," replied the old peer. "We should always in this world take time and fortune by the forelock, otherwise we shall never catch them, if they get on in front. I know the king intends to honour you to the utmost," he added, in a low tone; "so away at once, and show your zeal and promptness. There is nothing pleases a king so much as to see diligence in obeying his commands."

"I would fain speak with you for some moments before I go, my noble lord," said Fulmer in the same low voice; but the old nobleman made a sign of impatience, saying aloud, "No time for that, no time for that. You will be back in a day or two at the farthest."

"Then I must write," answered the young man, in a whisper; but, raising his tone, he added, "Farewell, all gentlemen and ladies who are likely to be gone before my return. My Lord Chartley, I will not bid you adieu, as doubtless I shall find you here for some days to come."

"By my faith, I fear so," answered Chartley, laughing. "His grace the king, when he has got his grasp upon a man's neck, is not famous for slackening it, as long as there is any head above; but I wait his good pleasure in all humility, trusting that you will bring me good tidings, and use your best eloquence to work my liberation."

"I will, upon my honour," answered Fulmer, earnestly; and then, turning his horse, he rode away.

There is nothing which should teach man virtue, if not religion, more than the study of history; not by showing that the result of evil action is punishment to the ill-doer, for such is frequently not the case, in this world at least, unless we take into account the moral suffering which the consciousness of wickedness must produce: but by showing in the strongest possible light the vanity of human wishes, the futility of human efforts, when directed in any other course than that which leads to imperishable happiness hereafter. We often see the man who lies, and cheats, and grinds the poor, and deceives the unwary, and wrongs the confiding, obtain the pitiful yellow dust which has caused so much misery on earth. We see the grander knave who plots, and fights, and overcomes, and triumphs, who desolates fertile lands, and sheds the blood of thousands, obtain power, that phantom which has led statesmen, priests, and kings, through oceans of fraud, falsehood, and gore. We see them all passing away like a vain shadow, snatched from the midst of trickery or strife, of disappointment or success, of prosperity or adversity, before the cup of joy is tasted, before effort has been crowned by fruition. A few lines of history, a brief record of censure or panegyric; then the page is turned, and all is over. The mighty and the good things last; and the spirits of those who wrought them are gone on high.

Richard walked in the gallery of the castle at York, his arms crossed upon his chest, his eyes bent down upon the ground, his brain busy, rejoining the broken threads of policy; as great a man perhaps as a bad man can ever be. He was mighty as a soldier, mighty as a politician, almost sublime in the vast wide-stretching reach of his subtlety. Through life he had played a game almost against all odds; and he had won every stake. He had seen those who stood between him and the light swept away; he had contrived to remove obstacle after obstacle; he had crushed or aided to crush all the enemies of his house; he had imposed the silence of death, or the chains of exile, upon all personal opponents; and he had often succeeded in the still more perilous strife with the passions and the feelings of his own heart; for, because he was ambitious, and all things gave place to ambition, we have no right to conclude that his heart was without feelings even of a gentle and a kindly nature. Ambition was the idol, and to it the heart sacrificed its children.

As he thus walked, a man in a black robe, with a velvet cap upon his head, which he doffed as soon as he saw the king, entered the gallery. His step roused Richard from his reverie; and, looking up, he exclaimed:

"Ha! How is the queen?"

"No better, I grieve to say, your grace," replied the physician.

"And when no better--worse," replied Richard, thoughtfully, "because a day nearer the grave. These days, these days, they are but the fevered pulses of the great malady, which, in the end, slays us all.--No better?--What is her complaint?"

"'Tis a pining wasting sickness, sire," replied the physician, "proceeding from the spirits more than the blood. It has consumed her ever since the death of the prince was announced to her so rashly, which may have occasioned a curdling of the juices, and rendered them no longer fit to support life. I grieve to say, the case is one of serious danger, if her grace cannot be persuaded to take more nourishment, and to cast off this black melancholy."

"How long may it last?" asked Richard, gravely.

"Not very long," replied the physician; "I trust art may do something to correct and alleviate; but cure nothing can, unless the lady use her own powers to overcome this despondency and gloom."

"Well!" said Richard; and, at the same time, he bowed his head as an indication that the physician might depart.

"It is strange," he thought, as soon as he was alone again. "Not long since, I should have heard such tidings with a sigh. Ann is dying, that is clear. How beautiful I remember her--how sweetly beautiful! Yet weak, very weak. The white and red roses might have adorned her cheek; but she should not have entwined them in her marriage bed. I loved her--yes, I loved her well--I love her still, though her weakness frets me. Yet England must have heirs. The crown must not become a football at my death, to be kicked from John de la Pole to Harry of Richmond. At my death! When will that be, I wonder? Ay, who can say? There hangs the cloud. No eye can penetrate it. Turn which way we will, fate's thick dark curtain is around us, and no hand can raise it up; but we must go on till we touch it. 'Tis well, perchance. Yet did one but know when that hour of death is to come, how many things might we not do, how many things might we leave undone. Laborious plans, vast enterprises, schemes that require long long years to perfect, might all be laid aside, and our energies fixed upon the period that is ours. We work in the dark, and half our work is vain. Well, well, time will show; and our labours must not be imperfect, because we know not the result. Yes, with this ever-ready fate yawning before me, nought must be delayed. Ann is dying, that is clear. Had it not been so, perhaps it might have been necessary to put her from me. Rome is an indulgent mother; and the sacrifice of a few dozen lollards, together with some small share of gold, would have found favour for a divorce. But she is dying, and that at least is spared. My brother's daughter must be her successor. I will move at Rome for the dispensation at once. And the lady too? But no fear of her. She is ready and coming enough. She will have children surely,

or she will belie her father and mother. Heaven, what a progeny of them, while I had but one son! Who goes there without?"

"'Tis I, sire," replied Sir Richard Ratcliffe; appearing at the door.

"Ah, Ratcliffe, come hither," said the king. "The queen is very ill, Ratcliffe--dying, her physicians tell me."

"Your Grace must bear Heaven's will patiently," replied the courtier.

"I will so," answered Richard; "but we must foresee events, Ratcliffe. The queen is dying. Men will say that I poisoned her; think you not so, Ratcliffe?"

"It matters little what men say, sire," answered the other, "since we well know that half they say is false."

"More than half," answered Richard. "Let a man look devout, and do some seemly acts of charity, till he has made a name for the trumpet of the multitude, and he may be luxurious, treacherous, false, avaricious, if he pleases, he shall still have a multitude to speak his praises to the sky. But let another, for some great object, do a doubtful deed, though justified perhaps by the end in view, the whole world will be upon his track, baying like hounds till they have run him down. Every accident that favours him, every event, the mere fruit of chance, that he takes advantage of, will be attributed to design and to his act. No man will die, whom he could wish removed, but what mankind will say, he poisoned him; no enemy will fall by the sword of justice, but it will be a murder; no truth will be told favouring him, but a falsehood will be found in it, and his best acts and highest purposes will be made mean by the mean multitude. Well, it matters not. We must keep on our course. While I hold the truncheon I will rule; and these turbulent nobles shall find that, slander me as they will, they have a master still. Oh, if Heaven but grant me life, I will so break their power, and sap their influence, that the common drudges of the cities, the traders who toil and moil after their dirty lucre, shall stamp upon the coronets of peers, and leave them but the name of the power which they have so long misused. But I must secure my house upon the throne. The queen is dying, Ratcliffe--I must have heirs, man, heirs."

Ratcliffe smiled meaningly, but replied not; for to mistake his purposes, while seeming to divine them, was somewhat dangerous with Richard.

The king remained in thought for a moment or two, and then enquired, in an altered tone--

"Who is in the castle?"

Ratcliffe looked at him in some surprise; for his question was not as definite as usual, and Richard went on to say--

"I heard that the princess Mary, of Scotland, had arrived last night. I sent too for Lord Fulmer. I will not have that marriage go forward till I am sure; and, if they dare to disobey me, let them beware."

"He is not yet arrived, sire," answered Ratcliffe; "but there has been hardly time. The princess, however, came last night. She went first to London by sea, it seems, and has since followed your grace hither. She has just returned to her apartments from visiting the queen."

"Ha! Has she been there?" said Richard. "That had been better not; but I will go and see her. Let some one go forward to say I wait upon her highness. We must have this marriage concluded speedily, betwixt the Duke of Rothsay and my niece Anne. Then, Harry of Richmond, thou hast lost a hand; and a Scotch hand is hard, as we have found sometimes. Go, good Ratcliffe, go to her yourself."

Ratcliffe immediately retired; and, after meditating for a few minutes longer, Richard followed him. He found two servants waiting at the door of the room to which he directed his steps, together with his attached though somewhat unscrupulous friend and counsellor, Ratcliffe, who had delivered his message and retired from the presence of the princess. The door was immediately thrown open, one of the servants saying, in a loud voice, "The king;" and Richard entered with a calm, quiet, graceful step, as unlike the man which the perverted statements of his enemies have taught us to imagine him as possible.

Seated at the farther end of the room, with two or three young women standing round her, was a lady apparently of some six or seven and thirty years of age--perhaps older, but she seemed no more--whose beauty could hardly be said to have been touched by the hand of time. The expression of her face was mild and melancholy; but yet there was something high and commanding in it too. Her dress was very plain, without ornament of any kind; and the colour was sombre, though not exactly that of mourning. She rose when the king entered, and took a step forward in front of her attendants, while Richard hastened on at a quicker pace, and taking her hand courteously, pressed his lips upon it; after which he led her back to her chair. The ladies around hurried to bring forward a seat for the king of England; but he remained standing by the side of the princess, for a moment or two, inquiring after her health and her journey. She answered briefly, but with courtesy, saying, that she had preferred to travel by sea, rather than cross the border, on both sides of which were turbulent and lawless men.

"I have come, my lord the king," she continued, "with full powers to negotiate and conclude the terms of the treaty already proposed between your grace and my beloved brother, for the marriage of my nephew and your niece. You may think it strange that he should choose a woman for an ambassador; but, as you know, I begged the office; and as you kindly seconded my views, by the hint contained in your letter, he was content to trust me."

"I could do no less than give the hint, as knight and gentleman, when I knew your wishes," replied Richard; "but, to say truth, dear lady, I almost feared to yield to them. It is nothing new to see princesses ruling states and guiding negotiations; and, from all my own experience, I should say, that strong must be the head and resolute the heart which can resist their eloquence, their beauty, and their gentleness. I always therefore fear to meet a lady as a diplomatist; but I could not refuse when you laid on me your commands."

"Yet I fear," said Mary, "that those commands, as you term them, were somehow made known to my brother or his ministers; for I find that several messengers were sent to England before I departed myself; and, the day before I set out, an old servant of mine, John Radnor, whom I always fancied faithful, and whom your grace knew right well, left me, with letters or messages, I am told, for England, which were kept secret from me, and I have never seen him more."

"Nor have I," said Richard, gravely; "but when we are alone we will talk farther."

"These are faithful friends," said the princess, looking round to the young ladies who were with her; but, marking a slight smile which curled Richard's lip, she added: "If your grace has matters of secrecy, they shall go. Leave us, girls."

The king and the princess remained perfectly silent till the room was cleared; but then Richard said:

"We, in high stations, dear lady, never know who are really faithful friends, till we have tried them long and in many ways. You said but now, that you fancied this John Radnor was your faithful servant. Now this surprises me not," he added, in a tone of gallantry, not unmingled with sarcasm, "for I always looked upon him as mine; and he, who is my faithful servant, must be yours."

The princess gazed at him for a moment with a look of surprise; but she then bent her eyes down, saying, "I think I understand your highness. Was he a spy?"

"Nay, that is a harsh term," answered Richard. "He was not exactly a spy. Peasants and franklins, when there is a great man in the neighbourhood, will bring him presents or offerings of no great worth, on the sweet certainty of receiving something in return more valuable than that they bring. Thus did John Radnor with intelligence. When he learned aught that was likely to be well paid, he brought it to him who was likely to pay him best. But let us speak of him no more; for his tale-telling mouth is closed in the dull earth. He was killed by accident, on that very journey of which you speak; but his letters were brought on by some posts of mine, who followed close behind him. All the packets that you have sent me, within the last year, have reached me safely, I believe--those which Radnor brought, delicately fingered indeed, and those which came by other hands, either intact, or resealed with greater skill. I have executed your commands to the letter, however, without attending to the recommendations of others, which sometimes accompanied them. But I grieve to say I have had no success. Many are the inquiries I have made; but not a vestige, not a trace is to be found."

The princess cast down her eyes, and crushed a bright tear drop between their jetty fringes. "Nevertheless," she answered, after a moment's silence, "I will pursue the search myself, though not doubting either your grace's kindness or your diligence. It is hardly possible that his companions in arms should not mark the place where so distinguished a man lies, even by a stone."

"He was indeed," said Richard, "the flower of courtesy and the pride of knighthood. I remember the good earl well, just before he went to Denmark, to bring home your brother's bride; and seldom have I seen one so worthy to live in long remembrance, or to be mourned by the widowed heart with such enduring grief as your noble husband, the earl of Arran. Did I know where he lies, I myself would erect a monument to his memory, although he took part with the enemies of my house."

While he had been pronouncing this panegyric upon her dead husband, the eyes of the princess, countess of Arran, had overflowed with tears; but she answered when he ceased, saying--

"That were indeed generous; and I beseech you show to me equal generosity in assisting me to pursue my search."

"To the utmost of my power will I aid you," replied Richard, "although I am sure it must be in vain. Let me, however, ask what leads you to believe that he still lives?"

"Nay, I believe not," replied the princess. "It is something less than belief--a doubt, a clinging hope. Perchance, had I seen his dead corpse, I might have felt somewhat of the same. I might have fancied that there was warmth about the heart, and tried to bring back life into its seat,

though life was quite extinct. Such is woman's love, my lord. But you may ask what has nourished even this faint hope, when twelve long years have passed, and when I received authentic news of his death in the last skirmish of the war. That man, John Radnor, swore that he saw him dead upon the field. The others who were with him, in some sort, corroborated the same story; but they were not quite so sure. My brother, all his court, affected to believe that it was true--to have no doubt thereof. But yet, if they were so thoroughly convinced, why, when they wanted me to wed another, did they press so eagerly for a divorce at the court of Rome--a divorce from a dead man! They must, at least, have doubted. Thus they taught me to doubt; and, ere I yield even to my king's authority, I must see and inquire for myself. All I ask is, let me find him living, or find where they buried him. His arms, his look, must have shown, whoever found the body, that he was no ordinary man, to be buried with the common herd on the spot where he fell."

Richard shook his head, saying, "Alas, lady, you know not what a field of battle is. The blows and bloody wounds, the trampling of the flying multitude, the horses' hoofs, will often deface every feature, and leave the dead body no resemblance to the living man; and, as for arms, there is always hovering round a field of battle a foul flock of human vultures, ready to despoil the dead, the moment that the tide of contest ebbs away."

"But this was a mere skirmish," replied the lady.

"I know, I know," said Richard. "He was hurrying across the country with a few score Lancastrian spears, to join Margaret at Tewksbury, when he was encountered by Sir Walter Gray, with a superior force. But think you, had he been alive, no tidings would have reached you from himself, no message, no letter?"

"That he should have sent none would indeed be strange," replied the lady; "but you know not, my lord, how I have been watched and guarded. I know that some of my letters from Denmark were actually stopped; and, till within the last two years, I have been almost a prisoner. Nay, more, I find they spread a report that I was married to the earl of Hamilton, amongst many other strokes of policy to bend me to their wishes. All these things have made me doubt. 'Tis true, I cannot fully give way to hope; but yet I perceive clearly they themselves do not feel sure Arran is dead."

"Well, lady, my best assistance you shall have," answered Richard. "All sheriffs of counties, and their officers, shall be commanded to give you aid--ay, and to prosecute the search themselves; and to monasteries and abbeys you will need no commendation."

"Thanks, gracious prince," replied the lady; and Richard, with an air of real kindness, answered:

"No thanks are merited, where the pleasure received is far more than that given. Would I could aid you farther!"

And then, changing the conversation, he added: "You have been to see my poor unhappy queen, I find. She is sadly ill, poor Anne; and the physicians give but very little hope."

"She looks ill indeed," replied the princess; "yet, I trust that care and skilful tending may restore her."

Richard shook his head, and fell into a fit of thought, or seemed to do so.

"Her heart has received a wound that will never heal," he answered, at length, with a sigh. "Man's nature resists these things; but woman's yields. Always a delicate flower, this last storm has crushed her. Our beautiful boy, our Edward, our only one, to be snatched from us in this sudden and fearful way! It was enough, surely it was enough, to break a heart so tender as hers. Alas, lady, I must not indulge in hope. But this conversation unmans me," he continued. "I am not fit now to discuss matters of urgent business. To-night, lady, to-night we will talk of the marriage of your nephew with my niece. At present, I can think of nothing but my dead boy, and my dying wife. Farewell, then, farewell for the present. Alas, poor lady! It has fallen hard upon her;" and, turning sharply away, he quitted the room, muttering words to himself, as if solely occupied with the fate of his wife, and the loss of his son.

The moment he had closed the door, however, he took the arm of Ratcliffe, who was still in waiting, and led him along the corridor, speaking to him in a low voice.

"We must conclude this matter speedily," he said--"the marriage, Ratcliffe. I mean the marriage. I will have you go yourself."

"I am ready this moment, sire," answered Ratcliffe. "But tell me where I am to go, and my foot shall be in the stirrup within half an hour."

"Where?" exclaimed Richard, in a tone of surprise, "why, to the sanctuary at Westminster, to be sure. I must have you deal with our good sister, Elizabeth of Woodville, the queen dowager, and persuade her to give her girls into my safe custody."

"That were difficult, very difficult, my lord," replied Ratcliffe.

"Not a whit," said Richard. "Be liberal of promises; say that I will wed her daughters to the noblest in the realm. Tell her, my own child being dead, my brother's children become objects of love and care, instead of fear. Assign them liberal pensions--ay, and give the same unto the queen their mother. Tell her, her kinsmen shall be well treated and restored to their estates and honours, and contrive to whisper in the ear of my fair niece Elizabeth, that, were Richard free, as he soon may be, he would set her on the throne of England. Dost thou understand me, Ratcliffe?"

"Ay, gracious lord, right well," replied Ratcliffe. "I have never wanted zeal; and, if zeal can do aught, within ten days the princesses shall be in your grace's hand."

"Zeal! Thou hast more than zeal, Ratcliffe," exclaimed Richard. "Zeal is the gallant horse that bears us on full speed. Wit is the hand that guides him. Why look'st thou thoughtful, man?"

"I was but thinking, sire," answered Ratcliffe, "that it were well to send off messengers to the pope. To wed your niece, you must have a dispensation. Rome has no pity for love's impatience, little consideration for exigencies of state. 'Twere well to have matters begun and carried on at once, with that slow court, or we shall have objections, and at first refusals."

"Refusals!" said Richard, with a bitter smile. "There are still lollards in England, Ratcliffe; and by St. Paul, if he delay or hesitate, his triple crown may lose its brightest gem. We are a devout son of the church, my friend; but still we must be tender to our subjects. See the bishop of London, when you are there, and bid him cease all flame and faggot denunciations. Tell him that reasons of state require us to be tolerant at least for the time, and insinuate that we intend to pass an act for the relief of men's consciences."

"He will send the news to Rome, sire," said Ratcliffe, with some hesitation.

"Let him," answered Richard, with a meaning smile; "'tis what I would have! I would provide something to give up, lest Rome's demands should be too unreasonable. A little fear, too, is salutary. So see him, see him, and put the matter as I have said, strongly enough to create alarm, not strongly enough to give offence. But the queen and her daughter must be first dealt with. Let me have her forth from sanctuary, and my wife no longer in the way between us; and I will pass over papal dispensations, and laugh at Roman thunders. You have your directions, away."

Thus saying, he turned to the door of his cabinet, round which several persons were waiting.

"Lord Fulmer has arrived, your grace, and is waiting below in the green chamber," said one of the attendants.

"Bring him hither," answered Richard; "and mark me, if any news come from the coast, give the messengers instant admission;" and he entered the cabinet.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Richard had seated himself, and taken up a paper from the table, which he was perusing attentively, when Lord Fulmer entered. He laid down the letter instantly, however, and gave the young nobleman the most flattering reception.

"This is kind indeed, my lord," he said, extending his hand to him. "I did not think the journey could have been performed so quickly. It shows that you look upon the king's service as paramount indeed, when you can quit your lady love thus, at a moment's notice, to render him assistance."

Unwittingly the monarch touched upon a tender point, as the reader is aware, and Fulmer felt in painfully. A cloud came upon his brow; and he replied, somewhat coldly, that he was always ready to serve the king.

"So, so," thought Richard, who was a great master of looks, and a great observer of them, "this young man is moody. I suppose my messenger arrived just in time. We must put a stop to this."

"I am glad to hear it is so, my lord," he said aloud, in a somewhat proud and kingly tone; "for while we can, as you know, curb with a strong hand the turbulent and the rebellious, we are ever willing to shower honours and rewards upon those who serve us zealously and faithfully."

"The only reward I desire, your grace," replied Fulmer, "is your kind permission to complete my marriage with the Lady Iola St. Leger as speedily as may be. I and my family have ever been faithful servants to the house of York. We have never changed our faction; and to your grace's

person you know I am attached. I trust then that I may have your permission."

"Ay, and much more," answered Richard. "There are intentions in my bosom towards you, and my good Lord Calverly, which need not be mentioned; but they will bear fruit--they will bear fruit;" and he nodded his head significantly. "As soon as this expedition is over, on which I would have you go,--I mean into Dorsetshire, to guard the coast there for a few days, and put down the turbulent spirit of the people in those parts, your marriage shall take place."

"May it not take place as I go thither, sire?" asked Fulmer, with an impatient tone. "I must have a day or two for preparation. 'Tis but the last ceremonies of the church are wanting; and I know that I shall have Lord Calverly's good will. I will set off immediately, when she is my own."

"What," exclaimed Richard, "has not my Lord Calverly told you that we propose to be present ourselves? He concealed it from you, to make it a pleasant surprise. No, no, this business admits of no delay. These turbulent peasants must be put down, before their discontent becomes dangerous; and you must away at once."

"May I speak plainly to your grace?" demanded Fulmer.

Richard bowed his head gravely; and the other went on, in a somewhat mortified tone.

"In quitting Chidlow castle now, for your grace's service," he said, "I leave a somewhat dangerous rival with my promised bride."

"A rival!" said Richard. "Who may that be? I thought she was contracted to you."

"It is so, sire," answered Fulmer; "but we all know that no contracts are held very valid, by some men, against the power of love."

"My brother Edward thought so," answered Richard, with a sarcastic turn of the lip. "Who may this rival be, I say?"

"No other than the Lord Chartley," answered Fulmer, "whom your grace has placed in ward with the lady's uncle."

"What, that gay youth again!" exclaimed Richard, with a laugh. "By my faith he meets us at every turn. But he shall be looked to--make your mind easy--he shall be looked to. Only serve us faithfully and well, and the lady's hand shall be yours, whoever may gainsay it."

"Her hand were of little value to me, my good lord and sovereign," replied Fulmer, boldly, "if her heart be given to another."

"Her heart!" said Richard, with one of those low, cold, withering laughs, so painful to an enthusiastic mind; "well, well, be you easy, this gay fisherman of hearts, this Chartley, shall be removed in a week or two, to some other place."

Fulmer was just in the act of muttering to himself--"In a week or two!" when the door of the cabinet was opened; and a gentleman in dusty apparel entered.

"They bade me come in, sire," he said, in a blunt tone, "though the news I bear is not a fair exchange for a gracious welcome. The earl of Oxford, with some other gentlemen of repute, has broken out of Ham castle, and has taken the way to Brittany."

Richard smiled; and, seeing that the gentleman had something more to add, he said--

"Go on."

"It is but a rumour," answered the other; "but, when at Dover, tidings were brought, that Sir John Fortescue, one of your officers in Calais, with twelve young gentlemen of good stock, had followed the same course."

"Ha!" said Richard, in a sterner tone. "Is this so wide spread? But it matters not," he added the moment after, with the smile returning to his lip. "I have the wasp in my gauntlet; and he cannot sting, but die."

"There was much turbulence in Kent too, as I rode along," said the blunt messenger.

Richard mused for some moments, and then said--

"It is not comfortable news, Sir Arthur. Nevertheless be you welcome. Is there anything else, you have to say?"

"No, my liege," answered the old knight, "what I have had to say is bad enough; but, as I came along, not three miles from York, I passed a limber young gentleman, on a weary horse. I have seen him in John Hutton's train; and he told me that he had ridden post, from a place called Lyme in Dorset, whither he had come in a fishing-boat, to bear your grace tidings from Brittany."

The news seemed to affect Richard more than all the rest; and starting up he exclaimed--

"Ha! Call me a groom, there!"

A groom was instantly called; and the king demanded, gazing at him with an eager eye--"Has any one arrived from Brittany?"

"Not that I know of, sire," replied the man; "but there was some one rode into the court just now."

"Bring him hither, instantly," said Richard; and, seating himself again at the table, he gnawed the side of his hand with his front teeth.

"Might I venture to say a word, sire?" asked Lord Fulmer.

"No, sir, no!" exclaimed Richard, vehemently, waving his hand for silence, and then resuming his bitter meditation.

At the end of a few minutes, a young gentleman covered with dust, pale, and evidently sinking with fatigue, was introduced into the cabinet; and the king, fixing his eyes upon him, demanded--"What news?--You are Sir John Hutton's nephew, if I mistake not."

"The same, my liege," replied the young man, in a feeble tone. "Would that my uncle had been still in Brittany, methinks he had watched better."

"Speak, speak," said the king, in as calm a voice as he could command. "Some mischief has happened--say what has gone amiss."

"The earl of Richmond, my gracious lord, has escaped from Vannes," replied the young man. "He was pursued with all speed, tracked by his own dog; but he reached the gates of Angers just as the duke's men were at his heels."

Richard sat for a moment as if stupified. Then turning fiercely to Fulmer, he exclaimed, "Is this a time to talk of marriages? To horse, Lord Fulmer, and away. Your instructions shall be ready in an hour. Serve the king well, and the brightest lady in all the land shall be yours, if you but ask her. Fail, and as I live I will give her to another. By Heaven, we will take hostages of all men; there is too little faith on earth. The lady's hand for the best doer! Till then, I'll keep her sure. Away, let me hear no more!"

Fulmer dared not express the feeling which these words called up, but hastened from the room, with a flushed brow and cheek, while Richard, leaning his head upon his hand, muttered once or twice, "'Tis time to buckle on our armour."

The two gentlemen who had brought him the intelligence which had so moved him remained standing before him without receiving the slightest notice, for some five minutes, though one was hardly able to stand from fatigue, and both were somewhat alarmed at the absent and unusual mood into which the king was plunged. His face was agitated, while he thus thought, with a thousand shades of emotion. Now he bit his lip, and fixed his keen eye upon the floor; now his brow contracted, and his lip quivered; now he raised his eyes to the fretted and painted ceiling over head, with a sort of vacant look, from which all expression was banished; and when he at length ended this fit of meditation with a loud laugh, both the spectators feared his powerful mind had become affected, by the disappointment he had lately undergone. They tried, indeed, to suppress all signs of wonder; but he seemed to read their thoughts, the moment his spirit was recalled to the immediate business of the hour.

"Strange, Sir Arthur," he said, "that the things which--seen through rage and disappointment--are magnified, as in a mist, into giant evils, should, under a moment's calm reflection, diminish to their own pigmy reality. Here now, a minute or two ago, I thought the escape of this earl of Richmond from Brittany, and the reception in France, a mighty great disaster, the earl of Oxford's flight from Ham a portentous incident. Now it moves my merriment to think how I would whip the dame of Derby's beggar boy back to his Breton almshouse, if he dared to set his foot within this realm of England. By holy St. Paul, I would give him safe conduct over the narrow seas, and not place a galliot to impede his coming, for the mere jest of scourging him like a truant back to school, but that our realm has bled too much already, and that I hold the life of every subject dear. Who is this Richmond? Where is his name in arms? On what fields has he gained glory? Where learned he the art of war? And is it such a man as this shall come to battle for a crown, with one whose cradle was a corslet, his nursery a bloody fight, his schools Hexham, and Barnet, and Tewksbury, his pedagogues York, and Salisbury, and Warwick and Edward? Where are his generals? Will Dorset--feeble, vacillating, frippery Dorset, lead the van, and order the battle? Methinks, it is indeed meet matter for merriment; and I may well laugh, to think that I should have given an anxious look towards the movements of this Tudor boy. Say, my good friend, have all the fugitive lords gone with him into France? But you are weary. Sit you in that chair--nay, the king, wills it. Now answer me."

"No, my gracious liege," replied young John Hutton; "he gave them all the slip, I hear; sent them to the duke's court, to compliment him on his recovery; and thus having lulled suspicion, by the sacrifice of his friends, he fled away with only four in company?"

"Is the good duke then well again?" asked Richard, with a slight frown once more contracting

his brow; "what news of Master Landais?"

"I heard he was right well, sire, and in high favour with his lord," replied the young man; "but I stayed not to learn all that was passing; for I thought your grace had been ill-served, and, entering a fishing-boat at once, I came over, and took horse. I have not lain in a bed since; for, although evil news never make a welcome messenger, yet I fancied your Highness' service might be benefitted by early tidings; and I thought that if it should be really so, your frown would prove lighter to me than your thanks for better tidings."

"You did well," said Richard, gravely, "you did right well, young man; and shall not go unrewarded. Weinants has been outwitted; over discreet men often are. Now go and seek repose; and remember, take your place at the board of our gentlemen of the privy chamber, till I can place you better."

The young man bowed, with a grateful look, and withdrew. Then turning to the other, Richard said, "Are you too over-weary, Sir Arthur?"

"Faith not I, my lord the king," replied the old knight. "I am hardened. My old clay has been beat to such consistence with hard knocks, that it cracks not easily."

"Well, we will give you till to-morrow for repose," said Richard, "then, good, faith, you must back to Kent, and strive to quiet the turbulent folks. You shall have letters, and authority. 'Tis pity no hemp grows there; but you will find ropes at Dartford--you understand me."

When Richard was once more left alone, he strode up and down the room for several minutes, in much agitation. "No more losses!" he said at length, "No more losses! They must not be suffered to fall off. This marriage must go forward quickly, once more to heal the breaches in the house of York. They shall not be patched with Tudor clay. We must keep all, gain more. This young Lord Fulmer, I was somewhat stern with him in my haste. I must smooth that down before he goes. But I will keep my fair hostage for his faith. Chartley--there is great power and wealth and many friends there. He must be won. Perchance this heiress may be a meet bait for him too. Let them contend for her in the king's service. At all events, while I have the pretty decoy in my own hand, I can whistle either bird back to the lure."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

It was like a cloud passing away from a summer sky. It was as when a weary traveller laying down the heavy burden he has carried far, by the side of the road, stretches his freed limbs in an interval of rest. Such was the effect of Lord Fulmer's departure from Chidlow. Iola's light and buoyant heart bounded up from beneath the load; all her bright and happy spirits returned; the smile came back to her lip; and, though the rose took longer to expand upon her cheek again, yet, after a night of sweet calm rest, some part of the bloom had returned.

Constance was never very gay; but she was cheerful. Chartley felt that a source of constant irritation and annoyance was removed; and, with the happy facility of youth, he prepared to enjoy the present hour, careless of fortune's turn the next. Even the abbess, though she knew little or nothing of what had been passing in the hearts around her, seemed to share in the relief, and laughed and talked in merry mood, especially with Chartley, who was an object of high admiration to her. Clear-sighted Sir William Arden, who had seen right well that Chartley and his rival could not go on long in the same dwelling without danger of bloodshed, felt his apprehensions removed; and Sir Edward Hungerford remarked:--

"Well, I am glad Fulmer is gone; for he was turning marvellous fierce, and he wore such an ill-appointed doublet. It was painful to see the blue and yellow, and made one think of some strange bird."

Only the good pompous lord of the castle seemed unchanged; and he, "full of wise saws and modern instances," walked gravely about, reasoning in very trite sort upon all he saw, and lecturing rather than conversing.

Early in the morning of the day after Fulmer's departure, all those who were mere guests, invited for a day or two, took their leave and left the castle. The abbess proposed to return to her cure on the following morning; and Lord Calverly was laying out various plans for making the heavy time pass lightly, when a courier arrived with letters from the king's lieutenant in the county.

"Now good faith," he said, "this is unfortunate; for it breaks all my purposes. This noble lord

here requires my immediate presence, to consult as to the best and most approved means of preserving peace and tranquillity in the county. He knows I have some experience in such things; and, though my judgment be but a poor judgment, yet he has confidence therein. Strange stories are current, he says, of meetings of peasantry by night, and strangers coming from distant parts to be present thereat. God forefend that there should be new troubles coming! But I must to horse and away. I will return before night; and, in the mean time, lords and ladies, you must amuse yourselves as best you may. There are fish in the stream, deer in the park, chess, dice, and other games in the little hall, instruments of music in the gallery, lutes, citherns, and the rest, so that you have means of entertainment if you seek it; and, good faith, if you are dull I cannot help it; for you know, my Lord Chartley, the call of duty is imperative, and courtesy, which gives place to nothing else, must yield to that."

They were not dull; but how shall I describe the passing of that day? To Chartley and to Iola it was a long draught of the cup of joy. Did they drink too deeply? I almost fear they did. Chartley *resolved* to act in all things prudently, to be calm, quiet, and upon his guard, though courteous and easy, as he would be to any lady in whom he had no interest. Iola *resolved* neither to be cold nor warm in manner towards him, neither to encourage nor to repel, to seek nor to avoid, to let his conduct be the guide of hers, to govern her feelings and to tranquillise her heart.

Oh, resolutions, resolutions! How that heart, which was to be so tranquil, beat, when her uncle rode away, and she felt herself left with him she loved, to pass the hours almost as they would! Heaven knows how they flew. Chartley was often with her. He did not shut himself in his chamber. He did not ride out to hunt, nor walk forth to meditate alone. At first he conversed with her, as they had done at their meeting in the abbey, gaily, cheerfully, with a vein of thought running through the merriment, and a touch of feeling softening the whole. But they were sometimes left alone together; and gradually they began to call up the memories of the past, to talk of scenes and incidents which had occurred, and words which had been spoken during the long adventurous night they had passed in the forest. It was dangerous ground; they felt it shake beneath them; but yet they would not move away. Their hearts thrilled as they spoke. Iola, with the eye of memory, saw Chartley sitting at her feet; and he, in fancy, felt her breath fanning his cheek as her head drooped upon his shoulder in sleep. Oh, how treacherous associations will open the gates of the heart to any enemy that desires to enter! They approached nearer and nearer to subjects which they had determined to avoid; they even spoke of them in circuitous and ambiguous phrases. The words which they uttered did not express their full meaning, but the tones and the looks did; and, by the time that the sun had sunk to within half an hour's journey of the horizon, Iola and Chartley knew that they loved each other, as well as if they had spoken and vowed it a thousand times.

She was agitated, much agitated, it is true, but perhaps less so than he was; and to see why, we must look for a moment into their hearts. Iola felt that in loving him she was doing no wrong, that the contract which bound her to Lord Fulmer was altogether void and invalid, that marriages in infancy, where that mutual and reasonable consent is absent, upon which every contract must be based, were altogether unlawful; and that therefore, morally and religiously, she was as free as if her relations had never unjustly made a promise in her name. It may be that she had been easily convinced--it may be that love for one and disliking for another had smoothed the way for such conviction; but still she was *convinced*; and no consciousness of doing wrong added weight to other emotions. She might contemplate the future with dread; she might gaze upon the coming days as upon a wide sea of tumultuous waves, through which she could see no track, beyond which appeared no shore; and she might tremble lest the billows should overwhelm her. But she felt confident in the protection of Heaven, and sure that she was doing nought to forfeit it.

Not so exactly Chartley. Not alone the future, but the present also, had its darkness for him. He knew not her exact situation; he knew not whether the ceremonies of the church--often in those days performed between mere children, and looked upon, when once performed, as a sacrament, merely requiring an after benediction to be full and complete--had or had not taken place between her and Lord Fulmer. His reason might teach him that such espousals, where neither the heart nor the judgment were consulted, were in themselves wicked and dangerous; but his mind had not yet reached the point of considering them quite invalid. He had been brought up as a strict Roman Catholic. It was the only religion tolerated in his native land; and, although he could not but see that gross corruptions had crept into the church to which he belonged, and that many of the grossest of those corruptions had been made the foundation of dogmas even more dangerous than themselves, yet, not having met with any of the followers of Wickliffe, he had never heard the heresies, the idolatries, or the usurpations of the Roman church fully exposed--nor indeed attacked--till passing through Bohemia, in his return from the East, he had met with some of the disciples of Huss at a small road-side inn. The conversation had been free; for, far from large towns, the doctrines which the council of Constance could not suppress were more boldly spoken; and Chartley heard words which shook his faith in the infallibility of Rome, and made him, determine to inquire and judge for himself at an after period. He had not yet inquired, however; and, even while he gave way to the impulses of the heart, he felt doubtful, fearful of his own conduct. Had such not been the case, the passion in his breast would have found open and undisguised utterance. Dangers and difficulties he would have set at nought; impediments he would have overleaped, with the knowledge that he was loved in return. But now he doubted, as I have said, hesitated, suffered his love to be seen, rather than declared it openly.

The abbess sat embroidering at one end of the hall, while Iola and Chartley stood together in

the oriel window at the other; and Sir William Arden, with the right knee thrown across the left, and his head bent, pored over the miniatures in a richly illuminated manuscript of Monstrelet, lifting his eyes from time to time, with a thoughtful look, towards Chartley and Iola, and thinking, if the truth must be told, that Constance was somewhat long absent. The glow of the evening sun, poured full through the window at which the lovers were standing, concentrated upon them by the stone work; and, both so beautiful and full of grace, they looked in that haze of golden beams like the old pictures of saints in glory. Just at that moment Constance entered the hall with a light step, and a more cheerful look than usual. She too had been reading; and she had found what she sought, truth--truth, which came home to her own heart, and dispelled every doubt and shadow within it. She looked up at the window, as she crossed the hall, and said, in a low sweet voice:

"What a fair evening! The sunset must look beautiful from the ramparts."

"So it must!" exclaimed Iola. "Let us go out and enjoy it. Will you come, dear lady mother?" she added, raising her voice to reach the ear of the abbess.

"No, dear child, no," replied the elder lady, "I must finish this cat's head. I never saw such a troublesome puss in my life;" and she laughed merrily. "I cannot get her whiskers in, all I can do. When I make them black, they look like a spot of ink, and when I make them white, they look like a drop of cream. But go, my children, go. The evening is beautiful; and sunsets and sunrises, and such sort of things, do young people good. Forget not to tell your beads, Iola, as he goes down; for no one can ever tell what his rising may look upon."

Without any other covering of the head than that which they wore in the house, the two girls went forth with Chartley, Sir William starting up and following. It need not be asked how the party divided itself. Ah, it is a pleasant number, four. It does not admit of much variety; but, on most occasions, it is perfect in itself. Happy Iola, how gaily she walked on by Chartley's side, round those same walls which she had trod some evenings before, with a pale cheek and anxious eye, and a heart well nigh despairing. Now all the scene was bright and beautiful, on the one side spreading out the purple glow of evening, on the other, the pale primrose of the west growing fainter at the approach of night, and the golden hills all round crowning themselves with the beams of the departing sun. As if to leave them free room to say all that might be sweet, yet dangerous, to say, Sir William Arden and Constance lingered a good way behind, paused often, once or twice sat down, till Iola and Chartley, circling all round the walls, came back to them again.

What was Sir William Arden doing? I verily believe he was making love in his own peculiar way; for, every now and then, in the midst of smiles at some odd frank speech, a faint blush fluttered over Constance's fair cheek, as if she felt that, in his warmer words, there was an allusion to herself.

Chartley and Iola passed them by, each party so full of their own thoughts as not to notice the other.

"It was indeed," said Chartley, "a night ever to be remembered--at least by me--a night full of sensations new, and deep, and thrilling; sensations known but once in a whole lifetime. Nor do I think that you will ever forget it. Did I not tell you, that it was one of those points of time which raise their heads above the waste of the past, and are seen like a mountain peak, till man is at the end of his journey?"

"It cannot be forgot, indeed," replied Iola, and cast her eyes down thoughtfully.

"Strange words you spoke that night," continued Chartley; "words that to me were then like the mysterious figures upon Egyptian stones, of which I could interpret nothing. Now, alas, I have got the key."

"What words?" demanded Iola. "What words of mine can even from memory produce so sad a tone?" and she looked up in his face, with the feeling of her heart but too plainly written in her eyes.

"You spoke," replied Chartley, "words that have rung in my ear ever since, 'Happy are those who have no ties to bind them!' I now knew of what ties you spoke--" and he added, almost vehemently, "Oh that I could rend them, and scatter them to the winds."

"Chartley!" said Iola, pausing for an instant, and then immediately resuming her walk.

"Forgive me!" said Chartley. "I know I am wrong. I know it is very wrong, even to feel what I feel, and that to speak it is worse. Forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive," replied Iola, in a very low tone. "You have done no wrong, that I know of."

"Oh yes, I have," answered Chartley. "I have agitated and alarmed you by my rash words. You tremble, even now."

"Every wind will move a willow," answered Iola. "If I tremble, Chartley, it is not from what you think; but, I say you have done no wrong, and I mean it."

"What, not to acknowledge love to the wife of another?" said Chartley.

"I, I, his wife!" said Iola, with a start. "No, no, I am not, and never will be. The sin were, if I vowed to love where I cannot love, if I promised what cannot be performed;" and, casting her eyes to the ground again, she clasped her hands together, and walked on by his side in silence.

"What then," said Chartley, after a moment's thought, "has not the church's sanction of your contract been pronounced?"

She remained silent for about a minute, ere she answered; and the many changes which passed over her beautiful countenance, during that short space, are impossible to describe. Then she looked up again, with one of those bright and glorious looks, in which a happy spirit seems to speak out, triumphing over dark thoughts or memories; but still there were drops in her eyes.

"Hear what there exists," she said. "I had little knowledge of it myself till I came here; but this, I now learn, is all. There is a cold parchment, contracting in marriage one Iola St. Leger to one Arnold Lord Fulmer. To it are signed the names of Calverly, Talbot, Bouchier, Savage, and other peers and gentlemen, having some guardianship over, or interest in, those two persons mentioned. But, above all," she added, with a faint smile and a rueful shake of the head, "are two crosses, somewhat crooked, shaken, and unseemly; for, in truth, I think our little hands must have been guided in the making of them, which, as at the side it is testified in clerkly hand, are the signatures of Arnold Lord Fulmer and Iola St. Leger. This is all, Lord Chartley."

"Then you are mine," said Chartley, in a low, deep, eager tone; "then you are mine. Tell me not of obstacles, think me not over bold. Iola would never have uttered what she has, had her heart not been ready to say, Yea; and as for obstacles, I will devour them like a flame."

Iola now trembled more than before.

"Hush, hush!" she said, "Do not speak so vehemently; you frighten me, Chartley. I must beseech you to do nothing rashly. Say nothing to any one at present--nay, not a word. I must entreat, I must beg--and" resuming in a degree her gay tone, she added: "more, I must command, that you interfere not in the least. You are my servant, are you not? Well then, servant, I order you to take no part in this whatever. Fear nothing, Chartley. Light as I seem, gay, as I am, gentle as I would fain be to all, I can be as firm as iron, where I am sure I have right on my side, as I am sure here. I cannot love him. I will not marry him; but the refusal must come from my own lips, and not be spoken by another."

"But they may find means to overbear your will," said Chartley, "unless you have some support--ay, and that support must be a strong arm, a stout heart, and powerful means."

"Should the time ever come when I need it," said Iola, "you shall have instant notice."

"But they may force you into a convent," said Chartley. "That, I believe, is within their power to do. At least, I have heard of several instances where it has been done."

"They would find it difficult with me," replied Iola. "They might force me into a prison, it is true; but vows against my conscience I will never take, to mortal man or to the altar. One thing, perhaps, they can do; for of that I know little. They may take from me these broad lands, and the goodly heritage which my father possessed and forfeited. I am reputed to be their heiress; but doubtless my uncle can take them from me, if I obstinately oppose his will."

"That is not worth a thought," answered Chartley. "Wealth has undoubtedly its value, my Iola; but it is not happiness, and only a small ingredient therein. Let us speak of things of more importance. I cannot but fear you calculate too much upon your strength, your courage, and your power of resistance. But leave the matter to me, and I will contrive to cut the gordian knot of all difficulties, in a very short space of time. There is a plan before my eyes, even now, which could hardly fail us."

"Would you cut that knot, like the Macedonian, with your sword?" said Iola, gazing at him with a meaning look. "No, Chantey, that must not be. If you love me as you say, you will not attempt it. Nay, more, you will trust to me, and to the promise which I make, to call upon you at once, in the moment of need, whenever that moment comes."

"But I may be absent. You may have no means," replied Chartley.

"Ah, I have means and messengers that you know not at," answered Iola gaily, "fairies that will fly like swallows with my messages, elves of the green wood that will track you for me through their darkest bowers. Nay, I am serious, Chartley. What would you think if I were to tell you that even in the midnight, with doors all bolted, barred, and locked, the keys lying by the heavy porter's head, and all the warders snoring in their beds, I can pass forth from this castle, and sport upon the lawns and slopes around, as if it had no walls--nay, that I have done it."

"Then you are a fairy yourself," answered Chartley, "as I have been half inclined to think ere now. But I have your promise; your solemn promise, that nothing shall ever force you, to this detested marriage, and that you will send to me, or give me notice, the moment that my aid is needful--and not delay too long."

"I will," she answered, emphatically. "Methinks you would not find it difficult to guard me once more through the green forest, as you did one night we both remember; and should it be needful, Chartley, so to do, I will then trust as implicitly to your honour as I did before; for Iola will be wholly at your mercy. But I must have promise for promise, and vow for vow. You must assure me that, whatever you see, whatever you hear, you will remain quiescent, and leave the whole decision to myself."

"Then if that youth returns," answered Chartley, "I must shut myself up in my dull tower, and make myself a prisoner indeed."

Iola smiled, saying in a low tone--

"It might perhaps be better--if Chartley cannot rule Chartley. But happily there is no chance of my being pressed on this sad subjects for weeks or months to come, as I learn from Constance that the king has refused to give an immediate consent; for which I could almost say, Heaven bless him."

"That is happy news indeed," answered Chartley; "and yet, Iola, I could wish that if a struggle is to be made, it might be soon made; for nothing is so painful as uncertainty."

"All men are alike in that, I see," replied Iola; "we women love to put off the evil day."

"It may indeed, in this instance, be as well," answered Chartley, "for it gives time for preparation; and that I will commence at once."

"Preparation for what?" demanded Iola in some surprise.

"For any thing that may occur," replied Chartley; "but for one thing we must both be prepared, sweet Iola--for flight--ay, flight to distant lands, love; for think not that if we venture to unite our fate by the dearest and the holiest rite, against the consent of your family, in defiance of their contract, and without the king's permission, this land will be safe for us thenceforward. Richard is well fitted to find treason in such acts; and, if he cannot part you from your husband, to take your husband's head. My preparation therefore must be, not only to secure a refuge in another land, but to provide means there, to keep us from poverty or dependence. But that will be easily accomplished. Will you regret it, Iola? Will you shrink from it--to pass some few years with Chartley on a foreign shore, and leave this fair land and all the memories of home behind you?"

"No, oh no!" she answered; "I will neither shrink nor regret. My home will ever be with my heart--" she paused, and the crimson spread gently over her cheek, as she felt how much her words implied. Her eyes too, sunk under the warm, and tender, and grateful gaze which was bent upon her; but the next moment she asked, in her low sweet tones--"Will you never regret, Chartley? Will you never think that you have paid for Iola's hand too dear a price, when memory turns back to your native land, high station, wealth, ambition, all sacrificed for her?"

"Never," answered Chartley; "were it to cost me all, and leave us but a cabin and bare food, I would not hesitate now, or regret hereafter. I do but change dross for a jewel of inestimable price, and I will value it ever as I do now."

They were both silent for several minutes; and then, as they turned the north western angle of the walls, they saw the sun setting in the splendour of scattered clouds, and Constance and Sir William Anton advancing towards them. Iola perceived that her cousin's step wanted its quiet steadiness; and when her eye fixed on her face, a blush rose in Constance's cheek.

"There is the sun setting and your uncle rising, lady," said Sir William Arden, in a gay voice, pointing with his hand in the direction of the road across the park, upon which several horsemen might be seen advancing--"we shall soon have the light of his countenance, though the star goes down."

"Let us go in," said Iola, in a hurried tone; "perhaps we have already staid out too long; but the evening has been so beautiful."

"And the conversation so sweet," said Arden, almost in a whisper to Constance; "so should close the phrase both with Chartley and with me, if I had aught of the court in my nature. I will study, dear lady--I will study, and rub off the rust which has gathered between my armour and my skin."

"No--Be ever, what you are," answered Constance.

Another day elapsed, and another. The sunshine mingled with the shade; as is ever the case in human life; but there were no dark clouds. Sometimes, for many hours, Chartley and Iola could obtain not a single moment for private intercourse. At others, a whole sweet hour was won from the great adversary of love, the world. Lord Calverly perceived not, or did not seem to perceive, that anything was changed; and the lady abbess set off to rejoin her nuns, as ignorant of the secrets of Iola's heart as she had come. Thus wore away the second day, till towards nightfall, when the whole party of the castle returned from their evening ride, and entered the great court. The porter did not venture to stop his lord's horse, as he passed the archway; but he followed him into the court, with a quick step, saying aloud--

"Lord Fulmer is returned, my lord, and wishes to speak with your lordship instantly. He is in the little hall."

The old nobleman dismounted from his horse, and, leaving Iola and Constance to the care of the rest, hurried up the manifold steps which led to the door.

Chartley's cheek flushed, as he heard the words the porter spoke; but, as he stood by Iola's side, assisting her to dismount, she said in a low but earnest tone--

"Chartley, to your tower, till you can command yourself--I beseech--I entreat you--if you love me."

Chartley bowed his head in sign of acquiescence; and, not considering that Lord Fulmer could not know all that had passed between Iola and himself, since his departure, he consoled himself with the thought, "If this lord keeps the spirit which he has hitherto displayed, he will soon seek me in my chamber."

Thus thinking, he turned away to the apartments assigned to him, while Iola, Constance, and Sir William Arden entered the main body of the building. The latter, however, seeing Iola take her cousin's arm, and whisper something in her ear, tarried in the great hall, while the two fair girls ascended the stairs.

The words of Iola to her cousin were--"Come with me, Constance. Something tells me in my heart that the hour of trial is coming. Let me meet it at once, before my spirit sinks with anticipation. But I must have something to lean on, dear cousin. You be my support."

They walked on, till they reached the door of the little hall; and it was not climbing the steps of the stairs, though they were many, that made Iola's breath come short and quick. It was the beating of the anxious heart. She opened the door at once, however, and went in. Her uncle and Lord Fulmer were standing together at some distance on the right of the door in earnest conversation; and, as soon as Iola and her cousin entered, Lord Calverly retreated towards the oriel window, saying to his companion--

"Come hither, come hither."

But Iola would not give up the ground; and, though she walked to the other end of the hall, she remained in the room. She turned an anxious and eager gaze towards her uncle and Lord Fulmer, however, and whispered to Constance--"I knew it--see how eagerly they speak."

They spoke so long that the suspense was very painful; but, at length, they turned, as if to come towards the two ladies, and Lord Fulmer said aloud--

"Upon my honour and my faith, not a word shall be uttered without your permission;" and then they advanced with a quick step, Lord Calverly only saying in reply--

"So be it then."

Iola gazed at them in the dim light, for the sun was by this time down; and her hand clasped tight upon her cousin's arm--

"Now, God help me," she murmured.

"Iola, my dear niece," said Lord Calverly, approaching, "I have a communication to make to you, which will take you somewhat by surprise; but you have received an education which will make you always submit to duty, I am sure, unmurmuring. This noble lord here has just informed me of circumstances which render it absolutely necessary that we should pass over all preliminaries, and that you should give him your hand immediately, according to the contract entered into long ago."

"Iola gasped, and tried to answer, but her voice failed her; and Lord Calverly went on to say--

"It is somewhat sudden in verity and truth; but he must depart for Dorset by daybreak tomorrow, and therefore the marriage ceremony must be performed to-night. The priest will be ready in the chapel at ten, and--"

"Impossible!" said Iola, in a firm and almost indignant tone; for this was worse than she had

expected, and it roused her anger. "What, two hours' notice to prepare for the most important step of all a woman's life And does this noble lord think to conciliate affection, or to win esteem, by such indecent haste, by such a rude insult to all the feelings of my heart?"

"What feelings?" demanded Lord Calverly, sharply. "I see, my lord, it is as you thought. Hark you, lady, I am not a man to be trifled with. I have ruled my own household well and steadily; and, please God, I will rule you too. No one has ever been suffered to disobey me; and you shall not be the first. Go and prepare. What, ho, without there?" he continued, turning to the door; and a servant running up, he said--"Bring lights here. Where is Lord Chartley?"

"Gone to his apartments, noble lord," replied the man.

"Set a guard at his door," said Lord Calverly. "Let his servants pass in and out, but not himself."

Then turning again to Iola, with an angry tone, he said--

"Marry! The feelings of your heart! We begin to understand them, niece. What have the feelings of your heart to do with a contract of marriage already signed and sealed?"

"Everything," replied Iola; "in as far as upon them depends whether I will or will not fulfil a contract entered into without my consent, and which therefore cannot be binding on me."

"Idle nonsense," cried Lord Calverly; "you know little of the law of the land, my learned gentlewoman. God's my life! We shall soon have chits out of a nunnery-school setting up for chief justices. The contract was entered into by your guardians on your behalf, and is binding upon you by law."

"Then let him appeal to the law to enforce it," said Iola; "for by my act and my will, it shall never be fulfilled."

"Nay, nay, my dear uncle," said Constance, "you are too harsh with her. Think what a surprise this must be, when you yourself told me that the king had not yet given his consent to the marriage, and that it must be put off for a month or two, till he and the queen could be present. Of course, she marvels at this sudden change; for I told her exactly what you told me."

"More fool you, wench," answered her uncle, who was irritated beyond measure, at the first opposition he had ever met with, from one whom he conceived to be dependent on himself. "Circumstances have changed; and now we must pass over royal consents, and all such trifling matters. She is a disobedient hussy, and shall bow her pride to my will this very night, or my name is not Calverly. Away to your chamber, madam, and prepare as fast as possible. You have two hours to think. So make your mind up, as best you may, to yield obedience, or you will find I will force you."

Lord Fulmer had stood during this conversation, which was so rapid as hardly to admit of interruption, in no very enviable state of mind, and with looks by no means calm or dignified. He had thought himself firmer and sterner than he really was, and now he hesitated and regretted.

"Stay, stay, my lord," he said. "Iola, let me beseech you--dear lady, let me plead."

"Hush, my lord," answered Iola, giving him a cold and shuddering look. "Your cause has been put upon its proper footing, force. My noble uncle, prompted by you, speaks the first feelings of your heart. No after thought can now avail. You and he may drag me to the altar. You and he may cause a vain ceremony to be performed, turn a deaf ear to my rejection of the vows tendered me, and commit what violence you will. But you cannot make me your wife; for that depends upon myself; and the words which would constitute me such shall never be uttered by these lips in favour of a man whom I never loved, and whom I now scorn."

"This is all vain," exclaimed Lord Calverly, his rage only increasing. "Argue not with her, my lord; she will learn her duty when she is your wife. This very night--ay, as the clock strikes ten--the ceremony shall be performed in the chapel of the castle, whether she will or not; and, once that sacrament received, the union is indissoluble. My chaplain will administer it. He will have no scruples to obey my commands, when I show him the contract. Away to your chamber, disobedient wench, and be ready to perform what you cannot refuse."

With a slow step, and still leaning on her cousin's arm, Iola quitted the hall, mounted a few steps near the hall door, passed through the long corridor which ran round that side of the castle, and then turned into the passage, leading to her own chamber. Constance marvelled that she trembled not; but Iola's step was firm and light, though somewhat slow. She opened the door of the ante-room, and looked in; but there was no one there, and it was dark and vacant.

"What will you do, dear Iola? How can I help you?"

"No way, dear Constance," replied her cousin, "but by giving me an hour for calm thought. Keep my girl, Susan, away from me. Tell her, I want no lights for an hour, and only wish to think."

"But what will you do?" asked Constance.

"Not marry him," replied Iola; "no, not if he had an emperor's crown to lay at my feet. Does he think this the way to win a woman's heart?--Leave me, leave me, dear Constance! Come again in an hour. By that time my resolution will be taken--" and as Constance turned sadly away and closed the door, Iola added, in a low voice to herself, "and executed."

Slowly and thoughtfully Constance trod her way back towards the lesser hall, pausing more than once, as if to consider some plan. When she entered, the sconces were lighted, and her uncle and Lord Fulmer were standing under one of them at some distance, still talking loud and eagerly.

"Nonsense, nonsense," cried Lord Calverly. "This is now my business. She will disobey my commands, will she? She shall be taught better--" Then, seeing Constance, he raised his voice, as if he had not been speaking loud enough before, exclaiming, "Where have you left that little rebel, Constance?"

"In her chamber, my lord," replied Constance, in a sad tone.

"'Twere better you stayed for her," said her uncle.

"She sent me away, my lord," replied Constance, "refusing all consolation."

"Well, well, let her sulk," answered the old nobleman. "We care not for sullenness, so we have obedience. The storm will work itself clear, my lord, never fear;" and he resumed his conversation with Fulmer.

In the mean time, Constance glided out of the other door, and sought a small room where the women servants of the castle were accustomed to work in the evening. She found her own maid there, but not Iola's girl, Susan; and, sending the former, to give her cousin's message, Constance proceeded through the lower passages of the house, and under the lesser hall, to the great hall below. It was now fully lighted; but she found Sir William Arden still there walking up and down with a slow step, and his arms crossed upon his chest.

"I am very glad I have found you," said Constance, approaching him, with an eager and confiding look. "I have something to tell you."

"I thought so, dear lady," replied the knight. "I thought so, as soon as I heard of this young lord's return; and so I waited here, to see if I could help. What is it? Two or three men came in, a few minutes ago, and took down some partizans from the wall. What may that mean?"

"That they have set a guard at Lord Chartley's door," answered Constance; "and that my uncle vows he will compel Iola to give her hand to Lord Fulmer at ten tonight."

"A guard at Chartley's door," exclaimed Arden. "Then something must be done indeed. We must consult, dear lady; but let us seek some more private place than this. You are not afraid to go with me?"

"Oh no," answered Constance, giving him her hand; "you persuaded me to tell you so the other day. But come into the passage behind the hall. Few pass that way, I believe; and, we can speak freely there."

Thus saying, she led him to the farther end of the wide vaulted chamber, and thence, through a low-browed door, into a small narrow passage, where a single lamp was twinkling. They both paused near the doors and Constance then said, "What is to be done? You told me you would help me on any occasion if you could. Now is the moment, my noble friend."

"And so I will," answered Arden, frankly; "ay, if it should cost my heart's blood. But let me hear the whole. I will interrogate you in order, my sweet witness. You say they have stationed a guard at Chartley's door, and declare they will force Iola to marry this moody boy at ten to-night. They must have discovered all that we have fancied between her and Chartley. Is it not so?"

"I can reach no other conclusion," answered Constance.

"Then, where is your fair cousin?" asked Arden.

"In her own chamber," implied Constance; "whence my uncle threatens to drag her down at the hour named, and force her to marry a man whom she abhors."

"It has been done before now," said Arden, setting his teeth close. "What does your cousin propose to do?"

"I know not," answered Constance. "She sent me away that she might think alone. She will refuse to the last, of that I am sure; and she will have strength to do it firmly too; for her courage is far greater than I ever dreamt it would be."

"Think you the chaplain will perform the ceremony if she does refuse?" asked Arden, in a meditative tone.

"I fear so," answered Constance. "He is a mere creature of my uncle's, and, as you have seen,

fat, sleek, and pliable, considering venison, and capon, and Gascon wine, much more than the service of the altar, or the conscience of his penitents."

"Then we must contrive to give your cousin some support in her resistance," said Arden, gravely. "It must be done; for she shall not be sacrificed, if I were to cleave Lord Fulmer to the chine with my own hand. But, upon my life, it is dangerous; for, if the king has given his consent, and we stop it with the strong hand, we shall have the wild boar upon us, and he is a savage beast."

"But his consent is not given," exclaimed Constance, eagerly. "That my uncle admitted, and said they would do without. From some words, too, I gathered that the marriage is to be concealed when it has taken place."

"So, so, then our course is clear enough," answered Arden. "We will take the king's part! Otherwise, dear Constance, I must have asked you to make up a little packet of plain clothes, and jump up *en croupe* behind your knight, and away with him to Brittany, as ladies did in days of old, if tales of knight errantry are true. Upon my life it would be no bad plan."

"Nay, nay," said Constance, "speak seriously, Arden; for my heart is very full of poor Iola just now."

"But one little corner left for me," answered Arden; and then more seriously he added, "Well, well, I will stop this marriage. Fear not; we must begin soon, however; for it will not do to have strife in the chapel."

"There will not be bloodshed?" said Constance, with a look of terror.

"Oh no, I trust not," replied Arden. "That which requires secrecy is soon given up, when men find it must be made public. The king's name will, I doubt not, be sufficient; but we must take means to prevent anything like resistance being offered. How many men are there in the castle, do you know?"

"There were thirty-five," answered Constance, "so my maid told me; but three of those who came from the abbey with us, and ten of my uncle's men, went well armed to guard my aunt back, and have not yet returned. Some, too, are cooks and kitchen men."

"We are ten," said Arden, musing. "That is quite enough; but yet we must have recourse to stratagem, in order to make sure that no rash opposition brings on violence. Leave it to me, dear Constance, leave it to me. You go to your own little chamber, say your prayers, and, when your hour is expired, go to your pretty cousin, and tell her, old William Arden says that they shall not marry her to any one against her will. So let her keep a good heart, be firm, and fear not."

"Had I not better go and tell her now," said Constance, eager to relieve her cousin's anxiety.

"What, little soldier, not obey your general's orders," exclaimed Arden, laughing. "No, no, we can do nothing yet, till the time comes near; for I suppose you would not have me tell your uncle that it was from you my information came. I must see signs of a wedding, before I proceed to stop it. But be content; all shall be prepared; and you be secret, not to let any burst of joy betray that we have concerted measures of deliverance. Now, farewell, dear Constance. Both you and Iola keep quiet above, till all the hurly burly's done; for we shall have hard words going, if nothing harder still, which God forbend."

"Oh, I beseech you, let there be no violence!" said Constance, imploringly.

"No, no, there shall be none," replied Arden. "If they assail not us, we will not assail them. But still women are better out of the way," he added, kissing her hand; "for they scream, you know, Constance, and that makes a noise."

With a faint smile Constance left him; and turning to the hall he recommenced his walk, till, at length, Lord Calverly came down, pausing suddenly, when he saw his guest there. The moment after he called for a servant, however, and gave him some orders in a low voice, while Arden turned at the other end of the hall, and in his perambulations approached, the place where he stood.

"It has been a lovely day, and promises as fine a night, my lord," said the knight, in the tone of ordinary conversation. "Methinks I will go and take a walk upon the battlements, a cup of wine, and then to bed; for I was stirring early to-day."

"Would I could be companion of your walk," replied Lord Calverly, with courteous hypocrisy. "Nothing is pleasanter than a warm moonlight night of summer; but I have dull business to be attended to; and business, you know, Sir William, must supersede pleasure."

"Quite just, my lord, and wise," replied Arden, "as indeed is always what your lordship says. I will away, however, giving you good night. May success attend all honourable business, and then slumber bring repose." Thus saying, he turned and left the hall; and the old nobleman called loudly by name for some of his attendants.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Now the reader must remember that a castle of those days, though fallen from the "high estate" of feudal garrison and constant preparation, was a very different place from a modern house, whether in town or country. Grosvenor Square will give no idea of it; and no country mansion, not even with park wall, and lodge, and iron gates, will assist comprehension in the least. Sir William Arden had to traverse a considerable number of round rubble stones, before he found himself standing under the arch by the porter's dwelling.

The man had just given admission or exit to some one; for he was standing at the wicket with the keys in his hand, gazing forth to the westward, although all trace of the sun's setting had disappeared.

Arden cast his eyes towards the south, in which direction Chartley's tower was situated; but it was not visible from the gate; and, satisfied on that point, the good knight turned to the porter, saying, without any preliminary explanation, to point out the person of whom he was about to speak,

"He has gone to the chaplain's house under the hill, has he not?"

"Yes, honourable sir," replied the porter. "But, by my faith, my lord perhaps reckons without his host; for the good priest calculates upon no marriages, baptisms, or burials, to-night; and he is just the man to forget that such a case may happen, and lay in a share of ale or Bordeaux, too large to let any other thoughts enter."

"Oh, he will be sober enough to work matrimony, though he must not undertake it himself," answered Arden. "Ha, ha, ha!"

The porter laughed too, right joyously, saying, "Jack stopped a minute to tell me his errand; and I could not help laughing, to think how suddenly the matter had come on at last."

And, as he spoke, he hung the enormous bunch of heavy keys up by the side of the door, addressing to them the words, "Ay, you are rusty enough to be spared more labour. Nobody will try to get into the castle now-a-days."

"It would be a hard morsel," answered Arden. "But who are those I saw riding up the hill at so much speed?"

"Heaven knows," replied the porter. "There were only two of them; and we shall soon see what they want if they come here. It does those knaves good to make them wait a little. So, by your leave, worshipful sir, I will go and finish my supper."

Sir William Arden still stood near the gate; and a minute or two after a horn without sounded; and the porter, creeping out of his den once more, came forward to demand, through the little iron grate, who it was that asked admission.

"We must see my Lord Chartley immediately," replied the man. "It is on business of great importance."

"Who are you, and what are you?" demanded the porter; "and who is that old woman in white on horseback? We don't admit any witches here."

These words were addressed to a man bearing the appearance of an ordinary servant, with a badge upon his arm; but the janitor, as he spoke the last words, pointed with his hand to the figure of good Ibn Ayoub, who sat his horse like a statue, while all this was going on, wrapped up in his white shroud-like garments, so that little or nothing of face or person was to be seen.

"I am the lord's slave," said the voice of the Arab, from under the coif-like folds which shrouded his head; "and this is my comrade--what you call a servant in this land of Giaours. Open, and let us through."

"The orders were to admit his servants," said the porter, musing, and turning at the same time partly towards Sir William Arden, as if seeking his counsel.

"Oh, let them in, let them in," said the knight. "Of course, he must have his servants about him. There can be no wrong in that."

The man immediately undid the bolts and bars, giving admission to the two servants, who

bowed low when they saw their master's kinsman under the archway; and Arden, turning with them, walked by their side, directing them to the stables.

"Keep your news safe, whatever it is," he said in a low voice to Ibn Ayoub, "or you may do mischief. But stay, I will wait for you, till you come out of the stables."

While the two men were taking in their horses, Sir William Arden examined accurately the low range of building used as the ecury, or cury, as it was sometimes called at Chidlow. It was very extensive, though low, and situated under the wall for protection; but each of the windows, small and high up as they were, were secured by strong iron bars; and there was no means of entrance or exit, but by the large door in the centre, and two smaller ones at the extreme ends, but on the same face.

"Come this way, Ibn Ayoub," said the knight, when the Arab came forth. "I will show you the way to your lord's lodging. Go up to him at once, and beg him to come down to my chamber below, to speak with me on some business of importance. Say, if he meets with obstruction by the way, not to resist, but to return quietly, and I will come to him. You will have to pass three men with partizans on the stairs, who are keeping watch upon the good lord; and they may perchance refuse to let him go forth."

"Then will I put my knife into them," said Ibn Ayoub.

"Softly, softly, wild son of Ismael. Do no such thing, but quietly mark all that happens; and then, when your lord is in his room again, come down to me; but tell him he will see me soon." Such were the good knight's last injunctions to the Arab, who then mounted the stairs of the tower: and immediately after, some words in a sharp tone were spoken above. Sir William Arden listened, and then entered his own apartments, which, as I have elsewhere mentioned, were on the lower story. Two of his servants were in waiting in his ante-room, engaged in the very ancient game of mutton bones. A word from their master however soon sent one of them away, and when he returned, at the end of five minutes, he brought with him four of Chartley's men. Almost at the same moment, Ibn Ayoub returned, saying, with rolling eyes,

"They will not let him pass."

"Never mind, my friend," replied Arden; "remain here with these good men till my return; and then, be all ready with what weapons you have."

The Arab smiled, well pleased with the name of weapons, and bared his sinewy arm up to the elbow. At the end of about five minutes, the knight returned, and, in a calm and easy tone, ordered three of Chartley's servants to go up to their lord, after which he turned to the rest, saying, "now, good fellows, I wish you to understand clearly what I desire to have done; and I command you in nothing to exceed the orders you receive. There are three men on the stairs, keeping guard upon my cousin and friend, Lord Chartley. This is contrary to the orders of the king, and contrary to an express agreement between Lord Chartley and Lord Calverly. I therefore intend to take those three men, and lock them up in the room above, which looks upon the walls, and to keep them there as long as I think proper. There must be no bloodshed, no violence, but what is necessary to force them into that room. You mark me, Ibn Ayoub. The great object is to avoid all noise, which may attract others to the spot. I am not to be disobeyed in anything, remember. Now, some one jump upon that table, and strike the roof twice with his sword."

One of the men sprang up, and obeyed the order; and then, saying "Follow!" Arden went out to the foot of the stairs. He ascended a few steps leisurely, and till sound of voices was heard above.

"You cannot pass, my lord," said some one; "our orders are strict."

"My orders to you are, that you get out of the way," said Chartley; "if not take the consequences. In one word, will you move?"

"My lord, it is impossible; you cannot pass," replied the voice, in a louder and sterner tone; and at the same moment Arden ran rapidly up the steps, followed by his companions, saying, "keep back, Ibn Ayoub. Remember, no violence."

On reaching the little square piece of level flooring, commonly called the landing-place, at Chartley's door, he found three of Lord Calverly's servants with partizans in their hands, in the act of resisting the progress of the young nobleman and his two servants, who seemed determined to make their way out. Now, of all weapons on earth, the most unwieldy and the least fitted for use in a narrow space was the ancient partizan. It might have been employed to advantage, indeed, in preventing Arden from mounting a stairs. But the servants were eagerly occupied with Lord Chartley, who was on the same level with themselves, where they had no room to shorten their weapons, so as to bring the spear points to bear against his breast. One of them looked over his shoulder, indeed, at the sound of feet rushing up, but had they turned to oppose the ascent of Sir William Arden and his party, they exposed themselves at once to attack from Chartley and his two servants. Thus, between Scylla and Charybdis, they were overpowered in a moment, and their weapons taken from them.

One of them then thought fit to say, that they had no intention of offending, and that Lord Chartley might pass. But in profound silence they were hurried into a small room, the windows of

which looked towards the walls, and not to the court, where the people of the castle were likely to pass. There the door was locked and barred upon them without any explanation; and Chartley and his friend looked at each other and laughed.

"Now if you will take my advice," said Sir William, addressing his cousin, "you will stay quietly here and not meddle any more. We have got three of them safe; we must have five or six more; and then we shall be in force enough to deal with the rest in a body."

"Out on it!" exclaimed Chartley. "What, shall I stay here like a singing bird in a cage, while you are busily doing my work for me?"

"Hear me, hear me, Chartley," said Sir William, "and don't be a fool," and, drawing him away from the men, he said in a low voice, "remember the king may have to deal with this at some time. Now, for me it is all very well; for I act in the king's name, to stop a marriage to which he has not given his consent. But with you the case is very different, being a prisoner in ward."

"Preach to whom you will, my dear Arden," exclaimed Chartley, "I was not made for sitting still when other men are acting. But I'll be very prudent, on my life. For many reasons, I would not embroil myself with good Lord Calverly, if there be any help for it; and when you deal with him, I'll be your lackey, and wait without, unless I hear I am wanted. In the mean time, however, I must help you to put some of these rats into the rat-trap, and now let us lose no precious moments. Where do you begin? With the porter?"

"No, no," answered Arden. "We must let the priest and the man who is gone for him pass in first, or we shall have an alarm given. Besides, I want to speak with the priest. So you had better take these men, and secure all the fellows in the stables. There must be several of them there now, tending their lord's horses after the ride; for I will answer for it they all supped first. Remember there are three doors; and you have nothing to do but lock each of them. Then you have our men, as you say, in a rat-trap. I, in the mean time, will gather together the rest of our own people, and come to you there, after I have seen and spoken to the priest, and locked up the porter, and any of his men that I can get."

On this briefly sketched out plan they acted, Chartley and his attendants securing, without the slightest difficulty, two of Lord Calverly's grooms, and three of Lord Fulmer's, in the stables, without the prisoners even knowing, at first, that they were locked in. In the mean time, Arden, passing alone through those parts of the castle in which the servants generally congregated, gathered together two or three of Chartley's men, who had not previously been summoned, sent one of them to call the rest quietly out into the court, and then proceeded towards the porter's lodging, followed at a little distance by two of the men. In crossing the court towards the gateway, he found that he was just in time; for the priest had hastened with reverent diligence to obey Lord Calverly's summons; and he was already half way between the barbican gate and the great door of the hall. Arden stopped him, however, saying, "Ay, good evening, father, I am glad to see you; for I want to put to you a case of conscience."

"Holy Mary, I cannot stop now, my son," cried the priest; "for I have been summoned by my good lord in haste."

"What, is he ill? Is he dying? Are you going to shrive him?" exclaimed Arden, with affected apprehension, still standing in the priest's way.

"No, no," cried the worthy man, impatiently; "'tis but to marry the Lady Iola to the Lord Fulmer. The hour is ten; and 'tis coming fast."

"Not so, not so," said Arden; "'tis not yet half past nine; and I must have my doubt resolved before you go."

"Then speak it quick," cried the priest, sharply. "You should choose fitter times."

"'Tis but this," said Arden, with a smile. "If a man see another about to do a wrong thing, and one which may produce great danger to himself, is it a sin to stop him, even by force?"

"A sin!" exclaimed the priest, with a not very decent interjection, common in those days, but which cannot be admitted there; "no sin at all, but a good work. There, let me pass."

Arden made way and walked on, laughing, to the gate, where he found the porter just entering his own abode, and saying good night to one of the servants, who had been sitting with him.

"Why, you have not closed the gates for the night, have you, porter?" said Arden, standing in the door-way of the lodge, so as to oppose the egress of either of the two.

"Yes, indeed, I have, worshipful sir," replied the man.

"Why, the priest will have to go forth," said Arden.

"Not he," cried the porter, with a laugh, which was echoed by the other servant. "After he has done his function, he'll get as drunk as a fiddler, and sleep on one of the truckle beds. I should not wonder if I had him here knocking for accommodation; but he shall not have it."

As he spoke, he deliberately hung the keys upon a peg, just at the side of the door.

"These are large keys," said Sir William, taking them down, to the man's surprise, and fixing in his own mind upon the one which he supposed to belong to the door of the lodge.

"Yes, they are, sir," answered the porter, somewhat gruffly. "Be pleased to give them to me. I never suffer them out of my hands."

"Back, knave! Would you snatch them from me," exclaimed Arden, thrusting him vehemently back; and the next moment he pulled the door to, by the large bowed handle, and applied the key to the lock. It did not prove the right one, however; and he had some difficulty in holding the door close, against the united efforts of the two men in the inside, till he had found one to fit the keyhole.

Chartley's men, however, had been trained to activity and vigilance, in travelling with their lord; and the two who had followed Sir William Arden, seeing a little bustle, and the light from the lodge suddenly shut out, sprang forward to the knight's assistance. The door was then soon locked; and, speaking through it, Sir William Arden said, "Now, saucy porter, I shall keep you there for a couple of hours, for attempting to snatch the keys from me."

The man was heard remonstrating and bellowing in the inside; but, without paying any attention, Sir William hastened back towards the stables, leaving the keys hanging in the doorway of the porter's tower. In the stable court, as it was called, he found Chartley himself, with eight companions; and a brief consultation ensued as to the next step.

"How many have you got under lock and key in the stable?" demanded Arden.

"Five at least," replied Chartley.

"Then there are five in your lodging and at the gate," said Arden, "That makes ten in all. Allowing five for cooks and stragglers, we are their superior in numbers, and a good deal their superior, I should think, in the use of arms. Now let us go on. Hold back. Let that fellow pass towards the kitchen."

"Had we not better go by the great hall?" said Chartley, as soon as one of the servants of the house had crossed the other side of the court. "We can secure any men who may be there."

"No, no," said Arden. "Leave all the management to me. I have promised there shall be no bloodshed; and I do not want even to show any force, unless it be needful. Let us go in by the back way, and up to the west of the little hall. By that means we shall cut them off from the chapel; and then, while you wait in the ante-room, to be ready in case of need, I will go in and reason with the good lords."

"But," said Chartley, "suppose they have gone to the chapel, already. I see light in the window."

"Then we must follow them," answered Arden. "But above all things, my good lord, do not show yourself in the affair, if you can help it. You may put yourself in great peril with the king, remember; whereas all that Dickon, as I shall manage it, can say of me is, that I was somewhat too zealous for his service. Do not come forward, at all events, till you hear strife."

"Well, well," answered Chartley; "that I may promise at least, Now on; for there is no time to spare."

Approaching quietly one of the many small doors which gave exit from the great mass of the castle buildings into the courts around, the whole party found before them a staircase, which, strange to say, was broader and more easy of ascent than those communicating with either of the two principal entrances. Treading as softly on the stone steps as possible, they soon reached a wide landing-place, from one side of which ran away a long corridor, passing over part of the staircase, and guarded from it by an open screen of stonework, while on the other side was a door; leading down by ten steps, to the entrance of the chapel; and between the two appeared another door, opening into a little ante-room, flanking the lesser or upper hall.

Sir William Arden lifted the latch of the ante-chamber door, and opened it gently, when immediately the voice of Lord Calverly was heard, raised to a loud and angry tone, exclaiming, "Get you gone, mistress, and tell her to come down this instant, or I will come and fetch her. Tell not me that you cannot get admission or an answer. If I come, it shall be to make a way for myself."

"But it is not ten yet, my lord," said the sweet voice of Constance. "You said you would give her till ten."

"What matters five minutes?" cried the old lord, in the same sharp tone. "But we will be to the letter, and so shall she. Let her know, girl, if she is not here, in this hall, by the time the castle clock chimes the last stroke of ten, I will come to fetch her, and drag her to the altar by the wrists."

Sir William Arden had held up his hand to those who were following him, at the first sounds of the voices speaking; and the whole party paused, some upon the stairs, and a few upon the landing. The next moment, the door of the ante-room opened; and, coming with a slow step, Constance appeared. She gave a slight start at seeing Arden and the rest, where she least expected to meet them; but he quietly laid his finger on his lip, and pointed along the corridor to the stone screen. Constance made a mute gesture, as if deprecating violence, and then passed on with a quickened step.

Arden did not immediately enter the ante-room, but waited till the light foot-fall of Constance had died away; and then, once more giving his directions to his followers, and bestowing another word of caution upon Chartley, he walked straight through the ante-room into the hall. When he entered, Lord Calverly was walking up and down one side of the long chamber, and Lord Fulmer doing the same in the other. The face of each was grave and moody; and they seemed not very well pleased with each other, or with anything that was taking place around them. Both however started on seeing Sir William Arden; and, in a tone of bitter civility, Lord Calverly addressed him, approaching quite close as he did so.

"I had thought, Sir William, you had retired to rest," he said, "and was wishing you tranquil slumbers. Allow me to say that, at the present moment, I and Lord Fulmer are busy with matters of much personal importance."

"Good faith, my lord," replied Sir William Arden, in a light tone, "I heard below that there were jovial things to take place in the castle, and I wish to share in the festivities of my honoured host."

"I know not what you mean, sir," said Lord Calverly, with a cold stare; but Fulmer at once advanced to the knight, saying--

"There is a meaning in your tone, sir, which must be explained. It seems to me, that you are determined to force your uninvited society upon us, at a moment when we desire to be alone."

"Exactly, my good lord," replied Arden. "I am precisely in that very unpleasant predicament. You will see how disagreeable it must be to me; and therefore I trust you will make it as smooth to me as possible."

"Why, marry, what is all this?" exclaimed Lord Calverly.

"If so painful, what brings you here?" demanded Fulmer sternly.

"I will tell you, young man," answered Arden. "I have learned, that it is the intention of this good lord to bestow on you the hand--"

"From whom, from whom?" shouted Lord Calverly.

"From an exceedingly fat priest, amongst others," replied Arden, smiling; "but the news is all over the castle. If your lordship cannot keep your own secrets, depend upon it, others will not."

"But what affair is this of yours, Sir William?" said Fulmer, with a sneer. "Are you an aspirant to the lady's hand?"

"Not at present," answered Arden. "But the case is this, without farther words, my lords. I find that this marriage is against the lady's will, and that threats are held out to her of using force--"

"Oh, she has made her complaint to you, has she?" said Lord Calverly.

"No, she has not," replied Arden; "but hearing it by accident, and having a great regard for your two lordships, I wished, as a knight and a gentleman of some experience and repute, to remonstrate with you, and show you what danger and disgrace to your fair names you bring upon yourselves by such proceedings--proceedings unworthy of English noblemen and Christian men."

He spoke so calmly, and in such a quiet reasoning tone, that neither Fulmer nor Lord Calverly suspected for one moment that he intended to proceed to any other measure than mere remonstrance. That they thought bold enough; and Fulmer replied, "We understand from whence your inspiration comes, Sir William; and I only wonder the prompter does not appear himself."

"That I took care of," said Lord Calverly. "I am not one, my young friend, to neglect any precautions. I think I have some experience in dealing with men, and some foresight too as to all that is likely to occur. It is not easy to catch me sleeping. Now, Sir William Arden, One word for all. I am not inclined to be wanting in hospitality or courtesy towards a guest; but I must desire to be left to the management of my affairs, without either your presence or your counsel;" and he made a low bow.

Arden paused for a moment, as if in expectation that he would add something more; and the old nobleman, who had with difficulty bridled his anger so far, went on in a tone far from cool, to say; "I would lack no courtesy; but, if you do not go, you must be removed."

"I have but little more to say," replied Arden, with imperturbable coolness, which contrasted somewhat strangely with his vehemence upon minor occasions; "but that little is important. This

marriage must not go forward."

"But I say it must!" exclaimed Lord Calverly, calling down a bitter curse upon his own head if he did not carry it through; and then, striding to the door which led to the staircase from the great hall, he shouted aloud, "Ho! Two of you come up here; here is something unpleasant that must be removed."

Steps were immediately heard running up; and Arden retreated towards the door by which he had entered, slowly and calmly, but with a smile upon his countenance.

"My good lord," he said; "you do not know what you do;" and, opening the door of the ante-room, he said aloud, "Here, I want some of you, my friends. Two stand on the landing, and keep that way against all comers."

"Take hold of him and carry him away to his own rooms," exclaimed Lord Calverly, at the same moment, addressing two of his attendants, who had entered; but when he turned and saw the number of armed men pouring in, he stood as one aghast; and Arden whispered to one of his followers, "secure that door," pointing to the one on the opposite side of the hall.

The man to whom he spoke, and two others, darted across, and had reached the middle of the hall, before the servants of the castle seemed to comprehend what was going on.

"Keep the door, keep the door!" cried Lord Fulmer; and they both immediately ran towards it. It was a race which of the parties should reach it first; and indeed neither won; but, just as the first of the old lord's servants was stretching forth his hand to seize the door, which was partly open, a stout arm applied a blow to the side of his head, which made him stagger back, and then measure his length upon the floor. The next instant the door was closed and locked; and Sir William Arden remained the master of both entrances.

"I beg your lordship's pardon," he said, "for taking somewhat decided means to obtain a fair hearing, which it seems you were not inclined to give me."

"Are we to consider ourselves prisoners, sir?" exclaimed the old nobleman, confounded and dismayed. "If so, I must appeal to the throne against such violence."

"If you, or Lord Fulmer either, can venture to do so, pray do," replied Arden, calmly. "But I too, my lord, am a prudent man, as well as yourself; and it is difficult to catch me sleeping. I said that this marriage must not go forward; and I now ask you both, my lords, whether you have the king's consent to this proceeding? In a word, whether it was not your intention to act in this business in direct disobedience to his authority?"

Fulmer gazed down upon the ground, and bit his lip; but Lord Calverly demanded fiercely--

"Who told you that, sir? I protest against such an interference in any man."

"It matters not who told me," replied Arden. "Suffice it that I am well prepared to justify what I do. Now, my lord, after what I have said, you dare not proceed to the act which you were about to commit--an act which would have only led you and Lord Fulmer here to long imprisonment, if not worse. If you give up all notion of such rashness, if you pledge me your word, that you will make no attempt to carry through this marriage, till the king's full consent has been obtained, and if this noble lord agrees to ride forward immediately upon the errand with which he is charged by the king, I will restore to you the command of your own house, which I have been obliged to take possession of in his grace's service. Moreover, I will refrain from reporting to the king the intended disobedience which I have been in time to frustrate. If not, I shall feel it my painful duty to put you both under arrest, and convey you myself to York."

It is hardly possible to describe the sensations produced by these words, and the calm and quiet tone in which they were uttered, upon the minds of his two hearers. Lord Calverly was astounded and terrified; for, like almost all very vain and pompous men, he was very easily depressed by difficulties and dangers. It only required to humble his vanity sufficiently, to make it a very submissive and patient quality, however vehement and pugnacious it might be under a slight mortification. To find himself suddenly deprived of all power in his own house, and treated with an air of authority and reproof, by a guest who ventured to back his pretensions by the redoubted name of Richard, was quite sufficient to silence him, although his wrath still swelled and fretted within.

Lord Fulmer, for his part, heard the words which had just been spoken, not only in sullen silence, but with much surprise. He well knew that, hurried on by passion, he had placed himself in a position of very great danger, and that the act of disobedience he had committed, if it reached Richard's ears, was likely to be followed by the ruin of all his hopes, and long imprisonment. But how Sir William Arden had so rapidly received tidings of the commands the king had laid upon him, he could not divine, forgetting entirely that the necessity of his departure on the following morning had been mentioned to Iola in the presence of Constance. At the same time, he felt that to remain would be ruin, and that resistance was vain. His only hope, therefore, was to escape the present danger, trusting that some of the many changing events of the day would afford him better opportunities, or at all events give him at some future time the means of revenge.

All Lord Calverly thought of, after he had in some degree mastered his anger and surprise, was how to retract, in as dignified a manner as possible; and he had just begun to reply, "Well, sir, if I am a prisoner in my own house, I have nothing to do but to submit;" but the voice of Constance was heard, speaking eagerly to some one without.

A moment or two after, she entered with a face still somewhat pale, and a look of much anxiety, saying:--

"I am sorry to tell you, my lord, that my cousin is not to be found. After knocking for some time at her door, I and her girl Susan chanced to see the key lying on the table of the ante-room; but we used it only to find her chamber vacant."

"Heaven and earth!" exclaimed Lord Calverly; "this is too much. Where can the foolish child have concealed herself? From the castle she could not go, for the gates were all locked at sunset. Let us search for her immediately."

"Ay, let us search," exclaimed Lord Fulmer, with a look of great anxiety. "If any evil have happened, I shall never forgive myself."

Sir William Arden was somewhat alarmed; but, although Constance's face expressed anxiety, it struck him there was less terror in it than might have been expected.

"Ay, noble lord," he said, "we always regret wrong actions when it is too late; but, before I permit either of you to quit this hall, we must have a clear understanding. Do you accept the conditions I mentioned?"

"Assuredly," replied Lord Calverly; "I must search for this poor child at once."

"And you, Lord Fulmer?" said Arden.

"I do," replied Fulmer, bowing his head.

"Then I commend you to your horse's back at once," said Arden; "and I will have the honour of waiting upon you to the stables. Otherwise, perchance, you might find neither men nor horses free to serve you."

"This is hard," said Fulmer.

"It may be no better, I fear," replied Arden. "Excuse me, for a moment, my lords, while I speak with the guard without;" and, turning to the men at the door, he added, "Suffer no one to quit the hall, but the lady, till I return."

He was not long absent; but, many had been the questions poured forth in the mean time, upon Constance, who was replying to one of them, when Sir William re-entered the room.

"I cannot even divine, my dear uncle," she said; "she communicated not her intention to me in any shape; and I certainly expected to find her in her own chamber, when I returned at the end of the hour, during which she wished to be left in solitude."

Arden seemed not to notice the words, though he heard them, but informing Lord Fulmer that he was ready to accompany him, prepared to lead the way.

At that moment, however, one of the servants whom Lord Calverly had called into the hall, and who had of necessity remained there with the rest, remarked, in a dull and sullen voice:--

"There is somebody ringing the great bell at the gate. 'Tis the third time it has rung. The old porter must be sleeping, not to open."

"He has no power," said Sir William Arden. "I have the keys. Go you," he continued, speaking to one of his own followers--"open the wicket; but give no admission to any large party. Two or three you may suffer to enter."

Lord Calverly was apparently about to say something; but the veteran soldier waved his hand to the man, as a signal to depart; and he retired at once, knowing no authority but that of his own master.

During his absence, which lasted some two or three minutes, the whole party stood in unpleasant silence. Lord Calverly, indeed, ventured a word in a low tone to Fulmer, but obtained no reply; and some one came and tried the door on the side of the principal staircase, leading to the great hall; but it was locked and guarded. The eyes of Constance sought the face of Arden; but neither spoke.

At length the servant returned; but he was not alone. Close upon his steps came a man dressed as an ordinary post or courier of the court, who gazed round the scene presented to him in some surprise.

"Which is Sir William Arden?" he said, somewhat to the dismay both of Fulmer and the old lord.

"I am he," replied Arden, advancing with a mind relieved; for, though resolved, at all hazards, to carry through what he had undertaken; yet he had some fear that his first plans might be in a degree disconcerted by the appearance of the royal messenger.

The post immediately handed him a letter, sealed with the broad seal, and Arden received it as an ordinary occurrence, with admirable command of his countenance.

"By your leave, my lords," he said, and, approaching one of the sconces, he opened the paper and read. The cover seemed to contain two other letters, and after having perused his own, he turned towards Lord Calverly, presenting one of them to him, and saying:

"I presume, my lord, this is an order to deliver up the ward of my cousin, Lord Chartley, to myself."

But there was more in the epistle to the old nobleman, and when he read it his face turned very pale.

"Now, sir," said Arden, addressing Lord Fulmer, "I will conduct you to your horse, and then immediately perform, the commands of his grace the king."

"In the name of all the saints, my dear child," said Lord Calverly, as soon as Arden and Fulmer had quitted the room; "what is to be done, if we cannot find your cousin?"

"Nay, I know not," answered Constance, "but I trust we shall find her well and safe, or at all events hear from her, if she should have taken refuge elsewhere. In the midst of all this confusion, it is very possible she may have slipped out of the castle unperceived."

Constance, it would appear, did not choose her means of consolation well; for her words had anything but a soothing effect upon her uncle, who walked up and down for two or three minutes, in a state of great agitation, making sundry addresses to saints and the virgin, which savoured much more of impatience than piety. At length, returning to his niece's side, as she remained standing in the midst, of the room, he whispered:--

"We must find her, we must find her, Constance. This is the most unfortunate out of all. You don't know what is in this letter;" and he struck it with his fingers. "The king here tells me to send her back to the abbey immediately, and that he makes the abbess, my good sister, responsible for her safeguard, till he can decide in the matter of her marriage himself. He must have had some inkling of this rash mad-headed boy's purpose."

"That is unfortunate, indeed," answered Constance, thoughtfully.

"Unfortunate!" exclaimed her uncle. "It is ruin, child. Why, I risk not only imprisonment but confiscation. I cannot comply with the king's commands; nor can I explain to him why I do not comply, without telling him all that has occurred to-night. It is ruin, I tell you. Here, come aside, that knave of a courier seems listening to us."

"You had better tell Sir William Arden your difficulty," replied Constance, when they had got to the farther end of the hall. "Though his manner is rough and blunt, yet sure I am he has a kind heart."

"Let us search well for her first," said her uncle. "Perhaps we may find her in the castle after all. I wish the knight would return. What a long time he stays. Hark!" he continued, after a pause of a minute or two. "There is the sound of horses' feet in the court-yard. Now, thank God, Fulmer is gone; a good riddance, on my life, for he had well nigh persuaded me to that which might have been my destruction."

Only a short interval took place before Arden returned; and, after giving some orders in a low tone to his own men, he advanced towards Lord Calverly, holding out his hand and saying--

"I beseech you, my good lord, to let all angry feeling pass away between us. Believe me, I have saved you from a great danger, into which you were persuaded to run, by your regard for the young nobleman who is just gone, contrary to the dictates of your own wisdom and experience."

Lord Calverly took his hand, and shook it heartily, saying--

"That is very true, Sir William, that is very true. I never liked the business, and was hard to persuade; but, having once decided, of course I could not suffer myself to be thwarted by a mere child. Pray, now, let us seek for her. I am ready, God knows, to obey the king in everything," he added in a loud tone, for the messenger's ears.

"Well, we will seek for her at once," said Arden. "But first let us restore the house to its propriety."

The followers of Chartley and of Arden himself were dismissed to their several occupations; the servants of Lord Calverly permitted to depart from the hall; the refreshment of the king's post was provided for; and the search was commenced, Chartley having been called to aid, at the suggestion of his cousin. Every nook and corner of the extensive building was examined, but Iola was not to be found.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The search was over. It had proved, as I have said, vain; and Lord Calverly was in a state of bewildered confusion of mind, which it was impossible to describe. Obey the king's commands by placing Iola once more in the abbey of St. Clare of Atherston, he could not do. To explain to Richard the cause of his disobedience was only to accuse himself of a worse fault of the same kind. To frame any excuse, real or false, for his conduct, he knew not how; and his whole anxiety seemed to be to pursue and overtake the fugitive, wherever she might have taken refuge. Several of the servants were examined, in order to obtain some clue to the course which she had followed; but no one could afford any. Her waiting-woman, Susan, was as much grieved, distressed, and anxious as the rest. The porter declared that he had closed every postern before he was shut into his lodging by Sir William Arden; and, at first, the old lord was inclined to suppose that Iola had taken advantage of the keys having been left in the door, to make her escape, while Arden was remonstrating with him in the hall. But, on the one hand, the porter declared that the keys had never been removed from the place where Arden had left them till they were taken to give admission to the king's messenger; and the man who had been shut up with him confirmed the story. They had both watched anxiously, they said, and must have heard the sound of the keys being withdrawn, had such a thing occurred. Sir William's attendant, too, who had given admission to the royal courier, stated that he had found the gates both locked and barred. The girl, Susan, too, showed that she had remained in her mistress's antechamber for nearly three quarters of an hour immediately before she was missed; and every servant stated positively that they had neither seen the lady, nor any figure, which could have been hers disguised, attempt to pass out of the castle.

"Nothing can, at all events, be done till morning," said Sir William Arden, "and therefore, my good lord, I will wish you good night. Let us take counsel with our pillows."

His suggestion was followed, Chartley accompanying his friend with less anxiety apparent on his countenance than the occasion might perhaps have justified. Before Arden went, he contrived to say a few words to Constance, unheard by the rest; but Constance shook her head, replying, "I know nought, indeed, and can give no information; but yet I am inclined to believe that dear Iola is in no danger, wherever she is. She used to roam far and wide, where I should have been afraid to venture; and I feel sure she is safe." Then dropping her voice quite to a whisper, she added, "Pray, tell Lord Chartley so."

A few minutes after, Chartley and his friend sat together in the chamber of the former; and Arden eyed him with an enquiring and yet a smiling glance.

"Know you aught of this escapade, Signor Chartley?" he said, at length. "Methinks you seem not so heart-wrung and fear-stricken as might have been expected, at the unaccountable disappearance of your lady love."

"Nevertheless, I am anxious," replied Chartley, "for I know not where she is, nor what has become of her, any more than the rest. But, at the same time, I have this consolation, that I believe her escape must have been planned, in case of need, long before; for she boasted to me that she could pass through the walls of this castle like a spirit. I therefore argue, that we have every reason to think her safe; and, to tell the truth, I should not much regret her having put herself beyond the power of her excellent wise uncle, were I not here in ward, and unable to do as I could wish."

"What would you do, if you were out of the old earl's clutches?" demanded Arden, with a smile.

"I would set off by day-break to seek her--" replied Chartley, "by day-break to-morrow morning."

"And having found her?" asked Arden.

Chartley smiled, and looked thoughtfully down on the table, for a moment or two, answering at length, "Don't you think, Arden, that if one going a journey found a peculiarly beautiful flower growing near his path, he would be inclined to gather it at once, not waiting till he came back again, lest it should be withered or plucked in the mean time. One would not mind a few scratches either, to get at it."

"Come, come, no metaphors," said Arden. "You know, I am dull as to all fanciful things, my good lord, so tell me plainly what you would do."

"Well, then," answered Chartley, "if I found her, as you suppose, I should be strangely tempted

to ask her to get upon the back of an ambling mule or light-footed Barbary jennet, and make a pilgrimage with me to some shrines of great repute in Brittany or France."

"Hymen's for one of them, I suppose," said Arden, laughing; "ah, Chartley, you are but a pagan after all. But you forget such things might be dangerous. When you came back, your head would be in a tottering condition, or, at the best, your dearly beloved liberty of roaming might be confined within the four walls of a small room."

"I might stay away, till heads were more sure upon men's shoulders, and liberties were not the sport of a tyrant's caprice," replied Chartley, more gravely than was his wont. "This state of things cannot last for ever, Arden. The world is getting sick of it. There are strange rumours abroad. Our poor queen Ann is ill; and men much suspect she will not recover. Few indeed do under the treatment she is likely to have; and Richard, they say, is very anxious for heirs."

"So, so," cried Arden, "sets the wind there? Why, methought a Chartley would never draw his sword against the house of York."

"Assuredly," replied Chartley, "so long as the lawful heirs of that house sat upon the throne. But there is such a thing, Arden, as two streams mingling--such a thing as two factions, long rivals arrayed in bloody opposition, finding a bond of fellowship, and uniting to overthrow one who has wronged and slaughtered both."

"I have heard something of this," said Arden, thoughtfully. "The rightful heir of York is Elizabeth of York; and, were such a thing possible, that Harry of Richmond should graft the red rose on the white rose stem, there is many a man beside yourself who would gladly couch a lance in his support."

Chartley gazed at him for a moment thoughtfully, and then answered. "He has sworn it, Arden, in the cathedral church of Rennes. I know I can trust you; and I tell you he has sworn it. The queen Elizabeth, too, consents, I am informed; and men but wait for the propitious hour."

"You have heard from Richmond!" said Arden, bluffly. "Your Arab brought you letters from the earl."

"No," answered Chartley; "but I have heard from Oxford. He is already in arms in Picardy; and Calais had better close fast her gates."

"Well, well," said Arden. "Love and war, 'tis strange how well these two dissimilar dogs hunt in couples. We were talking of love just now, and lo, she runs straight up to the side of war. So, if you were free, you would ride off with this sweet pretty Iola, and wait for better times, tending hens and sowing turnips round a cottage door. Upon my life, I see no reason why you should not, even as the matter is."

"But I am in ward," said Chartley. "My pledge has been given to this good old Lord Calverly."

"That is all at an end," replied Arden, with a smile, drawing some papers from his pocket. "I have kept you all this time in ignorance, to win your secrets from you. But now know, my lord, that you are in ward to me, and not Lord Calverly. Here is the king's letter to me, and there is one from his gentle grace for you, probably announcing the same thing. The truth is, I fancy, this rash Lord Fulmer has let Richard into too many secrets; and the king is determined to keep his hold of the young lover, by delaying his marriage, while he at the same time separates you from her, to ensure that she is not won by a rival. How he happened to fix upon me as your jailer is a marvel."

While he had thus spoke, Chartley had opened the king's letter, and was reading it eagerly.

"Wrong, Arden, wrong!" he exclaimed, with a joyous look, "wrong, and yet right in some things--read, read!"

Arden took the letter and ran over the contents with that sort of rapid humming tone which renders some words distinct, while others are slurred over. Every now and then he added a comment in his own peculiar way, not always in the most polite or reverent language; for those were not times of great refinement, and right names were often applied to things which we now veil both in word and seeming.

"To our trusty and well beloved--well, well--so he wrote to Buckingham--'our intentions towards you were more gentle than the need of example required to be apparent'--doubtless, his intentions are always gentle; but his needs are numerous--'somewhat exceeded in strictness the spirit of our injunctions'--Poor Lord Calverly, mighty strict indeed when he lets his house be mastered by a prisoner and a handful of guests!--'transferred you therefore in ward to your cousin, Sir William Arden, who will better comprehend our intentions. Nor do we purpose here to shut up our benevolence towards you, but to enlarge it according to your merits and services, even in that which you most desire'--What does the hypocrite mean? He will have your head off ere he has done--'In the mean time, as you incurred displeasure by rashness, so win fair fortune and your heart's content by prudence; for having learned your wishes from a rival and an enemy, we give you an earnest of our good will, in disappointing his desires, with the thought of gratifying yours, according to your deserving, in good season. So, commending you to the

protection of God, the Blessed Virgin, and St. Paul--what a number of them!--'we bid you, et cetera.'"

Arden laid down the letter, and fell into deep thought. Chartley spoke to him, but he did not seem to hear. Chartley gazed at him, and laughed in the joyous hopefulness of youth; but Arden took no notice. Chartley shook him by the arm; but his cousin merely said in a sharp tone--

"Let me think, idle boy!--Let me think. Would you be chained to the collar of a boar, to be dragged with him, wallowing through the blood of the dogs, which will soon be let loose to hunt him to the death?"

"I know not what you mean," exclaimed the young nobleman; "have you gone mad, Arden?"

"It is you who are mad, if you see not the object of this letter," replied Arden. "Hope to you--suspense to Fulmer--both for the same purpose. To keep you his. He holds out a prize to the eyes of both, to be won by a race of services and submissions to himself. Will you enter upon this course, Chartley? Will you, even for the hand of Iola, become the labouring straining serf of him who slew your royal master's children, slaughtered innocent babes, spilt the blood of his own house? See through his artful policy--shut not your eyes to his purpose--calculate the price you must pay for his support of your suit--judge accurately whether, when all is done, the hypocrite will keep the spirit of his promise; and then choose your path."

"I saw it not in that light," replied Chartley, at once brought down to a graver mood, "and yet it may be as you say."

"May be? It is!" replied Arden, "by St. Peter, that dear little girl was right and wise, to fly away and not be made a decoy to lead the game into his net! She knew it not indeed; but that matters not. 'Tis well that she is gone. Her foolish uncle must be sent to court, to confess his sins and excuse them as he may. It is the best course for him, the best result for us. Time--it is time we want."

"But I want something more, Arden," said Chartley. "I want liberty--freedom to act as I will. Then my course is soon decided. By Heaven, I have a thousand minds to rise upon my ward master, bind him, and carry him with me--whither he would be right willing to go, *under compulsion*."

"No, Chartley, no!" answered Arden. "I will not put a colouring upon my actions that they merit not. I will not seem to do by force that which I am afraid to do with good will and openly."

"Then what will you do? How will you act?" demanded Chartley, somewhat puzzled.

"'Tis a case of difficulty," replied Arden, musing. "I must not accept a charge and then violate a trust; I must not shelter a breach of faith under an equivocation."

"But if you refuse to ward me," answered Chartley, "'Tis certain I shall be placed in stricter hands."

"I will not refuse," replied his cousin. "I know this king, and I will accept the ward for a time; but I will write to him and tell him, that it shall be for but one month, as I could never manage you long in my life--which Heaven knows is true enough. If it last longer I renounce it. I know well how it will be. If he sees you tranquil and quiet, he may perhaps let you have full liberty then, thinking that he has power over you by the hope of this fair lady's hand. If not, he will write to me at the month's end, to keep you still in ward, which I will not do for an hour. Meanwhile, we shall have time for all preparations, to find the lady, and seek both the means of flight and means of living afar. Then, have with you, Chartley, and good fortune speed us both!"

This arrangement was not altogether pleasing to his more ardent and impatient companion.

"But hark you, Arden," he said, "long ere the time you speak of, things may have occurred which will require instant decision. Everything is hurrying here to a close; and, before a month be over, much may take place which will render it necessary to act at once."

"I do not think it," answered Arden, deliberately. "The march of great events is generally slow. Sometimes, indeed, it happens that an earthquake comes and shatters all; but more frequently the changes of the world are like the changes of the year, spring, summer, autumn, winter; cloud, sunshine, wind, rain, thunderstorm, sunshine once more, and then the same course round."

"But I tell you, Arden, Oxford is already in arms," replied Chartley, "and marching towards Calais, to take it from the usurper, that Richmond is promised aid from France, and that troops are already gathering at Rouen."

"Rain drops before the storm," answered Arden; "but, before you can do aught, you must find your sweet lady Iola, gain her consent to your plans, make all your preparations for escape; and this will all take some time, let me tell you."

"What if we find her speedily," said Chartley, "and see, moreover, that she is likely to fall into the king's hands, and to be held out, as you yourself have said, as a prize to the most

serviceable."

"Good faith, then you must act as you think fit," said Arden. "I shall guard you, and your seven or eight servants, with myself and my own three. Richard cannot expect that I should augment my household to pleasure him, in a matter that he puts upon me without my wish. Should need be, you must lay your own plans and execute them. Only let me not know them, at least, till the month is over. But methinks, my good lord and cousin, your impatience somewhat miscalculates the future. A month is a short time for all I have mentioned."

"Ay, but I go fast," answered Chartley. "To-morrow we will away to seek this fair lady, and never give the search up till we have found her. You despatch this old lord as fast as may be to York; for, if he should stay and find her out, we might have strife or difficulty."

"See how he takes the tone of command already," exclaimed Arden, laughing; "but do you know, Signor Chartley, that I have a strange hankering for this great castle of Chidlow, and do not love to leave it yet. There are others to be served as well as you."

"How so?" demanded Chartley, in surprise; "why should you wish to stay at Chidlow?"

"Because there is a little maiden there, with sweet soft eyes," replied Arden, "who though, God wot, somewhat given to pensive mood, smiles brightly when I talk to her; and methinks it will not be very easy to tear myself away."

"What, Constance?" exclaimed Chartley. "You, Arden, you! You thinking of love and matrimony! Why, I have given you over to dull celibacy for the last ten years. You were wont to think no eyes so bright as a spear's point, to feel no love for aught but a suit of Milan steel, to warm to the sound of cannon sooner than the lute, and to think the blast of the trumpet sweeter than any lady's tongue. Now, farewell to all hopes of your inheritance! Lack-a-day, what a splendid fortune I have missed by not watching you more closely! and we shall soon have half a score of little Ardens, with round curly heads, playing with your rusty greaves, and calling you Papa."

"Go on. I am laughter proof," answered Arden. "Let him laugh who wins. Of one thing, at least, I am certain, if she gives me her hand, 'tis with free will and all her heart. No ambition in a case where the bridegroom is a simple knight, no ambition where she does not know him to possess a single angel in the world, except herself. But tell me, Chartley, where have been your eyes?"

"Looking into Iola's, I fancy," answered Chartley. "'Tis true, I saw you sit and talk with her upon the battlements the other day, and heard you laugh, and saw you smile; but I thought, good sooth, 'twas mere good-nature that kept you lingering behind with Constance, in order that Iola and I might have free leave to pour forth our hearts to each other."

"No, no," answered Arden. "I am very good-natured and generous, I know; but in this instance, like the rest of the world, I was good-natured--with an object. 'Tis true," he continued, in a graver tone, "there is a great difference between her age and mine--some four and twenty years, and I shall wither while she will still bloom. Perhaps you think her too young, Chartley, to be taken as my wife; but I am not yet old enough to adopt her as my daughter; and one or the other she shall be, if she will; for I will not leave that dear girl to the sad choice of vowing herself to a convent, or remaining dependent upon her foolish uncle's bounty."

Chartley laid his hand affectionately upon his cousin's, saying, "Far from thinking her too young to be your wife, Arden--far from thinking you should not make her such, I believe and trust that you will find happiness with her, such as you have never known before. I have seen the honeysuckle in the woods, twining itself sweetly round the trees. It chooses generally a stout and sturdy trunk, of mature growth, and there it winds itself up, loading the strong branches with its nectar-dropping blossoms. Sometimes, however, I have seen it climb up a light sapling, till they mingled leaves and flowers together, in one heavy mass; but then, there being no steadiness in either, they have been blown to and fro with every wind, till a fiercer blast of the tempest has broken or rooted up the frail prop; and the honeysuckle has been laid low with that it clung to."

"Well, I have no cause to make the objection if she do not," answered Arden. "She has wound herself round my heart, I know not how; but I have concealed nothing from her: She knows my birth-day as well as I do myself; and she says she does not care a groat"--Chartley smiled--"no, not exactly a groat," continued Arden, "but what she said, was this, that when one loved any body, the heart never stopped to ask whether he was rich or poor, old or young; that where calculation entered, love was not. Upon my life, I believe what she said is true; for I know I began to make love to her without any calculation at all, and not much thinking of what I was about. Is that the usual way, Chartley?"

"Precisely!" answered his cousin.

"Well, then, let us go to bed," said Arden; "for I shall rouse this old lord by cock-crow, and send him off, as soon as I can, to York."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

To write a really good play is undoubtedly a much more difficult thing, and the achievement a much more glorious one, than to write a good romance; and yet the dramatist has some very great advantages over the romance writer. He is conventionally permitted to skip over all dull details, which the romance-writer is obliged to furnish. The prominent points alone are those with which he deals; the burden of the rest is cast upon nimble-footed imagination, who, supplies in a moment, from her own inexhaustible stores, all that is requisite to complete the tale, with much richer and more brilliant materials than pen or tongue can afford. If some reference to events going on at a distance from the scene be necessary in words, they may be as brief as the writer wills; and all that is needful to describe the approach of dangers, which have been long preparing, and the effect upon him to whom the tale is told, is comprised in two brief sentences:

Stanley--Richmond is on the seas.
King Richard--There let him sink--and be the seas on him,
White-livered runagate!

This is quite enough; and although I have heard the admirable critics object to the conceit approaching to a pun, expressed in the second line, as unnatural, when placed in the mouth of a man agitated by violent passions, as in the case of Richard, yet that man must have been a very poor observer of human nature, who does not know that the expression of strong passion is full of conceits. It seems as if ordinary words and ordinary forms fail before the energies of passion, and that recourse is had to language often obscure, often, extravagant, sometimes ludicrous, and always full of conceits.

However that may be, it is needful for me to give somewhat more at length the course of events which Shakspeare summed up but briefly. I will be rapid too, and pretend, in this short chapter, to give but a sketch of events, which took several months in action.

Weary men sleep not always sound; and, in less than four hours after the earl of Richmond had laid his head upon his pillow at Angers, he again came forth from his chamber, and went down to that large public room, which in those days, and for many years after, was to be found in every inn, both in France and England. When he entered, the room was tenanted by only one person, for the dinner hour was passed; but that person advanced to meet him at once, with a low reverence. "Ha, Sir Christopher Urswick," said the earl; "right glad am I to see you. The passport you obtained for me from the court of France served me right well this morning at the city gates. By my faith, the pursuers were close upon my heels. But why did you not come yourself?"

"Because I should have been in prison at Nantes by this time, and could serve you better in France," replied Urswick. "There are many of your friends waiting for you, sir, with anxious expectation, at the court of Langeais; and Madame de Beaujeu, the regent of the kingdom, is prepared to receive you as your dignity requires."

"Then am I expected?" asked Richmond.

"Many things are foreseen, which we can hardly say are expected," answered Urswick; "but all knew that, within a month, you must be either in France or England."

Richmond paused in thought, and then asked: "How far is it hence to Langeais?"

"Barely twenty leagues, my lord," replied the other; "an easy ride of two short days."

"And what is now the state of France?" asked Richmond, fixing his keen inquiring eyes upon him.

"Still sadly troubled," replied Urswick. "The contest for the guard of the king's person and the rule of the kingdom still goes on. Orleans, Dunois, and the old constable, on the one side, pull hard against Madame de Beaujeu, her husband, and the rest of the court, on the other; and there is nothing but cabals, dissensions, and from time to time outbreaks; but the princess has more wit than the whole of France put together; and she will break through all their plots, and confound their intrigues. Still the state is very much troubled, and a new revolt is expected every day."

"Then we can pause, and rest at Angers," said Richmond, gravely. "If I have many friends at the court of France, I have been obliged to leave many at the court of Brittany. Their safety must be considered at once. I will write to the good duke, before I break bread. I pray you, in the mean time, seek me a trusty messenger. Let him be a Frenchman, for there might be danger to any other."

Prompt to execute his determinations, the earl at once addressed a letter to the duke of Brittany, explaining the causes of his flight, and pointing out to the weak but amiable prince the

stain which his minister had brought upon his name, by engaging to give up a guest, who trusted his hospitality, to a bitter enemy.

He urged not, it is true, the punishment of Landais; but he entreated that his friends, the companions of his exile, might be permitted to join him in France.

This letter had all the effect he could have desired. Free permission to go or stay was granted to every Englishman at the Breton court; and the rage and shame of the duke, at the misuse of his power by Landais, joined with the vehement accusations brought against that upstart minister by the Breton nobles, induced the prince to give him up to justice, reserving to himself indeed the right to pardon him, if he should be condemned by a court of justice. The proceedings, however, were too speedy for the slow duke. Landais was condemned; and he was hung also, while the signature to his pardon was still wet.

Three days after his arrival at Angers, the earl of Richmond set out for Langeais, and early on the second day reached the gates of that fine old château, in the great saloon of which may still be seen the sculptured memorials of joys and ceremonies long past, which ushered in the reign of the active and enterprising Charles VIII. His reception was kind and cordial; but, as Urswick had informed him, trouble still reigned at the court of France; and some weeks elapsed before the earl could obtain anything like a promise of assistance from Madame de Beaujeu. Then, however, she engaged to furnish a small and insignificant force, to form merely the nucleus of an army to be raised in England. Two thousand men alone was all that France offered; but with this insufficient army Richmond determined to take the field, and named Rouen, where he had many friends, as the meeting-place of his troops. The assistance in money was not greater than the assistance in men; and the hard condition of leaving hostages for the payment of all sums advanced was enforced by the shrewd regent of France, whose whole object and expectation, apparently, was, by stirring up civil wars in England, to prevent Richard from pressing any of those claims which he had against the neighbouring sovereign.

She had to deal, indeed, with one perhaps as shrewd as herself; and, although Richmond could not refuse the demand, he took advantage of it to free himself of a person whose lightness and incapacity rendered him little serviceable as an ally, and whose sincerity and good faith were somewhat more than doubtful. Dorset was easily persuaded to avoid the perils of an enterprise, the result of which no one could foresee, by remaining as one of the hostages in Paris, with another gentleman whom the earl felt he could do very well without; and Richmond departed for Rouen, resolved to strike for life or death, a throne or a grave, with whatever means fortune might furnish.

A number of gallant English gentlemen surrounded the future king. But they were in almost all cases without followers, and but scantily provided with money. It was therefore not upon their unaided arms that Richmond could depend for a crown; and, as he rode into the fine old town of Rouen, a shade of despondency came over his countenance, never very bright and cheerful. But at the door of the house which had been prepared for him he was met by the boy Pierre la Brousse, who had been sent on to announce his coming, and now sprang forward to hold his stirrup.

"The good bishop is waiting within, my lord," said the boy eagerly, as Richmond dismounted. "He has news for you from England--" and then, giving a glance at the earl's face, he added-- "Good news, my lord."

"You seem much in his confidence," said Richmond, coldly. "Does he tell you whether his news is good or bad?"

"His face does," replied the boy. "I watch men's faces."

Richmond smiled and walked on, guided by Pierre, to the room where Morton sat. For a moment the prelate did not seem to hear the opening door, but remained, with the light of the lamp well nigh absorbed by the black ceiling and the dark arras, poring over some papers on the table before him. The next instant, however, he raised his eyes as Richmond advanced, and, starting up, exclaimed--

"I beg your pardon, my lord the king, I did not hear you enter."

"The king?" said Richmond. "You forget, good father, I am as yet no king."

"But shall be so within a month," replied Morton, laying his hand on the papers, "if there be but one word true in ten of all that is written in these letters. But you are weary, you are thirsty. Let me order some refreshment, while supper is preparing."

"I am weary of disappointments, thirsty for hope," replied Richmond. "Give me your tidings, before I drink or rest. Now, boy, retire;" and he seated himself by the side of the chair which Morton had been occupying.

"This, my lord, from the gallant earl of Northumberland," said Morton, handing him one letter. "See what comfortable assurances he gives of the north."

Richmond read, and looked well satisfied, but said nothing; and then Morton handed him

another, saying--

"This from Sir Walter Herbert."

"But poor comfort, that," observed Richmond. "He bids you be assured that, whatever appearances he may put on, he will stand neuter. This is cold, right reverend father."

"In some cases, neutrality is better than favour," replied Morton. "Herbert is Richard's right hand in Wales. If his right hand fail him, his left will serve him but little. Read this from Rice ap Thomas."

"Ay, this is more cheering," exclaimed Richmond, his face brightening. "A thousand men! Why 'tis half the force we bring hence. But think you, reverend friend, that he can keep his word?"

"That he has the will, doubt not," replied the bishop of Ely, "and his power must be shorn indeed, if he double not the number promised. Now mark, my noble prince, what is said by this good Captain Savage--a leader of no mean renown, and a man whose bare word will outweigh the oaths of other men. Listen, 'Wales waits for his coming, as those who watch for the dawn. She feels he is her son, and will give him the welcome of a parent.' Tudor will meet here many kinsmen, more friends than kinsmen, more soldiers than friends, more servants than all; for those will serve him with their hearts and their purses, their prayers and their means, who have not strength to draw a sword nor power to raise a force. Let him land nowhere but in Wales."

"And so say I," exclaimed Richmond; "my first footsteps upon British shore shall be in the land of my fathers. I will go forth to seek the crown, which is my right, from my own native home; and with such promises as these, such friendship as yours, so good a cause, so base an enemy, I will march on even with my little band, assured of victory, and shame the petty aid of miserly France, by winning gloriously, or leave my bones to pay the miserable debt, and let them go to England to fetch them back. Now, my good lord bishop, for our preparations; for I will not tarry longer by a day than I can help, on this ungenerous soil."

"Nay, my noble prince, take some refreshment," said Morton; "the proper hour for supper has long passed, and I doubt much that you tarried on the road for either food or rest."

"Ha! supper--I had forgot," said Richmond; "well, I suppose, man must eat. So we will sup, and call my brave companions in to aid us. Then will we discuss our after measures, hear all their counsel, and adopt--our own."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Gaps are sometimes pleasant things. With what interest the eye traces a gap in a deep wood; how it roams up the glade, marking a tree out-standing here, a clump of bushes there, the rounded swell of the turf, the little sinking dell! And now imagination revels in the void, filling up every breach in the line with a continuation of its own, seeing the fancied woodman's hut peeping out from behind this mass of foliage, peopling the coverts with dun deer, and raising up forms of lads and lasses to wander through the chequered shade.

I must have a break in the history of those upon whom the principal interest of the tale has been concentrated, and can only furnish a few brief lines, to guide the reader's imagination aright. We left them in the spring of the year, when skies were soft, though warm, when the shower mingled with the sunshine, when the leaf was in its green infancy upon the branch, and all nature was rejoicing as if filled with the sweet early hopes of youth. It was now summer, ardent summer; the sky was full of golden light, the woods afforded deep shade; the corn was turning yellow on the ground; and the cattle lay in the hot noonday, chewing the cud, under the shadows of the trees. The longed-for summer had come. It was fruition.

Lord Calverly had followed the advice he had received, and presented himself to the king to make what excuse he best could. He dared not indeed tell the whole truth, and merely said, that his niece, unwilling to fulfil the contract with Lord Fulmer, had fled he knew not whither. Richard, however, divined more than he acknowledged; but he dealt leniently with him. There was no fine, no confiscation, no actual imprisonment. He merely required that the old nobleman should remain constantly at the court till his niece reappeared, after having satisfied himself that Lord Chartley was not cognizant of her flight nor aware of her place of refuge.

Suspicion and policy were busy in the king's mind at that hour; for reports reached him, from his numerous spies in France and Brittany, which showed that storms were gathering on the horizon; and signs, not to be mistaken, told him of discontent and disaffection amongst the

people of his own land, while phantoms of shadowy conspiracies flitted across the scene before his eyes, and left him in doubt and apprehension of every man. All those whom he most feared and least trusted he kept at the court under his own eye, believing that the terror of the axe would secure that obedience which he could not obtain from love and zeal.

Lord Fulmer, indeed, remained in Dorsetshire, in command of a small body of forces; but he was kept in check, and his fidelity secured by the presence of a much larger power upon the verge of Somerset and Devon, commanded by one in whom Richard could confide. Never failing in dissimulation, the king noticed not in any way what he suspected or what he knew of the young lord's conduct; but every messenger which went to Dorsetshire carried commendations and hopes, and many an expression of regret that the Lady Iola St. Leger had not been found, so that his marriage must be necessarily delayed.

It might be supposed, that if Richard thought precautions so necessary in these instances, he would have exercised still greater vigilance in the case of Lord Chartley. Such, however, was not the case. The paradoxes of the human mind are part of history; but so common is it for the most jealous, watchful, and suspicious, in every rank and relation of life, to place the utmost confidence in those who are destined to frustrate all their plans and purposes, and disappoint all their expectations, that it is no marvel even so keen and untrusting a man as Richard should feel no apprehensions, with regard to either Chartley or Arden, though he was hateful to them both, and yet be suspicious of Lord Calverly and Fulmer, who might perchance disobey his orders, and refuse reverence to his authority in matters of small moment, where their own passions were concerned, but who never entertained a thought of abandoning the king's party, to which they had attached themselves from the first. Cunning often overreaches itself, often sees a distant object, and overlooks that lying at its feet. But there were many circumstances which rendered Richard careless in the case of Chartley. He looked upon him as a rash, heedless, light-spirited young man, too open and too frank, either to be sought by or to seek other conspirators. He had always been firmly attached to the house of York, had been brought up from his youth under its guardianship, had inherited, as it were, animosity to the house of Lancaster, had taken no part with the new nobility, as the relations of Edward's queen were called, and had, in his boyhood, treated with some haughty contumely one of the upstart favourites of the queen's brother, which caused him to be sent from court to travel in foreign lands. These things had not been forgotten by Richard; and he argued--"It is neither with Richmond nor with Dorset that this gay young lord would intrigue, if he intrigued at all; and, so long as this fair maid of St. Leger remains to be won, I have him sure. 'Tis well she hides herself; for were she at the court, or in her uncle's house, I might have to decide too soon. I doubt that moody discontented Fulmer; but of this light-spirited youth I am secure."

The month, during which Sir William Arden had agreed to hold his noble cousin in ward, passed away. Richard heard of them travelling here, travelling there, roaming from this village to that, hovering sometimes round Chidlow, sometimes round Atherston, lodging at Tamworth, at Leicester, at Hinckley; and he easily divined that Chartley was seeking eagerly for Iola. The multitude of affairs pressing upon his attention gave him but little time to think of minor things; and he suffered the period to lapse, without taking any farther precaution for the young lord's custody. It was recalled to his memory some days afterwards by Catesby; and the king mused over the suggestion for some moments; but at length he said in a somewhat doubtful tone--

"No. Let it be. But this girl must be heard of, Catesby. I must know where she is, lest this youth find out the hidden treasure, and snatch at it without our consent. There must be people who know her habits and her haunts. Let them be enquired after, and in the mean time write me a letter to Lord Chartley, requiring him to use every diligence to seek for the Lady Iola, and bring her to the court, when he shall be rewarded as his heart could desire. But mark you, Catesby, mark you. Put in 'If the lady's heart go with it.' These young fools, we must talk to them about hearts, or they will not believe. Methinks hearts wear out about thirty, Catesby. Is it not so?"

"Sometimes sooner; sire," answered Catesby, gravely. "But I will do your bidding; and methinks the person most likely to know where the lure lies hid is the lady Constance, her cousin. The old lord sent her back to the abbey of St. Clare; but I will despatch some one thither, skilled in ladies' interrogatories, who will soon extract from her all that she knows."

"So be it," said the king, and there the conversation dropped.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

It was in the month of July, often a wet and rainy month, in this good climate of England; but the rain had exhausted itself, and sunshine had come back again, bright and clear. The world

looked fresh and beautiful, as if a new spring had come; and light and pleasant air tempered the heat of the atmosphere; yet the door of the woodman was shut and bolted; and, in the middle of the summer, a large fire burned upon the hearth. With his leathern jerkin cast off, his powerful and sinewy arm bare, and a heavy hammer in his hand, he stood by the fire turning, from time to time, a piece of iron which lay amidst the ashes. Then, approaching a sort of moveable anvil, which stood in the midst of the floor, he adjusted upon it some plates of iron, fastened closely together by rivets, one of which however was wanting. Next, bringing the red hot iron from the fire, he passed it through the two holes where the lost rivet had been, and with heavy blows of the hammer fastened the whole together, while his large hound stood by and contemplated his proceedings with curious eyes. Then throwing down the iron plates by the side of some others very similar, he took up a bright corslet, grooved and inlaid with gold tracery, and gazed upon it with a thoughtful and a care-worn look. Through the hard iron, on the right side, was a hole, of the breadth of three fingers, and all round it the crimson cloth, which lined the corslet, was stained of a deeper hue.

"Ay, Ban," said the woodman, speaking to the dog, "those are the holes which let life out! How is it to be mended? Nay, I will let it be--why should I care? 'Twere a lucky lance that found twice the same entrance;" and he cast down the corslet on the floor.

The dog turned round towards the door, and growled; and the next instant some one raised the latch, and then knocked for admission. In haste, but yet with no agitation, the woodman lifted the various pieces of armour which cumbered the ground, removed them to the inner room, and locked the door. In the mean time the knock was repeated twice or thrice, and the dog bayed loud. The woodman drew the bolts, and threw back the door suddenly; but the only figure which presented itself, was that of Sam, the piper.

"Why, what have you been about, Master Boyd?" he said. "You were hammering so loud but now, I could not make you hear."

"Mending my tools," said Boyd, with a grim smile. "But what want you, Sam? Have you brought me any news?"

"Ay, plenty," answered the piper. "First, let me put down my bag, and give me a draught of beer, if it be but thin penny ale, for I am thirsty, and my mouth is full of dust."

"It has often been full of other things since day-break," said the woodman; "but thou shalt have the beer. Sit you down there, outside the door, and I will bring it you."

The piper sat down on the rude seat at the door; and, while the woodman departed "on hospitable thoughts intent," the hound came and laid its head upon the lap of the wandering musician. But Sam, as curious as any of his class, was seized with a strong desire to see what the woodman had been really doing, and was rising to look in. The moment he attempted to move, however, the dog, though he knew him well, began to growl, and thus kept him there, as if he had been placed on guard, till Boyd's return.

"Well, now for your tidings then," said Boyd, when the man had drunk.

"Which will you have first?" demanded the piper, "news from the court, the castle, or the field?"

"It matters not," said Boyd. "Shake them out of the bag, Sam, as they come."

"Well then, from the court," said Sam. "It should have the place of honour, though there is but little honour in it. Well, the king is mighty wroth to hear that the Earl of Richmond has put to sea with a fleet and army to invade England. He laughed, they say, when he was told thereof; and, when he laughs, 'tis sure that he is angry."

"But is Richmond on the sea?" asked the woodman. "I doubt it."

"Nay, I speak but what men tell me," answered Sam. "They say he is on the sea with a great power. Many men refuse to pay the benevolence too, and declare it is an exaction against the law. All this makes Richard angry; and he rages at trifles like a mad bear, when the dogs have got him by the muzzle."

"He'll need a bear-ward, soon," said Boyd; "and he may get one."

"Men say he is insane," continued Sam, "and that his brain has never been right since his son died at Middleham. However, the queen's funeral was as glorious as could be; and Richard wept a basin full, I am told. But yet men have cried more over a raw onion, and never felt it much at heart."

"Well, well, what is all this to me?" asked Boyd, impatiently. "The queen is dead and buried. God rest her soul! It had little rest here, since she married the murderer of her husband. The king might love her, or might not, may grieve for her, or not. What is all that to me? She was not my wife;" and, seating himself on the bench, he bent his eyes thoughtfully upon the ground.

"Well then, my court news is told," said Sam. "Now for my country gossip. Know you, good

man Boyd, that the Lord Chartley, whom you and I had to do with a good many months ago, when they burned the houses on the abbey green, is back at Tamworth?"

"Ay, I know," replied Boyd. "He has been here thrice, hovering about like a fly round a lamp."

"He's a good youth," said the piper. "He promised me one gold angel, and he gave me two. He has a right loving remembrance of that night too; for I never see him but I get a silver remembrance thereof, so I am rich now, Master Boyd. Then, there's his good cousin, Sir William Arden. He hangs fondly about here too, and is, most days, at the grate of the convent."

"Ay, what does he there?" asked Boyd.

"Why, he talks to the Lady Constance by the hour," answered the piper; "and they all say it will be a match, although, if he be not well stricken in years, he has been well stricken in wars. He's a good man too, and bountiful of silver groats; but his hair is getting mottled with grey, so that he is not so good a man as the young lord, whose hair is all brown."

"Oh, give to me the bonny brown hair,
The teeth so white, and the skin so fair,
The lightsome step, and the dainty air,
Of my sweet Meg of the May."

"No, no. I like Chartley best; and I shall make a fortune by him too, before I've done. 'Tis the first luck that ever befel me, and I shall open my cap to catch it."

"Then, will you let it all run out in drink?" said Boyd. "But, how may this luck come to you?"

"Why, he has promised me," said the piper, "to fill me a gill stoup with gold pieces, if I can find out for him where ligg the pretty lass who watched with him in the forest through one live-long night not long ago. The Lady Iola, they call her. I know not if you know such a one, woodman; but he has asked high and asked low, asked rich and asked poor, and employed all sorts of cunning men to know where the lady is, so that, in sheer despair, he has betaken himself to a piper--and the piper is the man for his money, for he has found her out."

The woodman started at his words; and, turning upon him with a stern brow, he said--

"And thou hast told him?"

The piper paused for a moment, and then laughed.

"No," he said, at length; "I have not told him yet. I thought that I would first speak with a certain person, who has sometimes odd thoughts of his own, and who, though a rough man at times, has often been kind to me, in days of trouble. When I meddle, I like to know what I am meddling with; and though I be a poor wretch, who rarely knows from one day to another where I shall get meat, or, what is more important still, where I shall get drink; yet, to say truth, I would rather lose a gill stoup full of gold pieces than make mischief which I cannot mend. I therefore determined to speak first of all with this person, who knows a good deal of the matter, and who, having hidden, can find. Am I not wise?"

"Thou art better than wise," said the woodman, laying his strong hand upon his shoulder. "Thou art good, as this world goes."

The woodman paused thoughtfully for a few moments, and then said--

"Not yet. You must not tell him yet. There is a task for her to perform, a scene for her to pass through, before there can be daylight. Said'st thou the earl of Richmond was on the sea?"

"'Tis so confidently reported," replied the other; "notices of great preparation at Harfleur, and of troops collecting at Rouen, have reached the court, and are noised about the city; and the rumour is, that the good earl has sailed, intending to land in Dorsetshire or Devon."

"Then he must fight or fail at once?" said the woodman; "and he must be advised. Yet, doubtless, the tale is false; and at all events, it is too late to stop him. Let me think. To-day is the twenty-eighth of July, is it not?"

"Ay," answered the piper; "'tis so by my calendar."

But the woodman seemed not to hear him, and went on in the same meditating tone, saying--

"It is a memorable day--ay, it is a memorable day. Once more in arms Hark you, my friend, will you be my messenger?"

"What, to the earl of Richmond?" cried Sam, with a start.

"Who said the earl of Richmond, fool?" asked Boyd, sternly. "No, to a lady."

"Ay, right willing," answered the piper; "if I judge who the lady is; for she was always kind and good to me."

"Let not your wit run before your knowledge," said the woodman, "or it will leave truth behind. I send you to a lady, whom you have seen, but with whom you never spoke--"

He suddenly broke off, and seemed to let his mind ramble to other things.

"If Richmond has spread the sail," he said, "he may have touched land ere now. But Richard is unprepared. He has no force in the field, no muster called, that I can hear of. There must be an error, and there may yet be time enough. Do you remember a lady who, with a train of maidens and grooms, passed through the forest several weeks ago?"

"Ay, right well," answered the piper. "She offered at the shrine of St. Clare, looked through all the church, examined the monuments, and read the books where strangers' names are written; and, moreover, she gave bountiful alms, of which I had my share. Then she went to Atherston, thence to Tamworth, and to many another place besides. She was at the court too."

"And is now gone to Tewksbury," said the woodman. "It is to her I intend to send you."

"'Tis a far journey, good man Boyd," replied the piper; "and princesses are too high for me. They say she was a princess. You had better send some one more quick of limbs than I am, and softer of speech."

"I can spare none," replied the woodman; "and 'tis because thou art not fitted to draw a sword or charge a pike that I send thee. As for speed, thou shalt have means to make four legs supply a cure for thine own lameness. Canst thou ride a horse?"

"Draw a sword or charge a pike!" exclaimed Sam. "Art thou going to make war, woodman?"

"May not the abbey need defence in these troublous times?" demanded Boyd. "Know you not, that I am bailiff now, as well as head woodman? Canst thou ride a horse, I say?"

"That can I," answered the man. "In my young days I rode the wildest. Would I had wild or tame to bear me now, for I hobble painfully."

"Well, then, thou shalt have one," said Boyd; "and, when thy journey is done, keep him for thy pains. But mark me, thou shalt promise, on thy soul and conscience, to drink nought but water till thou hast delivered my message----"

"'Tis a hard oath," said the piper. "I took one like it once before; and I was forced for a fortnight after to double the pint stoup, to make up for lost time. Well, well, I will take it."

"That is not all," answered Boyd. "Thou shalt promise me, moreover, to utter no word regarding whom the message comes from, neither to mention my name, describe my person, nor tell my abode; but simply to seek that lady, and tell her that the fate of the person for whom she has so long enquired may still be heard of, and that you can lead her to one who can give her all the tidings she desires."

"And bring her hither?" demanded Sam.

"No," answered the woodman. "First, let me be assured, if you really know where the Lady Iola is. Tell me how you discovered her, and where. Do not hesitate; for it must be told."

"Nay, I hesitate not," answered the piper, "for thou wert there too; so I can little harm her. One night, as I was passing through the wood which lies between Atherston and Alanstoke--you know the wood right well, not the first coppice, but the bigger wood beyond--I heard a sound of singing. There were many voices; and, as I love music, I crept up, when in the little glade, beside the stream that runs into the Tamworth water, I saw some thirty people, men and women too, singing right sweetly. I know not well what songs they were--assuredly not the canticles of the church--but yet they seemed pure and holy; for ever and anon they praised God's name, and gave him honour and glory. They prayed too, but in the English tongue; and I could not help thinking it were better if all men did the same in the land. Sure I am, if they did so, they would know better what they say than when they pray in Latin; and, though people, no doubt, would call the meeting Lollardy, I liked it well. Then, when they parted company, I saw the Lady Iola, for she was one, walk away between two men. One was about your height, good man Boyd. The other, I knew by his long white beard--the good old franklin, Elias Ames. There was a lad followed, to see that no one watched, I fancy; and he seemed to me wondrous like the son of the gardener at the abbey. But I tricked his vigilance, and followed round by the other path, till I saw the Lady Iola and the good old franklin go into his pretty wooden house, with the woodbine over the door, while the others went their way. Next morning, soon after day-break too, I saw the lady peep forth from the window, through the honeysuckles, looking, to my mind, far sweeter than they."

"Well, then," said the woodman, after meditating for a moment, "go to the lady I have mentioned; tell her what I have said, but not who said it; and lead her to that house with as few followers as may be. There she will hear more."

"But how shall I get admittance to her?" demanded Sam. "Why, those knaves, those grooms of hers, will look me all over from head to foot, and then drive me from the door. How should a poor piper get speech of a princess?"

"You shall have the means," answered Boyd. "Wait here for a minute;" and, retiring once more into his cottage, he was a short time absent. When he returned, he bore a piece of written paper in hand, and gave it to his messenger, saying. "There, take that to Sir William Stanley's bailiff at Atherston. He will help to send you on the way."

"A horse---believe him," said the piper, reading. "Does that mean he is to believe a horse?"

"No," replied the woodman, gravely, "to believe you, and give you a horse. I knew not that you could read. Now look here," he continued, giving the man a large gold cross, of what is called the Greek form, set with five sardonix stones, and attached to two very beautifully wrought chains, terminating in the heads of serpents. It seemed of very ancient workmanship, but was so splendid as greatly to excite the admiration of the poor piper.

"There, cease gazing!" said the woodman; "but take that cross, and put it up carefully, where it will be seen by no one, lest you should be robbed and murdered for its sake. When you meet with the lady's train--you will find her either in Tewksbury or some of the neighbouring villages--ask to speak with her chief woman. Tell her to take the cross to her mistress, and ask if she will purchase it. There is money for your journey too. Methinks she will soon see you, when she looks upon that cross."

"But what if she do not?" asked Sam. "What then?"

"Return," replied the woodman, apparently greatly moved; and, without further words, he was re-entering his cottage, when the piper called after him aloud, saying:

"Hark ye, hark ye, yet a minute, Master Boyd. There are two words to the bargain, remember. If I undertake your errand, you must not spoil mine."

"Thine, man!" exclaimed the woodman, turning upon him sharply. "What is thine?"

"If I understood you rightly," said Sam, with a tone of deference, "you said, or meant to say, that the secret of this dear lady's abode was not to be told to the young lord as yet, but that it might be told by and by. Now, I must be the teller; for I made the discovery."

"I understand thee," said the woodman. "Fear not, thou shalt have the gill measure of gold pieces, which is what thou carest about; and no one shall take it from thee. Now, quick upon thy way; for time presses, and events are hurrying forward which admit of no delay."

CHAPTER XL.

Midsummer days dawn early; and, even in that class of life where it is not customary to pass the greater part of night in study or amusement, it rarely happens that the rising sun finds many ready to rise with him. The hour at which the labours of the abbey garden begun, in summer time, was five o'clock. But long ere that hour had arrived, on an early day of August, the door of one of the cottages on the abbey green was opened, and a stout good-looking young man came forth, taking great care to make his exit without noise. He looked around him too, in the grey twilight; for the air was still thickened with the shades of night. But every window had up its shutters of rude boarding; and he passed along upon his way without fear. His step was light, his countenance frank and good-humoured; and, though his clothes were very coarse, they were good and clean, betokening a labourer of the better class. He had soon crossed the green, passed between the houses which had been left standing at the time of the fire, and those which were in course of reconstruction; and then, following the road down the hill, he reached the bank of the stream, along which the troops had marched when coming to search for doctor Morton. He did not, however, pursue the road towards Coleshill; but, turning sharp away to the left, along a path through some meadows watered by a small rivulet, he kept, between himself and the abbey, a row of tall osiers, which screened the path from the hamlet. At the distance of about half a mile was a coppice of some four or five hundred acres; and from beyond that might be seen, with an interval of two or three undulating fields, a much more extensive wood, though it did not deserve the name of a forest. Towards the edge of the latter the young man bent his steps, following still the little path, which seemed rarely beaten by the busy tread of men's feet; for the green blades of grass, though somewhat pressed down and crushed, by no means suffered the soil to appear.

Indeed, it was a wild and solitary scene, with just sufficient cultivation visible to render the loneliness more sensible. The young man, however, seemed to know all the paths right well; for though they sometimes branched to the one hand, and sometimes to the other, and sometimes could hardly be traced amongst the grass, yet he walked on steadily, without any doubt or hesitation, and at length entered the wood, near a spot where stood a tall red post.

He had nearly a mile farther to go, after this point was reached; and his course led him through many a wild glade and bowery avenue, till at length he came to a spot highly cultivated, which seemed to have been reclaimed from the wood. Immediately in front of him, and at the other side of this patch of cultivated ground, was a neat wooden house, of one story in height, but with glass windows, and even two chimneys; great rarities in those days. The whole front was covered with wild honeysuckle, rich in its unceasing blossoms; and every window, as well as the door, looked like a pleasant bower. Approaching with a light step, through a number of rose bushes, which were planted in front of the house, the young man knocked hard at the door with his knuckles; and in a moment after it was opened, and he went in.

He did not see or remark, however, that he had been followed on his track. When he first came forth from the house upon the green, there had been protruded, beyond the angle of a new building on the opposite side, a face very nearly black in hue, and surmounted by a turban. It was instantly withdrawn; but when the young man hurried down towards the stream, a figure, clad almost altogether in white, glided from behind the new houses; and bending almost to the ground, in a position which it would be difficult for European limbs to assume, the swarthy watcher marked with a keen and flashing eye the course the youth took, and, the moment he disappeared behind the osiers, darted down with the speed of lightning, leaped a low enclosure, went straight through the little rivulet, though it was more than knee-deep, and followed it along its course, keeping the opposite bank to that which was pursued by the person he was watching. When he had come within about ten yards of the end of the row of osiers, he paused, and, bending his head, listened attentively. A footfall met his ear. It was upon soft green turf; but yet he heard it; and he remained perfectly still and motionless for a minute or two, then waded through the rivulet once more, and creeping gently in amongst the willows, gazed eagerly up the side of the hill. The young man's figure was there before him, at about fifty yards distance; and from that sheltered spot the other watched him nearly to the edge of the wood. As soon as he disappeared, his pursuer crept softly out, and, bending low, hurried up to the slope where the figure had been lost to his eyes.

There was a gentle dip in the ground at that point; but when the Arab lifted his head, and gazed around, nothing was to be seen but the green branches of the wood, about a couple of hundred yards in advance, and three small paths, separating a few feet from where he stood, and then leading amongst the trees at points considerably distant from each other. Instantly, however, the Arab knelt down upon the ground, and seemed to examine the grass upon the path, with a keen and searching eye, and on his hands and knees advanced slowly to where the point of separation came. There he paused, scrutinized that to the right, and that to the left, and then that in the middle, following it on, in the same position, for several yards. Then, starting on his feet, he bounded forward along it like a deer, and entered the wood. There the ground was sandy; and though the little paths were many and intricate, a long line of foot prints guided him on aright till he reached the little cultivated farm, just at the very moment the young man was entering the house.

Drawing back at once, the Arab concealed himself amongst the tangled bushes, and slowly and quietly made an aperture, by pulling off the leaves, so as to have the door of the building full in his sight. Then kneeling down, with his arms crossed upon his chest, he kept his eyes, motionless and hardly winking, upon the front of the house, for well nigh twenty minutes. At the end of that time, the door opened, and the young man came forth again, with what seemed a written paper in his hand; and, behind him, the watcher saw a fair and well-remembered face. The door was shut immediately again; and Ibn Ayoub bent himself down, till he was completely covered by the bushes. A moment or two after, the son of the abbey gardener passed by the place of the Arab's concealment, and as soon as there had been time for him to make some progress on his homeward way, Ibn Ayoub rose and followed slowly.

Some four or five hours later in the day, Chartley sat in the small chamber of an inn, with his head resting upon his hand, and his eyes bent gloomily down. It was not a usual mood with him; but disappointment after disappointment will sink the lightest heart. A man feels a feather no weight, but yet he may be smothered with many.

"There is Arden," he thought, as he heard the sound of horses' feet below; "and he is happy. All consenting, all rejoicing, to think that a fair penniless girl has won the heart of one of the richest and noblest men in England; while I--as careless to the full of money or state as he, am made wretched because this sweet Iola is an heiress. Curse on this wealth! Would there were none of it; we should all be happier then. But am I envious? That is not right. Well, well, I cannot help it. He must not see it, however. Well, Arden, what news? You have of course seen Constance. Has she had any tidings?"

"Yes, as before," said Arden; "a few words found on her table. 'Tell him I am well, and safe,' so ran the writing; 'bid him be of good heart. I will keep my word, and send if there be danger.' That was all, but it was in her own writing. Methinks, Chartley, it were as well to give up this pertinacious search. If you discover her, may it not draw other eyes too upon her place of refuge? The king, depend upon it, has us closely watched."

"I do not think it," answered Chartley; "and, besides, how can I feel easy, not knowing in what direction she may need my aid, When she does need it? One mistake might ruin all our hopes. Oh, could I but discover her, Arden, my tongue would soon find words to win her to instant flight, as the only means of safety--as the only means of insuring that she is not forced into this loathed

marriage, and I am not driven to cut Fulmer's throat or my own. Ha, Ibn Ayoub, where hast thou been all day?"

"On my lord's business," said the Arab, and was silent again, seating himself quietly on the floor in the corner of the room; a custom which he had whenever he wished to talk with his master privately. On these occasions, nothing would induce him to speak openly; for, though a slave, Ibn Ayoub had a will of his own end exercised it; and Chartley well knew that it was in vain to bid him give his tidings, or ask his question in Arden's presence. The good knight, however, soon retired to his own chamber; and Chartley, fixing his eyes upon the Arab, who remained perfectly silent, demanded what he had been doing.

"Seeking that which is lost," replied the slave, rising and standing before his master.

"And hast thou found it?" asked Chartley, with his heart beating; for there was an air of grave importance about the man, from which he, who had known him well for some three or four years, argued a consciousness of success.

"I have, my lord," replied Ibn Ayoub. "Thou once didst pour balm into my wounds, and hold cool water to my thirsty lips. I can now do the same for thee. She whom thou hast lost is found. I heard thee inquiring how it could be, that the lady sent letters to the other lady. From what I had seen, at the castle of the old man, I guessed the secret messenger, tracked him, and saw the lady's face. Now, thou can'st go thither when thou wilt?"

"Did she see thee, Ibn Ayoub?" demanded Chartley, adding, in the same breath, "What did she say?"

"She saw me not," replied the Arab. "I was hidden from her sight."

Farther explanations ensued; but, as so often happens with every man in the course of life, the first step thus taken in advance brought its doubts and difficulties with it. But Chartley was impetuous, and he felt it impossible to refrain. As to telling him the name of the place where Iola had found refuge, or describing it, so that he himself could judge exactly where it was, that the Arab could not do; but he offered to guide his lord thither, whenever he pleased, averring truly that he had noted every step of the way so well he could make no mistake.

"How far?" demanded Chartley.

"One hour, with fleet horses," answered the man.

"Well, then, to-morrow at daybreak, we will set out," replied his master. "Say nought to any one, but have our horses prepared, and we will away with the first ray of dawn."

This course was followed; and, while Arden was still quietly sleeping in his bed, Chartley and the Arab were on their way towards the house of the old franklin, Elias Ames. With the certainty of a dog tracking a deer, Ibn Ayoub led his master along every step of the way which the gardener's son had pursued on the preceding day, except in as much as he circled round the foot of the little rise on which the abbey stood, and reached the end of the row of osiers by crossing the meadows. The whole journey occupied as near as possible an hour; and at the end of that time Chartley had the franklin's house, and the cultivated land around it, before him.

"There," said Ibn Ayoub, pointing with his hand. "She dwells there."

"Well then," said Chartley, springing to the ground, "lead the horses in amongst the trees, where they cannot be seen. I will give the signal when I come out. She may be angry," he thought; "but women little know, I believe, the eager impatience which a man who loves truly feels to see again the lady of his heart, after a long absence."

Thus saying, he walked along the path, and approached the house. The windows were all closed with their wooden shutters; and he circled it all round, without finding means of entrance.

"It may alarm her, if I rouse the house suddenly," he thought; and, retreating to the edge of the wood again, he remained watching for about half an hour longer. Then the old man himself and a stout woman servant came forth from the door, and took down the boards from the windows; and when that was done, the good franklin walked away down a little dell to the right, as if to superintend his own affairs for the day. Chartley waited till he was gone; and by that time the woman had re-entered the house; but he heard, or fancied he heard, the tones of a sweet well-known voice speaking to her as she went in. He then crossed the space between, hesitated for a moment as to whether he should knock at the door or not, but at length laid his hand upon the latch, and opened it without farther ceremony.

The passages in the house formed a cross, dividing it into four equal parts. Before him, all was vacant; and he could see clear through, by a door at the back, into a little orchard behind; but he heard a woman's voice speaking on the left, and now he was sure that she was answered in the tones of Iola. Walking on then, he turned up the passage on that side, and saw the woman servant coming forth from the door of a room. She closed the door suddenly behind her, when she beheld a man in the passage, and demanded sharply what he wanted.

"I wish to speak with the lady in that room," replied Chartley. "When she knows who it is, she will see me, I am sure."

"Nonsense, nonsense, young man," replied the woman. "There is no lady there. That is a store room."

"Then your stores speak, my good woman," answered Chartley; "for I heard a voice which I know right well talking to you."

"Go away, go away," replied the woman, who, in the dark passage where Chartley stood, could not see his dress, or judge of his station. "Go away, or I will call in the men to make you."

"All the men in the neighbourhood would not make me," answered Chartley aloud. "At least, not till I see that lady. Tell her it is Lord Chartley. If she bids me go, I will."

The words had scarcely passed his lips, when the door through which the woman had just passed was thrown open, light suddenly streamed into the passage, and Iola herself ran out, exclaiming: "Chartley, is that you? Nay, nay, you are rash indeed. You should not have come."

"But, now I have come, you will not bid me go," said Chartley, taking her hand, and kissing it. He put some restraint upon himself to keep his lips from hers.

"I cannot bid you go at once," answered Iola, bending her eyes down, with the colour rising in her cheek; "but you must go soon, and not return again, unless I send."

"This is hard," answered Chartley; "but still, I shall not feel it so much now I know where you are, and can hover round the neighbourhood, like a dove over its nest, watching the treasure of its love."

"Nay, Chartley, you are no dove," answered Iola, with a smile. "Open that other door, Catherine, and watch well from the windows that no one approaches. Come in hither, Chartley," she continued, as the woman opened the door of a room opposite to that from which she had come. "Here is my little hall. No grand reception room, yet sweet and pleasant."

A floor of dried and hard beaten clay, a low roof with all the rafters shown, walls covered with mere whitewash, an unpolished oaken table, and seats of wood, did not make the room seem less bright and sweet to Chartley when Iola was there. She herself was dressed as a mere cottage girl, and doubtless, when the mantle and hood, then worn in the middle and lower ranks of life, were added, an unobserving eye might hardly have recognized her; but she did not look less lovely to the eyes of him who sat beside her.

They were sweet, sweet moments which those two passed together; and, perchance, it were hardly fair to tell all that they said and did. Iola owned that it was sweet to see him once again, after so long a separation and so much anxiety and care; but yet she told him earnestly that he must not come again.

"A few days now," she said, "must determine everything. There are rumours busy in the land, Chartley, and which reach even my ears, that there will be a fresh struggle for the throne. Let us not call the eyes of the watchful king upon us, nor by any rash act run the risk of falling into his power. I am told that he has spies in every direction--even here; and I feel by no means sure that he has not discovered more than we could wish. But one thing is certain, that, if we wait till he finds himself assailed upon the throne, the hurry and confusion which must prevail will give us opportunities which we do not now possess. Then, Chartley, I will redeem my plighted word to you, and, whenever I know the moment, will let you hear, and stake the happiness of my life upon your faith and truth. But, even then, I must make some conditions."

Chartley mused; and Iola thought it was the word "conditions" which surprised and made him thoughtful; but it was not so.

"These reasonings on the passing events must have been prompted to her," he thought. "They are not those of Iola herself."

She went on, however, under the impression I have stated, and that in a gayer tone, because she thought the stipulations she was going to make were not likely to be refused.

"My conditions are very hard ones," she said, "and may well plunge you in a reverie, noble lord. They are that, when I am your wife, I may be never asked, why I go not to confession--"

She looked up in his face with a smile, and added:

"The truth is, I have so many and such heinous sins, that I fear to confess to the priest, lest I should not be able, or willing, to perform the penance."

Chartley laughed, saying: "You shall confess them all to me, dear one; and I shall only thank Heaven that the secrets of your heart are told to none but your husband and your God."

"Oh, you are a heretic, Chartley!" cried Iola, with a gay and meaning look in his face. "So men would think you, at least, if they heard such words. Perhaps I may think differently. Moreover,

you shall not call me to account if I neglect some other ceremonial parts of what we are taught to believe religious duties."

Now she looked somewhat timidly at him, as if she did not know how far she could venture to go; and Chartley's face had certainly become graver than she had ever seen it. He pressed her hand tenderly between his own, however, and said, "Dear Iola, I will covenant generally with you, in no degree to meddle with such things. Your words may surprise me and take me unaware; but this I promise, that I will interfere in nought which concerns your religious belief; for I think I understand you, though how all this has come about I cannot, and do not, divine. One thing, however, my Iola, may be decided upon between us at once. If you are searching for truth, let me search with you. Let our minds be bent together to the same great object; but, at the same time, for our own sakes, and each for the sake of the other, let us be careful in all these matters; for I have already arrived at this conclusion, that those who rule in every spiritual matter would shut out light from us, and bar the way with the faggot, and the cord, and the sword, against all who do seek for truth."

A look of bright, almost angelic, joy had come upon Iola's countenance as he spoke; and she answered in a low but solemn tone:

"I have found it, Chartley--that truth which you mention."

"Where?" asked Chartley, eagerly.

"I will show you," she replied, "when, with my husband by my side, I can pour out to him, pledged and plighted to me for ever, all the thoughts of a heart which shall never be opened to any other mortal being. Your words, Chartley, have been to me a blessing and an assurance. Oh, God, I thank thee. My last fear and doubt are removed! Now let us talk of other things; for you must go indeed. Tell me where you will fix your abode for the next few days. Then I shall not need to watch you; for I have been obliged to place spies upon you, in order to know where to find you in case of need."

"I will fix my quarters at Atherston," answered Chartley. "But are you a little queen, that you have spies at will, and messengers over all the land, with castle gates flying open before you, and means of travelling invisible to human eyes. How was it, in Heaven's name, you escaped from Chidlow castle; for I have heard nothing more than the mere assurance which you sent Constance the day after, that you were in safety."

"I must not tell you all," answered Iola, gravely, "at least, not yet, Chartley; but this much I may say, though it will sound very strange to your ears, that there are many, very many--ay, thousands upon thousands--of people in this land, all linked together by ties the most sacred, who have been forced, by long and bitter persecutions, to establish means of communicating with each other, and of aiding and assisting each other in time of need. They are to be found in the courts of princes, in the mart, the church, and the camp; but they are known only to each other, and not always even that. They are innocent of all offence, peaceable, blameless; yet, if they be discovered, death is the punishment for the mere thoughts of the mind. I tell you they are many, Chartley. They are increasing daily, in silence and in secret; but the time will come, and that ere long, when their voice will be heard, aloud and strong; and no man shall dare to bid it cease. To them I owe much help. But now indeed we must part."

The parting lasted well nigh as long as the interview; and, though it had its pain, yet Chartley went with a happier heart, and with hope and expectation once more burning as bright as ever.

CHAPTER XLI.

In a large room, of the convent of Black Nuns, near Tewksbury, with a vaulted roof and one window at the farther end, seated at a small table, and with an open parchment book upon it, was the Princess Mary or Margaret of Scotland--for she is occasionally called in history by both those names. She was diligently examining the pages of the volume, in which seemed to be written a number of names, with comments attached to them, in the margin, in a different coloured ink. On the opposite side of the table stood an elderly man in the garb of a monk, who remained without speaking, and with his eyes fixed calmly upon the princess, apparently not at all comprehending the object of her search.

At length, when she had run her eye and her finger down the whole line of names upon every page, pausing for a moment here and there, to examine the observations attached to some particular entry, the princess raised her eyes to the old man's face, saying--

"And these are all the men of note, you are sure, good father, who fell at Tewksbury?"

"All who are buried here," replied the monk. "There were some others, whose names you will find, if you turn over two pages, who were borne away to rest elsewhere. They were not many; for their friends did not like to come forward and claim them, for fear of being compromised in what was called the treason. So all that were not claimed were buried here, and the rest, as I said, removed."

Mary turned over to the page which he mentioned, and found some twelve or fourteen other names, which, to her at least, were totally without interest. She then closed the book, and gave it to the monk, saying "I thank you much, good father. There is something to benefit your convent, and pay masses for the souls of those who fell."

The old man called down a blessing on her head, and walked slowly along to the end of the old vaulted room, in order to depart, passing a gay and sunny-looking girl as he did so. She advanced with a light step from the door, towards the princess's chair, looking, as she went by the old man in his sober grey gown, like spring by the side of winter; and, when she came near the lady, she said, holding up a small packet in her hand--

"Here is a curious thing, your highness, which has just been shown to me by an extraordinary sort of man. He wishes you to buy it; and in good truth it is not dear. I never saw anything more beautiful."

"I am not in the mood for buying gewgaws, child," replied the princess. "Well, show it to me, not that I shall purchase it; for of that there is little chance."

The young lady immediately advanced, and placed in her hand a golden cross, ornamented with sardonix stones, Mary hardly looking at it till she had received it fully, her mind being probably busy with what had just been passing. When her eyes at length fixed on it, however, her countenance underwent a strange and rapid change. Her cheek grew pale, her beautiful eyes almost started from their sockets, and with a low cry, as if of pain and surprise, she sank back into her chair.

"Good Heaven, what is the matter, lady?" exclaimed the girl. "Your highness is faint. Let me fly for help."

But Mary waved her hand for silence, covered her eyes for a moment, and then bending down her head over the cross, seemed to examine it attentively. But the girl, who stood by her side, saw clearly tears drop rapidly from her eyes upon the trinket.

The moment after, the princess dashed the drops away, and, turning to her attendant with a face full of eagerness, demanded:

"Where is the man? Bring him hither instantly."

The changes of expression in her countenance had been so lightning-like, so rapid, that the girl stood for a moment like one bewildered, but then, at an impatient gesture of the princess, hurried from the room. At the end of a minute or two she returned, followed by the piper, somewhat better clothed than usual, but still bearing evident signs of his class, if not of his profession, about him. The princess fixed her eyes upon his face, with a keen, penetrating, inquiring look, as if she would have searched his soul, and then said, turning to the girl who had accompanied him into the room: "Retire."

Still, after the attendant was gone, Mary continued to gaze upon the man before her in silence. It seemed as if she wished, before she spoke, to read something of his nature and his character from his looks. At length, in a low and tremulous but yet distinct voice, she asked:

"Where got you this cross?"

"That I must not say, lady," replied the piper. "Are you the princess Mary of Scotland?"

"I am," she answered. "Must not say?--Good faith, but you must say! This cross is mine; and I will know how you possessed yourself of it."

"If you be the princess Mary of Scotland, and that cross be yours," replied the piper, who was now quite sober, and had all his wits about him, "I was bid to tell you that the fate of the person you seek for may still be heard of near the abbey of St. Clare of Atherston. You may keep the cross without payment, for in reality it was sent to you as a token."

"Keep it," cried the princess, pressing it to her bosom, "that I will! I will never part with it more. Payment! Here, hold out your hand;" and, half emptying her purse into it, she added: "Had you brought me a king's crown, you had brought me nothing half so precious." Then, leaning her brow upon her fair hands, she fell into a long deep train of thought, which, perhaps, led her far away, to early days, and scenes of youthful joy and happiness, while hope, and love, and ignorance of ill, the guardian angels of youth's paradise, watched round her path and round her bed. At length, She seemed to tear herself away from the visions of memory; and looking up, she said, in a slow and somewhat sad voice--

"St. Clare of Atherston. Ay, it was near there, at Atherston moor. But, how can that be? I have watched, and enquired, and examined, and seen with mine own eyes; and there was no trace."

"I cannot tell your highness how it can be," replied the messenger; "for I know little or nothing; and guesses are often bad guides. But this I can do. I can lead you to one who can give you all the tidings you desire."

"Ha!" cried the princess, starting up. "Let us go. Let us go at once. I will give instant orders."

"Nay, sweet lady," answered the piper. "In good sooth, my horse must have some time for rest; and my old bones are weary too; for I have had scanty fare and long riding."

"You shall have refreshment," said the princess. "I would not be unmerciful, even in my impatience; but yet we must set out to-night. I will not lay my head upon a pillow till I am upon the way. Now tell me, before I send you to get food and rest, who is the person to whom you take me?"

"Nay, that I know not," replied Sam. "I have given my message as I received it. I know no more."

"Now this is very strange," exclaimed Mary, "and raises doubts. I know not that I have injured any one, or that there is any who should wish to do me wrong; but yet I have found that men will wrong each other full often without a cause, sometimes without an object. Yet this cross, this cross! I will go, whatever befall. This cannot lie or cheat. I will go. But one thing at all events you can tell me. Whither are you going to lead me. You must know the place, if not the person."

"Ay, that I can tell, and may tell," replied Sam. "It is to the house of a poor honest Franklin, who labours his own land, in the heart of an old wood. A quiet and a secret place it is, nearly half way 'twixt Atherston and St. Clare. The man is a good and honest man too, lady, of more than seventy years of age, who lives in great retirement, rarely seen but once in every summer month at Atherston market, where he sells his corn and sheep; and when they are sold, he goes back upon his way, holding but little talk with any one."

"Seventy years of age," said the princess, thoughtfully. "Nay, that cannot be then."

"But indeed it is, lady," replied the piper, mistaking her meaning; "for I have known him twenty years myself and more, and have seen his hair grow grizzled grey, and then as white as snow."

"Did you ever know or hear," demanded the princess, "of a dying or wounded knight being carried thither, from any of the last combats that took place between Lancaster and York--I mean about the time of Tewksbury?"

"No," replied Sam; "but I was lying ill then, being hurt with a pike at Barnet, and could not walk for many a month."

"And you can tell no more?" asked the princess.

"No, nothing more," he answered, "but that there you will have the tidings which you seek, as surely as you see that cross in your hand."

"Come of it what will, I will go," said the princess. "But which is the safest road? for it is strongly rumoured here, that the earl of Richmond has landed somewhere on the coast, and that armies are gathering fast to meet him. We might be stopped."

"Oh no, all is quiet in this part of the land," replied the other; "and we can easily go by Evesham and Coventry. I heard all the news as I journeyed on. The earl, they say, has indeed landed in the far parts of Wales; but his force is very small, and not likely to stand against Sir Walter Herbert who commands there. A mere scum of that ever-boiling pot called France, with scattered and tattered gabardines, lean and hungry as wolves."

"They may be found as fierce as wolves," said the princess. "But it matters not. I will go, even should they be fighting in the midst of the road. Now, good man, you shall have food, and your horse too. I give you till four o'clock--time enough for rest. Be you ready; and, if you lead me aright, you shall have further recompense."

Her impatience somewhat outran the clock. She was on horseback with her train, some minutes before four; and, ere they paused for the night, they reached the small town of Evesham. The next day brought them to Coventry, and thence a short day's journey remained to Atherston. They arrived in the evening; but still there were two or three hours of light; and as soon as the princess had entered the small inn, to which she had sent forward harbingers, she ordered her guide to be called, and told him that in half an hour she would be ready to set out.

"The place cannot be far," she said, "for I remember the road well; and 'tis not a two hours' ride hence to St. Clare."

"Were it not better to wait till morning?" demanded Sam, with a look of some doubt. "It will take you well nigh an hour and a half to reach the place we are going to, and--"

"And what?" demanded Mary, seeing the man pause and hesitate.

"I was going to say," replied Sam, "that you must take but two attendants with you--men to hold the horses; and it might be as well to wait till morning, as I hear troops are gathering fast, and tending towards Nottingham, so that 'tis better to ride by daylight."

Mary gazed at him with some suspicions rising again in her mind; but yet the very wish to travel by daylight seemed to speak honesty of purpose.

"Was that what the man told you, whom I saw speaking to you at the door?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Sam. "He told me there were troops moving about in all directions."

"And why must I have only two men with me?" she demanded.

"I know not," replied the piper. "So I am told. But, if you have any fears, I will remain in the hands of your men, while you go in. They can easily drive a sword through me, if any evil happens to you; but I only say it is better to go in the morning, lest we should meet any of the roving bands which always flock to the gathering of armies. Be it, however, as you please."

Mary thought for two or three moments, but then rose, saying--

"I will go, and at once. I cannot rest in uncertainty. Let them bring forth the horses as soon as they are fed. We will ride quick, and make the way short."

From Atherston, for about half a mile, the little party pursued the highway, till shortly after crossing the little river Anker, from the banks of which they turned through lanes and by-paths, till they came to a piece of sloping ground, where two hills crossed each other with a low dell between them. A small stream ran in the valley; and beyond the opposite slope, towards the north west, extended a considerable mass of wood-land, over which were seen, rising at the distance of five or six miles, the ruined walls and towers of the old castle near St. Clare. The sun was already on the horizon, and the spot over which they rode was in shadow; but the sky was beautifully clear, and the golden light of the setting sun caught the high distant ruins, and the young trees upon the hill on which it stood.

"Here," said the piper, who was riding beside Mary to show her the way, "here was fought the last skirmish of the war. It was one of the most bloody too; for little quarter was given, and many a brave soldier and noble gentleman fell here."

"I know it well," said Mary, with her eyes full of tears. "I have been here to weep before now. Oh, that my eyes could pierce those green grassy mounds, and know who sleeps beneath."

"They were not all buried here," said Sam, in a low tone. "Some were buried at the abbey, and some at Atherston. Those were the knights and captains. The common soldiers lie here."

Mary rode on in silence; and more than once she wiped the tears from her eyes. A mile farther brought them to the wood; but from this side the distance to the franklin's house was farther; and the last quarter of a mile was ridden in twilight. At length, however, while they could still see, they came in sight of the low house, with its single story, and the cultivated ground around it; and pointing with his hand, the piper said, in a low voice--

"That is the house. Now you must go forward alone, lady; and when you reach the door knock hard with your hand, and they will give you admission. Ask to see the lady."

"The lady!" said Mary, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes," replied her guide, "the lady. I will stay here with the horses, in the hands of your servants. There you will get the tidings which you have long sought."

The lady dismounted, and, bidding the servants wait, walked along the little path. They could see her approach the house, and knock with her hand at the door. It was opened instantly, and she disappeared.

CHAPTER XLII.

An old man, with a long white beard, presented himself before the princess countess of Arran, almost the moment after she had knocked, and, in answer to her demand to see the lady, simply said, "Follow me," and led the way along the passage. Her heart beat; her brain seemed giddy;

her whole frame was agitated; but she went on; and, at the end of a step or two, her guide opened a door, and held it in his hand, till she had entered. Then closing it he retired.

The sun, as I have said, had sunk; but the twilight was clear, and the windows of the room looked towards the west, where lingered still the rosy hues of the setting sun. The room was filled with a sort of hazy purple air, and the objects which it contained, though shadowy and somewhat indistinct, could still be seen clearly enough. Standing not far from one of the windows, with the light background of the sky behind her, so that her features were not discernible, the princess Mary beheld the beautiful form of a girl, apparently eighteen or nineteen years of age. As the rays passing from behind glanced on the rich satin of her robe, and the gold lace that fringed the bodice, it was evident to Mary that the person before her was dressed in the gorgeous habiliments of the court of that time. She could see nothing more at the first moment, but as the girl advanced towards her, the face was slightly turned towards the window, and the fine chiselled features were beheld in profile, showing at once, how beautiful they must be when the light of day displayed them more fully.

"Welcome, lady," said the sweet tones of Iola, the music of her voice thrilling upon the ear of the princess, like the notes of some delicate instrument, although there was much emotion in those tones. "You have come somewhat sooner than I expected. I presume I speak to the princess Mary."

"The same, my child," replied the lady, taking her hand, which Iola had partly offered. "This is a strange meeting; and you tremble more than I do, though I am told that from your voice I shall hear tidings which, whatever be their especial nature, may well shake and agitate my heart and frame."

"I am not wont to be so weak," said Iola; "nor to fear, nor to hesitate; but yet I cannot help it at this moment. Let us sit down for a while, and speak of other things, so that these emotions may pass away."

"They will but increase by delay," replied Mary; "and I am eager to hear from your lips, or indeed from any lips, those tidings which to me are as the words of Fate. Speak, then, dear child, speak at once, and tell me what you know."

"Nay, lady," said Iola, in a very grave and even melancholy tone, withdrawing her hand from that of the princess; "I have questions to ask as well as you; and they must be answered, before my lips are unsealed."

"Nay, this is cruel," said the princess Mary, "to torture me with delay, when the sight of that cross, the gift of early pure affection, to him I loved the best, and this mysterious journey, and this strange meeting, have raised my expectations--oh, that I dared say my hopes to the highest point--it is cruel indeed."

"No, not cruel," answered Iola. "Could the dead see all the actions of the living, would the living dare to meet the dead? I have a hard and painful task to perform, and I must perform it. Yet, dear lady, I would do it with all gentleness, for I have to ask painful questions--questions which, if my heart tell me true, may raise anger and indignation, as well as cause pain and sorrow."

"Speak then, speak then," said Mary, impatiently. "Let them be quickly over."

"Well, then, as it must be so," said Iola, "let me first say, I know the early history well, the marriage of the princess Mary to the earl of Arran, her brother's subject and friend, the advantage which base enemies took of his absence in Denmark, in his sovereign's service, to ruin his father and his uncle, to seize his estates, forfeit his honours, and blast his name--a name on which the voice of calumny never breathed till then."

Mary sank into a seat and covered her eyes with her hands; but Iola went on, seeming to hurry her words to get over her painful task with speed.

"I know, too," she said, "the generous devotion of the princess, that she fled in disguise from her brother's court, to warn her husband of his danger, when he returned from his successful embassy, bringing with him his sovereign's royal bride; I know that she sought his fleet in a poor skiff, and fled with him into exile and poverty; I know that she only returned to her own land, after years of exile, on the delusive promise that her petition and submission would recover his estates and honours, for him she loved. Hitherto, all is clear; but, now comes the question--Lady, forgive me," she continued, taking Mary's hand, and kissing it; "but I must pain you."

"Speak, dear child, speak," said the princess. "There is nought in my whole life, that I am not ready to tell here or anywhere."

"Well, then," said Iola, with a sigh; "did the princess Mary, when her husband was doing his knightly devoir here on this English ground, in behalf of the house which had befriended him and his, did she consent to a divorce from her once-loved lord, and----"

"Never, never, never!" cried the princess, starting from her seat, "never, by word or deed. What, has that dark tale come hither too? 'Twas done without my consent or knowledge; and,

when done, I raised my voice and wrote my protest against it. They told me he was dead. They told me that he fell there, on Atherston moor--fell, as he lived, in noble deeds and gallant self-devotion."

"And then, hearing of his death," said Iola, in a voice sunk to the lowest tone with emotion; "the princess married James, Lord Hamilton."

"'Tis false!" exclaimed Mary, vehemently; and then, clasping Iola's hand in her own, she added: "Strange, mysterious girl, how is it that you, who know so much, do not know more? Hamilton was kind. He sought my noble husband as a brother, spoke in his favour to the king, raised his voice with mine; and, when at length the news of his death came, my brother and my sovereign signed a contract of marriage on my behalf, between him and me, and in his bounty gave lands and lordships to Lord Hamilton and the Princess Mary, his wife. They laid the contract before me, and I tore it and scattered it to the winds--for I had doubts," she added, in a low thoughtful voice. "I saw couriers going and coming to and from England, whose tidings were concealed from me; and, I had doubts--I have still doubts--that he died then. Now, I am sure he is dead, or they would not give me liberty to roam and seek his burial-place; for, ever since that day, when I tore the contract before my brother's face, in name I have been free, in truth a prisoner. I had but one faithful servant, whom I could trust. He, indeed, once deceived me, because he was himself deceived. He told me that my husband was dead in Denmark; and when we found, from certain intelligence, that he was here in England, warring for the house of Lancaster, the poor man was more thunderstruck than I was, for I had not believed the tale. Oh, how the heart clings to hope--how it clasps the faded flower, when even the root is withered. Still, still, till the end I hoped! With what tears I watered my pillow! With what prayers I wearied Heaven. Although I saw letters telling plainly that he died, sword in hand, on Atherston moor, I would not believe, till they told me at length, but a few months since, that, if I pleased, I might come and seek him myself. But, oh, dear child, that hope which I so fondly clung to would become a horror and a terror, if I could believe that my dear, my noble Arran, had been lingering on here, living, and yet doubting of my faith and truth. I know what his noble mind would have felt; I know how his kind and generous heart would have been wrung; I know the black despair into which he would have fallen. But it cannot be. I will not believe it. He would have written; he would have sent; he would have found some means to re-assure and comfort me. Now, then, I have answered all. Tell me, tell me, I beseech you, how died my husband? Where have they laid him? But you are weeping, my poor child."

"Stay a moment," said Iola, her voice half choked with sobs. "I shall recover in a minute. Then I will tell you all;" and, breaking away from her, she, quitted the room suddenly.

With a foot of light, Iola trod the passage nearly to the end, and opened a door, from which immediately a light streamed forth.

Sitting at a table underneath a burning sconce, with his arms resting on the board, and his forehead on his arms, was a tall and powerful man, dressed in the garments of a nobleman of high rank, somewhat antiquated indeed in point of fashion, but still rich and in good taste. He seemed not to hear Iola's foot; for he moved not, although the stillness of his figure was broken by the heaving of his chest with a long, deep, gasping sigh. She laid her hand upon his arm, saying:

"Look up, look up. Sunshine has come again."

He raised his head with a start; and the countenance before her was that of Boyd the woodman.

With that eager grace so charming to see but indescribable in words, Iola caught his hand and kissed it, as he gazed upon her with a look of doubt and wonder.

"It is all false," she cried, "all utterly false! She is yours--has been yours always. True, through wrong, and persecution, and deceit, she is yours still--yours only."

"False," cried Boyd. "False? How can it be false? With my own eyes I saw the announcement of his sister's marriage to James Hamilton, in the king's own hand."

"He signed the contract," cried Iola, "without her consent; but she tore the contract, and refused to ratify it."

"But my letters, my unanswered letters?" said Boyd.

"She has been watched and guarded, surrounded by spies and deceivers," exclaimed Iola, eagerly. "Hear all I have to tell you. Much may even then remain to be explained, but, believe me, oh, believe me, all will be explained clearly and with ease."

"I know that one traitor, that John Radnor, was bought to tell her I was dead, when not ten days before he had spoken to me--me, ever his kind and generous lord--and knew that I was safe and well. I saw the proof of the villain's treachery; and I slew him; but, oh, I cannot think that there are many such. Yet they have been fiends of hell indeed; for torture, such as the damned undergo, were not more than they have fixed on me, by making me think my Mary, my beautiful, my devoted, false to him she loved."

"Oh, she was never false," cried Iola. "They thought to cheat her to her own despair, by tales of your death; but the instinct of true love taught her to doubt, till she had seen your tomb with her own eyes."

"I will go to her. I will go to her," cried the earl of Arran, rising up, and taking a step or two towards the door. But there he paused, and asked, "Does she still believe me dead?"

"She does," replied Iola, "though perhaps a spark of hope is kindled."

"Go and fan it into flame," replied the earl, "gently, gently, Iola. I will bear the delay. Yet come as soon as ever she can bear to see me. Do it speedily, dear girl, but yet not rashly."

"I will be careful. I will be very careful," said Iola; and, hurrying away, she returned to the chamber where she had left the Princess Mary, bearing a light with her.

"You have been long, my child," said the Princess; "but your young heart knows not the anguish of mine; and that fair face speaks no unkindness."

"It would speak falsely, did it do so," replied Iola. "Methinks the power to give joy and reawaken hope were the brightest prerogative that man could obtain from Heaven. And now be seated, dear lady; and I will sit on this stool at your feet, and tell you a tale, woven into which will be answers to all that you could question, with many a comfort too, and a balm for a crushed and wounded heart."

"Angel," cried the princess, drawing her to her and kissing her brow; "you look and speak like one of Heaven's comforting spirits."

"Listen then," said Iola. "'Tis more than ten years ago that a party of the lords of Lancaster, led by the gallant earl of Arran, as the most experienced of the troop, hastened across this country to join queen Margaret's force at Tewksbury. The news of Barnet had vaguely reached them; but still they hurried on in the direction which the retreating army had taken. The main body of their little force remained for the night on the green at St. Clare. I remember it well, though I was then but a child of eight years old; for the earl of Arran came to the Abbey, and I saw him there in his glittering armour. He came on here himself, with several other gentlemen, and lodged for the night at this house; for he had learned that a superior body of troops was on the way to cut him off, in the neighbourhood of Atherston. The old man whom you saw but now tried to persuade him to retreat; but his high courage and his good faith led him on; and, on the following day, he encountered the enemy on the moor, and, for nearly two hours, made his ground good against a force treble his own numbers. At length, however, in a strong effort to break through, having already received an arrow in the arm and a wound in the head, he was cast from his horse by a lance which pierced through and through his corslet. The troops then fled, and the day was lost."

Iola's voice trembled as she spoke, and Mary bent down her head upon her hands and wept.

"Be comforted," said the young girl, taking the princess's hand, and gazing up towards her. "Hear me out; for there is comfort yet."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mary, suddenly lifting her head. "Was he not slain then--was he not slain?"

"Hear me to the end," said Iola, "and hear me calmly. The old man you saw but now had been a follower of the house of Lancaster. He was interested too in that noble lord; and when he beheld the fugitives pass along the edge of the wood, and the fierce pursuers spurring after, he went away towards the field to see if he could aid the wounded. He found a number of the people from the abbey upon the field, and some of the good sisters. Litters were procured; the wounded men were removed; the dying had the consolation of religion; but the earl of Arran was not found amongst either. While the old man went his way, the litters travelled slowly to St. Clare. She who was abbess then asked anxiously for the earl of Arran; but they told her that he was neither amongst the wounded, nor the dying, nor the dead. She said they must be mistaken; for a soldier, who had stopped to get a draught of water at the fountain, had seen him fall pierced with a spear; and she sent them back with torches, for, by this time, it was night, to seek for him once more. They sought for him in vain; but the old franklin, as he had turned homewards, had seen something glitter in the bushes just at the edge of the wood. On looking nearer, he found that it was the form of an armed man, with the head of a lance in his breast. The staff was broken off."

"Oh, God, was he living?" exclaimed the princess.

"He was," replied Iola; "nay, be calm, be calm, and hear me out. I must tell the rest rapidly. The old man staid with him till nightfall; then got a cart and moved him hither, where a great part of his baggage had been left. They dared not send for a surgeon; for pursuit after the house of Lancaster was fierce, and slaughter raged throughout the land. But the old man himself extracted the lance's head, and stanchd the bleeding by such simples as he knew. For three months he tended him as a father would a child; but for nearly a year he was feeble and unable to move."

"Does he live, does he live?" cried the princess.

"Can you bear it?" asked Iola. "He did live long, for many years; but he heard tidings which disgusted him with life. Hermit or monk he would not become; for he had other thoughts; but he cast off rank and state, and, putting on a lowly garb, he lived as a mere woodman in a forest near, a servant of the abbey where all my youth was spent."

"But now, but now!" demanded Mary. "Does he live now? Oh, tell me, tell me!"

As she spoke the door opened. Mary raised her eyes and gazed forward, with a look of wild bewilderment, and then, with a cry of joy and recognition, sprang forward and cast herself upon her husband's bosom.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Confusion and agitation pervaded England from end to end. Men gathered together in the streets and talked. Couriers passed between house and house. The fat citizen gossipped with his neighbour, over the events of the day, and looked big and important, as he doled out the news to his better half at home. The peasantry too were moved by feelings of their own. The village green and the alehouse had their politicians. The good wife looked anxious, lest Hob should be taken for a soldier; and the old men and women recalled the days when the feuds of York and Lancaster were at their height, and hoped that such times were not coming again.

Still, however, the news spread far and wide, that the earl of Richmond had landed on the Welsh coast, and was marching towards London to grasp the crown. From castle to castle, and city to city, and cottage to cottage, the rumour rolled on. He was there--actually there, upon English ground; the long-expected blow was struck; the long anticipated enterprise had begun.

Busy emissaries, too, whispered in every ear, that Richmond was affianced to the heiress of the house of York. There was no longer a question of York and Lancaster. It was no longer a fratricidal war between the descendants of the same ancestor; but York and Lancaster were united; and the long rival factions took their stand, and unfurled their banners, side by side, against one who was equally inimical to both. Every evil act which Richard had committed was called to memory, denounced, and exaggerated. False facts were fabricated, many of which have been transmitted to the present day, to blacken his character, and misrepresent his conduct. His views, his deeds, his very person, were all distorted, and the current of popular opinion was turned strongly against him. Still the prudent, the timid, and the idle, counselled together, and prepared to follow a temporising policy.

"Take my advice," said an old man to his neighbours, "keep quite quiet; take part with neither; let Lancaster cut York's throat or York Lancaster's, or both join to destroy Richard, we have nothing to do with such things. We shall suffer enough, whichever wins the day; but better to suffer in pocket than to die or get wounds in a cause which concerns us very little. One king is for us just as good as another; and as to the question of right, as no doctors have settled it, how should we be able to decide? Keep quiet, and let them fight it out amongst themselves."

Such was very commonly the feeling amongst the lower classes of the people; and many of a higher rank were moved by the same considerations. "If we fight for Richmond," they thought, "he may lose a battle; and then we are at the mercy of Richard. If on the contrary we march under the banners of Richard, he may be defeated, and Richmond have our fate in his hands."

The higher nobility, indeed, pursued a different course. They began to gather men; they made preparations for war; but they kept as secret as possible, in what direction they intended to act. They were in general very silent as to their intentions, though exceedingly busy and active in their preparation; and constant communications were passing from one to the other, the nature of which was not discovered.

The only one who seemed inactive in the realm was the king himself. He, so energetic and daring in the camp and the field, so astute and cautious in the council-chamber, for a time seemed to do very little. The first news of Richmond's armament, indeed, had almost cast him into a state of frenzy; but, when he learned that the earl had landed at Milford-haven with but three thousand men, his rage appeared to sink into contempt. He treated his coming as a mere bravado, and seemed to scorn the display of any extraordinary measures against so pitiful an attack.

"Sir Walter Herbert will give a good account of him," he said, when some of his courtiers spoke of the invasion. "Herbert has full five thousand men, choice soldiers, ready and fit to rid our soil of these French weeds, or I know nought of gardening. We shall soon hear news of him."

He did soon hear news; but it was that Richmond marched on unopposed through the land, that he had been joined by Rice ap Thomas, with a thousand men, that Savage had gone over to him, that Herbert made no movement to oppose his progress, that Wales was rising rapidly in his favour, that friends and supplies were pouring into his camp, and that he was rapidly advancing upon Shrewsbury. Then it was that Richard not only felt the necessity of energy, but became sensible of his danger, and began to act with that fierce and impatient eagerness which had formerly characterized him. His messengers hastened over all the country, calling every one he could count upon to arms, and ordering those who were doubtful to join him at Nottingham, without an hour's delay. Norfolk and Northumberland were summoned in the same terms; but while the one hastened to obey, with all the promptitude of zealous attachment, the other made no professions, but slowly raised men, and marched with tardy steps, into such a position that he could act as he judged fit, whenever the moment for action came. Catesby hurried up with all the men that he could raise; and many others came in with extraordinary speed; for though disaffection had spread wide, it was by no means universal; and many of those who were discontented were not willing to aid in hurling Richard from the throne. The army increased in number daily; and when the king compared his own force with that of Richmond, even after the latter had reached Shrewsbury, and had been joined by the young earl of that name, and the Lord Talbot, he laughed all fears of danger to scorn, and prepared to cast himself in the way of his enemy, in whatever direction he might bend his steps. Lord Calverly was sent to raise all his tenantry and dependants; and, amongst others to whom messengers were despatched, to call them immediately to the aid of the crown, were Fulmer and Chartley. The courier sent to the former found him on the full march from Dorsetshire, and returned to Richard with this reply to his summons--

"The Lord Fulmer craves the king's pardon, for moving without his commands; but having learned that the earl of Richmond had landed in Wales, he thought he could not be far wrong in marching at once, to offer his sword and his troops to his sovereign's service."

Richard was surrounded by many persons, when these words were reported; but shortly after, he whispered to Ratcliffe, who stood near him, saying--

"This youth Fulmer deserves well. He shall have his bride. But not yet, Ratcliffe--not yet. We must crush this Breton-nurtured young Richmond, and then we will have gay days and bridals. The girl must be brought to a place of security. We will send her to York."

"But your grace forgets that she is not at the abbey," replied Ratcliffe, who took the king's words for a command. "She must be found, before she can be sent to York."

Richard smiled, with one of his dark looks of serpent subtlety, in which a slight touch of scorn mingled with an expression of triumphant cunning.

"She needs not to be found," he answered; "but what said the young Lord Chartley to our summons? Has he returned no answer?"

"He called for his horse at the first word, sire," replied Ratcliffe, "and said, that in four days his tenants should be in the field."

"Impetuous ever!" said Richard; but then he fell into a fit of musing, and his brow grew somewhat dark. "Four days," he repeated, "four days That argues preparation. He has a two days' journey, speed as he will. His tenants shall be in the field--Ay, but for whom? Send some one after him. Bid him join us at Broughton, and let him be well watched."

"At Broughton, sire?" said Ratcliffe, in a doubtful tone.

"Yes," answered Richard; "we march tomorrow for Leicester. At Broughton we have him at our will. Have you heard from Lord Stanley, or his brother, Sir William?"

"He is true, I doubt not, sire," replied Ratcliffe; "the last news was that he had fallen back somewhat from Lichfield, upon the advance of Richmond, not having force to oppose him, since the defection of Sir George Talbot and the earl of Shrewsbury. But 'tis said his brother William is marching to join him with two thousand men, and they will fight the traitor as soon as they meet."

"That must not be," said Richard, with a stern thoughtful look. "If they win the field, a subject gains the honour which the crown should have. If they fail, they plume this gosshawk's wings with the eagle pens of victory, and many will draw to him after a won battle, many fall from us. There is ever, Ratcliffe, a light and fickle crowd, that flutters round success, heedless of right or merit, as clouds gather round the rising sun to gild their empty vapours in the beams that suck them up ere it be noon. No, no! We will have no one either snatch Richmond from our hand, or try and fail. Bid them fall back as he advances, till, with our kingly force, we overwhelm him like a rat in a torrent. Send off a post to-night; and, in the meanwhile, watch well the young Lord Strange. His neck is better security than his good father's faith. We will to Leicester early, before the army. But it must not lag behind. One day's march lost, and Richmond would slip by. He must not reach St. Paul's."

Thus saying, he turned to the rest of the courtiers, and spoke of other things.

CHAPTER XLIV.

The sun had set nearly an hour. The moon had not yet risen, and the forest was all in darkness; but there were many people round the door of the woodman's cottage. Horsemen, and men in armour, and a groom leading a beautiful white horse, evidently caparisoned for a lady. Through the chinks of the boards which covered the windows much light was streaming; and the scene within was an unusual one for such a place. There were four persons standing round a table, on which was laid a parchment; and Iola and Chartley had just signed it. The earl of Arran took the pen and gave it to the princess countess of Arran, who added her name to the act; and he, himself, then subscribed his own.

Two or three of the attendants, male and female, attested the deed likewise; and then the woodman, if we may still so call him, placed Iola's hand in Chartley's, saying, "Now, take her, noble lord, and place her beyond risk and danger as speedily as may be. To your honour she is trusted; and I do believe that neither your honour nor your love will ever fail; but yet, remember she is not your wife till the ceremonies of religion have consecrated the bond between you. I trust we shall all meet again soon, in the presence of those who may rightly judge of these matters; and I promise you there to prove, that the contract between this lady and the Lord Fulmer is utterly null and void, and that this contract is legal and good. To insure all, however--for who shall count upon even a single day--give this letter to the earl of Richmond, when you have joined him, and tell him it comes from the woodman who once sent him intelligence which saved him from captivity, and perhaps from death. Now, God's blessing be upon you, my children. Nay, let us have no farewells, dear Iola. Take her, Chartley, take her, and away."

"But was not Constance to meet us here?" said Iola, in a low tone. "I thought she was to be my companion."

"I fear that has gone wrong," said the woodman. "The abbey gates were closed an hour before sunset, and even one of my men was refused admission to the mere outer court; but I shall join you soon and bring you news. Though I can raise no great force, yet with what men I can muster I will not fail to help the noble earl with my own hand. So tell him."

Thus saying, he led Iola to the door of the cottage, with his own strong arms placed her on the horse's back, and then with one more blessing, retired from her side. Chartley sprang lightly and happily into the saddle, and the whole party rode on. It consisted of some twenty men besides the lover and his lady; and, at a quick pace, they proceeded through the forest, taking very nearly the same direction which had been followed by the woodman and the bishop of Ely, but by the general road, instead of the narrow and somewhat circuitous paths along which the prelate had been led.

I have not time or space to pause upon the feelings of Iola at that moment--at least, not to describe minutely. They were strange and new to her. She had encountered danger; she had resisted anger, without fear; but her circumstances now were very different. She was not only going alone with the man whom she loved into the wide world, with perils, changes, and events, surrounding them on all sides like a mist, through which the most piercing eye could not discover one ray of light, but she was quitting all old associations, breaking through every habit of thought, entering upon an entirely new state of being. The grave of a woman's first life is her marriage contract. Did she doubt? Did she hesitate? Oh, no, she feared for the future in one sense, but in one sense alone. She believed, she knew, she felt, that she had chosen well, that Chartley's love would not alter, nor his tenderness grow cold, that her happiness was in him, and was as secure as any fabric can be, built upon a mortal and perishable base; but she felt that in uniting her fate to his, if she doubled the enjoyments and the happiness of being, she doubled the dangers and anxieties also. She was much moved, but not by that consideration--in truth her emotion sprang not from consideration at all. It was a sensation--a sensation of the awfulness of the change; and though it did not make her tremble, yet whenever she thought of it, and all that it implied through the wide long future, a thrill passed through her heart which almost stepped its beatings.

With Chartley it was very different. Men cannot feel such things with such intensity, nay, can hardly conceive them. His sensations were all joyful. Hope, eager passion, gratified love, made his heart bound high, and filled it with new fire and energy. He was aware that many dangers were around them, that every hour and every moment had its peril, and that then a strife must come, brief and terrible, in which, perhaps, all his newborn joys might be extinguished in death. But yet, strange to say, the thought of death, which had never been very fearful to him, lost even a portion of its terrors rather than acquired new ones, by what might appear additional ties to existence. We little comprehend in these our cold calculating days--in an age which may be

designated "The age of the absence of enthusiasms"--we little comprehend, I say, the nature of chivalrous love; nor, indeed, any of the enthusiasms of chivalry. I must not stay to descant upon them; but suffice it to say, Chartley felt that, whenever he might fall, to have called Iola his own, was a sufficient joy for one mortal life, that to do great deeds and die with high renown, loving and beloved and wept, was a fate well worthy of envy and not regret.

Still he had some faint notion of what must be passing in her breast. He felt that the very situation must agitate her; he fancied that the mere material danger that surrounded them might alarm her; and he hastened to cheer and re-assure her as much as might be.

"I trust, dearest Iola," he said, "that I shall not weary you by this fast riding, after all the agitation of to-day. Once past Tamworth, and we shall be more secure; for all my men muster at Fazely; and I trust to find myself at the head of three hundred horse."

"Do you stop at Tamworth?" asked Iola. "I have heard that there are parties of the king's troops there."

"We must leave it on the right, where the roads separate," replied Chartley. "Stanley, I hear, is retreating somewhere in this direction from Lichfield; but him I do not fear. If we reach Lichfield in safety, all danger is past. Ride on, dear one, for a moment, while I speak to some of the men in the rear. I will not be an instant ere I return to your side."

He might perceive something to raise apprehension, as he thus spoke, or he might not; but Chartley dropped back, and gave orders to two of the men, to keep at the distance of a hundred yards behind the rest, and if the slightest signs of pursuit were observed, to give instant warning; and then, while returning towards Iola, he paused for an instant by the Arab. "Ibn Ayoub," he said, "in case of attack, I give thee charge of the most precious thing I have. Shouldst thou see signs of strife, seize the lady's bridle, and away for safety, wherever the road is clear. Fleet will be the horses that can keep pace with thine and hers. A town, called Lichfield, is the place where we must meet. Thou hast once been there, and dost not forget."

"Why should the emir fight, and the slave fly?" asked Ibn Ayoub; "but be it as thou wilt."

"It must be so," answered his lord; "now, ride up closer to us, and remember my words."

Thus saying, he spurred on and renewed the conversation with Iola, in a cheerful though tender tone, and dear words were spoken, and bright hopes expressed, which made the way seem short. They recalled the past, they talked of the night when they had first met, and their sojourn in the forest, and Iola forgot in part her agitation, in the thrilling dreams of memory; but every now and then she would wake from them with a start, and recollect that she was there with Chartley--there alone--not to return in a few hours to the friends and companions of early youth, but in one, or, at most, two short days, to be his wife, to renounce all other things for him, and to merge her being into his. It was very sweet; but it was awful too, and, as from a well in her heart, new feelings gushed and almost overpowered her.

They had passed the turning of the road to Tamworth, and were riding on towards Fazely. All danger of an attack from that side seemed over; and Chartley's conversation became lighter and more gay, when suddenly one of his men rode up from behind, saying:

"There are some horsemen following, my noble lord. They are but three indeed, of that I am sure, for I rode up to that little hillock on the common, whence I can see for half a mile. But I thought it best to tell you."

"Spies, perhaps," said Chartley, in a calm tone. "If so, I would fain catch them, and bring them in to Fazely. Ride on, dearest Iola. I will take ten men, and see who these gentlemen are. All is prepared for you at Fazely, and we are beyond peril now. I will follow you at once. Ibn Ayoub, guard the lady."

"Chartley, you would not deceive me?" said Iola; "if there be danger, I would share it at your side."

"Indeed, there is none," replied Chartley, "you heard, dear one, what the man said. I know no more. There are but three men. They can make no attack, and indeed no resistance."

He turned his horse's head as he spoke, and, taking the eight last men of the troop with him, rode back to the rear. He had not far to go, however; for, about two hundred yards behind, he plainly saw the figures of three horsemen, one in front and two following, coming at a quick pace along the road. He halted his little troop when he could distinguish them, and as they approached nearer, exclaimed:

"Stand! Who comes here?"

"Is that thee, Lord Chartley?" asked a voice, which the young nobleman thought familiar to his ear.

"It matters not who I am," he replied; "you cannot pass till you declare yourself."

"May I never wear aught but a sorry-coloured cloth cloak and brown hosen," cried the other, "if that be not Chartley's tongue. I am Sir Edward Hungerford; do you not know me?"

"Faith, Hungerford!" replied Chartley, laughing; "like a kingfisher, you are better known by your feathers than your voice. But what brings you this way?"

"Seeking you, good my lord," replied Hungerford, riding up. "I have been over at Atherston enquiring for you, and then upon a certain green near a certain abbey; and I fear me, by riding through these roads, in this dusty August, I have utterly polluted a jerkin of sky blue satin, of the newest and quaintest device--would you could see it; and yet now 'tis hardly fit to be seen, I doubt--but faith, all the news I could get of you, was that you had ridden away towards Fazely, where your musters are making, and, as I rode down to the bridge on the Coleshill road, I caught a sound of horses' feet, and followed."

"But what might be your object?" asked Chartley; "what your pressing business with me?"

"Nay, I will tell you, when we get to Fazely," replied Hungerford; "and we had better ride on quick, for I must bear back an answer to Tamworth to-night."

The society of Sir Edward Hungerford, at Fazely, was by no means what Chartley desired; and he determined on his course at once.

"Gramercy, Hungerford!" he said; "these are perilous times, which break through courtesies and abridge ceremonies. Fazely is in possession of my merry men. It is an open undefended village, and I will let none into it, but my own people."

"Why, you do not look on me as a spy," replied Hungerford, in an offended tone; "your hospitality is scanty, my lord Chartley."

"If you have to return to Tamworth to-night, Hungerford, it is not hospitality you seek," answered Chartley; "true, I do not look on you as a spy, or ought, but the best-dressed man of honour in the land; but I do hold it a point of prudence, in times like these, to let no one know the numbers and disposition of my little force, when one can never tell in what ranks one may see him next. In a word, my gentle friend, I have heard that you have been of late with good Lord Fulmer, down in Dorsetshire; and Lord Fulmer is much doubted at the court, let me tell you--of his love for me there is no doubt. Now, if you were seeking me at Atherston and elsewhere, you can speak your errand here as well as at Fazely."

"But you cannot read a billet here as well as at Fazely," replied Hungerford, "no, nor smell out the contents--though I had it scented before I brought it, which he had omitted."

"Who is he?" asked Chartley.

"My noble friend, Lord Fulmer, to be sure," answered the gay knight.

"Ah, then, I guess your errand," replied Chartley; "here, let us dismount and step aside. Mundy, hold my horse." Springing to the ground, he walked to a little distance from his men, with Sir Edward Hungerford.

"Now my good friend," he said, "let me have it in plain words, and as briefly as may suit your courtly nature."

The message, which Hungerford delivered in somewhat circuitous terms, and with many fine figures of speech, was what Chartley anticipated; and he replied at once--

"I will not baulk him, Hungerford, though good faith, he might have chosen a more convenient season. Yet I will not baulk him; but, as the person challenged, I will dictate my own terms."

"That is your right," said Hungerford, "we can have the cartel fairly drawn out, and signed by each."

"Good faith, no," answered Chartley; "the first of my conditions is, that there be no cartel. We have no time for fooleries. Events are drawing on, in which all personal petty quarrels must be lost; but still, although I might refuse, and refer our difference to a future time, when peace is restored, yet I will not seek delay, if he will demand no other terms but those I can grant at once. Thus then, I will have no parade of lists, and witnesses, and marshals of the field; but I will meet him sword to sword, and man to man, my bare breast against his. Alone too let it be. There is no need of mixing other men in our quarrels. It must be immediate too; for I have not time to wait upon his pleasure. To-morrow at dawn, tell him, I will be alone upon the top of yonder little hill, behind which the moon is just rising, if that silver light in the sky speaks truth. There we can see over the country round, so that his suspicious mind cannot fear an ambush. I will be alone, armed as I am now, with sword and dagger only. Let him come so armed likewise, and he shall have what he seeks. These are my conditions, and thereon I give you my hand. Be you the witness of our terms; and if either take advantage, then rest shame upon his name."

"I will tell him, my good lord," replied Hungerford, "but I cannot answer he will come; for these conditions are unusual. 'Tis most unpleasant fighting before breakfast. Men have more

stomach for a hearty meal, than a good bout of blows."

"Good faith, if he have no stomach for the meal I offer, he may even leave it," answered Chartley. "'Tis the only time, and only manner that he shall have the occasion. You own, yourself, I have a right to name the terms."

"Undoubtedly," replied Hungerford. "Yet still the manner is most uncustomary, and the hour comfortless. If I were a general I would never let my men fight till after dinner: An Englishman gets savage in digestion, owing to the quantity of hard beef he eats, and always should be brought to fight at that hour when he is fiercest. However, as such is your whim, I will expound it to Lord Fulmer; and now, my noble lord, I trust you will not hold my act unfriendly, in bearing you this billet, which I will leave with you, although I have delivered the substance."

"Not in the least, Hungerford," replied Chartley. "I believe, like many another man, you are better, wiser, than you suffer yourself to seem."

"Thanks, noble lord," replied the knight, moving by his side towards their horses; "but there was one important matter, which I forgot to mention, though I have borne it in my mind for several months."

"Ay, what was that?" demanded Chartley, stopping.

"That last night at Chidlow," replied Hungerford, "your doublet was looped awry. Were I you, I would strictly command the valet of my wardrobe to begin at the lowest loop, and so work upwards; for it has a singular and unpleasant effect upon the eye to see apparel out of place, especially where slashings and purfling, or bands, or slips, or other regular parts of the garment are out of symmetry. For my part I cannot fancy any fair lady looking love upon such a disjointed garment."

"I will follow your sage advice," replied Chartley, laughing; "and now, good night, Hungerford. Another evening I trust to entertain you better."

Thus they parted; and Chartley, putting his horse to speed, rode after Iola and her companions. They had reached Fazely, however, before he overtook them; and the young lord found the master of his household, with all due reverence, showing the lady Iola to the apartments in the large farm-house which had been prepared for her.

The place was not a palace assuredly; but many a little graceful decoration had been added to its plain accommodations, since Chartley's messenger had arrived that evening. Garlands of flowers had been hung above the doors, fresh rushes strewed the floors, and wreaths of box hung upon the sconces.

All was bustle too in the village. Groups of men in arms were seen lingering about; and merry sounds came from the ale-house opposite. Iola's heart, however, sunk a little, when she saw the many signs of approaching warfare, although those who were to take part therein, and peril life and happiness, seemed to treat it as a thoughtless May-day game. A buxom country girl was waiting to attend upon her, some light refreshments were spread out in the hall; and when Chartley's step and Chartley's voice were heard, the momentary sensation of dread passed away, and she felt that the first perils were passed.

An hour, a little hour, they stayed together, in sweet dreamy talk; and then Chartley led her to her chamber, where a bed had also been prepared for the maid. With a kind and gentle adieu, Chartley bade her rest well, that she might be refreshed for their march on the following day, and then returned to hear reports, and give directions.

The next was a busy hour. Orders, inquiries, the receipt of intelligence, the examination of rolls and accounts, filled up the time; and then, dismissing all to repose, the young lord sat down to write. Two or three letters were speedily finished; one to Lord Stanley, one to the Earl of Richmond, and one to Sir William Arden. A few brief tender lines to Iola he folded up and put in his own bosom; after which he wrote some directions upon paper, sealed them, and then marked upon the back--"To be opened and followed if I be not returned by eight of the clock--Chartley."

And then he sat, and leaned his head upon his hand, and thought. He would not retire to rest, lest he should not wake in time; but the hours of the night slipped by; and at length he rose, and broke the slumbers of his drowsy master of his household, who, though startled at seeing his lord by his bed-side, could hardly be brought to understand what was said to him.

"Here, take these orders," said Chartley. "Put them under your pillow for to-night, and see that they be executed at the hour named to-morrow."

"I will, my lord. Yes, my lord, I will," replied the man, rubbing his eyes; and having given him the paper, Chartley procured a cup of cold water, drank it for refreshment after his sleepless night, and then proceeded to the stable. There, with his own hands, he saddled his horse; then mounted, and rode away.

CHAPTER XLV.

I know no labour of the body which fatigues so much as agitation of the mind; but the fatigue which it produces is very often of that kind which refuses repose. The mind, in its immortality, does not so easily yield to slumber as its death-doomed companion. More than an hour passed ere Iola slept; but, when she did sleep, it was with the calm and tranquil repose of youth and innocence. Fears she might feel; strong emotions might affect her; dangers, anxieties, and cares she might undergo; but there was no evil act to be regretted, no evil thought to be combatted. The worm that dieth not was not in the heart. The fire that cannot be quenched had not passed upon the brain. She slept sweetly, tranquilly then; and daylight found her sleeping still.

The light-hearted country girl, who lay on the small bed at her feet, slept quietly too; but she had her accustomed hour of waking, and, at that hour, she rose. Her moving in the room roused Iola; and on being informed of the hour, though it was an early one, she said she would rise too, that she might be ready for whatever course Chartley chose to follow. Her toilet was nearly complete, and the girl had left the room some minutes, when she suddenly returned with a look of alarm, saying:

"Oh, lady, there is that terrible-looking black man at the door, insisting to speak with you."

Iola waited not to hear more, though the girl was going on to tell her that the whole house was in confusion, but sprang to the door and threw it open, demanding,

"What is it, Ibn Ayoub?"

"There is danger, lady," said the Arab. "My lord gave me charge to guard you to Lichfield in case of strife; and strife is coming."

"But where is your lord?" demanded Iola, with eager alarm in her tone and look.

"It is not known," replied the Arab. "He rode out this morning alone, it is supposed to visit some posts, or see for the men not yet come up. But he commanded me yesterday to guard you safely to Lichfield in any hour of peril. That hour is now. The Lord Stanley with a large force is marching on us; and our people are parlying with his, at the end of the village. They say they will give admission to none, till our lord's return; and Lord Stanley says he will force them. Throw on your hood, lady, and come down. Your horse is ready; and there is a way through the farm into the fields."

Iola hesitated for a moment; and then, looking earnestly in the Arab's face, she demanded:

"Did he say that I was to go?"

"By the beard of the prophet, he did," replied Ibn Ayoub.

At the same moment came the blast of a trumpet from no great distance; and the voice of the master of Chartley's household was heard calling up the stairs, and exclaiming:

"Call the Lady Iola, call the Lady Iola!--Tell her she had better hasten away, out by the other end of the village. Bid her make haste--bid her lose no time."

Iola snatched up her hood from the table; and leaving all the little articles of dress which had been brought with her, scattered about, she hurried down the stairs. All was confusion below; and in vain she tried to obtain some further information concerning Chartley. Most of the men had gone forth at the first news of danger; and there were none but the farmer and his sons, and the master of the household, an elderly and somewhat infirm man, on the lower story. The latter urged her eagerly to fly; and, hurrying into the court at the back of the house, she was soon mounted on the fleet horse which had borne her thither. Ibn Ayoub seized the bridle. One of the young men opened the great gates behind and in a minute or two after, Iola found herself amongst the fields and hedgerows, to the east of Fazely. Those hedgerows were then numerous, and in full leaf, hiding the fugitives from all eyes; and for nearly half an hour, the Arab urged the horses on at a quick pace. At first, just as they issued from the village, a number of loud sounds were borne upon the air; and once again a blast of a trumpet was heard. But gradually the sounds became faint, as Iola rode on; and very soon the calm sweet silence of an early summer morning fell over the scene around. Nought was heard but the beating of the horse's feet upon the road, the lowing of some distant cattle, and the singing of a bird. All was peaceful, except poor Iola's heart; and it beat with manifold agitating sensations.

"Let us go slower, Ibn Ayoub," she said. "We must be out of danger now--at least, out of that danger. Let me think, let me think. At this pace, I seem to leave thought behind me."

"Ay, there is no peril now," said the Arab, in his peculiar Oriental tone; "but yet it were well to reach Lichfield as soon as may be; for there my lord said he would join us."

"But are you sure you are in the way to Lichfield?" asked Iola. "And are you sure, also, that your lord will be able to join us?--Heaven, what will become of me, if he should not?"

"God is good," said the Arab, reverently laying his hand upon his breast, "and fate is unchangeable. This is the road to Lichfield; so I understood them; but every road has an end; and we shall soon see. Yet let us go slowly. I forgot you are not an Arab."

The way was longer however than the good slave thought, and seemed to Iola interminable. Villages were in those days few in the land; and many of the towns now existing were then villages. The road they travelled was evidently a small country road, good enough from the dryness of the season, but little frequented, and furnished with none of that convenient information, which tells the traveller of modern times, by an inscription on a tall post, that he must turn to the right to reach one place, or to the left to reach another. The heat was very great too, oppressing both the horses and the riders which they bore; and gradually the bright clear light of the summer morning began to be obscured. A thin filmy veil was drawn over the sky; and, as if forming themselves out of it, the yellowish outlines of gigantic clouds were seen writhing and twisting themselves into a thousand strange fantastic shapes. There was no wind, and yet they moved, and, gradually piling themselves up, they seemed to climb one over the other, like the Titans in the strife with Heaven.

"We shall have a storm ere night," said the Arab; "and you seem weary and alarmed, lady."

"Alarmed I am, but not for the storm, Ibn Ayoub," replied Iola. "It is for your dear lord, I am alarmed. It is this apprehension makes me feel weary, I believe, and the agitation of our sudden departure. Yet the air is terribly oppressive. I feel as if I could hardly breathe;" and she unclasped the sort of collar, called a gorget, which, at that time, formed a part of every lady's dress.

The Arab smiled. "It has but the feeling of spring to me," he said, "though in your cold clime, doubtless, it seems hot; but we will find some house where you can get refreshment and a few minutes repose."

"We may obtain information," said Iola; "and that is of more importance. I can very well ride on to Lichfield. It was but six miles, I think they said, from Fazely. By this time, we ought to have seen it, I think."

"True, we have travelled more than six miles," said the man; "but yet all seems clear. Nay, there is a house there. I see the roof peeping over the hill; and this must be, the gate leading up to it."

They turned along the little farm road, which they saw winding through two neighbouring fields, sloping upwards towards the west; and, as they rose upon the little hill, they attained a more distinct view of a good sized farmer's or franklin's house, with the low sheds and barns, which were then common in England.

"You go first and speak to them, lady," said Ibn Ayoub. "My skin frightens them--as if it needed to be washed in milk, to have a true heart."

He spoke from experience; and, judging that he was probably right, Iola rode on to the door, and called to a girl, who was carrying a milk-pail through the passage. She instantly set down the pail, and came running out to speak with the beautiful lady who called to her; but the moment she cast her eyes beyond Iola, to the face and figure of Ibn Ayoub, she ran back into the house with a scream. An elder woman, however, appeared in her place, with a frank good-humoured countenance, to whom Iola explained that she had come from Fazely, intending to go to Lichfield, but that, from the distance they had travelled without finding the city, she judged they must have made some mistake.

"Mistake, sweet lady! ay, marry, have you," answered the good woman. "Why, you are within four miles of Castle Bromwich, and I don't know how far from Lichfield--fourteen miles, we reckon; and they are good long ones, as I know. But you look tired and pale. Won't you come in and rest? That foolish child was frightened at your tawny Moor; but I'll warrant she'll soon be playing with his golden bracelets."

Iola had turned pale, to find that she was so far distant from the place of her destination. She feared, too, that in so long a ride as was now before her, she might fall in with some parties of the troops that were crossing the country; and, judging that she might obtain some information for her guidance at the farm, she accepted the good woman's offer, and dismounted. Ibn Ayoub led the horses round to a stall at the back of the house; and Iola was soon seated in the kitchen of the cottage, with milk and eggs before her, and the good dame pressing her to her food. There is something in graceful sweetness of manner, which wins upon the rudest and most uncultivated. But the good farmer's wife was not so. By character kind and cheerful, nature had taught her the best sort of courtesy, and to it had been added an education superior to that of many in her own rank. She could read, and she could write, which was more than one half of the class above her own could do; and she had lived in towns before she married a farmer, which had rendered her polished in comparison with others. It was with the kindness of her heart, however, that Iola had

most to do; for there was so much frank sincerity in her hospitality, that Iola was encouraged to place some sort of confidence in her, and to ask her advice as to her farther course. The opportunity of so doing was easily found; for the good woman herself was not without that share of curiosity which is almost uniformly found amongst persons leading a very solitary life; and she asked full as many questions as it was discreet to put. Amongst the rest, how it happened that a lady, like Iola, was going to Lichfield, with only one man to guard her, and he a tawny Moor?

"There were plenty of men to guard me this morning," replied Iola; "but Fazely was menaced by a large body of troops, which the people about me judged to be enemies; and I was advised to fly as fast as possible, with the good Arab, who is a faithful and devoted attendant of----"

There Iola paused and hesitated, not knowing how to conclude her sentence, without calling forth inquiries or perhaps exciting suspicions, which might be difficult to answer, and unpleasant to endure. But the good woman saved her all pain on the subject.

"There, never mind names," she said. "These are not times for people travelling to give their names. It may be your husband, it may be your brother, you are talking of; but it is all the same to me. So then, there are two sets of them at Fazely, are there I heard of some people having mustered there from the west, three or four days ago; but I did not know there were any others marching up. Are you aware, dear lady--nay, do take another egg; you want refreshment, I can see--are you aware that the earl of Richmond and all his people are at this time in Lichfield?"

"No, I was not," answered Iola; "but, nevertheless, I must get forward thither as fast as I can; for there I am to be met by those to whom I must look for assistance and protection; and what I now fear is encountering any of the bands of lawless soldiers, who are now roaming about the land."

"Ay, marry, 'tis to be feared you do, riding so lonely. Why, Castle Bromwich was full of Sir William Stanley's people; but the greater part moved on yesterday to Atherston; two thousand goodly men as you would wish to see, they tell me; one half of them in armour of plate. I know not whether any were left behind, but 'tis very likely; for there is generally what they call a rear guard. Then there are the king's troops moving from Tamworth towards Leicester. They were to go yesterday. I don't know whether they did. As for that matter, Sir William's are the king's troops too, I suppose."

This intelligence did not serve to cheer Iola very much, for it only showed her, more forcibly than ever, the difficulty she might meet with, in trying to escape from that circle of military operations which were taking place all around her; and, for a moment or two, she looked so disconsolate, that the good woman's pity was moved.

"Ah, poor thing," she said, "I wish I knew what I could do for you. You are too young, and too gentle, to be exposed to such sort of things. Now, I warrant you, you have seldom stretched your limbs on a hard bed, or eaten homely fare like ours."

"Oh yes, I have, often," replied Iola, with a gayer smile than she had ever assumed since she entered the house; "and very happy was I when I did so."

"But you are a lady by birth?" said the good woman, with a doubtful look.

"Oh yes," replied the fair girl, "I am the heiress of a high house, my good dame; more's the pity."

"Ay, why more's the pity?" asked the farmer's wife.

"Because flies will come where there is honey," answered Iola; "and many a one seeks riches who cares little for love."

"True, very true," replied the other, with a sigh. "I wish I could help you, dear lady; but I know not how. They took all our horses and carts yesterday, and the men with them, and my husband too, to carry over the baggage of Sir William's troops to Atherston. If my man had been at home, he would have told you what to do soon enough; for he has got a head, I'll warrant."

"Let us call in the slave, and consult with him," said Iola. "He is faithful and honest; and we trust him much."

Ibn Ayoub was accordingly sought for, and found in the farm-yard, where he had already made such progress in overcoming the prejudices of the farmer's daughter, that she had brought him a bowl of milk with her own hands. Although he spoke English but imperfectly, and understood less what others said than they understood him, his questions soon elicited from the good farmer's wife and her daughter, who followed him into the room, much more intelligence than Iola had obtained. The girl told them, that people from Bromwich had been seeking more carts that morning, that a band of Sir William Stanley's men had arrived at the town by daybreak, and were to depart at noon, or before, if they could get carriage. The farmer's wife remembered, too, that one body of them was likely to pass along the very road upon which she had been about to direct Iola towards Lichfield.

"Can we learn when they have gone by?" asked Ibn Ayoub, in his laconic way.

"Then we could go on at once, when the way is clear," said Iola.

"That were easily done," said the farmer's wife. "The road is not very far. We have a field that overlooks it."

"Send the little cow-boy to feed the cattle by Conyer's copse," suggested the daughter. "There he will see them all pass; and, my life for it, he will go down and talk with some of the archers, and learn what they are doing, and all about it."

"'Tis a good way," said Ibn Ayoub. "Let him not know why he is sent, lest he tell as well as ask."

Such was the course followed. With his dinner put into his wallet, the boy was sent to drive the cattle from the pasture where they were feeding, to that which overlooked the road; and he was strictly enjoined, if any soldiers went by, and asked whether there were carts or waggons at the farm, to say, no, they had gone to Atherston and not returned, and to come back and tell when they had passed. Iola, it was arranged, should remain where she was, till it was ascertained that this body at least had gone by; and when she made some faint excuse for intruding so long upon the good dame's hospitality, her hostess laughed, saying--

"Bless thee, my child, if 'twere for a month, thou art welcome. So thou art safe, I do not care. Come, Jenny, you've got the churning to do; and I have to make the cakes."

All that frank and simple kindness could do, during the next three or four hours, was done by the good woman of the house, to make her fair guest comfortable and at ease. Amongst the most painful periods of life, however, are those when thought and feeling are compelled to strive against each other for the mastery, when the heart is filled with deep emotions, and yet the external things of life are pressing upon the brain for attention and consideration. Such was now Iola's situation, as she sat meditating upon how she should make her way to Lichfield, through all the difficulties and dangers which surrounded her, while her heart was filled with anxiety for Chartley, and for the result of the struggle which she believed might be going on at Fazely.

Twelve o'clock, one, two, three o'clock came; and the cow-boy did not return. At last, somewhat anxious in regard to his absence, the farmer's daughter set forth herself to see for him. She found him in the very act of watching a small body of troops, passing from castle Bromwich towards Atherston; and, having looked along the road as far as she could see, she returned to the farm to make her report. It was now agreed that Iola, and her attendant, should still remain for half an hour, as the girl had seen a number of stragglers on the road; and while Ibn Ayoub went to prepare the horses, the good dame endeavoured, to the best of her power, to give Iola an accurate notion of the various paths she was to follow, to reach Lichfield by the least dangerous roads. Iola bent all her attention to her lesson; but, at length, she suddenly interrupted the good woman in her detail, saying--

"Oh, I know that spot well, where there are the three stone mounting steps, and the great cross above them. One road leads to St. Clare, of Atherston, and the other to Tamworth."

"And the little one on the left straight to Lichfield," replied the good woman. "It is the same distance from each, just seven miles and a furlong. If you were to go on the Tamworth road, you would have Fazely close upon your left. As you go to Lichfield, you will leave it four miles upon your right."

The horses were soon after brought round. The adieus were spoken. The good farmer's wife would receive no recompense for the entertainment which she had afforded to Iola. But a small brooch, which the lady took from her hood, and bestowed upon the daughter, was more than compensation for everything but the kindness and tenderness which nothing could repay; and, with a motherly blessing upon her head, as she departed, Iola waved her hand, and once more rode upon her journey.

CHAPTER XLVI.

On the evening of the nineteenth of August, and at the hour of half-past six, was seen riding alone, through the woodland, then lying about three miles to the right of the direct road from Lichfield to Tamworth, a gentleman mounted on a powerful black horse. No pleasant ride was it he was taking; for by this time, one of those violent thunder storms which so frequently interrupt the brief course of an English summer, and which were both more severe and more frequent when the land was better wooded than it is at present, had broke upon the earth, after it had been menacing in the sky all the morning. I am fond of describing thunder storms, having

watched many a one in all its changes for hours; and there is infinite variety in them too, so that a dozen might be described, and no two alike; but, as I have done so more than once before, I would certainly have said nothing of this storm, had it not been an historical one, and connected with an incident of some interest in English history. Suffice it, however, that the thunder seemed to shake the very earth, rattling amongst the trees of the forest as if immense masses of stone had been cast through them by some tremendous engine. The lightning gleamed all around, before, behind, overhead, in amongst the trees, under the green leaves and boughs seeming to display for an instant all the dark recesses of the forest, as if they had been suddenly lighted up by a thousand torches, and then leaving them in blacker shade than before. For the roar of the thunder, for the flash of the lightning, that traveller would have cared very little; but for the increasing darkness of the day, which seemed to anticipate the setting of the sun, and for the deluge which poured from the sky, drenching himself, his horse, and his accoutrements, he did care. Had there been any wind, the rain would have been blinding; but it came pouring down in such torrents, straight, even, unceasing, that what between the failing light, the vapour rising from the hot ground, and the incessant dark drops, it was impossible to see for more than a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards along the road.

Yet the traveller turned his head often as he rode, looking hither and thither, wherever any opening in the wood appeared; and he went slowly too, as if he were in no haste, or uncertain of the way. Still, as he proceeded, he murmured to himself.

"This is most unfortunate. Perhaps 'twere better to go back; and yet, in this blinding deluge, I might again miss the road, and wander Heaven knows whither. What will they think too? Would to Heaven I had brought the boy with me! True, he never was in this place in his life before, any more than myself; but he seemed to have an instinct in finding his way."

He rode on for about ten minutes more, and then exclaimed joyfully:

"There are some felled trees! There may be a woodman's cottage or some forest but near--a horse, upon my life, and a woman's garments under that shed. Woman, with all her faults, is ever a friend to the distressed, a help in the time of peril;" and, turning his horse out of the path, he rode quickly over some cleared ground, man[oe]uvring skilfully amongst the felled trees and stumps with which the spot was encumbered.

His course was directed towards a little open shed, into one side of which the rain drove furiously; but immediately in the way, at the distance of only a few feet from the shed itself, was a deep sawpit, at either end of which were piles of timber, which he could not pass without going round. Just opposite, however, under the partial shelter which the shed afforded, was the form he had seen from the road; and close by was the horse, a beautiful animal of pure Arab blood, covered with splendid housings of velvet and gold, which were getting soaked in the descending deluge. All that he could see of the woman was, that, in figure, she was slight and graceful; for her hood was drawn far over her head; and she stood in the farther part of the shed to avoid the rain as much as possible. Her riding-suit, however, spoke no lowly station; and it was with a tone of gentlemanly deference that the stranger accosted her.

"Pardon me for addressing you, lady," he said; "for necessity compels me to do so; and yet I fear, from finding you taking refuge here, that my application will be fruitless. I have lost my way in this wood; and I would fain know if I am near Tamworth, or if there be any place where I can obtain shelter in the neighbourhood."

"You are far from Tamworth," said a sweet musical voice, "five or six miles at least; and as to shelter, I have just sent an attendant to see if there be any better place than this within a short distance. I, myself, am not aware of any. He will be back immediately," she added; "for I told him not to go far."

Perhaps there was a little apprehension in the latter part of her reply; for, although the dress of the stranger was that of a high rank, and his demeanour courteous, yet still he was a stranger; and, to say truth, his features and expression, though not marked by any violent passions, and hardly to be called repulsive, were not altogether prepossessing.

"If you will permit me," he said, "I will wait till your attendant returns, and crave a part of the roof that covers you."

What she replied he did not hear; for, at that instant, there was a bright flash of lightning, which caused her to hide her eyes with her hand, followed instantly by a tremendous roar of the thunder that drowned every other sound. Before the rattling peal had ceased, for it seemed to go round and round the whole sky, the stranger was by her side, dismounted, and tying his horse at some distance from her own; and Iola, with her eyes unshrouded, was examining his appearance attentively. He was a man in the prime of life, tall and well formed, but spare in person, and somewhat thin in face. The features were good, but somewhat stern in character, with a forehead broad and high, and a slight wrinkle between the brows. The whole expression was grave and thoughtful, with a slight touch of shrewdness, and a cold, inquiring, calculating eye. The second look, however, was more satisfactory to Iola than the first had been. That grave, even stern, looking man, was far more acceptable to her, as a companion at that moment, than one of the gay light flutterers of the court would have been. When his horse had been secured, the stranger pulled off his hat, which was of a foreign fashion, and shook the wet from the broad border and

the plume; and then, turning to the lady, he said:

"I fear I break in upon your privacy; but I am sure your kindness will forgive it, and trust that, if you have it in your power to give me any information or direction, you will do so. Your own heart will thank you; for it will be indeed a charity, and I shall be most grateful."

"I know nothing of your need, sir," replied Iola. "All you have told me is your wish to reach Tamworth, which is far. If you will tell me what other information you may want, I will give it willingly, though I know but little with any certainty."

"Business of importance, indeed, carries me to Tamworth," he answered; "and I ought to have been there ere now; but we live in dangerous times, and the country is in a troublous state, so that at every step one may stumble upon some body of hostile troops."

"That is true," replied Iola; "for I am seeking, myself, to get beyond these two lines of adversaries. If I knew which you had to fear, perhaps I might give you information."

The stranger smiled. "Can you not tell me, in general terms, what you know of the two armies?" he asked. "Then I may be able to judge."

"You fear to speak your faction to me," answered Iola; "and therein you do me wrong; for, believe me, if you were king Richard himself, I would not betray you to your enemy; nor, if the earl of Richmond, to king Richard. Yet, perhaps, you are wise to keep your own counsel."

"I have always found it so," said the other, with a laugh. "Not that I doubt you, dear lady; for you do not look like one who would injure any one. But you can, as I have said, tell me generally."

"Well, then, I learn," said Iola, "that the king is at Leicester with a large force, the earl of Richmond at Lichfield; Sir William Stanley, on his march to join the king, moved yesterday to Atherston and the Lord Stanley sought to pass through Fazely this morning, just between us and Tamworth. Whether he passed or not I cannot tell."

"Retiring before the earl of Richmond's army," said the stranger, musing. "But why think you he did not pass?"

"Because there were other troops in the village," answered Iola, "some three or four hundred men, I learned, under the Lord Chartley."

"Then is Chartley at Fazely?" exclaimed the other, with a glad look. "How far is Fazely hence, dear lady?"

"About three or four miles, I am told," answered Iola; "but I know not that Lord Chartley is there now. When I came thence this morning, the troops of Lord Stanley demanded admission, and were refused. Strife was likely to ensue; and I was told to fly and seek safety at Lichfield."

"Then now I know who you are," said the stranger, taking her hand; "the Lady Iola St. Leger. Is it not so? I am a friend of Lord Chartley's; and he wrote, to me, that he and you would be at Lichfield to-night."

Iola blushed, she hardly knew why, and, when the thunder had ceased echoing, replied,

"You have guessed right, sir; but I knew not that Lord Chartley had written to any one. May I not know your name?"

The stranger paused for a moment thoughtfully, and then answered, "You will think me discourteous; but yet, methinks, the rule I have laid down it were best to adhere to. Much depends upon prudence in my case; and it were better to be over discreet than rash."

"Then, my good lord, I know you too," replied Iola, with one of her gay looks, beaming up for an instant, and then disappearing again like a meteor over the night sky. "Shall I tell you whom I believe you to be?"

"No," replied the stranger. "That might make me more discourteous still, and neither answer yes or no to your surmise. But deal with me merely as a friend of the Lord Chartley's, who wishes him well--as one linked in the same cause with him, whose enemies are his enemies, and let me hear anything you may judge necessary for me to know."

"I am quite sure I am right," answered Iola; "although it is a mystery to me how you came hither alone, unattended, and certainly in a place of danger."

"Good faith, it is a mystery to me too," replied the other; "but a simple mystery, dear lady, and a foolish one. The truth is, I lost my way. Now tell me, think you, from what you know, that I can cross safely from this place to Tamworth?"

"No, indeed, my lord," replied Iola. "Lord Stanley's troops are most likely in possession of Fazely; for I much fear that Lord Chartley's men would be soon overpowered."

"Then why did Chartley refuse to let him pass?" demanded the stranger. "All that Stanley

could desire was to retreat in peace; but he was compelled to clear a passage, at any risk, otherwise the earl's army would cut him off from the king's host."

"Lord Chartley was not there," said Iola. "He had gone forth, they informed me, early in the morning, and had not then returned; but I can tell you little of the matter, for orders had been left to hurry me away in case of danger. However, if even you could pass Fazely, and could reach Tamworth, you would be in more danger still: for parties of the king's troops were in possession of that place at a late hour last night."

"They have been removed farther back," said the stranger, nodding his head significantly; "and Stanley is in full retreat too, if this unfortunate affair has not delayed him. Yet, it would be dangerous to attempt to pass," he continued, musing; "for there is something strange here; and one error were fatal. I must have farther intelligence before I act."

"I trust we may have some soon," answered Iola; "for I know the slave will not return without gathering tidings, if it be possible to get them. I wish he would come, for, though it thunders less, the evening is growing dark."

"Be not alarmed," replied the stranger. "As far as one arm can, I will protect you, lady. I hold that point of chivalry to be the great and most essential one, without which valour is the mere brute courage of a bull, that teaches us to right the wronged, and to protect the weak."

"I trust you are reserved for nobler things than even that, my lord," replied Iola, "and would not have you risk your life in my defence. 'Tis only that I may have to ride to Lichfield, through this dark stormy night which makes me fear."

"Better not ride to Lichfield, at all," replied the stranger, "for Lord Chartley's plans must have been altered by one circumstance or another. He knew not yesterday that the earl of Richmond was to be at Tamworth this night."

"I am but as a soldier, noble lord," replied Iola, with a faint smile, "and must obey my orders. But, hark! I hear a horse's feet--my faithful Arab, come to bring me news."

"God send the tidings be good," said her companion; and, advancing to the other end of the shed, he exclaimed: "Heaven, what is this? In this twilight, it seems like a spectre in a shroud!"

The next instant Ibn Ayoub rode up to the side of the shed, and sprang to the ground casting the bridle free upon his horse's neck. He glared for an instant at the stranger, with his black eyes flashing with eagerness; and, then turning to Iola, he put his hand upon his head, saying: "I have been long, lady; but, I could not help it. There is neither house nor hut, for a mile and a half; and Heaven was sending down streams of fire and water all the way."

"But what news from Fazely, Ibn Ayoub? What news from Fazely?" asked Iola, eagerly.

The Arab gave a glance to the stranger, and she added: "Speak, speak! You may speak freely. This gentleman is a friend. I know him."

"Well, then, lady, bad news," answered the Arab. "Lord Stanley had taken the place, and gone on to Atherston. His rear guard hold it still, however."

"But was there strife?" asked Iola, in eager terror.

"No," answered the Arab. "They dealt in words it seems; and when they found that this lord had two thousand men and they but three hundred, they gave up the place, upon condition that they might have half an hour to go whithersoever they would."

"But your lord, your lord?" asked Iola. "Had you no tidings of him?"

"God is good; I heard not of him," said Ibn Ayoub. "The woman of the house is all for king Richard, and could talk of nought but what Lord Stanley did, and told me how Lord Fulmer's force had marched out of Tamworth, going to join the king, and now lay a few miles off at a place they call Pondhead."

"What shall we do then?" demanded Iola, in a tone of fear and bewilderment. "I know not where Pondhead is; and it may lie straight in our way to Lichfield."

"You had better come to that house," said Ibn Ayoub, "and rest there for the night. The woman has a heart, though as turned the wrong way; and the lad, her son, seems a good youth. When I told her a lady was here in the wood, she cried out at once to bring you there for shelter, and offered all her house could afford, without asking whether you were for the king or the earl. I told her afterwards, indeed, that your uncle was at the court, and high in favour. I would not tell a lie; but that was the truth and could do no harm."

"Much good," said the stranger, now joining in the conversation for the first time. "I fear this storm will last all night; and you must have shelter. So, indeed, must I, for I must not venture rashly to Tamworth till I hear more. I will now seek a boon at your hands. Let me go with you, as one of your attendants. Pass me as such on the good woman of the house--"

"You, my lord--you!" cried Iola; "will you venture thither?"

"Even so," he answered, calmly, "if you will so far favour me as to take me with you. I may return the kindness another day. If you have any fear, however, that I may bring danger on you, I will not go."

"Oh no, 'twas not for that I feared," replied Iola. "'Twas the great risk to yourself. I thought of."

"No great risk, I trust," answered the other. "My face will not betray me in this part of the world: The night is too nigh for strangers to come in; and what this good man has said will smooth the way for us. I can talk deftly of the good Lord Calverly, and speak of Richard's overwhelming force, and Richmond's little band, as calm and scornfully as Lovell or Catesby, nor ever seem to think that right and justice, and God's vengeful strength, can make head against a glittering army and a kingly crown. Let us go on. I can play my part well. Do not forget yours, however. Speak to me, order me as a gentleman of your uncle's household, and, above all forget the words 'my lord.' This night, at least, we will dry our garments by the fire.--To-morrow, my resting place may be a damper one."

"But by what name shall I call you?" asked Iola.

"Call me Harry--Harry Vane," answered her companion; "but, I beseech you, remember that all depends on care and prudence; and if I make any mistake in my due service, rate me well. Be a mere shrew towards me for this night, though you be gentle as a dove, to my good friend Lord Chartley."

With many doubts and apprehensions, Iola yielded to the plan, and, mounting her horse, rode through the still pouring rain, with the stranger by her side and Ibn Ayoub directing them on the way. Many things were arranged as they went, and the good Arab cautioned, which indeed he did not require. They did not reach the door of the house, to which he led them, before the sun had completely set; but as they turned towards the west, they saw a golden gleam on the horizon's edge, and showing that the storm was breaking away.

Timidly, Iola opened the door of the house, which was a large one for the times and the class of people to which it belonged, while the Arab gathered the bridles of the horses on his arm, and the stranger followed a step behind the lady. The scene within alarmed her more than ever; for it was not like the little quiet farm house she had visited in the morning. The outer door opened at once into the kitchen, a large dingy room well grimed with smoke; and round a table sat three or four stout, heavy-looking, countrymen, together with a handsome youth, somewhat better dressed, while two or three young girls were working busily at various household matters, and a stout dame, with gown tucked up, was taking off, with her own hands, a heavy pot, from a hook that suspended it above the fire.

"Hey, mother, mother!" cried the young man, turning round his head, "here's the lady the brown man told you of."

"Ha," said the good woman, setting down the pot and gazing at Iola with a look of wonder, either at her beauty or the richness of her apparel. "Well, I wot you are not fit, my lady, to pass the night in woods and thunderstorms."

"No, indeed," answered Iola. "One of my attendants told me you would kindly give me shelter for the night, and I will most gladly pay for any accommodation I receive. I was making my way to Lichfield, thinking to escape from all these scenes of strife; but it is too late, I find, to go on."

"Ay, that it is," answered the bluff dame; and, at the same moment, the stranger whispered--

"A prouder tone, a prouder tone."

"Set me a seat by the fire, Harry Vane," said Iola, with a somewhat queenly manner; "and then call in the slave. He is wetter than we are."

The stranger hastened to obey; and the good woman of the house laid fresh wood upon the fire, aided to remove Iola's hood and cloak, and offered all attention.

The loftier tone had its effect; for it is a sad truth, that nothing is obtained in this world--not even respect--without exaction. Modest merit! alack and a well-a-day, who seeks for it? and, if not sought, it cannot be found. One's pretensions should ever be a little more than one's right--not too much indeed, for then, we shock our great chapman, the world--but always enough to allow for abatement. The world will always make it; and such is worldly wisdom.

However that may be, there was no lack of kindness and hospitality. The guests were entertained with the best which the house afforded; the horses were fed and tended under Ibn Ayoub's own eye, for they were to him as children; and the good dame and her daughters busied themselves to provide for Iola's comfort, tendering dry garments of their own, with many apologies for their coarseness, and admissions that they were unfit for such a great lady to wear.

While she was absent from the room, submitting to these cares, her son conversed with the

stranger; and even the ploughmen joined in to ask questions concerning the movements of the armies, and their probable result. He played his part well, and with a shrug of the shoulders said, nobody could tell what might be the event. Richmond's army was but a pitiful handful, it was true; but it was increasing daily, and if the king did not force him to a battle soon, the two hosts might be nearly equal. Then again, he added, suspicions were entertained that some of the great nobles were not well affected to the king.

"Why does not the earl of Northumberland bring up his forces?" he asked. "It is well known that he could lead six or seven thousand men into the field; and there they are, either lingering in the North, or advancing by such slow marches, that a dozen battles might be fought while they are on the way. For my part, I hold it better not to be over zealous for any one. None can tell who may win at this rough game of war; and the lower ones are always losers. If we take the luckless side, then we have fines and confiscations for our pains, and if we help the winner we get but cold thanks, when he has secured the game. I will have nought to do with it, and was right glad when I was sent to guard my young lady to Lichfield."

About an hour and a half was passed, in a hurried desultory kind of way, and then Iola sought repose. The stranger was provided with a bed in a room below, and a sleeping-place was offered to Ibn Ayoub in a room over the stables. He would not use it, however; but, bringing in some dry straw, he placed it across Iola's door, and there lay down to rest. There might be a struggle in his mind, between her and the horses; but duty won the day.

For the next six hours Iola rested indeed, but slept little; for the spirit was busy if the body found repose. Whatever faith and trust in God may do, we all know that there are sufferings to be endured, from which our mortal nature shrinks, evils to be undergone that wring the heart of clay; and though 'twere wiser never to dream they may be, till they are, importunate experience will not let us rest in such bright though fanciful security. If imagination be vivid, all probable, all possible ills are called up to frighten us. If reason be predominant, still we count the numbers of those enemies, to meet them as we may. Iola's thoughts were of Chartley all the night long. Waking, she tormented herself with doubt and apprehension for his safety, and sleeping, she dreamed of him, and fancied he was in captivity or dead. It was a relief to her when morning dawned; and she rose. The house was soon in all the busy bustle of a country life, and people were heard coming and going long before Iola had quitted her room.

When at length she went down, however, she found all the men absent on their work; and the first greeting of the good dame was, "Ah, lady, lucky you stopped here, or you might have been caught. The earl of Richmond and his rabble are all in Tamworth and the villages round. Fazely is full of his men; and Lord Stanley has retreated to Atherston. However, if you go on the road you were travelling, you will now get to Lichfield quite safe; for they march on quite orderly 'tis said; more so than our own people do, indeed."

"How many are there?" asked Iola. "Have you heard?"

"Well, nigh twenty thousand men, they say," replied the good woman; "but there is never believing such tales. Now, I will help you to break your fast in a minute, and send you on your way; for there is no knowing whether we may not have some of the rebels here before long."

"Where are my servants?" asked Iola. "They must have some food too."

"Oh, they will come, they will come," said the dame. "They are looking to the horses. Mag, go and call them."

The meal was soon despatched, the horses brought round, and Iola's purse produced to make payment for her entertainment. Here it was not refused; for the mistress of the house was a prudent and careful person, who lost no opportunity of taking money where she could.

They rode away with many adieus and wishes for their fair journey, and the morning was bright and clear. But as soon as they had reached the public road again, Iola checked her horse, saying, "Ride on a few yards, Ibn Ayoub;" and then, turning to the stranger, she added, "I know not whether the information is to be depended on, my lord; but the good woman told me just now, that the earl of Richmond's army is at Tamworth, and the villages round, even at Fazely. All king Richard's troops are withdrawn, she says. So, if you can trust her report, your way is clear."

"I saw a peasant come in from the north with a load of wood," said the stranger; "but I did not venture either to stay or ask any questions; for the man eyed me strongly. Be the tale true or false, however, the result must be risked. I can be no longer absent. To you, dear lady, I have to return my most sincere thanks, for giving me what aid you could in a very dangerous situation."

"Speak not of that, my lord," replied Iola; "but yet one word before you go. I am terrified and apprehensive regarding Lord Chartley. I know not what may have befallen him. I do beseech you, if you can find time when you reach Tamworth, inquire into his fate, and should you find him in difficulty, or danger, aid him to the best of your power. It would quiet many a painful thought too, if I could have intelligence at Lichfield."

"I promise you upon my faith and word, dear lady," said her companion, riding closer and kissing her hand; "nought shall be left undone to aid him to the best of my power. Ay, and I will send you news too. So, now farewell; and God's protection be around you."

"And you," said Iola. Thus they parted. [\[5\]](#)

CHAPTER XLVII.

Come back with me, dear reader, come back with me both in time and space; for we must return to the morning before, and to the little hill-top--not far from the spot where the road to Tamworth and to Fazely separates--over which, at that time, spread brown turf, green gorse, and a few patches of stunted heath, with here and there a hawthorn, rugged and thorny, like a cankered disposition. There is a man on horseback at the top of the mound; and he looks, first eagerly towards Tamworth, then at the sun, just rising over the distant slopes. Lo, two or three horsemen coming on the road from Tamworth! All stop but one, and turn back. The one comes forward at fiery speed, quits the road, gallops up the hill, and stands fronting the other.

"Good morrow, my Lord Fulmer," said Chartley. "I am here alone. No one knows of my being here. You have brought men with you along the road."

"They have gone back to Tamworth," replied Lord Fulmer, with a look of fierce satisfaction upon his brow. "I take no advantage, Lord Chartley. It is quite satisfaction enough to me to have you here at my sword's point, without my seeking to punish you otherwise. Come, draw, my lord, and take your last look of earth; for either you or I quit not this spot alive."

"On horseback, then?" said Chartley. "So be it;" and he drew his sword.

Lord Fulmer wheeled his horse a little, to gain ground, and then spurred furiously on his adversary, his strong charger coming forward with tremendous force. Chartley's was a lighter horse, but far more agile; and, knowing that it would not stand the shock, he drew the right rein, and struck the beast's flank with the left spur. The horse passaged suddenly to the right; and Lord Fulmer was borne past, aiming a blow at Chartley's head as he went. The other, however, parried it with a cool smile, and then wheeling suddenly upon him, in a manner he had learned in other lands, met him, in the act of turning, and, striking him in the throat with the pommel of his sword, hurled him backwards out of the saddle.

The moment this was done, he sprang to the ground; but Fulmer was already on his feet, and ready to attack his adversary sword in hand.

"A pitiful mountebank's trick," he cried, "unworthy of a knight and gentleman."

"I would fain spare your life, boy," cried Chartley, somewhat angry at his insulting words.

"I will not hold it at your pleasure," returned Fulmer, attacking him furiously, with his dagger in one hand, and his sword in the other. The combat was now somewhat more equal, though Chartley was the stronger man, and the better swordsman; but, to use a common expression, he gave many a chance away, unwilling that men should say he had slain Lord Fulmer, to obtain his contracted bride. For several minutes he stood upon the defensive, watching an opportunity to wound or disarm his foe. But even a calm and patient spirit, which Chartley's was not, will get heated under strife like that. Soon he began to return the blows, and the contest waxed fierce and strong; but, even in his heat, Chartley forgot not his skill; and Fulmer did. A conviction, a dark and fearful conviction, which vanity had hidden from him before, that he was no match for the man to whom he was opposed, began to mingle with his anger. The blows that fell about him like rain, the thrusts that he could hardly parry, confused his mind and dazzled his sight. He was driven round and round, back upon the side of the hill, where the footing was unsteady; and then suddenly he felt his guard beat down; a strong grasp was laid upon his throat, and once more he was hurled prostrate on the turf. His sword was lost, the hand which held his dagger mastered, and, when he looked up, he saw the blade of Chartley's *miséricorde* raised high and gleaming above his head. Chartley paused for an instant. The better spirit came to his aid; and, still holding tight the fallen man's left wrist, with his knee upon his chest, he brushed back the curls of hair from his own forehead, with the hand that held the dagger. At that instant he heard a sound behind him, which, in the eagerness of the strife, he had not before noticed, and in an instant his arms were seized.

Shaking off the grasp laid upon him, as he started up, he turned fiercely and indignantly round. Ten or twelve men on foot and horseback were now around him; and, with a withering glance at Lord Fulmer, who by this time had risen on his knee, Chartley exclaimed, "Cowardly traitor, is this your good faith?"

"On my honour, on my soul!" exclaimed Lord Fulmer, rising and passing his hand across his eyes, as if his sight were dim, "I have no share in this. These people are none of mine."

"What would you, sirs?" exclaimed Chartley, as the men advanced towards him again, "Keep back, for I am not to be laid hands on lightly."

"Stay, stay," cried one of the men on horseback, riding forward. "Your name is Lord Chartley, or I much mistake--nay, I know it is; for I have seen you often at the court. Yield to the king's officer. I am commanded to apprehend you, and carry you to the nearest post of the royal troops. We have pursued you hither from St. Clare, and have come just in time, it seems. Do you yield, my lord, or must I use force?"

Resistance was in vain; and, with a heavy heart, Chartley replied, "I yield, of course, to the king's pleasure. What have I done that should cause his grace to treat me thus?"

"He was informed, my lord," replied the officer, "that you were leading your men straight to the army of the rebel Richmond."

"Or rather, you should say, straight towards the forces of the good Lord Stanley. Upon my life 'twill make a goodly tale, to hear that the king imprisons those who go to meet his foes, and honours those who run away before them."

"There are some other matters too against you, sir," replied the officer. "Reports have come from a good man, lately the bailiff of the abbey of St. Clare, tending to show that you have had schemes in hand, contrary to the king's good pleasure. If you were going to Lord Stanley, however, in that matter you can soon exculpate yourself, as into his hands I shall deliver you, his being the nearest force at this moment. Pray mount your horse, my lord. Some one take up his sword and give it me."

During all this time, Lord Fulmer had stood by, with his eyes bent down and his arms folded; but now, as if with a sudden emotion, he started forward to Chartley's side, exclaiming, "Upon my honour and my conscience, I have had nought to do with this."

Chartley sprang into the saddle, and gave him a look of scorn, saying, "My noble lord, it is mighty strange they should know the day, and hour, and place where to fall on me, many against one. Had I not come hither to meet you, they would have found me with good three hundred spears, and might have bethought them once or twice, before they judged it fit to tell me such a tale. Now, sir, which way? I am your humble varlet."

"To the right," said the officer; and the whole party moved on upon the road to Atherston.

Chartley was in no mood for conversation; but with his head bent, and his heart full of bitter disappointment, he rode slowly forward with the soldiers, half inclined, at the turning of every road they passed, to put spurs to his horse, and see whether he could not distance his captors. But, as if judging that such an attempt was likely, wherever an opportunity presented itself, one of the soldiers rode forward to his right hand or his left; and he saw that several of the footmen, who were archers, kept their bows bent and their arrows on the string.

At length there was a sound of horse, coming at a quick pace behind; and a party of some two hundred men, all clad in glittering armour, and bearing a banner at their head, rode by at a rapid trot, going in the same direction as themselves, and only turning their heads to look at the small party as they passed by.

The officer, however, who rode by Chartley's side, instantly shouted loudly, "Lord Stanley, Lord Stanley!" and then spurred on. Chartley saw him speak to a gentleman at the head of the other troop, who seemed to wait and to listen with impatience; for his gestures were quick and sharp, and he soon rode on again. The officer immediately returned, and, ordering the archers to follow as speedily as they might, he said, "Now, my lord, we must gallop forward to Atherston."

He then put his troop at once into a more rapid pace, and rode after the body of horse which had gone on.

"Did Lord Stanley say aught regarding me?" asked Chartley, when they had nearly overtaken the others.

"Ay, my lord, he did," replied the officer, in a gruff tone. "He said your men opposed the passage of his force through Fazely this morning, but that he had driven them out, and let them go, for, friends or enemies, 'twas no matter, they were but a handful."

"'Twas by no orders of mine," answered Chartley. "Had I been there, it would not have happened."

"That you must explain yourself, my lord," answered the officer. "I only do my duty, and that with no good will."

At the pace they went, a very short space of time brought them to Atherston; and at the door of an old-fashioned inn, which then stood there, and in which Chartley had lodged for some weeks, Lord Stanley sprang to the ground, saluted by a number of gentlemen and soldiers, by whom the little town was already occupied. He spoke for a moment or two to one of them, and then entered the inn, saying aloud, "That will do--only set a guard;" and the gentleman whom he

addressed immediately advanced to the spot where Chartley still sat upon his horse, saying, "Your lordship must follow me. I am sorry that I must place a guard over you."

"Can I not speak with Lord Stanley?" demanded Chartley.

"Not at present, my good lord," replied the gentleman. "He is full of business. The king marches from Leicester to-morrow; and we must not be tardy."

Chartley made no reply, but followed in bitter silence, passing through the groups of gazing idlers round the inn-door, to a room up one flight of stairs, where some of his own servants used to sleep. There he was left alone, with the door locked and barred upon him. A moment after, he heard the tread of a sentry, and then the voice of some one speaking from a window to a person in the street, and saying, "Hie away to the king, and tell him you have caught him. Beseech his grace to send me orders what I am to do with him, for I have no instructions. Add that I will send in our muster-roll to-night."

Chartley mused over what he heard. The words evidently applied to him; and he asked himself what would be the result of the message. The fate of Gray, Vaughan, Hastings, Rivers, Buckingham, warned him of what was likely to befall him; short shrift and speedy death. All the bright visions had vanished; the gay and sparkling hopes that danced in his bosom on the preceding night were still. If death is terrible, how much more terrible when he comes to put his icy barrier between us and near anticipated joys. Chartley could have died in the field with hardly a regret, but the cold unhonoured death of the headsman's axe, the inglorious unresisting fall, it was full of horrors to him. Yet he nerved his spirit to bear it as became him; and he communed with and schooled his own heart for many a live-long hour. The minutes crept on minutes, the shadow wandered along the wall, a thunderstorm closed the day, and the rain poured down in torrents. Chartley marked not the minutes, saw not the shadow, hardly heard the storm that raged without. He thought of Iola; and he asked his heart, "What will become of her?"

They brought him food; but he hardly tasted it, and wine, but he knew there was no consolation there; and when the sun went down, he crossed his arms upon his chest, and, gazing forth from the window, said to himself, "Perchance it is the last that will ever set for me."

Shortly after, a light was brought him; and he asked if he could get paper and pen and ink; but the man went away, saying he would see, and did not return.

The whole night passed. There was no bed in the room; and though once or twice his eyes closed in sleep for a few minutes, with his arms leaning on the table, yet it was but to wake up again with a start. The next morning, dawned fair, but for some hours no one came near him. At length food was again brought, but the man who carried it either would not or could not answer any questions, and the day rolled on, chequered by sounds and sights in the streets, such as commonly are heard and seen in a small town filled with soldiery.

It was a long and weary day, however; and Chartley's heart fell under the most wearing of all things--unoccupied solitude; but, at length, the sky grew grey, and night and darkness came on.

Nearly an hour then passed in utter silence; and the whole house seemed so quiet that Chartley could hardly imagine that Lord Stanley and his train still remained there. But at the end of that time he heard a quick step, the challenge of the sentry at his door, and then the password, "The Crown." The next instant the door opened, and Lord Stanley himself appeared.

There was but slight acquaintance between him and Chartley; and his brow was thoughtful and anxious, boding no good, the young nobleman thought.

"I grieve, my lord," he said, closing the door behind him, "that it has not been in my power to see you sooner, and grieve still more to be your jailer; but I have no choice, and better perhaps it is that you should fall into my hands than those of an enemy."

"Much better," answered Chartley, courteously; "but imprisonment is hard at any time; and now I have a pass under your own hand sent me by a mutual friend. I beseech you to think of this circumstance, and not to detain me here, to my peril and great loss of time."

Lord Stanley seemed a good deal agitated, by feelings he did not explain; for he walked once or twice up and down the room without reply; and Chartley went on to say, "I have not mentioned this pass, or the letter which accompanied it, to any one, lest by so doing I might injure you much, and a cause I have much at heart."

Stanley approached close to him, and laid his hand upon his arm, replying with great earnestness, but in a very low tone, "My dear lord, I freely tell you, that I would let you escape within half an hour, were the danger only to myself; but the truth is, my son's life is in peril. The king keeps him as a hostage at the court. He is never for a moment out of some one's sight, and if I but trip in the hazardous path I have to tread, I am made childless in an hour. But tell me, my good lord, how happened it that your men refused me a passage through Fazely yesterday?"

"I know not," answered Chartley; "some foolish mistake, I suppose, for I myself was not present;" and he proceeded to relate all that had occurred to him since he left Fazely.

"'Tis most unfortunate," said Stanley; "but still, till the very last moment, I must either obey the orders of the king, whatever they may be, or be the murderer of my own child. If he should bid me put you in still stricter confinement, or send you on at once to him--which were indeed ruin to my hopes for you--yet I must obey. The mere confinement here is no great evil. Your men have by this time joined the earl of Richmond; and though, doubtless, you would wish to lead them yourself, yet, if you lose glory, you will escape some danger and hard blows."

"Ay, my good lord," said Chartley, "but there are other perils too. What if Richard orders you to put me to death?"

"You must have form of trial," said Stanley.

"None was granted to Buckingham, nor to many another I could name," answered the young nobleman.

"Now God forbend," cried his companion; "but yet, my lord, think what a son's life is to a father; and judge in my situation what I could do. Hark!" he added, "there is a horse's feet below. Perchance it is the messenger returned. We shall soon know."

An interval of gloomy silence succeeded, each listening with anxious and attentive ear. They could hear some words spoken, but could not distinguish what they were. Then came a step upon the somewhat distant stairs, and then in the passage. The sentry gave the challenge; and some one, in a rough loud tone, demanded to speak with Lord Stanley, adding, "They say he is up here."

Stanley instantly rose and went out, and Chartley could hear him demand, though in a low voice, "Well, what says the king?"

"As to the musters, my lord, he says that noon to-morrow will be time enough," replied the same rough tone; "and as to the prisoner, he says, 'Strike off his head before breakfast; there are proofs of treason against him.'"

Stanley muttered something to himself which Chartley did not hear, and then came a pause; but at length the steps were heard receding, and Lord Stanley did not again appear.

"It is determined," said Chartley to himself. "Well, death can come but once. What matters it, the axe, or the spear point? but yet, poor Iola! This room is very hot, I shall be stifled here, and disappoint them;" and, walking to the window, he threw it open and looked out.

The room was a considerable height above the street, and to leap or drop from it might have risked the breaking of a leg or of a neck. Nevertheless, Chartley perhaps might have tried it, but there was a still more serious impediment. Two sentinels were stationed at the door, and walked up and down before the house, passing and repassing beneath his window. There were numerous groups, too, talking together in the narrow road, notwithstanding the darkness of the night, which, though fair and starlit, was quite moonless. A lantern passed along from time to time, and Chartley easily conceived that there would not be much repose in Atherston till dawn. The hope of escape faded.

In a few minutes the sound of horses' feet was heard at some distance. They came nearer and nearer, and Chartley could just see the figures of three mounted men ride up to the house, and there draw in the rein.

The foremost, without dismounting, asked the sentry, "Is the Lord Stanley quartered here?"

"Yes," replied the man; "but he is gone to repose, I think."

"Tell him I am a messenger from his brother, bringing news of importance, which must be delivered to himself alone," said the other.

As he spoke he began to dismount slowly; and while one of the two men who accompanied him took the bridle, the third sprang with great alacrity to hold the stirrup, showing, as Chartley thought, reverence somewhat extraordinary for a mere messenger. The soldier at the door called out somebody from within, who seemed to be a domestic servant of Lord Stanley's; and the moment the man beheld the messenger's face, he said, "Oh, come in, sir, come in. My lord will see you instantly." The stranger followed him into the house, while his two companions walked his horse up and down the road.

About half an hour elapsed ere the messenger came out again; and then, springing on his horse at once, he rode away at a quick pace.

A few minutes after this, Chartley's dark reveries were interrupted by two men bringing in a truckle bed, for there had been none in the room before. One of them was a servant of the inn, whom the young lord knew well by sight, and had been kind to. The man, however, took not the least notice of him, any more than if he had been a stranger; and, saying to himself, "Fortune changes favour," the young nobleman turned to the window again.

A minute or two sufficed to set up the bed in its place; and then the servant of the inn said to

the other man, "Go fetch the blankets and the pillow; they are at the end of the passage, I think."

The moment he was gone and the door closed, the man started forward and kissed Lord Chartley's hand.

"Comfort, comfort, my lord," he said. "The headsman may sharpen his axe, but it is not for you. Look under the pillow when I am gone; keep your window open, and watch. But do not be rash nor in haste. Wait till you have a signal;" and then, starting back to his place, he began to stretch the cross bars of the bed out a little farther.

A minute or two after, the other man returned loaded with bedding, which was soon disposed in order; but just as they were retiring again, the servant of the inn seemed to see something amiss about the pillow, and returned for an instant to put it straight, after which the two left the room together. The key was turned, the bolt was shot, and Chartley, putting his hand under the pillow, drew forth a billet, folded and sealed. It bore no address, and contained but few words. They were as follows:

"The sentinels at the gate will be removed at midnight. Blankets and sheets have made ropes before now; and a grey horse, whose speed you know, stands half a mile down the road. Turn to the right after your descent. Before you go, in justice to others, burn the pass and the letter which came with it; and, if you understand these directions, extinguish your light at eleven."

"Who could the letter come from?" Chartley asked himself. "It was neither the handwriting nor the composition of an inn chamberlain, that was clear," and, taking out the pass, he compared the writing of the two. There was a very great similarity.

Chartley's heart beat high again, but, as he gazed upon the two papers, the clock struck ten. "Two long hours!" he thought, "two long hours!" How wearisome seemed the passing of the time. But it did pass; and when he calculated that eleven o'clock was drawing near, he approached the pass to the flame of the lamp. It caught and burned; but ere the whole was consumed, there came across the prisoner's mind a doubt--a suspicion. It was the only hold he had upon Lord Stanley; a paper which proved that nobleman had connived at his march to join the earl of Richmond; a paper which he dared not order to be taken from him by force lest it should discover its own secret. The next instant, however, nobler thoughts succeeded. "Away, injurious suspicions!" he said, and, casting the paper down upon the floor, he suffered it to consume, and then trampled out the sparks with his foot. The letter from Richmond, which had accompanied it, shared the same fate; and then he waited and watched for the stroke of eleven. It was longer than he had thought it would be; and at length he began to fancy that the clock had stopped.

Presently after there was a stroke of the hammer on the bell; another, and another, and another. The tale was complete, and he blew out the light. Then, placing himself at the window, he watched. The road was now nearly deserted. In a house opposite there was a candle burning, but it was extinguished in a few minutes. A small body of soldiers passed along with measured tramp. Next came a drunken man, brawling and shouting till his voice was lost in the distance. A deep silent pause succeeded. Chartley could have counted the beatings of his own heart. Then a man passed by, singing a low plaintive air in a sweet voice, and his footfalls sounded as if he were somewhat lame. After that there was another longer pause, and all was still again. Then came a little noise in a distant part of the inn, which soon subsided, and silence reigned supreme. It lasted long; and Chartley, thinking the hour must be near, tied the clothing of the bed together, and fastened the end to a hook and bar fixed into the wall for the purpose of suspending a sconce. It was but a frail support for the weight of a strong man; but he thought, "It will break the fall at least." When that was done, he sat down in the window seat again, and watched. Oh, the slow minutes, how they dragged along. At length the clock struck twelve, and still the sentinels paced up and down. Three minutes had perhaps elapsed, though to him they seemed many; and then the great door of the inn opened, and a voice said, "Guard dismissed! quarters, twenty-two. Roll call at dawn!"

There was a clatter of arms, and then side by side the soldiers marched up the town. He waited till their tramp could no more be heard, then put his head to the door of the room, and listened. Some one was breathing heavily without, as if in sleep. Approaching the window softly, he drew forward the end of the sort of rope he had formed, cast it over, and mounted on the window seat. Then, holding fast with both hands, he contrived to grasp one of the knots with his feet, and slid part of the way down. He loosened one hand, then the other, and then freed his feet. Still the hook and bar held firm, and a moment after his feet touched the ground.

There was a light burning in a room below, but no one stirred; and, passing quietly all along the front of the house, he soon accelerated his pace, and, almost at a run, reached the verge of the little town.

The moon peeped up above the edge of the slope, and Chartley looked eagerly forward. There seemed some dark object under a group of trees about three hundred yards in advance. He thought it looked like a horse, but as he came nearer he saw two, and paused for an instant; but the moment after came a low sweet whistle, like the note of a bird, and he went on.

Beneath the shade of the trees he found his own horse and another standing, and a man holding the bridles of both. With a wild feeling of liberty Chartley, without putting foot in stirrup,

vaulted on the noble beast's back; and it gave a neigh of joy, as if it felt that its lord was free again.

Then, drawing forth his purse, the young nobleman would have rewarded the man who held the charger; but, in a voice Chartley seemed to know, he said, "Wait, my lord, wait, I go with you to guide you. You go to Tamworth, is it not?"

"To Lichfield, to Lichfield," said Chartley; and he spurred on upon the road which he knew right well. They rode on, the man following some way behind, till Atherston was left afar, and the chance of pursuit became less and less. At the distance of about four miles from the little town, Chartley was overtaken by his follower, who had put his horse into a gallop, to catch the fleetest beast which the young nobleman was riding.

"To the left, my lord," he said, "to the left, if you must needs to Lichfield, though the earl's army is at Tamworth. The small bridle paths save us a mile and a half, and will not be bad now."

"Who are you?" asked Chartley, turning his horse into a narrow lane, to which the man pointed. "I know your voice, surely."

"Poor Sam the piper," answered the man, "though now rich, and no longer the piper. Now you marvel how I should have been pitched upon to guide you; but that is soon explained. I was sent over by one you know well, to bear some news to the Lord Stanley, and there I heard what was likely to befall you. I would have found means to get you out, if Heaven had not put it in the good lord's mind to be kindly himself; but as I was recommended to him as a man of discretion, who could be trusted, and as I caught a glance of the good earl of Richmond going in, and told the Lord Stanley so, he might think that it would be well to employ me in what would put me out of the way."

"The good earl of Richmond!" exclaimed Chartley; "has he been with the Lord Stanley?"

"Ay, this very night," replied the other, "with nought but two grooms in company, which shows that he knows his game is very sure."

Chartley mused as he sped onward; for though few doubted, except the one who might have been expected to doubt most, that secret intelligence existed between Richmond and his stepfather, yet the young nobleman had not imagined so bold a step as a personal conference would be ventured by either.

It was still dark when he arrived at Lichfield; and Chartley spent more than half an hour in awakening the sleepy ostlers from their beds, and obtaining some accommodation at the principal inn, for there were, at that time, two in the good town. No information could he procure either regarding Iola or his men; for there had been so many persons passing to and fro within the last eight-and-forty hours, that no description served to distinguish one from another. There was no lady lodging in the inn, however, one of the ostler's assured him, except "the fat canoness of Salisbury;" and as to the troops, they had all marched out of the town, and gone to Tamworth. Forced to be satisfied with this small intelligence, Chartley gave orders that his good guide should be well taken care of, and that he himself should be awakened at sunrise; and he then cast himself down upon a bed. For the greater part of two nights and two days he had not closed an eye; and, notwithstanding much love and some anxiety, drowsiness overpowered him in a moment; the many busy thoughts which were whirling through his brain grew confused and indistinct, and he slept.

From a deep, dead, heavy slumber, he woke with a start, and gazed around. The room was full of light. Sounds of busy life made themselves heard on all sides. There was a girl crying water-cresses in the street, and people laughing and talking in the full-day bustle of the world, while a creaking wood-cart wended slowly along, singing its complaining song. It was evident that he had been forgotten; and, going to the door, he called loudly for the chamberlain.

The man declared that he knew not any one was sleeping in that room, but informed him it was well nigh ten o'clock, which was confirmed the moment after by the church clock striking. No other information could he afford, but that no lady was in the house, except the fat canoness; and Chartley instantly set out to inquire at the other inn. There he was likewise disappointed; and to every place where he was likely to gain intelligence he went in vain. We all know how much time may be occupied in such searches; and at that period Lichfield was full of monasteries and convents, at each of which Chartley applied. At only one of them did he gain any indication of the course of the fair fugitive. It was a small community of hospitable nuns, where the withered portress informed him that three ladies had slept there the night before, and she did think that one of them had come up to the gates with an odd-looking brown man.

"We do not lodge men," she said, "and so he went somewhere else; but the lady we took in; and she, and the servant, for so he seemed, went away at ten this morning."

Chartley demanded eagerly whither they had gone; and the old sister replied, "To Coventry, I believe. All the three ladies went to Coventry, to get out of the way of the war; for they said there would be a battle to-day. Have you heard of such a thing, young gentlemen?"

Chartley replied he had not; but the good woman's words threw his mind upon another train of

thought, and he hurried back to the inn.

He leaned his head upon his hand, and meditated. "A battle, and I not present? That must never be. Yet Richmond was at Tamworth last night, and Stanley at Atherston. It can hardly have been fought. Yet it may be ere nightfall. It is now near four; and many a field has been fought and won, in the hours of daylight that are left." Thus he thought, and then, starting up, he called aloud, "Drawer Drawer! Bring me some wine and bread. Bid them prepare my horse instantly, and call the man who came with me hither."

The wine and bread were brought, and Sam was soon in the young lord's presence.

"Here, my good friend," said Chartley, giving him some gold. "You have served me well, on this and other occasions, as I learn. I will reward you further if I live. Now I must away to Tamworth; for I hear there will be a battle soon, if it be not already fought; and I would not, for one half a world, be absent."

"Nor I either, my good lord," replied Sam. "I have always prayed to see another battle, ere I died; and now I've a good chance, which I will not lose. So, with your leave, I'll ride with you."

"Be it as you like," replied Chartley. "But keep me not; for I depart as soon as I have quitted my score."

One cannot always get out of an inn, however, as soon as one likes; and in those days all things moved more slowly than they do now. There is nothing in which the advance of society is seen so much as in facilities; and there were few of them in Europe at that period. Men were often a month going the distance they would now travel in two days; and at every step of the road some drag or another was put upon the wheels of progress. The score was five minutes in reckoning, although the items were but few. The horse was not ready when this was done, and more time elapsed. Both the ostlers had gone out to see a procession of grey friars; and the bit and bridle were not to be found. In all, half an hour was consumed; and then Chartley set off, and rode to Tamworth with speed.

When he entered the little town, all seemed solitary. The setting sun shone quietly through the deserted street. Not a cart, not a waggon was to be seen; and a dog that came out of one of the houses, and barked at the heels of the horses, was all the indication of life within the place.

"They have marched out, sir," said Sam, who followed him close behind; "and all the good folks have gone after them to see the sport."

"Then there has been no battle yet," answered Chartley; "but we must find out which way they have gone. There is a man talking with some women down that road. Ride down and gather news, while I go on to the inn, the Green Dragon, there, and order some provender for the horses."

Before Sam returned, Chartley learned that Richmond, with his small army, had marched towards Market Bosworth. "He won't get there without a fight," said the elderly host, who had come out at his call, "for King Richard is at the Abbey of Merrival. God help the right!"

"Did you chance, mine host," demanded Chartley, without dismounting, "to see with the earl's army the bands of the Lord Chartley?"

"To be sure, to be sure," answered the host. "They are joined with Sir John Savage's men. They marched in the rearguard."

Chartley asked their colours and ensigns; and the old man answered readily, showing that in reality he knew nothing about them, and, after feeding his horses, Chartley rode on towards Bosworth.

As the young nobleman advanced, he met numerous groups of Tamworth people returning to the town at nightfall; and from them he obtained information sufficient for his guidance. The two armies, he found, were in presence, and a battle on the following day was certain. Richard's head-quarters were at the Abbey of Merrival; but Richmond had pitched his tent in the field. The number of the king's army was greatly exaggerated, and many of the men shrugged their shoulders, as they spoke of Richmond's force, evidently judging that his cause was hopeless.

"He had better have waited a day or two," said an elderly man, riding on a cart, which had apparently conveyed some of the baggage of the army; "for people were flocking to him very fast; but, fighting now, he will be overwhelmed; and, if I were you, young gentleman, I would keep myself from others' ill-luck."

"I should deserve bad luck myself if I did," replied Chartley, and rode on.

Night now fell heavily; but soon after a noise began to be heard. First came a murmur, like that of the distant sea; and then, as the young nobleman spurred forward, louder sounds separated themselves from the indistinct buzz. Voices shouting, ringing laughter, and the clang of arms were heard. Twice, too, there was the blast of a trumpet, but that was more distant; and Chartley found that he must be approaching the rear of Richmond's host.

Small as was the force with which the earl had landed in England, and small as it was still, when he encamped on Bosworth field, it had not failed to attract, as it marched on, a number of the idle, the dissolute, and the greedy, in even a greater proportion than is usually the case. The camp was kept clear by sentinels; but, for full half a mile before he could see a tent, Chartley passed through innumerable groups of men and women, and even children, from Tamworth and Lichfield, and as far as Shrewsbury. He had no difficulty in passing the sentinels, however, though he had not the word; for, to say truth, they kept no very strict watch, and his appearance was passport sufficient.

When he had entered the little camp he inquired for his own men in vain for nearly an hour. It was too dark to see the colours, or the ensigns of the different leaders, though most of them had a banner or a pennon pitched before his tent; and along the whole of the left wing of the army he passed without gaining any intelligence. At length some one told him that a body of horse, which had joined the earl at Tamworth, was encamped on the extreme right, near a morass. "There where you see those fires," said the man; "for they brought no tents with them, and have cut down the apple trees in a goodman's orchard to keep themselves warm."

Chartley turned his horse thither, and rode on quickly; but at the first fire he came to, he found no faces round it which he knew; and the men took little notice of him. As he drew near the second, however, a man who was sitting by it turned his head, and then, starting on his feet, waved his steel cap in the air, crying out aloud, "Here is my lord!"

Instantly the whole body sprang up, with a shout of gratulation; and in a minute after the master of the young lord's household, and several of the leaders of his bands, had gathered round his horse.

Chartley's first inquiries were with regard to Iola; but the account of the master of his household satisfied him that she had taken her way to Lichfield, accompanied by Ibn Ayoub alone. He thought it strange, indeed, that she should have gone on to Coventry; but he doubted not that something had occurred which he knew not of, to make her decide upon such a course. The old man went on to explain that, following the directions contained in the letter which his lord had left with him, the soldiers, on being expelled from Fazely by the troops of Lord Stanley, had immediately gone to join the forces of the earl of Richmond.

"We were in sad alarm about you, my lord," he continued; "but, thank God, here you are safe. Would it were so with good Sir William Arden too."

"Ha, have you news of him?" demanded Chartley.

"Ay, my lord, sad news," replied the old man. "Two men, who came over to join us from the enemy, about an hour ago, tell me that he was caught upon the road, stealing a nun from a convent; that he and his men turned and fought like tigers, while she and a woman who was with her made their escape. I said it was nonsense, for Sir William was always a very sober and discreet gentleman, rather rough with his tongue, but a good man at heart. One of the men, however, swears it is true, declares that he kept guard over him himself, in the king's camp out there, and that his head is to be struck off to-morrow morning, between the two armies."

"Are the men here?" demanded Chartley.

"Yes, my noble lord," replied the other.

"Then bring them to me," said Chartley; and, dismounting from his horse, he seated himself by the fire.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Shakspeare made a mistake. The morning was bright and clear, and the sun shone strong and powerfully, drawing up a light mist from a marsh which lay between a part of the earl of Richmond's forces, and the much larger army of the king. At an early hour in the morning, all was bustle and preparation; and, notwithstanding a great inferiority in point of numbers, a calm and steady cheerfulness reigned in Richmond's army, which was not the case in the royal host. There each man looked upon his neighbour with doubt; and rumours were current of emissaries, from the enemy's camp, having been seen busily passing from tent to tent, amongst the king's troops, which was evinced by the doggerel lines fixed on the duke of Norfolk's pavilion, as well as by several other circumstances which made a noise for a moment or two, but were soon forgotten. The impression, however, existed and gained strength, that much dissatisfaction reigned amongst the leaders; and when the forces of Lord Stanley appeared on the one wing, and those of

his brother on the other, without advancing nearer than half a mile, fresh doubts and suspicions arose.

The man[oe]uvres on both parts, before the action began, were few and simple. A tardy sort of lethargy seemed to have fallen upon Richard; and though he rode forth with a crown upon his helmet, as if desirous of courting personal danger, he moved his men but little, till the day was considerably advanced.

Richmond rode over the whole field in person accompanied by the earl of Oxford, Sir William Brandon, Sir Gilbert Talbot, and Sir John Savage, and caused the marsh to be examined and its depth tried with a lance. He then commanded a considerable movement to the left, with a slight advance of the right wing, so as to allow the extreme of the line to rest upon the edge of the morass, with the position which he thus took up fronting the north west. He was observed to smile when he saw the position assumed by Lord Stanley, in front of the morass and to his own right, commanding the whole of the open field, between the two armies; and, immediately after, the earl of Oxford pointed out to him another considerable body of troops, advanced to a spot exactly facing those of Stanley; so that the ground enclosed between the four lines appeared very like a tilt yard on a large scale.

Richmond nodded his head, merely saying, "They are Sir William's men." Then, turning round, he demanded, "Which are Lord Chartley's troops?"

"Here, my lord," said a man from the ranks.

"I fear poor Chartley is not here to head them," said the earl of Oxford, in a low tone, running his eye along the line.

"He was here last night," said Richmond, "and sent me a strange note, saying he would be with me betimes this morning; but he has not come."

"My lord, the enemy is moving in two lines," said a horseman, riding up; and, cantering back to the centre of his force, the rest of Richmond's arrangements were soon made. His disposition in some respects resembled that of his adversary. In two lines also his men were ranged, having somewhat the advantage of the ground, but the great advantage of the sun behind them, while the fierce rays shone strong in the face of Richard's soldiers.

The earl of Oxford commanded the first division, Richmond himself the second, Talbot one wing, and Sir John Savage the other; and all the leaders knew that death awaited them if they were taken.

In what are called pitched battles, not brought on by skirmishing or any accidental circumstance, but where parties meet with the full determination of casting all upon the stake, there is generally a short pause before the strife begins. For, perhaps, a minute, or a minute and a half, after the troops were within less than a bow shot distance of each other, and each could see the long line of faces under the steel caps of the archers in the opposite ranks, there was a dead silence; the trumpets ceased to sound; each Bowman stood with his arm and foot extended; the fiery cavalry reined in their horses; and one might have heard a drop of rain, had it fallen upon the dry grass. Then a baton was thrown up into the air on Richard's side; and every man of the centre front line drew his bow string to his ear and sent an arrow into the ranks of the enemy. Nor was this flight of missiles without reply; for closer and faster still, though not so numerous, fell the shafts from Richmond's little host amongst the adverse troops. Their aim was truer too; for the eyes of his men were not dazzled by the bright beams which poured into the faces of the enemy; and many of the foe were seen to fall, while a good deal of confusion spread along the line. Mounted on a tall horse, on the summit of a little mound, towards the centre of the second line, Richmond could see over the whole field; and, marking the disarray of the centre of Richard's army, he said aloud, "Now, had we men enough for a charge on that point, we might win the day at once."

"You and yours were lost, did you attempt it," said a deep voice near; and, looking round, the earl saw a tall figure, mounted on a strong black horse, with armour not the best polished in the world, though of fine quality and workmanship, and bearing in his hand a sharp stout lance, which, in addition to the long tapering point, carried the blade of an axe, like that of a woodman, forming altogether a weapon somewhat resembling an ordinary halbert. His horse was totally without armour; even the saddle was of common leather but the stranger bore the spurs of knighthood; and over his neck hung a gold collar, and a star.

"Why say you so, sir knight?" demanded Richmond.

"Look to the right," replied the stranger; and, turning his eyes in that direction, the earl beheld a horseman galloping at full speed towards the centre of Richard's line, where the king evidently was in person, while the large body of horse, commanded by the duke of Norfolk, was seen gliding down between the marsh and the troops of Lord Stanley. It was a moment of intense anxiety; but at the same instant Chartley's squadrons of horse were seen to fall back a little, in good order, so as to face the road leading round the morass; and Stanley's whole force wheeled suddenly on its right, so as to join the earl's line, and nearly hem in the duke of Norfolk, between it and the marsh.

Richard's cavalry instantly halted and retreated in perfect array, just in time to save themselves from destruction. They did not escape without a charge however; and at the same time, the two front lines of the armies advancing upon each other, the battle raged hand to hand all along the field.

It was just at this moment, that coming up from the rear, a little to the left of the spot where the earl of Richmond stood, rode forward a young knight in splendid armour, mounted on a beautiful grey horse. By his side was a man no longer young, though still in the prime of life, totally unarmed, even without sword or dagger; and behind came ten spears wearing the colours of Lord Chartley. The young nobleman paused for an instant, gazing over the field, and the strange confused sight presented by a battle, at a period when cannon were little used and no clouds of smoke obscured the view, extending over a line of more than half a mile. Here squadrons of horse were seen charging the enemy's line; there two cavaliers seemed to have sought each other out in single combat; in one place a company of foot was pushing on with the levelled pike; in another, the archers with their short swords were striving hand to hand; the banners and pennons waved in the wind, fluttered, and rose and fell; and long and repeated blasts of the trumpet sounded to the charge, and animated the soldiers to the fight.

It was a wild, a sad, a savage, but an exciting scene; and Chartley's face, as he gazed with his visor up, looked like that of an eager young horse, furious to start upon a course.

"There is the earl, Chartley," said Sir William Arden. "That is his standard. The taller one in front must be the man."

Chartley instantly turned his horse, and rode up to Richmond's side.

"I am late upon the field, my lord," he said, "but I will make up for lost time. I went to save my noble friend, Sir William Arden here, from the headsman's axe. I beseech you keep him with you; for you will find his counsel good, and he is unarmed. Whither shall I go?"

"Lord Chartley, I presume," said Richmond; "a gallant soldier never comes too late to be of glorious use. There, straight forward on your path is your noble friend, the earl of Oxford. I beseech you give him help. He is sore pressed and terribly outnumbered."

"Follow!" cried Chartley, turning to his men and raising his arm; and down he dashed into the thickest of the fight.

Small though the aid was, the effect was soon apparent. Some ground which had been lost was regained in an instant; the first line of Richard's troops was pressed back in the centre. The banner of Lord Oxford made way in advance; but just then Sir William Brandon exclaimed, "Richard is coming down with all his power, my lord."

"Then must we not be behind," replied Richmond. "Advance the banner, Brandon! Good men and true, keep your men back yet a while, till you receive command. Then down upon the boar, and pin him to the earth; for I will leave my bones upon the field or win this day." Thus saying, he rode on towards a spot which had been left vacant in the struggle which was going on; and those who were above could see that a group of some twenty or thirty persons from the enemy's side moved down as if to meet him. The greater part, however, paused where the two lines were still striving man to man, some engaging in the combat, some gazing idly forward.

One, man, however, with two or three pages running by his side, burst from the rest like the lightning from a cloud. He was covered with gorgeous armour; his mighty horse was sheathed in steel; and circling round his helmet, beneath the waving plume, appeared the royal crown of England. Straight towards Richmond he dashed, trampling down a foot soldier in his way, and rising the gentle slope, with his lance in the rest, without the slightest relaxation of his horse's speed.

"Mine, mine!" cried Sir William Brandon. "Mine to win a coronet!" and, giving the standard to another, he couched his lance and bore down to meet the king. But that unerring hand failed not. The eye was but too keen. Straight in the throat, the point of Richard's spear struck the standard-bearer, and hurled him dead upon the plain, while the knight's own lance shivered on the king's corslet. Brandon's horse also rolled upon the ground, but Richard leaped his charger over it with a shout, and spurred on.

Without asking leave, Sir John Cheney darted forth to meet him. His fate, however, was but little better; for, though not slain, he was hurled wounded from the saddle in an instant. But at that moment Richard was met by a new adversary; for, as he was rapidly approaching the spot where Richmond stood, the tall knight, whom I have mentioned, sprang from his unarmed horse and threw himself on foot in the king's way. Richard checked up his horse for an instant at the unexpected sight, and dropped the point of his lance, to strike this new adversary in the face; but ere he could accomplish it, with a tremendous sweep of both his arms, the knight struck him on the side of the helmet. The lacings gave way. The casque and crown fell off; and a deep stream of gore flowed down the pale face, which was seen, as he hung for a moment in the stirrups. The horse rushed on, but the king soon dropped upon the field; and three or four footmen, springing on him, dispatched him with their daggers.

The tall knight leaned for an instant on the staff of his weapon, and looked up and down the

field; and then, as if he had gathered all in that brief glance, he exclaimed, in a loud and vehement voice. "Now, earl of Richmond, gaze not on the dead, but on to support the living! Sir William Stanley is charging the enemy in the flank. On with your whole force, and the day is yours. If not, it may be lost still. Give me my horse, boy."

The order was instantly given; the whole force of Richmond moved down the hill; and though the struggle was protracted for some twenty minutes longer, it was no longer doubtful. All was confusion indeed, in the ranks of Richard; but Norfolk and many other noble gentlemen struggled to the last, and died without yielding an inch of ground. Northumberland took no part in the fight; and others fled soon, while others again remained to be made prisoners; but steadily the earl of Richmond's line advanced, till the whole of Richard's host either lay on Bosworth field, or were in full flight across the country.

At the end of two hours from the commencement of the battle the trumpet sounded the recall, and Richmond's tent was set up, on the spot where Richard had commanded at the beginning of the day. The curtains were drawn up, and knights and noblemen crowded round, while the field was searched, to ascertain the numbers and the quality of the slain. Litters, formed hastily of lances laid across, were seen moving about the plain, bearing the wounded from the field of carnage; and many a group might be observed, in distant parts of the prospect, engaged probably in less pious offices.

Richmond, now on foot, and with his casque laid aside, stood for several minutes gazing silently on the scene before him; and, oh, who shall tell what passed through his mind at that moment? How often has the flood of success a petrifying effect upon the heart! and, doubtless, it was so with him; but he had then just stepped into those Lethe waters, which so often drown in dull oblivion all the nobler and more generous feelings of the soul.

Nobody ventured to break upon his silence; for it was evident to all that strong emotions were busy at his heart, till, at length, a voice without, said--

"Lord Stanley!" and many others took it up, repeating, "Stanley, Stanley!"

Richmond took a step forward; but ere he reached the verge of the tent Stanley himself appeared. He bore in his hands the royal croft, which Richard had carried on his helmet, and, without a word, he advanced straight to Richmond, and placed it on his brows. Then, bending the knee, he said, aloud--

"Hail, king of England! Long live our sovereign lord, King Henry the Seventh!"

Richmond embraced him warmly, while a shout rent the air, and some words passed between the two which no ear heard. Then advancing, with the crown upon his head, Henry graciously thanked those around him for their aid and service, adding a few words upon the glorious event of the day.

"There is one, however," he continued "whom I see not here, and to whom double thanks are due. I cannot name him, for I know him not; but his hand defended my life when two gallant gentlemen had fallen before my enemy, and his hand slew the usurper of the crown I now bear. He wore round his neck the collar and star of some foreign order, and--"

"He is fearfully wounded, sire," said Lord Chartley, who had just come up. "That litter, which you see yonder, is bearing him, at his own request, to the abbey of St. Clare. He earnestly besought me to entreat your grace, if your time would permit, to pass thither for a brief space, on your march. He is a man of high and noble birth, allied to a royal house; but I must say no more. The rest he will tell you, if he live till you arrive."

"Noble Lord Chartley, to you too I owe great thanks," said Henry; "and they shall be paid in coin that you will like full well. But this noble gentleman has taken strong possession of my mind. How did he fall?--I saw him late in the battle, safe and foremost."

"True, sire," replied Chartley; "he was before Sir George Talbot and myself, as we followed the last troops of the enemy which kept together, to disperse them. Then, however, just on the brow of the hill, the young Lord Fulmer turned with his band, and bore my noble friend down with his lance while he was contending with two men in front."

"But you avenged him, Chartley," said Sir George Talbot; "for you carried the young serpent back on your lance's point, like an eel on an eel-spear. He will never take odds against a gallant knight more."

"I know not that," said Chartley; "for I saw him remounted and led away between two servants. But, if your grace will visit the noble gentleman of whom you spoke, I will forward at once and bear the tidings after him."

"I will not fail," replied Henry; "'tis but a mile or two about, I believe; and, as soon as we have taken some order here, I ride thither ere I go to Leicester."

Chartley thanked him and retired; and the king, calling a page, whispered to him some brief words, adding aloud, "To Tamworth then, with all speed. Say, there must be no delay--no, not a

moment."

CHAPTER XLIX.

In a small room, in the stranger's lodging at the abbey of St. Clare of Atherston, lay the form of a wounded man, upon a low bed. A lady sat by the pillow weeping; and the abbess was near the head of the bed, with her eyes overflowing too, while the priest stood near, with a boy in white garments behind him.

"Not yet, not yet, good father," said the wounded man; "I am still very strong--too strong. Nay, weep not, Mary, you have shed tears enough for me already in your life; and in good sooth thus would I die. My heart is light and happy, my dear wife, and I look up in trust and hope. Knightly in my harness have I met my fate; and I am cheered by my lady's love. I trust Richmond will come before I go; for, as my journey is long, we might not meet again for many years; and I would fain insure all, that there be no shade on my departure."

"Lord Chartley expects him instantly, my noble son," replied the abbess; "he is waiting his arrival now under the gateway. Oh, had I known your rank, and dear ties to my poor brother St. Leger, when I but thought you a poor woodman, you should have had every tenant of the abbey to lead to fight for the house of Lancaster."

"The king!" said Chartley, opening the door; and, with a slow step, and look of sympathy, Henry entered and approached the dying man's bed-side.

"How can I enough thank you, sir?" he said; "and how can I enough regret the fate of such a knight?"

"Regret it not, sir," replied the other, gazing firmly in Henry's face; "for I regret it not. Nor do I need thanks. I have fought for that side on which I fought and bled in years gone by. I am content to die in arms. I wish no better. But I have a boon to crave, not for ought done in this day's field, but for a service rendered months ago, when Bishop Morton bore to Henry of Richmond the proof of a plot to yield him to the hands of his fell enemy."

"I remember well," replied Henry; "but he told me he had those proofs from a poor woodman, who was called Boyd."

"He told you true," replied the other; "the woodman lies before you, but, none the less, Thomas Boyd, earl of Arran."

Henry started, and his politic mind ran on into the future; but he replied, almost at once--

"I vowed that I would grant whatever boon was in my power to grant to that same woodman, and I will not break my oath. Name your request, my noble friend."

"It is but this," answered the earl, "that by your royal will and prerogative, passing over all opposition and obstacles, you will at once, and without delay, unite in marriage a lady, called the Lady Iola St. Leger, to that young lord standing behind you now."

"But," cried the abbess, "there is a contract--"

"Cease, cease, good mother," said the wounded man; "such contracts must be thrown in the fire. There is a better contract between her and Chartley."

"Nay, but my brother, her uncle," said the abbess, "he signed the contract on her behalf with the Lord Fulmer."

"A better than her uncle signed the contract with that young lord," replied the dying earl; "her father, lady abbess--her father, whom this Lord Fulmer slew. Ay, marvel not, lady! Your brother's daughter died, in his sad flight, when dark misfortune overwhelmed the house of Lancaster. There were then dangers and miseries as dark, over my hapless race; and that generous friend took my dear child, to save her and me from greater difficulties still, and passed her for his own. Slain by the foe, he had not time to tell his weaker but more prosperous brother, or yourself; but the proofs are in my hands. Did I not visit her here, more than ten years ago, and gaze at her, through my closed visor, lest the tears that washed my cheek should betray the secret? Have I not watched over her ever since that hour, when I fell wounded for the house of Lancaster? But here are the proofs, my lord. Take them, and grant my boon. I would fain have seen them wedded before I die; but that cannot be, for I am waning fast; and now, let no vain mourning for the dead

impede their union--no, not an hour. Do you grant my boon, Henry of England?"

"I do, and willingly," replied Henry; "were that contract even valid, I would cast it to the winds, sooner than see the child wed the slaughterer of her father. But it cannot be valid. Nay, my good lord, I will do more. With these proofs in my hand, I will o'erstep all ceremonies. You said but now, that you would fain see this union ere your death. If you do really so will--if it will be comfort to you on your bed of pain, from which I trust you will yet rise to health--let the marriage take place at once, and I will justify it with my sanction. My first act of royalty shall be to bring a satisfaction to a friend who has served me."

"Alas, it cannot be, sir," replied the earl of Arran; "my child is far away--at Coventry, they tell me; and my race is well nigh run. I shall, indeed, rise from this bed to health, but it will be to health immortal, I do trust; but never more can I behold my child."

Sobs from the side of his pillow interrupted him, and, taking Mary's hand, he said, "Nay, Mary, nay!--My lord, the king, you were about to speak."

"'Twas but to say," replied Henry, "that this may not be so impossible as you think. I trust your hour is still far off. Your voice is strong."

"Because my will is strong; but I interrupt you rudely," said the earl.

"However that may be--if to see your child safe, guarded by a marriage bond with one who can protect her strongly, and will love her truly, or I am no judge of men," replied Henry, "can bring comfort to you, even in this hour, 'tis not impossible--All wait here a moment."

He left the room, and in a few minutes returned, leading in Iola herself.

"Now calmly, my good lord," he said, as the earl raised himself quickly to catch her in his arms, "I sent for her from Lichfield to Tamworth yesterday, thinking this good lord would meet her there. Three hours ago I sent for her on Bosworth field, bidding her join me here, and purposing to unite her to my noble friend at once. Thus your boon was granted, ere it was asked, and you must seek another. She has brought a bridesmaid with her, too, from Tamworth. The Lady Constance, too, I think they called her."

"Let it be quick," said the earl of Arran, in an altered voice, unclasping his arms from the fair form they held; "let it be quick!"

A few moments passed in explanation to Iola, and for a time she bent down her eyes and wept. But the earl repeated, "Let it be quick! Iola, lose no time;" and, drying her eyes, she said, sadly but sweetly,

"I will obey you to the last, my father."

There was a group ranged round the bedside of the dying man, some five minutes after. The princess Mary held his hand in hers, and leaned her head upon his shoulder. Iola's hand was clasped in that of Chartley; and the priest, with an open book, read hurriedly the binding words, while the low answer gave assent.

As he ended, the wounded man said, in a voice as strong as ever, "Amen!" and then placed his hand over his eyes.

It rested there.

They gazed upon him anxiously. He stirred not.

The priest hurried to his side, and removed the hand. He looked upon the face of the dead.

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): The first mention that I find of the real arquebuse, or match lock, is in an account of the household of the Duke of Burgundy in 1474; but small cannons, called in France *coulverines á la main*, were used long before. They are represented in the old miniatures, as resting on the shoulder of one soldier, while another takes the aim from behind, and the first applies the match at the word of command.

Footnote 2: For an account of the terrible effect--approaching to madness--of the death of Edward, Prince of Wales, upon Richard III. and his queen, see the history of Croyland Abbey.

Footnote 3: Richard's attempt to obtain possession of the person of Richmond by bribing Landais, the duke of Brittany's minister, is too well known to need particular notice.

Footnote 4: He referred, of course, to the superstitious notion prevalent not alone at that time but for long afterwards, that if the body of a murdered man was touched by the hand of his assassin, the wound of which he died would bleed. I may remark that such superstitions were recognised even in Scottish courts of justice long after they were extinct in England.

Footnote 5: This singular adventure of the earl of Richmond, when on his way between Lichfield and Tamworth, and the fact of his passing the night at a farm house, are not inventions of a romance writer, but historical facts.

THE END.

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