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Bloundelle-Burton**

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FORTUNE'S MY FOE

By **J. BLOUNDELLE-BURTON.**

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D. APPLETON AND COMPANY, NEW YORK.

FORTUNE'S MY FOE

A ROMANCE

BY

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

AUTHOR OF THE SCOURGE OF GOD, THE CLASH OF ARMS,
DENOUNCED, IN THE DAY OF ADVERSITY, ETC.

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1899

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FORTUNE'S MY FOE.

[PROLOGUE.](#)

OFF CARTAGENA.

The storm of the night was over. The winds had subsided almost as quickly as they had risen on the previous evening--as is ever the case in the West Indies and the tropics generally. Against a large number of ships of war, now riding in the waters off Boca Chica, the waves slapped monotonously in their regularity, though each crash which they made on the bows seemed less in force than the preceding one had been; while the water looked less muddy and sand-coloured than it had done an hour or so before. Likewise the hot and burning tropical sun was forcing its way through the dense masses of clouds which were still banked up beneath it; there coming first upon the choppy waters a gleam--a weak, thin ray; a glisten like the smile on the face of a dying man who parts at peace with this world; then, next, a brighter and more cheery sparkle. Soon the waves were smoothed, nought but a little ripple supplying the place of their recent turbulence; the sun burst forth, the banks of clouds were dispersed, the bright glory of a West Indian day shone forth in all its brilliancy. The surroundings, which at dawn might well have been the surroundings of the Lower Thames in November, had evaporated, departed; they were now those of that portion of the globe which has been termed for centuries the "World's Paradise."

The large gathering of ships mentioned above--they mustered one hundred and twenty-four--formed the fleet under the command of Admiral Vernon, and in that fleet were also numbers of soldiers and marines who constituted what, in those days, were termed the Land Forces. There were also a large contingent of volunteers from our American colonies, drawn principally from Virginia.

The presence here both of sailors and soldiers was due to a determination arrived at by the authorities at home in the year 1739, to harass and attack the Spanish West Indian Islands and possessions in consequence of England being once again, as she had been so often in the past, at war with Spain. Now that fleet lay off Cartagena and the neighbourhood; some of the officers and men--both sailors and soldiers--were ashore destroying the forts near the sea; the grenadiers were also ashore; the bomb-ketches were at this very moment playing upon the castles of San Fernando and San Angelo; the siege of Cartagena had begun.

Upon the quarter-deck of one of the vessels of war composing the great fleet, a vessel which may be called the *Ariadne*, the captain walked now as the storm passed away and the morning broke in all its fair tropical beauty, and while there came the balmy spice-laden breeze from the South American coast--a breeze soft as a maiden's first kiss to him she loves; one odorous and sweet, and luscious, too, with the scents of nutmeg and banana, guava and orange, begonia, bignonia, and poinsettia, all wafted from the flower-laden shore. But because, perhaps, such perfumes as these, such rippling blue waves, now crested with their feathery tips, such a bright warm sun, were not deemed by Nature to be the fitting accompaniments to the work which that fleet had to do and was about to do--she had provided others.

Near the ship which has been called the *Ariadne*, alongside the great and noble flagship, the *Russell*, passing slowly--but deadly even in their slowness!--through the line made by the *Cumberland*, the *Boyne*, the *Lion*, the *Shrewsbury*, and a score of others, went the hideous white sharks of the Caribbean Sea, showing sometimes their gleaming, squinting eyes close to the surface of the water and showing always their dorsal fin as the water rippled by them.

"The brutes know well that they will be fed ere long," the captain--Henry Thorne--said, half to

himself, half aloud, as he gazed through the quarter-deck starboard port; "they know it very well. Trust them."

"They must know it, sir," said the chaplain, a fine rosy-cheeked gentleman, who had already had his morning draught, wherefore his cheeks looked shiny and brilliant--he having been standing near Thorne while he murmured to himself--"specially since they have been fed enough already by our fleet. Three went overboard only yesterday from the *Weymouth*. While we are here they will never leave us."

"So-so," the captain said. "So-so. 'Tis very true." Then, turning to the chaplain, he asked, "How is it with her below? Have you seen the surgeon's mate? What does he say? Is her hour of trial near?"

"It is very near," the other answered. "Very near. Pray Heaven all may go well. Ere long we may hope to congratulate you, sir, upon paternal honours. 'Tis much to be desired that the Admiral will give no signal for the bombardment to commence until Mrs. Thorne is through her peril."

"At least I hope so. With all my heart. Poor girl! Poor girl! I would never have brought my wife on board, Mr. Glew, had I known either of two things. The first that she was so near her time; the second, that we should be ordered to join this squadron--to quit our station at Port Royal."

Whereby, as you may gather by this remark of Captain Thorne, the *Ariadne* was not one of those great war vessels which had sailed from England under the order of the Admirals. Instead, she had come down from Jamaica, where she was stationed, to join the fleet now before Cartagena.

Then the captain continued--

"If the Admiral does open the attack this morning 'twill be a fine hurly-burly for a child to be born amidst. Surely, if 'tis a boy, he should live to do great things. He may be a bold sailor--or soldier, at least. He may go far, too; do well. He will be fortunate also in his worldly gear. I--I--am not rich, Glew, but he--or she--will be some day an heir or heiress to much property and wealth that must come my way at last if I live. If I live," he repeated, more to himself than to his companion.

"You have not made your will yet, sir?" the parson asked, rubbing his chin, which was red and almost raw from the use of a bad razor that morning. "The will you talked about. As a chaplain who, on board ship, is also supposed to be something of a lawyer, I feel it right to tell you that you should do so. No man who is before the enemy, whatever his standing, should neglect so important an office as that."

"I will not neglect it, Mr. Glew. Let the child but be born and I will perform it in my cabin the moment I know the good news." Then, changing the subject, he asked, "Will they let me see her if I go below, think you?"

"I will make inquiries," the other said, going towards the after-hatch. "Yet," he went on, as he put his foot on the ladder beneath, "I doubt it. The event is very near at hand. The wife of the master-at-arms, as well as the wife of the ship's corporal, are with her--they rule all. But I will go see," and his head followed his body and disappeared.

Left alone, or at least without the companionship of Mr. Glew, for none could be alone on board such a ship as this was--even though she might have been making a pleasant cruise on summer seas; while more especially, none could be alone when that ship was one of a large number engaged in a bombardment--the captain went about his duties. He visited the gun decks and saw that all were at their proper stations, inspected the twenty-four, twelve, and nine pounders, swivel guns, stern and bow chasers, and indeed, everything that could throw a ball; he saw that sponges and rammers were ready, and that every bolt and loop was in working order. He neglected nothing, no more than he would have done had his young wife been at home at Deptford or Portsmouth, and he without the knowledge that at the present time, she was about to make him a father.

Yet, all the same, his thoughts were never absent from her, his bride of a year; again and again he lamented bitterly that she had come upon this cruise with him. Why, he asked himself repeatedly, could he not have left her behind in Port Royal, where she would have been well and carefully attended to, and where he could have joined her after this siege was over? He had been mad to bring her! Already the bomb-ketches were making a hideous din all around; already, too, some of the great ships of war had received their orders to open fire, and were obeying those orders; from the forts on shore a horrible noise was being kept up as they replied to the attackers in a more or less irregular and perfunctory manner.

"What surroundings," he muttered to himself, breaking off even as he did so to bawl orders to the men in the tops to train their swivel guns more accurately upon the shore, "what surroundings for a little helpless babe to be born in the midst of. What surroundings!"

They were, however, to become worse--far worse for the poor mother below; surroundings more terrible and awful to accompany the birth of a new-born child.

Commodore Lestock, with his broad red pennant hoisted, tapering and swallow-tailed, went in to bombard all the forts along the shore, and after him followed an appointed number of the ships in his squadron. It was a noble sight, one that might have caused--and doubtless did cause--many hearts to beat enthusiastically in their owners' breasts. Along the line of other vessels which they passed, cheer rang upon cheer; the bands of the flagships, and others which possessed such music, played "Britons, Strike Home." Soon five hundred great guns were firing on those forts, which replied with courage; the din was tremendous, as also was the vibration caused to each of the vessels while the flames belched forth and the guns shook. And in the middle of the cannonading--when, on board, one could not see across the ship, nor from the mizzen to the main shrouds on either side--the chaplain, staggering on to the upper deck, his handkerchief to his nose and mouth to keep out the saltpetre from his lungs, ran against Captain Thorne giving orders for a marine who had been wounded by a shot from the shore to be carried below.

"Sir," Mr. Glew said hastily, and clutching the captain by the arm, "sir, I offer my congratulations. It----"

"Is well over?" Thorne exclaimed. "Is that it?"

"It is that, sir. And the child is----"

"What?"

"A girl."

"A girl," the captain repeated, while even amongst all the roar of the cannonading, Glew seemed to think he heard a tone of disappointment in the other's voice.

"So-so!" Thorne exclaimed a moment later. "Well, carry down my love to my dear wife. I must not leave the deck now. Say--say--that I will be below ere long. Say that I--am--rejoiced."

* * * * *

Meanwhile, what was passing below in the captain's cabin--which had been set aside for his wife ever since her hour drew nigh; he sleeping in a spare one close by? Independently of it being now a chamber in which a young and beautiful wife had just become a mother, as well as a room in great disorder, there were other things which, in any circumstances, must have caused it to present an appearance of extreme confusion. Naturally, all the pictures had been unshipped, since the concussion of the guns would otherwise have brought them from the bulkheads to the floor, or deck, to say nothing of shivering any glass they might possess. And also all china and glass in the cabin, and the pretty knick-knacks which Thorne had bestowed about it, were removed from their usual positions. Whereby the apartment in the *Ariadne*, in which Mrs. Thorne had but recently presented a child to her husband, was even more disarranged than it would ordinarily have been. Likewise, every port and scuttle was opened, so that thus some of the concussion should be avoided, and the cabin was thereby made less hot and stuffy than such a place would otherwise have been in this climate. Yet it was but a poor place in which to bring a fresh body and soul, into a troublous world--a poor place in which a child should first open its eyes upon the light.

"Dear, dear!" said Mrs. Tickle, the wife of the master-at-arms, she thinking thus, as she wiped the perspiration from Mrs. Thorne's face. "Dear, dear! What a place for the sweet young thing to give birth to a babe in. Yet," and, as she spoke, she took a sip of rumbullion from a cannikin close to her hand, and then passed it over to Mrs. Pottle, the wife of the ship's corporal, "it might have been wuss. My first was born in Havant Work'us', Tickle being away with Captain Clipperton at the time."

"Ha!" said Mrs. Pottle, as she in her turn took a sip of the toothsome liquor. "Indeed, and it might have been wuss. Even now it may be so. What if one of them forts should plump a round shot into us below the water-line? Then there won't soon be no Captain Thorne, nor Mistress Thorne, nor baby either."

"Nor yet no Mrs. Tickle nor Mrs. Pottle," said the other. Whereupon each took another drink at the rumbullion to calm their nerves, which, in truth, needed little calming, since this was not the first battle, or rather bombardment, in which these good ladies had taken part. For, in those days of a century and a half ago, it was common enough for the wives of the petty officers and the lower-deck men to sail on board ships with their husbands, they doing much such work therein as, in these days, is done by soldier's wives who are on the "strength of the regiment." They could also turn their hands to other things, even as Mrs. Tickle and Mrs. Pottle were now doing. For they were almost always excellent nurses, understanding much about wounds and fevers and other complaints, and quite capable of working under, and sometimes of advising, the raw sawbones whom the Admiralty sent into the ships of war to cure--or kill--the sailors.

"Is the battle over?" Mrs. Thorne asked feebly, opening her eyes now as she spoke, and endeavouring in her newly-developed maternal love, to turn them down upon the tiny mite lying on her breast.

"Over, deary!" said Mrs. Tickle, sinking the character of the inferior woman who was in the presence of the superior, and speaking only as a good-hearted, motherly creature, which indeed she was, to another who needed her care. "Not yet, poor lamb. Lawk's sakes," she whispered to her comrade, "can't she hear the guns a-belching? Ah! drat you all," she muttered, as at this moment a larboard broadside bellowed forth, causing the ship to tremble at her keelson; "that's them lower deck twenty-four pounders at it again. Poor dear, she don't seem to hear or feel them, anyhow."

She should have done so, indeed she must have done so, since even as the roaring continued, while the *Ariadne* was brought round so that now her starboard broadside could be fired, she lifted her arms feebly and enfolded more tightly to her breast than she had done before the little atom she had but recently brought into the world.

"My child," she moaned, "my child! Oh what can your future be with such a beginning as this? What shocks and tempests must threaten the existence that commences in such turbulence and throes as these."

"You 'ear," said the master-at-arms' wife to the wife of the ship's corporal, "you 'ear! She is quite calm and full of understanding. Ah! poor dear." Whereupon she stretched out her hand once more for the can of rumbullion.

And even now, as each of these women in the cabin listened to the uproar without, that uproar seemed to increase. Half a dozen vessels were firing at once; the battery which had been constructed ashore by those who had landed overnight was adding to the tumult; the bo'sun's pipes were heard whistling like some shrill-voiced bird that sings its loudest amidst the violence of a summer storm; the master-gunner's voice was heard on board the *Ariadne* giving his orders. And there came too, the sound of a hideous crash in the vessel, the rending of timbers, the shrieks of sailors, who were doubtless wounded--bellows, shouts and curses.

"The ship is struck," said Mrs. Tickle, calm and tranquil as became a sailor's wife who had been in battle before. "Pray Heaven 'tis not below the water-line."

"Nor that the magazine is set afire," said Mrs. Pottle, also with heroic coolness. "Otherwise we have got our passage to Davy Jones. Yet," she continued, the woman rising above the Amazon, "I have three poor little children at home in Portsmouth town. And one is a'most blind. God help them, what shall they do if Pottle and I have got our discharge!"

While, even as she spoke of her children, that other child, the newly-born babe present in the cabin, set up a piteous infantine wail. Little, unconscious creature as it was, bearing a brain but an hour old, it seemed to recognise, to have some glimmering of the terrors that enveloped it. And while it did so the ship listed to starboard, causing Mrs. Thorne's body to move somewhat, and, at the same moment, the white, delicate hands seemed to strain the infant closer to her; the liquor can, too, was upset, whereby the drink went slopping over the cabin carpet. But the other two matrons were not to be stopped, even at that moment, from doing their duty. Mrs. Tickle sprang up and held the ailing woman tightly in her berth, as she muttered--

"The ship has listed four degrees. Yet she goes no further. They have stopped the water from pouring in. Go, Pottle, and find the surgeon. He must come here, even though he quits the wounded for an instant."

Whereon Mrs. Pottle went forth, a heroine still, though a white, pale-faced one. A heroine, not thinking of her own life--now in deadly peril!--but only of the little children at home in Portsmouth town. Above all, she thought of the half-blind one who could never do aught for itself when it grew up. She thought of it, and wondered who would protect it when she and her husband were gone.

"My husband, my husband!" wailed Mrs. Thorne, as she and the other woman were left alone. "My husband! Will he not come to me? To me. To his wife and new-born babe. Oh! my husband. Why comes he not?"

"Dear heart," exclaimed Mrs. Tickle, "he cannot come. His duty is on deck. Duty before all." Then she bent her head a little nearer to the other's, and said, "We are sailors' wives. Our duty first. Duty before all," she repeated.

As she did so the cabin door was slid back, and Mrs. Pottle returned, bringing with her the surgeon's mate from the sick bay--a young, callow Irishman, who was now making his first cruise. The surgeon, an old man, who had an army of children of his own at home in Rotherhithe, had attended Mrs. Thorne through her trouble, but now he was busy with those who were wounded and in the cock-pit. He could not come.

The mate was very pale--too pale, thought Mrs. Tickle, for a sailor-doctor to be, even though he were smelling powder for the first time. Then, to that good lady's astonishment, as she cast her eyes on her nursing comrade, she saw that she too was very pale--was white--ghastly. And in

a moment she imagined, guessed, that the ship's corporal was dead! By that freemasonry, by some telegraphic method of the eyes, which women alone know how to use, she signalled to the other to ask if such were the case, yet only to discover that she had not divined aright. Mrs. Pottle shook her head; then, seeing that the eyes of the captain's wife were wide open, she stepped behind the surgeon's mate, and from the screen of his broad back put her finger to her lip. Thereby not knowing what else she meant, Mrs. Tickle understood at least that silence was to be observed.

"My husband," moaned Mrs. Thorne again now, gazing up into the dark eyes of the handsome young fellow who looked so white, "my husband--I want him."

"Nay, madam," he said, even as he felt her pulse and arranged her more comfortably in the berth, "nay, not yet; the bombardment is not over." While, turning his head round, he whispered to Mrs. Pottle behind him, "You have left the cabin door open; shut it."

It was well she obeyed him at once. Well that, amidst fresh discharges of the twenty-four pounders, another crash on deck and a noise which was the fall of the foremast, added to the piercing cries of the child, Mrs. Thorne could not hear nor see beyond that door. Well that it was shut immediately on the order of the surgeon's mate.

For now six sailors were carrying down the after-ladder a helpless, limp body at that moment--one that was to be laid in the very next cabin to that which Mrs. Thorne was occupying. The body of Henry Thorne, with a bullet in it that had pierced the heart.

And behind them came the chaplain, shaking his head sadly, yet muttering somewhat thankfully, too--

"But he made that will. He made that will. And the child is safe. Although it seems, no will was needed, yet it is as well that he should have made it."

* * * * *

For many years after her father's death *Ariadne's* home was with her mother at Gosport, and here she grew from childhood to womanhood, and became a sweet, pure girl, whom to see was at once to admire. A girl so fair and pretty, that, whenever she walked abroad, the eyes of men were turned towards her approvingly; a girl, tall, and with a figure that full womanhood would develop into one of extreme grace and beauty; one who possessed also such charms as deep hazel eyes, which looked out at you from between thick eyelashes that were many shades darker than the fair hair crowning her head as though with a golden diadem; a pretty girl whose masses of curls reminded one of the cornfields in July.

For years she lived with her mother here in Gosport, having done so from the time when Vernon sent them both home to England in the first ship of war that went back after Mrs. Thorne was able to travel. And of all the neighbourhood around she was the pet; she was, too, the darling of old sea captains who had had arms and legs lopped off in many a fierce fight against those whom we called our old "hereditary foes"; the darling of every old blue who had drawn cutlass for His Majesty King George II., or King George I., or even, amongst the very old and decrepit, for Great Anne; the beloved of those sea-dogs who had first spat their quids out on the enemy's decks and had then hewn that enemy down before them. For these old salts, no matter what their rank was, regarded her as their own child and property. Had she not been born amidst the roar and smoke of England's cannon as they vomited forth fire and fury? Was she not a sailor's child, and he one who had fallen as a sailor should fall, dying on his own deck, while doing his duty? That was enough to make them love the little thing who grew beneath their eyes towards beauteous womanhood; enough to make old lieutenants who had served sufficiently long to be admirals, and admirals--fortunate dogs!--who had not seen half the service of those old lieutenants, worship her; to make them wander up to her mother's house and smoke their pipes there, and talk to her about the father who had died the glorious death. It was sufficient, too, to set old tars carving out ornaments and knick-knacks from ancient ships of war which had been towed as prisoners into the harbour and there broken up, all of which they presented to her with grins of pleasure, and almost with blushes--if such could be!--upon their wind-tanned, scarred faces. It was amply sufficient also to cause others to bring her in baskets of strawberries and raspberries from their little gardens on the outskirts of the town, and bouquets of the sweet old-time flowers that grew in such profusion in those gardens. And some there were--and many--who called her the "Sailor's Pet," and others who named her the "Mariner's Joy."

Yet 'twas not only the old who loved *Ariadne* Thorne. Be very sure of that. For you cannot but suppose that the young men loved her too--those lieutenants and second lieutenants who, although still beardless, had fought in many of the numerous sea-fights of the period. Young fellows with boyish faces who had, all the same, been with Hawke at the Isle of Aix, and Howe at St. Malo, or had assisted in the destruction of the *Oriflamme* by the *Monarque* and the *Monmouth*. They all loved her, and she loved one, and one alone. Happy, happy man!

Two years before this narrative begins, however, and when *Ariadne* was sixteen, there fell upon her a great blow, that of her mother's death--a blow which, when it strikes a young girl in her swift blossoming from maidenhood to womanhood, is doubly cruel. Mrs. Thorne died of an internal disorder with which she had been for some time afflicted, and the girl was left alone, or almost alone, in the world. She had a relative, it was true, an uncle of her late father's, one General Thorne; but he was a very old man--so old, indeed, that he could talk of Eugene's campaign against the Turks, and speak of that great soldier as one whom he had seen in boyhood; while he was also able to boast that he had formed one of the guard of honour which had accompanied the present King, George II., now grown old, to his coronation. He dwelt at, and owned, an estate spoken of generally as "Fawnshawe Manor," which lay five miles or so on the London side of Portsmouth; one that would at his death come, with a very considerable fortune, to *Ariadne* herself. A fortune and an estate which would have come to her eventually through her father had he not been slain at Cartagena, even without his making that will which his chaplain, the Reverend Mr. Glew, had so impressed on him to do, although it was unnecessary; that must have come to her, since no heir male existed to deprive her of it, or to step in between her and it.

She had likewise a friend, a true and steadfast friend, one who loved her as, next to her mother, no other woman could have loved her. A hard, rugged woman was this friend, with a deep voice and corrugated face, yet possessing within her bosom a heart of gold; the woman who had assisted at her birth--Mrs. Pottle, now growing old.

"Ah!" this good creature would moan sometimes as she sat by her fireside, either in her own room in the house at Gosport, or, later, in her parlour at the lodge at Fanshawe Manor, which she came to occupy later. "Ah! if Ariannie," as she pronounced the loved one's name, "was not left to me, mine would be a weary lot. Pottle, he've gone; he done his duty, but he've gone; at Anson's victory off Finisterre, it were. And as to all my children--oh!" she would exclaim, "there! I can't abide to dwell on them. Oh! my children," whereon--because old customs grow on us and are hard to shake off--the brave sailor-woman would endeavour to console herself with something from a black bottle.

But she was true as steel to "her little child," as she called *Ariadne*; true and loving as her honest English heart, as any honest woman's heart, could be. She had not attended to all the child's wants since the black day off Cartagena in '41; had not nursed and attended to *Ariadne* for years, nor told her--in company with her own little ones--of fierce and turbulent sea-fights and land-fights, without becoming a foster-mother to her. So, now, she accompanied the girl, clad in her deep mourning and weeping sorrowfully for her loss, and also for having to quit the little house where she had lived so happily for the great one where she did not know whether she would be happy or not. She accompanied *Ariadne*, sitting by her side in the coach and calling her "deary" and "dear heart," and bidding her cheer up, because the General--"although he hadn't the luck to be an admiral"--was reported to be kind and good.

"And," she would say more than once, "remember that, as the lawyer told you, you go to what is your inheritance. It will be all your'n, and you will rule over it like a young queen until some day you love one who will rule over you."

Practically, that was what *Ariadne* did do after a few short months; she did rule over the house for her great-uncle, as, ere long, she was to do it for herself. General Thorne was now helpless with old age, and was glad to know that, already, the girl was in the home which must so soon be hers; that she was there to bring sunlight into the great vast house which, through the Fanshawes, had by intermarriage come into the possession of the Thornes.

As Mrs. Pottle had said, she presided over it like a young queen, graciously and kindly, making herself beloved all around the place, yet not forgotten by those old sailors amongst whom her earliest days had been passed. She became its mistress from then until now, when this history opens, and when "*Ariadne* Thorne" was a toast in the county, while many gentlemen of various degrees aspired to win both her hand and her love. When, too, others aspired to win that hand, not so much because they desired to obtain her love so much as, in its stead, they desired the possession of Fanshawe Manor and the hundred thousand guineas which were reported to be her fortune.

CHAPTER I.

THE LION AND THE JACKAL.

Seventeen years have passed since the child who was to bear the name of that ship of war, in which she was born, had come into the world--upon the very day and at almost the very hour

when her father had left it. Seventeen years!--full of storm and strife and battles, of thrones in danger; of one throne--that of England--almost lost to its holder by the invasion of him to whom it by birth belonged. Years full of storm and strife and battle by land and sea; of Dettingen won and Fontenoy lost, of India coming nearer to our grasp and America imperceptibly receding from it. Years full, too, of changes in many ways, especially in our own land. Of growing alteration in that old mother speech of ours which had become welded, by time and mixture of race into the superb and sonorous diction of the English Bible and of Shakespeare, and which found its last exponent in the great Defoe, but was now sinking into a jargon in which gentlemen and ladies spoke in a mincing and affected manner that was but a poor substitute for the grammar which, if they had ever known it, they had now forgotten. Gentlemen and ladies who should have been scholars, but who did not know the difference between "was" and "were" nor "is" and "are," nor the proper pronunciation of the vowel "e."

Changes, too, of clothes, of habits, customs, and morality. Scarlet and blue cloth taking the place of russet or peach-coloured satin; French dishes and kickshaws in the place of the honest beef and mutton which had made us "eat like wolves and fight like devils"; and with the dancing-master manners of Chesterfield and his imitators superseding the grace and dignity of earlier days. The rogue too was now a crafty, scheming knave who feared public opinion as much as he feared the Lord Chief Justice and his subordinates, and began at this time to think as much of his respectability as of his neck; whereby he was an infinitely less interesting vagabond than his predecessor, who revelled in his crimes, drank to the health of his friend, the gallows, and went drunk to Tyburn, damning and cursing the populace who cheered him, and jerring at the parson who sat in the cart by his side, had been.

Two things, however, God be praised! were still left in existence in this England of ours, namely, masculine courage and feminine virtue; and against them neither the vagabond nor the knave had any more chance than they had ever had or ever will have. When they succeeded they did so because their victims were either fools or wantons, and when they failed, as often enough was the case, if they did not find the gallows they found the cart-tail, or what to them, if they belonged to the upper classes, was often quite as bad--contempt and ridicule.

* * * * *

Seventeen years had passed, consequently the world had arrived at the year of our Lord 1758, and Beau Bufton sat in his lodgings in the Haymarket one June afternoon. In front of him, because he was a beau, there stood three wigs upon blocks, one black, the other brown, a third one golden, and upon each his eye glanced with considerable complacency--a complacency which, however, was somewhat marred by the recollection that none were paid for, and, as far as Algernon Bufton knew, were not likely to be so just yet. Which fact would not, perhaps, have been particularly painful to him except for one other, namely, that his credit was running short and his creditors were beginning to pester him. Nevertheless, he smiled approvingly upon them; not because they themselves were splendid, and would be costly--if he should ever pay his bills!--but because he considered that they would become him vastly.

"It was the golden one I wore," he muttered to himself now, "when first I won her young and virgin heart at the Wells. Ay! the golden one. I do remember very well. I assumed it because it matched the blue frock and the green silk waistcoat trimmed with gold and the black breeches of velvet. Ah! well, I will wear it again."

Then his eye, which was a dark, full one, fell upon a number of fans nailed against the wall, in the midst of which, spread out and open, was one that seemed to possess the place of honour. We know those fans because our grandmothers' grandmothers (when we had any!) left them behind after they had departed for a better world than this. We know the carved ivory sticks, the highly coloured landscape, the lover kneeling at his mistress's feet, with ever one amorous arm around her waist--as should be in such happy sylvan scenes!--also we know the blue sky and the sportive woolly sheep, as well as the bird upon the bough, the rivulet and waterfall. Thus the fan appeared on which Beau Bufton gazed now, his chin--a long one, causing him to be a man mistrusted of other men--in his hand. Yet more particularly he gazed upon two letters carved into the topmost ivory rib, and lacquered golden; two letters entwined together--the letters "A. T."

"Ah, Ariadne!" he whispered, with emotion, "although you did protest, you let me take it. Ah, Ariadne! In faith you must be mine. Those sweet clear eyes, that supple form, those gentle features, and," he concluded, perhaps a little inconsequently, "the Fanshawe Manor and the hundred thousand guineas. All--all must be mine."

Then he returned to his seat, with again the smirk of fervour on his face, while, still nursing that long chin, he pursued his meditations.

It has been said that this chin made other men mistrust him. And, it may also be said, it was of so peculiar a shape as to make people dislike him. In truth, it was a blemish to what otherwise would have been a good-looking face--a long oval face, in which were set the soft dark eyes above

mentioned. But this chin, running down to a point (so that some wondered how his barber shaved it, while others said it looked like a sheep's tail stuck on to an ordinary face), spoilt all. It caused him to look crafty; it seemed to make him lisp a little as he spoke, as though its weight was more than his lower jaw could bear; and it gained his enemies, since it irritated those who regarded it. It gave him, too, a cynical appearance, which was not obnoxious to him, as he considered that it emphasised the clever things which he flattered himself he was particularly smart at saying. For the rest, he was fairly tall, not badly knit, and as lean as a greyhound.

Thinking of her whom he apostrophised as Ariadne, and of her sweet, clear eyes and supple form--with the Fanshawe Manor and the hundred thousand guineas not forgotten!--his thoughts lent themselves to other things in connection with her. To a letter he had addressed to her at Fanshawe Manor, this side of Portsmouth--one full of holy vows of admiration and esteem; a billet containing a little scrap of poetry (written for him, probably, by a garreteer of Grub Street for half-a-crown); one suggesting also that, by great good chance, he would be in the neighbourhood of Havant on a certain evening now close at hand, and that then "his wandering love-led steps" (for so he phrased it) would turn, as turns the needle to the pole, towards the avenue of limes where oft Phyllis was known to walk at eve and Philomel to warble. Perhaps, too, the gutter-poet had helped him in this charming composition!

"Ay, so I wrote," he said to himself now. "And so I did. Well! well! Now for the means. I vow they run uncommon short." Whereupon he unlocked a 'scrutoire that stood close to him, and thrusting his hand into a drawer, pulling forth a silk purse. A well-filled one, too, as it seemed by its weight; one heavy enough for any beau to carry, provided always that it was so carried simply to supply the wants of the passing hour, and was backed up by a good sound balance at Sir Mathew Decker's Bank, or at some other. But, should it happen to represent all the available cash that its owner was in possession of as his whole goods, then but a lean and sorry purse.

He turned its contents out upon the table before him, picking out amongst them five great three pound twelve shilling pieces, which he stacked carefully in a little heap by themselves.

"They look well," Beau Bufton said, while assuming the cynical smile which he practised in private, so that it should not fail him when required in public. "They give their possessor an air of sumptuousness. To draw one out 'twixt thumb and finger from a well-gallooned waistcoat, and present it to, say, Ariadne's tiring maid, or some scurvy groom, bespeaks wealth and ease. So, so. 'Tis very well."

Then he fell to counting the guineas and half-guineas which he had also tumbled out of the silken purse, though, as he did so, his chin seemed to grow longer. "Humph!" he muttered, "seventy-nine guineas in all. Devilish little. I thought there had been more. And where are more to be gotten? Seventy-nine guineas---- Come in!" he cried, breaking off. Come in!--a knock being heard at the door, Yet, even as he did so, he thrust a copy of the *Universal Chronicle* over the little heap, or, rather, endeavoured to do so.

"The chink of money is always agreeable to the ears of the poor," said a man who now entered the room, "especially when those ears have learnt to discriminate 'twixt gold and baser metals. And how does the illustrious Beau Bufton find his health and spirits to-day?"

The new-corner who asked this question was a man of about the same age as the Beau, neither of them being yet thirty, or within a year or so of it; yet, except in point of age, there was no similarity between them, for Bufton's clothes were of the newest and best--as why should they not be, since still the creditors were confiding; his ruffles and neck-lace were clean and expensive. But with the other man things were mighty different. His coat was cloth, 'tis true, but cloth well worn; his linen and his lace were, say, dingy; and his wig had had never a shilling spent on it at the curler's for many a long day. Also his spadron stuck out two inches from its leathern scabbard and clinked against a heel that needed sadly the cobbler's aid. Nevertheless, he was a better-looking man than the Beau, in so far that his features were softly turned and much more manly.

"Has't done it?" asked Bufton now, his dark eye roaming over the other's worn garments, and resting with extreme displeasure on the sight of his visitor's feet, which were lifted with an indifferent air on to a neighbouring chair, across which was thrown a scarlet cloak. "Has't done it, Granger?"

"Ay! ay! She loves you, Algernon, as I do think. The letter is in her hands, and she awaits you in the lime-tree avenue. Thursday is the night. Fortunate man!"

"You have rid post haste back?"

"Post-haste! Ay, in the devil's chariot. A lumbering waggon thing from Portsmouth was my coach. A waggon lined with straw; and, for comrades, two of Knowles' sailors, drunk; a demirep; also a Jew who furnishes for the Press-gang. What travelling! What a sumptuous coach! I protest, Algy, you starve your jackal."

"Better fare next time. When we have bagged the luscious plum. Then the jackal shall be starved no longer. Meanwhile, you know----" and here he gave the well-accustomed smile and fingered his chin, so that the man called Granger began to feel his gall arising, and instantly

interrupted him, saying--

"NO jokes. No bites. Starve me as you will, keep me short of money, but in the name of God, spare me your wit. My stomach is weak from heavy fasting. I desire no emetics."

"At least you yourself waste no politeness. You do not curb a bitter tongue."

"Better so, nevertheless. Better I cursed and swore, as Knowles' sailors did all through the night, than listened to your emasculated gibes. Algernon, my friend, in spite of your having won the love of a great heiress, you will never succeed in life if you fail to recognise that you are not a wit. The fourth-form little boy humour with which you regaled us once at Shrewsbury becomes not London. I do remember that humour with pain. I think you killed your little sister Lucy, by repeating your schoolboy wit to her, or perhaps you put your finishing stroke to her end by your Cambridge----"

"Be still! be still!" Beau Bufton exclaimed, wincing as the other mentioned his dead sister's name. In truth he had loved that child, and thinking himself cynical, had sometimes retailed to her his sallies made both at Shrewsbury and at Clare. And now, to hear that his humour, as he deemed it, had slain her! 'Twas too much. "Be still," he cried, "or I will find some other to do my work--to do----"

"Your dirty work! That's what I do. Because of my infirmities. My fall from the position of a gentleman. Well! I have done it. A. T.--she," and he pointed to the fan which occupied the place of honour, "loves you. If you woo her carefully, and do not weary her with your accursed flabby wit, you may win her. Then--then--why, then--oh! my God!" he exclaimed, breaking off into a strident peal of laughter, "you may be so happy together. So happy. So happy." And again he laughed.

"You have been drinking," Bufton said, fingering his chin still. "Drinking again. Come, tell me once more before you forget. About the meeting? Where, and when is it?"

"Have I not said! At the lime-tree avenue, leading up to Fanshawe Manor. Eight of the evening is the hour, and Thursday is the day. Win her--fail not to win her; she is yours for the trouble, and then there is the fortune and a large per centum for me."

"I shall not fail."

"I'll make very sure you do not. Remember, if I am a broken man--I--I can break--bah! Threats are unnecessary. Now, I want money."

Saying which he flung the *Universal Chronicle* aside, and then started at the sight of the little heap of gold before him. "What!" he exclaimed. "What! And three pound twelve shilling pieces, too. Gad! No Shoe Lane ordinary for me to-night."

Whereupon he took two of those coins and dropped them into his waistcoat pocket.

CHAPTER II.

AN HEIRESS.

The coach--it was the Self-Defence, which did the journey from the "Swan with Two Necks" in Lad Lane to the "Globe" at Portsmouth in ten hours and a quarter--had passed Purbrook, and was nearing Fanshawe, which hamlet lay, as all the world knew, or ought to have known, between the former place and Portsdown Hill, which is some five miles from Portsmouth. About which village the new road-book said, amongst other things, "On L., i.m., Fanshawe Manor, late General Thorne. Justice of the Peace, etc.; now Miss Ariadne Thorne." So that, as all who read may see, since Cary's Guide is understandable enough, the child born seventeen years ago off Cartagena, in the ship after which she was named, was now the owner of an estate. And what else she owned has already been made clear.

The June evening was delicious in its soft summer coolness as, now, the Self-Defence drew near that ancient inn, "The Hautboy," it retaining on its equally ancient sign-board its old-time spelling of Hautbois; and from the box-seat the Beau, who was the only occupant beside the coachman, made ready to descend. A very gallant beau he looked, too, as, throwing off his long light drugget cloak--assumed to fend the dust from his bravery underneath--he displayed his costly attire; attire consisting of his best laced scarlet summer coat, his blue waistcoat, which was a mass of galloon, and his best satin breeches, the whole surmounted by the golden peruke and the much-laced three-cornered hat.

"You will be a-staying at the manor then, my lord?" the coachman said now, deeming that one so fine and brave-seeming as this spark whom he had brought from London could be no other than a lord going courting the heiress of Fanshawe. "I'll go bail the lady is a-looking eagerly for you."

"Not positively at the manor," Beau Bufton replied. "Not positively, as yet. For to-night, at least, at the inn. There is, I should suppose, good accommodation for a gentleman?"

"Ay, there is, my lord; that is, if so be as how one requires not them damned French kickshaws, which they say are now the mode. But if good beef and mutton, a pullet, or---- Bill," he broke off to speak to his mate, the guard, "sound the horn. The O'boy is in sight."

None descended at that old hostelry with the exception of the Beau himself, since, with the addition of one personage inside who was booked for Portsmouth, nobody but the Beau had that day travelled from London. Therefore his own descent took but very little time. A small valise was handed out from the boot, the customary fee of half-a-crown was distributed to guard and coachman, the landlady nodded to (she staring somewhat amazed at Bufton's finery all the time, and more particularly at his chin, which, she told her gossips later, gave her "a mort o' fear"), and the visitor entered the low-roofed passage. Then, as he did so, he felt his sleeve pulled gently by a woman standing in the doorway, who, on having attracted his attention, curtsied two or three times.

"Ha!" he said, glancing at her and noticing that, though plainly but comfortably dressed, she had a strangely worn and seamed face, such as those who have led an existence much exposed to the elements often possess. "Ha! It should be the good woman Mr. Granger told me of. Mrs.--Mrs.----?"

"Pottle, your worship's honour. Miss Ariadne's nurse from the first."

"Ay, Mrs. Pottle. Well, you would speak with me? You have some news?"

"If it pleases your honour. Will your honour step this way?"

It was indeed Mrs. Pottle, one of those women who in past days had assisted at Ariadne's birth. Yet with now but little of the comeliness left for which she had once been distinguished, the rumbullion, or its substitutes in England, usquebaugh and gin, having done their work. Time also had made her grey, and in some places bald. Otherwise, she was not much changed. As for her whilom companion in the *Ariadne*, she was gone. She lay now within the common grave at Gibraltar.

"I shall see her to-night?" Beau Bufton asked, somewhat impatiently--eagerly--as he stepped into a side room after her. "She will be there?"

"In truth she will, the pretty thing," the woman answered, roving an eye, and that a somewhat watery one, on him, "in very truth. At eight, in the lime-tree avenue. Your worship can find it?"

"Doubtless. I may therefore rely on seeing her?"

"It is to tell you so that I'm here. Oh! sir, you will be good to her. She loves you fondly."

"Tush! What do I seek her for except to be kind?" Then he said, "Will she consent, think you, to what I desire--to--to--a speedy marriage?"

"She loves you," Mrs. Pottle replied, with a gleam in her eye, "while, as for the marriage--well! young, tender though she is, and full of a maiden's fears, she longs for it."

"She shall be gratified," Beau Bufton said, smirking and pulling at his chin so that Mrs. Pottle stared at him, wondering in her own mind if he were trying to pull it off. "I do avow she shall as soon as may be. I will go seek your parson here----"

"Not here," Mrs. Pottle said, laying on his arm a finger, which he noticed had lost the top joint--it had, in truth, been shot off by a spent bullet in an attack made by the *Ariadne* and *Kingston* on five Spanish galleys, the shot coming through the scuttle of a cabin in which she was calmly cooking--"not here. You must do that in London town. She is a maiden averse to talk and gossip. She would not suffer----"

"I will do it wher'er she pleases, so that she is mine. Now go, good woman, and tell her I shall be there. I must make a meal first and also remove the dust from off my clothes. Go now."

"There was a promise," Mrs. Pottle said, with an appearance of hesitation, of modesty, which sat strangely on her rough face. "The gentleman, your friend, he gave a promise of reward----"

"Curse me!" replied the Beau; "you waiting-women, you go-betweens, are all alike. Damme! I know there was a promise of five hundred guineas. But--when we leave the church--when all is over. Do you think I have such a sum on me now?"

"Not now, dear gentleman. Oh! no. Not now. But a little earnest. A little----"

"How much?" asked Bufton, looking at her and recognising that here was a cormorant who would do nothing for nothing. "How much?"

"A little. Just a little. A trifle. Ten guineas will not hurt a pretty man like you."

"Five," said Bufton. "Five, now. Five." Then, seeing a strange look in Mrs. Pottle's eyes, which his wonderful knowledge of human nature, whereon he so congratulated himself, did not assist him in fathoming, he said, "Well, ten, then. Here," and slowly drawing forth some loose guineas from his waistcoat, he put them in her open palm.

"A noble gentleman," said Mrs. Pottle, pocketing them in an instant, "a real gentleman. Now, sir, I go. To-night," she repeated, "in the lime avenue, at eight," and so withdrew.

Yet, doubtless because of the rough life she had led for years, her gratitude evaporated swiftly the moment she was outside the door of the room and had closed it on him; while her face assumed an expression strangely unlike that which it had worn when she thanked him for his gift.

"Curse you," she muttered to herself. "Curse you. May joy go with you," and she shook her fist and mumbled to herself.

Two hours later Beau Bufton had entered the long lime avenue, and was making his way up to where the lady of his heart was to await him. He had added somewhat to his appearance, smart as it had been before--had combed and dusted his peruke, perfumed his hands and lace, and supplemented his other adornments with a new sword, which he had brought down from London wrapped in silver paper. Now, it lay against his thigh, its ivory handle decorated with a gold sword knot, and once, as the Beau came to a portion of the avenue where it was almost dark, so thickly did the trees interlace overhead, he told himself he had done wisely to bring it. Ariadne might have other admirers--country clowns, 'tis true, yet fellows, who, nevertheless, were capable of feeling pangs of jealousy at the sight of so aristocratic a wooer as he. And--and--he thought they might attack him with clubs, or even with plebeian fists--when--well--damme!--he would run them through. A little blood-letting--the reputation of being a swordsman--would not hurt him. To win an heiress after having slain a yokel lover would make him--well! perhaps even make him the more sought after. Therefore he went on, wishing, however, that his Ariadne had not selected a part of the avenue so distant from the main road--and so near to her house; and then--then--he knew she was there and had kept the appointed meeting.

A girl came towards him from beneath the trees, shyly, almost hesitatingly; while over her fair hair she had drawn a riding-hood. And a moment later Beau Bufton had taken her hand and was impressing kisses on it, and muttering phrases such as were in use in the highest London circles, and, consequently, must be irresistible to this provincial heiress.

"I am enraptured," he murmured now, "that one so fair should deign to receive her admirer. Ah, madam, if you but knew how my thoughts have dwelt on you since you let me claim you at the Wells----"

"And stole my fan, bad man. Ah, sir, you should not have trifled thus----"

"Love, madam, knows no law. But--but--fair Ariadne--almost had I said fair and chaste Diana--may I not gaze once more in rapture on those lovely orbs, those features ever present in my memory? Will you not remove your hood?"

With no more than a brief assumption of coyness, the fair one did as her gallant desired, showing a mass of light hair beneath the hood, and, beneath that, a pair of bright eyes which glistened in the evening dusk. She had too a fresh red-and-white complexion, the whole being a very satisfactory proof of the benefits of country air and living, as opposed to the effects of what an earlier poet had rapturously spoken of as "the stench of the London flambeaux."

"Ah! I protest," Beau Bufton exclaimed now as the maiden yielded to his request, and displayed her loveliness, "once more I tremble at the sight of those charms which won my heart at Tunbridge. Ariadne, you know by my letters all that I desire--all I wish. To call you mine. To be your husband. You cannot doubt my love."

"So soon?" she said. "Oh, fie! Not yet--not for years, I vow. I am too young."

"Young! Is the heart ever too young for love? And, Ariadne, dearest one, now is the time. I protest I cannot wait."

"But there are my guardians, the lawyers. What will they say?"

"What can they say? I am of ancient family, sweet one, and allied to some of the most distinguished houses in the land. They can make no dissent."

"If 'tis to be done," the girl said, "it must not be here. Oh! I could not. Instead, in London. We go to London two weeks hence. Yet--yet--I fear," and she gazed up into his face with a look of alarm that fascinated him. For now he knew that the hundred thousand guineas were almost in his grasp.

Yet as those clear eyes met his, they also disturbed him.

"Where," he muttered, "where, dearest, have I seen such orbs as yours before? Or was't in my dreams of them? Those lovely orbs."

"I do not know," she answered. "How can I say? I have wandered little away from this old country home of mine; and at Tunbridge was the first time I have ever been in the gay world. Ah, Algernon, you will be good to me?"

"Your life shall ever be my choicest care. My most precious treasure. Dearest, may I not put up the banns to-morrow, when I return to London?"

"You will love me always?"

"Always and ever."

Then she slid her hand coyly into his, and told him it should be as he desired.

"Now," she whispered, "you must away. Sunday sen'-night we leave for Cowley Street in Lambeth. You will not, Algernon, desire a great wedding? Let it be private; with none there but Mrs. Pottle, my faithful nurse. Say that it shall be so, my own."

"It shall be ever as you wish, sweet one," Beau Bufton answered, while as he did so he laughed in his sleeve. Mrs. Pottle, her faithful nurse! The woman who had done more to bring this about in accord with his jackal's, with Lewis Granger's machinations, than any one else; the woman who was to have five hundred guineas for so bringing it about (unless he could in any way manage to avoid the payment of the money); the woman, who, that very night, had had ten guineas from him.

"Yes, yes," he whispered, "Mrs. Pottle, your faithful nurse, on your side; Lewis Granger, my hireling, on mine." While as he mentioned the latter's name he reflected that here was another who would have to be hoodwinked out of the guerdon he had stipulated for--hoodwinked out of five thousand guineas. Verily! a vast number of those guineas would drunken, ruined Lewis Granger get, when once Ariadne's fortune was in his hands. A vast number!

"Farewell, then," the girl said now. "Farewell, my beloved. Oh! do not deceive me, do not take advantage of my innocence and inexperience. Say you will not."

"Dear heart," he murmured, "who could deceive thee?" "A girl," he added to himself, "who has a hundred thousand guineas and a Hampshire manor. Who could do so?"

They parted now, she clinging to him tenderly before going away, and whispering in his ear that 99, Cowley Street, Lambeth, was where she would be a week from Sunday next, and that then she would be all his, and, meanwhile, would write often. They parted, she going up the avenue towards where the house stood, and he standing looking after her, feeling his chin and, with a contemptuous smile, drawing down the corners of his mouth.

CHAPTER III.

"A COUNTRY CLOD."

It was now almost dark--yet not quite so, it being the period when the days are longest--and for some little time the Beau stood gazing after the retreating figure of his captured heiress. Then he turned slowly and began to retrace his steps to the Hautbois, where he intended to snatch a few hours' rest ere the up coach, which left the "Globe" at Portsmouth at five o'clock in the morning, should pass.

Perhaps never had Algernon Bufton been in a more agreeable frame of mind than he was at this present time. Everything was, he told himself, very well with him. A ruined spendthrift; a man who, seven years ago, had inherited a substantial fortune and, in the passage of those seven years, had managed to squander it; the chance had come to him of winning this girl, whom, in his mind, he considered to be little better than a fool.

He had thought so at first when he made her acquaintance at a public ball at Tunbridge, he having gone there heiress hunting and with a list in his pocket of all the young ladies who were known to be either the possessors of large fortunes or the future inheritors thereof; and he still thought her a fool after this evening's interview. That she should have fallen violently in love with

him did not of course stamp her as one, since, in spite of his unfortunate chin, he deemed himself not only attractive, but irresistible. Yet a fool she undoubtedly was to throw herself away on a man about whom she had made no inquiries (as he knew she could not have made), and to be willing to marry him in the surreptitious, or, as he termed it, "hole in the corner," manner that she was about to do.

"If I were a scoundrel," he mused to himself with extreme complacency, "who was pursuing the girl with some other object than that of obtaining possession of her fortune, how I might hoodwink her! Granger, if kept sober till midday, could play the parson sufficiently well to throw dust in her eyes. But not in such a case as this should it be done. No. No! my beauteous Ariadne. Not in such a case as this. You shall be tied up devilish tight, so tight that never shall you escape your bonds with Algernon Bufton; so fast that my demise alone shall cancel them. You are not one of the pretty helpless fools whom villains deceive.

"A fine property, too," he mused, casting a dark eye around, "a fine property. The trees alone would sell for much if cut down. Yet--yet--we must not come to that. An avenue gives ever an imposing---- Hist! What is this? Some country clown, by the way he sings to himself. Perhaps a rival."

Whereon, true to himself, Beau Bufton assumed a haughty, indifferent air as he strode along, and drew down his lips into the well-known Bufton sneer, as he considered it.

The person of whom he spoke, and who was quite visible in the evening gloaming, was now drawing near, and Bufton decided that he had guessed aright when he imagined him to be a country clown. A country squire perhaps; but no more.

This person's face, he could observe, was an extremely good-looking one, though marvellously brown and sunburnt--probably, the Beau thought, from common country pursuits--a handsome English face indeed, from which looked forth two bright blue eyes. Also he was tall and well-set, though perhaps his figure was not exhibited to its best advantage owing to a rolling gait. In his apparel he showed that he was a gentleman, his coat of blue cloth being of the best, while his lace, although not costly, was that which a person of position might wear. By his side he carried a sword which evoked the deepest disdain from Bufton, since it was but a common whinyard in a black leather case, and boasted only a brass handle and hilt. For the rest, he was a young man of the Beau's own age.

As they drew close to each other in the twilight, this young man fixed those blue eyes on Bufton's face with an extremely keen glance; a glance so penetrating that the other whose nose was in the air, and whose chin was stuck out in front of him, knew well enough that he was being scanned from head to foot. Then, before he could progress more than another step or so, he was startled by hearing the new-comer address him.

"My friend," that person said, "have you not lost your way? Or are you not aware that this is private ground, the property of Miss Thorne?" For a moment the Beau could scarcely believe his ears. To be addressed as "his friend" by a person of this description! A country clod, and in a plain blue coat!

"My good fellow," he said, with now his choicest sneer, "is it not possible that the lady you mention may occasionally receive visitors other than the rural inhabitants of this neighbourhood?"

"Extremely possible," the new-corner replied, "since she deigns to receive me, who am not of this neighbourhood. But, since I happen to have a very strong and tender interest in Miss Thorne, may I make so bold as to ask if you have been received as a visitor by her to-night?"

It was, perhaps, as it happened at this juncture, a little unfortunate that Bufton had never accepted his friend Granger's estimate of him as a more just one than that which he had long since formed of himself. For the latter, in "coarse and ruffianly language," as the Beau termed it, always took great delight in telling him that he didn't know himself. "You are not as clever as you think, my friend," he would say again and again; "you are not astute, and, indeed, without my assistance you would be but a sorry knave. Also, your absurd belief in your powers of ridicule, the use of which is always the mark of either an envious person or a fool, will some day get you into trouble. I wish you could be more intelligent." Which advice was, however, entirely thrown away on Bufton, who was a man strong in his own conceit. And, perhaps, after all, he had a right to be so, since he had undoubtedly perpetrated many knavish tricks very successfully during his career.

But now his folly and his idea of his own importance ran away with him; while, at the same time, the reticence on which he prided himself--and truly so in unimportant matters, though he could blab freely on matters that should be kept secret--was shown to be the useless thing it was.

"Young man," he said, "you forget yourself, allow yourself an unpardonable license when you state that you have a strong and tender interest in Miss Thorne. Such a thing is impossible in one of your condition--indeed, in any one--now!"

"Why, you scurvy dog!" the other answered, approaching him--and now his blue eyes blazed indignantly, while his brown face seemed to assume a deeper hue--"you dare to speak thus to me--"

-you jackanapes. Begone from off this place at once, ere I kick you down the avenue. Who are you, you bedizened mountebank, who dares put his foot here? Begone, I say, at once!"

That calmness is a mark of the truly great had long been an axiom of Beau Bufton; while he was also aware that those who possess such terrible powers of ridicule and contempt as were his, must never stoop to bandy words with others--since, thereby, even a clown might find a loophole for retaliation. Nor did he forget those axioms now, even though his blood boiled at being addressed as he had just been. But, on the other hand, none could be allowed to make such remarks to him--especially not he who had the monstrous temerity to state that he had a strong and tender interest in Miss Thorne. In Miss Thorne--the girl who, not a quarter of an hour ago, had promised to be his wife within a fortnight--the girl who had a hundred thousand guineas for portion!

"My good man," he said, "you carry a sort of weapon at your side."

"Ay, I do. A good one, too."

"Draw it, then. I must teach you a lesson. I presume you are of some standing; that I may cross swords with you. You perhaps may be considered a gentleman----"

"At least I have the gentleman's trick of knowing how to use a small sword. Come, let us make an attempt. Lug out. Come."

Not being wanting in personal courage, while feeling very sure, too, that Renoud had taught him all that there was to be learnt at the fence school in Marylebone, the Beau drew forth from its scabbard the bright new blade which, for the first time, he had hung by his side to-night, and put himself upon his guard. Yet he could have wished that his calm and dignified manner had more favourably impressed his antagonist, and that he had not drawn his own common-looking blade with such an easy air. It was, he thought, an air far too self-confident for a yokel to assume. However, there was a lesson to be taught, and he must teach it.

"You have ventured to state," he said, "that you have a tender interest in Miss Thorne. If you will withdraw those words----"

"Curse you!" the other said furiously. "You dare to mention her name again. Have at you!" and in a moment their swords were crossed.

Then Beau Bufton knew that he could not possibly be dealing with a gentleman. For his opponent seemed utterly oblivious of every form and method of recognised attack and defence, and, what was more, parried every one of his choicest thrusts--even Renoud's low quarte, which was thought so well of; while he also had the gross vulgarity to parry a sweet flanconnade with his left hand. And the fellow had made him positively warm! Nevertheless, he seemed to know more than was desirable, since he had an accursed acquaintance with the old *contretemps*, or *coup fourré*, which was a dangerous knowledge for one's antagonist to possess.

In truth, Bufton began to think (although scarcely could it be possible that Heaven would ever permit such an outrage) that this provincial was very likely to stretch him ere long upon the soft grass beneath his feet. A thing that, if ever known, must load his memory with eternal disgrace. He a beau, a *maître des escrimeurs*, to be laid low by such a one. It must not be. He must try the *botte coupée*. He did try it--and it failed! While to make matters worse, his bucolic adversary laughed at him.

"Come," that adversary said, "this will not do. You are not a coward, it seems, therefore I will spare you. Only, henceforth, venture no more in this place." Whereon, as he spoke, he disarmed Beau Bufton with a heavy parry, and, a moment later held that gentleman's sword in his left hand.

"Now," he said, while on his face there came a good-humoured expression which made him look surprisingly handsome, though, indeed, there was little enough light left for the other to observe it by--"now be off. And, here, take your sword; it is a pretty weapon. Only, for the future, wear it for ornament--not use. Away with you."

"Curse you!" said the Beau, snarling at him. "I'll be at evens with you yet. If what I think is true, we shall meet again."

"Very likely," replied the other, "but it must not be here. I suspect you of having been courting one of the maids; next time go round to the offices--there you will not be interrupted," and in a moment he had walked swiftly away up the avenue.

Humiliated as the Beau was by his defeat at the hands of such a fellow! doubly humiliated, too, by that insulting suggestion that he, a gentleman, should have been lurking about after one of Ariadne's maid-servants, he had the good sense to hold his tongue and to let the victor--for such, in truth the other was--depart without further words. Yet, even after his defeat at that other's hands, he could still find some reflections to comfort him.

"Since," he said to himself, as now he went down the avenue on his road back to the inn, "the fellow is evidently on his way to visit her, he must be some local rustic who imagines that she

favours him. Favours him! Oh, ye gods. Him! And not a quarter of an hour ere he came along she was promising to be mine--to be my wife--her head upon my shoulder--kissing me. Nay, I think she did not kiss me; in the hurry of our parting that sweet ceremony was forgotten. Ha! very well. When next he observes me, in this avenue, perhaps--it may be so!--he will see me riding up it as the owner, and the owner also of my Ariadne's guineas. Ah! my rural friend," he murmured, "I can forgive your insolence very easily."

Whereon, comforted by these reflections, he strode forward to the Hautbois, intent on obtaining some rest ere the coach should pass in the early morning.

His host and hostess were sitting outside the porch of the inn as he drew near it, the summer evening being so warm and balmy, while the old thatched house, over which the honeysuckle and woodbine twined, was close and stuffy inside; and as he now drew near both rose with the antique ceremony of such persons, and bowed and curtsied.

"Your worship has paid a visit to Mistress Thorne?" the man asked inquiringly, supposing that for no other purpose could a gentleman have come down from London by the coach, only to return by it the next morning.

"Yes, to Mistress Thorne," the Beau answered. "Yet, my friends," he said, "it is a visit which I wish not discussed. It was on business--a matter of business of some import. I pray you to keep silence on the matter."

"For," he continued to himself, "I would not have that country calf know that he has a rival in the field. Thus, when he learns that Ariadne is mine, his despair will be greater. Thus, too, I shall have my revenge."

"I will say nothing, your worship," the man promised, while his wife echoed his words. "Nothing. Doubtless Miss Thorne has much business to transact."

"Always--always," replied the Beau.

"And did your worship see Sir Geoffrey going up to the house? He must have passed that way almost as you returned."

"Sir Geoffrey!" Bufton exclaimed. "Sir Geoffrey! What Sir Geoffrey, pray?" while as he spoke he felt, he knew not why, that he was turning somewhat white. Fortunately, however, the darkness which was now all around prevented that whiteness from being seen.

"Sir Geoffrey Barry," the man replied. "I thought your worship would have known him. He is of the county, and one of His Majesty's sea captains. And he awaits only the command of a ship-of-war to--to----"

"To what?"

"To espouse Mistress Thorne!"

Later that night, if the worthy landlord could have but seen into the small, low-ceilinged room in which Beau Bufton was installed, he would perhaps have thought that his guest was a madman, or, had at least, partaken too freely of the contents of a silver flask by his side. For he laughed and chuckled to himself again and again; while also, he snapped his fingers more than once in a manner which seemed to testify exuberant delight.

"To espouse Mistress Thorne," he repeated continually, as now he proceeded to divest himself of his clothes, knowing that it was necessary he should obtain some few hours' rest. "To espouse Mistress Thorne. Oh, gad! It is too much!" Yet, it would seem as though there was a sinister side to his humour as well, since occasionally, amidst all his hilarity, he would exclaim--

"Curse him! Curse him! He *is* a gentleman, it would seem, and he outraged me not only by his jeers and derisions, but also by having got the better of me in the encounter. So be it! A fortnight hence, my friend, and I shall have had my full retaliation. Ah, Sir Geoffrey Barry, you do not know yet with whom you have to deal! 'One of the maids,' indeed!"

CHAPTER IV.

AN UNKNOWN VISITOR.

"Ah! what a little Time to Love is lent,
Yet half that time is in unkindness spent."

As Sir Geoffrey proceeded up the avenue, at the end of which stood Fanshawe Manor--an ancient house that for years had belonged to a family bearing the same name as itself, and had then passed into the hands of that family's kinsmen, the Thornes--he looked ahead of him, expecting to see the light dress of Ariadne on the verandah; the spot where, whenever she knew he was coming from Portsmouth to visit her, she placed herself.

But to-night, very much to his disappointment as well as to his astonishment--she was not there. This disconcerted him a little, since it was the first time that he had ever known her to be absent from that point of observation. The first time! and this on the evening when, of all other evenings, he had encountered that grimacing, pranked-up fop who had spoken as though, forsooth, he had some intimate knowledge of her and her doings. What did it mean? he asked himself in consequence. What? Was it possible that she, his modest, winsome Ariadne, in whose eyes truth shone, in whose every accent truth was proclaimed, could be--a--a coquette! Was it possible, too, that she, who knew that he was riding from Portsmouth on that very evening to pass an hour with her, had been whiling away the previous hour with that fellow--that creature whom he believed was what they called, in their London jargon, a macaroni--a swaggerer--a beau!

If so--but no! He could never believe that!

He had resolved at first, after quitting his unknown antagonist, that he would tell Ariadne all and make her laugh at his description of the man, and especially at the encounter they had had, as well as its result; but, now--would it not be best to say nothing whatever on the subject--to see, instead, what she would say to him? Surely the stranger must have been there to visit her, and, equally surely, if such were the case, she would tell him all about it.

So he went on towards the house, yet with, he knew not why, his feelings a little dashed--his heart a little sore, in spite of his certainty in Ariadne's truth and honour.

These two had known each other almost from boy and girl, and from that time, notwithstanding he was ten years older than she, had loved each other, the love not being, however, spoken of openly until a year or so ago. They had known each other from the time when his father, the late Sir Geoffrey Barry, had returned to his mortgaged, encumbered estate near Alverstoke, "a battered and shattered man," as he had frankly, and without shame, described himself to be.

"Foregad!" the late baronet used to say, he never having ceased to use the quaint expressions of his earlier days of nearly fifty years ago; those days of Queen Anne and the first George--which now seemed so far off--when he had wassailed and drunk deep at Locket's, Pontack's, and Rummer's, amidst such company as Vanbrugh, Nokes, and gentle George Farquhar. "Foregad, what would you have? Why should I not be battered, broken? I fags, I have laced myself with claret all my days, and done other things as well, equally dashing to one's constitution. Wherefore, behold the result. A broken, ruined old man; a beggar, where once I owned every acre I could see from my blue saloon window. And with nothing to leave poor little Geoff--nothing. Not a stiver!"

And then, when he spoke of the boy, he would almost weep; nor was he able to find consolation until his old butler (who served him now without wage) said that he thought--"he was not sure, but still he thought there might be yet a bottle or so of the yellow seal in the cellar," which, when found, revived his drooping spirits so much that soon he would be singing snatches of songs he should have forgotten, or warbling "Ianthe the Lovely" in a cracked and quavering voice, or other snatches from "Charming Creature," and, by midnight, would go reeling and staggering to bed. In one way, this was a bad example for his son; in another, it proved a good one; for the boy grew up hating and despising such habits as those of his father, and contemning the sight of an old man who had outlived all his dissolute companions yet had never outlived their dissolute ways. And he also grew up resolved that his life should be a different one from that. He did not know the French proverb, "*Autres temps, autres mœurs*," but he felt it, and he resolved to put it into action. Wherefore, when the old satyr, the man of so many unclean memories, sometimes maundered on over his second bottle of yellow seal about the miserable remnants of a fortune, once so substantial, which would be all he could possibly leave behind, Geoffrey would turn almost fiercely on him and say:

"Enough, sir, enough. The past is past, and cannot be undone. Suffice it that I have a calling, an honourable profession; that I am a sailor. I want nothing more. Yet, since our calling--mine is one in which in these days interest is of greater value than merit, and a friend at Court of more use than courage and determination, if you have any interest, use it on my behalf. There must be some amongst your old boon companions still alive who will lend a helping hand, even though only in memory of the Iphigenias and Roxanas with whom you all revelled once."

This was not, perhaps, a dutiful speech, nor one which a son should very willingly make to a father, yet, in the circumstances, it was pardonable enough; and, at least, the old baronet did not resent it, as how, indeed, could he, remembering the ruin he had brought upon himself and his son after him?

That he acted upon the hint was, however, probable; it was most probable, too, that he brought influence to bear upon some of those admirals and captains whose seamanship had never been as great as their social power and influence (for it was the latter, as often as not, which made admirals and captains in those days). At any rate, the young man rose fast, and shifting from ship to ship, serving at one time as lieutenant in some great vessel of war, at another in command of a bomb-ketch, and, next, of a third-rate; and then woke up one day to learn that he was a captain, though without a ship. He was getting on, he told himself; he was eradicating the disorders caused by his now dead father's life; the name of Sir Geoffrey Barry should lose its tarnish and should be borne once more with honour.

And all the time he was in love with a child, a girl with whom he had often played, a sailor's daughter; the child of a man whose memory was honoured and esteemed. This was the softer side, the romantic portion of his life; this--his love for Ariadne Thorne; a romance that had only one drawback to its perfection--the fact that she was rich, and he, although now one of the King's captains, was poor. How, therefore, should they wed?

Yet love sometimes ran smoothly in those brave, sweet old days; a man of rank who followed an honourable calling, whose prospects were good, might hope to win an even richer woman than Ariadne was, especially when she loved him. And if his girl did not love him, then--then! there was no truth in womankind; no truth in whispered words, in glances, and, later, in vows and protestations. For, a year before the time which had now arrived when he was drawing close to the house in which she dwelt, Ariadne told him that she loved him, and had loved him always; that she would be his wife the moment that he asked her.

Even as he thought upon all this, he saw her appear on the verandah; he caught a glance of her white summer dress, and could see that she was fastening some lace about her throat; he saw, too, that she perceived him, for now she took her handkerchief and waved it to him, and then, leaning forward with both hands upon the balcony-rail, watched his approach. And a moment later, descending to the path beneath, she came towards him.

It was dark now, or almost so--dark enough, at least, to prevent them from doing more than recognise each other's forms; but--for lovers--that is enough. Whereon Geoffrey Barry, putting now her hand within his arm, led her back to the verandah from which she had descended.

"For the first time," he said, after a tender greeting, "for the first time, sweet, you were not in your accustomed place. Almost I began to fear you might be unwell. Lovers are difficult to satisfy, you know, and that which they have grown used to expect----"

"I had to change my dress," Ariadne said, glancing up at him. "I wore a darker one but lately, and it got torn. Otherwise I should not have failed." Then she asked, as now they entered the great saloon to which a domestic had by this time brought a large branch-candelabra, in which were a dozen white wax candles, "How is it you have come so late? What is there to do at Portsmouth that should keep you from me?"

"Much. You know, sweetheart, that I have gotten a ship. No great affair at present--a small frigate, a capture; yet the time is coming. France itches for another great defeat; she is never satisfied! Soon it will come, And then, my Ariadne---- Ah!" he said, breaking off, "ah! I see you have already been taking the air to-night," and he directed her eyes to a dark hood lying on a table close by. "Did you get your dress torn in the bushes of the park?"

"No," she said. "No. I have not been out since the afternoon. But if I go with you partway down the avenue, the hood will be necessary. The dews are heavy sometimes on these summer nights," and she lifted her soft eyes to his.

"You have had a visitor," he said, as now he took a place by her side on a vast couch in the saloon. "A person----"

"I have had no visitor here to-day, Geoffrey," she said, interrupting him. "Why should you suppose that?"

"No one to see you?"

"No one. Why do you ask?" And there came now a blush upon her face, a deeper colour than before.

"I met," he said, "a man who, without doubt, hinted that he had been to see you."

"It is impossible!" she exclaimed.

"Impossible, perhaps, that he saw you. Undoubtedly possible, however, that I saw him--and--and--conversed with him. A gallant spark, too, if rich clothes and gauds make a man such. A gentleman figged out in London fashion, scarlet coat, yellow peruke, and such things. One who might be a rich man, if, too, such things mean wealth."

"Geoffrey!" the girl cried, and now he saw that she had turned very white. "I cannot understand. And--and--you conversed with him. What, then, did he say?"

"He said," her lover continued, "on my asking him if he had not lost his way, if he had not wandered by accident into private property, that it was possible you might receive other visitors sometimes than the rural inhabitants of this place."

"Oh!" Ariadne exclaimed. "It is impossible! Impossible! He must have been some stranger--some man who had been drinking----"

"He had not been drinking," Geoffrey answered, with quiet emphasis.

"Who, then, could he have been?" she asked now, while he saw that she was still very white; whiter even than before. He felt certain, too, that her hands were trembling. "Could he be lurking here with a view to entering the house at night?" she added.

"Not in that apparel."

"Then seeking one of the maids. Perhaps 'twas that. There are evil men everywhere, men of rank and wealth, who---- Oh!" she exclaimed, "I will summon Mrs. Pottle;" and so speaking, she went towards the bell-pull and rang it.

"Has Mrs. Pottle gone to her room yet?" she asked the servant who answered the summons. "If not, bid her come here." While on receiving an answer to the effect that Mrs. Pottle was in the housekeeper's room, she repeated her order.

Then, a moment or so later, the heavy footfall of Ariadne's old nurse was heard outside the door, and Ariadne, going towards it, went out into the passage to speak with her. It would, however, have been wiser for her to have bidden the woman come in and tell her story before Sir Geoffrey Barry, since, thereby, he would better have believed in his mistress's good faith; for now this action on her part, this going outside to converse with her principal servant, her confidante, seemed a strange one on the girl's part; and, alas! he also heard a word, a few whispered words, that confirmed his worst suspicions. He heard her say, the door not being quite closed to, "Then he has seen him." He heard the words clearly, in spite of their being uttered in that whisper. Heard them, and made up his mind at once as to what his future course must be.

A moment later Ariadne came back, and still she was pale, and, he thought, trembling as she advanced towards him.

"None of the maids," she said, "have left the house this evening to Mrs. Pottle's knowledge. Therefore this man----"

"Ariadne," he interrupted, and she thought how handsome he looked as he stood there before her, the lights from the candelabra illuminating his face. "Ariadne, let us say no more on the matter. There is no need. I will go now----"

"Now! So soon! Oh, God! Geoffrey!" regarding his face, "you do not believe me! Instead, you believe that I have met--seen this man. Is that it?"

For answer he looked at her--once; yet said nothing. What could he say, he asked himself, having heard those words?

"You do not believe me," she insisted. "Speak, then; say so in as many words, Sir Geoffrey Barry. I command you!" And now, slim girl as she was, and only as yet on the threshold of womanhood, she stood before him as calm and full of dignity as though her years were far riper.

If she were an actress, he told himself, at least she was a good one!

"Say it," she repeated; "let there be no misunderstanding. Say that you do not believe me!"

"You forgot," he answered at last, his eyes upon the floor, "to close that door when you spoke to your woman. And I heard your words--that I had seen him!"

"Ah!" And now the girl gave a cry of despair, her dignity and her defiance leaving her in a moment, while, as she uttered that cry, she sank prostrate on to the couch where but a little while before they had sat together. "You heard them!"

"Yes. I heard them."

"And you suspect that this man, this stranger, is my lover? Mine! The lover of the woman who is your affianced wife!"

"What can I suspect, Heaven help me! Since you deny all. Since you will tell me nothing."

CHAPTER V.

THE HAPPY MAN.

A fortnight had passed; the wedding of Beau Bufton was at hand--it was to be on the next day--and he was celebrating what he called his last night of freedom right royally. Indeed, he had been celebrating it during the whole of that preceding day most royally by wandering about from chocolate-house to chocolate-house, where he did not drink always of that succulent but sober beverage; by inviting a few of his choice companions to his rooms to supper, and by visiting his tradespeople and telling them that ere long now every bill should be paid, while also obtaining loans from more than one of them on the strength of his forthcoming wedding with an heiress. One thing, however, he had carefully kept quiet, namely, the information as to who and what his heiress was, and where she came from. And it was well, indeed, that he had obtained these loans, since his already lean purse had suffered considerably through the inroads made on it by two people, one of whom was Mrs. Pottle, now in town at Lambeth, with her charge; and the other Lewis Granger, who haunted him like a spectre. Of the two, the former was perhaps the worst harpy, the most intolerable blood-sucker, as on each occasion when she had seen him she had demanded money from him, and would listen to no denial.

"Five 'undred guineas," she said to him on the first meeting, which was under the shadow of the great Abbey, she being there to hand him a note and to explain why she could not convoy him to Cowley Street; "five 'undred guineas to come to me, in a day or so now, and you won't give me a paltry twenty. Fie, Mr. Bufton! Shame on you! And me doing all, and putting you in the way of marryin' such a sweet young thing. Fie, Mr. Bufton!"

Whereon, of last, by wheedling and cajolery, and also by threats that even now it was not too late for her to break off this marriage and to keep the "sweet young thing" out of his way, she had gained her object and obtained her request--a request only to be reiterated and insisted on the next time she saw him.

"But," exclaimed the Beau, "it is to come off the sum--off the five hundred guineas! You will remember that, Mrs. Pottle!" Though, even as he made the remark, he told himself that each of these handfuls of guineas was in truth a gift, since there would never be any five hundred guineas to find its way into her pockets. Quite a wasted gift.

"Ah," groaned Mrs. Pottle. "Um! Off the five 'undred. That ain't noble. That ain't royal. Howsomdever, if it must be, it must." After which she shuffled a letter into his hand and bade him read it. Which he did--in rapture!

"Oh, my beloved one," it ran, the handwriting being, he noticed, beautifully clear and legible, as indeed all young ladies' handwriting was in those days, "I am here at last in London, ready to be your bride. Yet ever have I trembled night and day with fear and apprehension lest aught should arise to prevent our arrival. My guardians would not at first decide to let me set out for London, because the season was almost past; and also because I have been ailing. Ay! in very truth almost have I been dead, owing to a terrible scene which arose betwixt me and one other, the man whom you attacked so nobly, as I have since heard, in the avenue; for, my beloved, that man desired my hand, you must know--he was unlike you, my unselfish hero! and was a fortune-hunter, and his reproaches were terrible when he learnt that we had met. But now he is gone to his horrid ship; now I can be wholly yours. Oh! my dear one, how I desire that you might come here to our town house so that I could see you, embrace you; but, alas! none must ever know till it is done. Meanwhile, Mrs. Pottle and I will sally forth, and we will meet to arrange all. Bid me but to come, and I will fly to you. Confide in her; she will be true. Now, no more, from your ever fond and trusting--A. T."

And "A. T." had sallied forth, as she had said, under the charge of the astute Mrs. Pottle; the lovers had met, and planned all; now, to-morrow, Beau Bufton would clasp his beloved one, his heiress, in his arms.

"Tell us," said Granger this evening, as he--clad in a brand-new suit, a new wig, and clean fresh lace--sat at the Beau's table, "us all. Let us know what is to be. My friends," he said, addressing two or three dissolute-looking young men, all fashionably dressed, who also sat, or rather lolled, at the repast, "we have a task, the task of duty, of friendship, to perform to-morrow early. Tell us, or rather tell them, since I know very well, what is to be done."

"Well, brave boys," exclaimed the Beau, beaming on them, as who would not beam who upon the morrow was to marry a hundred thousand guineas, "this is the plan: We wed to-morrow at Keith's Chapel, in May Fair, at eleven. I would that it had been earlier, but Keith's clerk says his reverence's deputy--Keith being now in Newgate--is never to be depended on before that hour, he not having slept off the effects of--well! of over-night."

"Keith's Chapel!" exclaimed one of the guests, who himself appeared as though he would not have slept off the effects of the present night much before the hour that had been mentioned. "Why, I protest, 'twas there James, Duke of Hamilton, married Miss Gunning a few years ago. You will be in the fashion, Beau."

"Ay! 'tis so," exclaimed Granger. "We are nothing if not fashionable."

"Yet," said an older, graver man than the first speaker, "are you very sure that thus you will be by law united? Has not a Marriage Act passed forbidding such things?"

"Such an Act has passed," Bufton replied, "but there are doubts as to its being able to break the holy tie, Keith being a licensed clergyman still permitted by the Archbishop to issue the license on a crown stamp, and to give a certificate. But even were it not so," and now Beau Bufton bestowed that smile of his upon his guests which always caused Granger's gall to rise, "the ceremony may serve, illegal though it should be; for if it is so, at least it will have given me sufficient possession of my young heiress to make another and more binding one necessary; while who, do you imagine, would be willing to marry my adorable Ariadne Thorne afterwards? In truth, she could belong to none but me."

"Ariadne Thorne!" exclaimed the youngest member of the company present, who now spoke for the first time during the present conversation, and causing his exclamation to be heard above the shrill peal of nervous laughter emitted by Lewis Granger at the Beau's exposition. "Ariadne Thorne! Can there be two of that name?"

"I devoutly hope not," remarked the Beau, fingering his chin and looking himself a little nervous, the company thought, "or else I have caged the wrong bird. What Ariadne Thorne do you know of, then, Dallas?"

"One who is a rich heiress, even as you say your future bride is. One who is the owner of Fanshawe Manor, in Hampshire, and is beloved by Sir Geoffrey Barry."

"'Tis she!" Bufton said, with his most hateful chuckle. "'Tis she. And Dallas, my dear, I have won her from him. She never loved him, and she is mine."

"I thought she did," the young man named Dallas muttered. "In solemn truth, I thought so. So, too, thought all the county. He is a brave, handsome fellow."

"Handsome is as handsome does!" exclaimed Granger, who had scowled somewhat at this conversation, and now seemed very desirous of putting an end to it; "while as for bravery--well! ask the Beau if Sir Geoffrey Barry was very brave in the avenue of Fawnshawe Manor two weeks ago."

"I had to give him a lesson in the use of the small sword, to--in fine--chastise him," Bufton said. "I was there with Ariadne, and--and--well!--he drew off."

"He drew off! He permitted you to chastise him! Him! Geoffrey Barry! The county, to which I myself belong, would scarce deem it possible."

"Yet," replied Bufton, with what he considered his choicest tone of contempt, "I have told you that it is so."

"And also," said Dallas, "you have told me that Ariadne Thorne loves you, while we know that she and you wed to-morrow. Naturally, your word is to me sacred. Yet--I speak it not in offence--it would be hard to convince all who know either Sir Geoffrey Barry or Ariadne Thorne that such things could be." After which he became strangely silent, the more so, perhaps, because now Lewis Granger bestirred himself to circulate the bottles, filling each man's glass again and again with wine, calling of toasts, singing himself snatches of songs, and generally egging on the company to hilarious behaviour.

Thus the time passed, until from St. James's Church hard by there rang out the hour of two, when Granger, who all through the evening had performed the part of master of the ceremonies, suggested that they should break off.

"It is a solemn occasion," he said, with his best air--one which, whatever might have been his past, he was well capable of assuming--"a solemn occasion in which we all take part to-morrow. Let us not, therefore, sit up toying until daybreak, now close at hand. Remember, there is a little feast at the Hercules Pillars directly 'tis concluded; let us reserve ourselves for that. Gentlemen, our dearest friend, the Beau, relies on all your company to-morrow to see him wed his fortune."

"Rather to see him wed a pure and lovely girl," said Dallas, who appeared more sober than some of the company--to, indeed, have become sober, or, at least, grave and thoughtful, during the last hour. "There is not a man under threescore in Hampshire who will not envy him when they hear of his *bonnes fortunes*. I shall for a certainty be there."

"And I," each of the others said. Whereon, bidding their host a short adieu and many pleasant dreams, and cautioning him jokingly not to oversleep himself in the morning, they trooped down the stairs and, so, away to their respective lodgings.

"Now," said Granger, when all the Beau's visitors were gone but he, "now get you to bed, and be ready betimes to-morrow. Also drink no more. Remember this must not fall through."

"I have drunk nothing--or scarce nothing," Beau Bufton replied. "Am I a fool that I should carouse away my chance of a fortune and an estate when it is in my grasp, when in nine hours--yes, nine hours! think of it, ye gods!--it will be mine."

Then, with his eyes on Granger, and with the point of his chin in his hand, he cried, "You are strangely sober to-night, too, Lewis. I have known the time when these," and he pointed to the half or three-quarter drained flasks of Tokay and champagne which stood about the table, "would have been too much for you to resist. When they would have been on the table, but without a drop in them, and you--well! you would have been beneath it."

"Do you taunt me with my infirmities!" exclaimed Granger. "Taunt me--your jackal, your tool--with being sober! Have I not also something to induce me to sobriety? Your marriage means much to me. Almost as much as it does to you." And he regarded the other with a strange fixity of gaze.

"Five thousand guineas?" said the Beau, interrogatively. "Humph!"

"Ay--it means--well! just so. Gad! you see everything. You are a monstrous clever man."

"So, so," said the Beau. "So, so. Anyway, I have brought my pigs to a good market. Eh?"

"You have. In solemn truth, you have. Now, good-night. I shall be with you to-morrow to breakfast early. To bed. To bed." And with a nod he left the room.

It was a wet, warm July night, or rather morning, for the summer dawn was coming as he left the house, yet he seemed in no hurry to seek his own bed, wherever it might happen to be. Instead, he peered up and down the street as though searching for a hackney carriage or chair; but, seeing none, walked fast up the Haymarket until he came to a night house which was still open, and in which were still many dissolute people of both sexes, drinking and carousing. Then he called for a dram, and ordering the woman who was waiting to bring pen, paper, and sand, sat down and wrote a short note--a note which, when he had sealed and addressed it to "Lord John Dallas," he dropped into his pocket, after which he paid his reckoning and went forth, finding now a chair and two men waiting for a fare outside.

"Carry me," he said, "to Park Place. Then I shall need you to take me to King Street, Covent Garden. A crown will do your business, eh?"

The men answering that it would, he stepped in, and they went off as fast as their state of semi-drunkenness (in which London chair-men generally were at that time in the morning) would allow, and eventually they reached Park Place, whereon, alighting, Lewis Granger walked down the narrow street regardless of the drizzle, until he stood before No. 13, when, taking from his pocket the letter he had written at the night house, he dropped it into the gaping dolphin's mouth in bronze which formed the entrance to the letter-box.

"If Dallas loves his mother, as I have heard tell," he said to himself, "that should do his business, and prevent him from interrupting us to-morrow. Our hymeneal ceremony needs no disturbance--until it is over."

After which he went back to his chair and was conveyed to his own lodgings in King Street. Yet when in them--or rather, in "it," since his abode consisted of but a small, meanly furnished room on the third floor--he still seemed disinclined for rest, and appeared to be, indeed, more disposed towards meditation and reflection than aught else; while, as food for such reflection, two pieces of paper which he drew from his pocket appeared to furnish it since he regarded them long and steadily. Each was a bill properly drawn and accepted, yet unlike. For the first, which had written across it the signature "Glastonbury," had also stamped on it in rough, coarse letters, though very plain ones, the word "Counterfeit," while the other was a bill for five thousand guineas, payable to Lewis Granger and signed by Algernon Bufton.

"Yet," muttered Granger to himself, as he regarded the latter, "you are useless; you will never be paid. Nevertheless, I will keep you--keep you safe. You may some day become a witness, if not a principal."

After which he laughed softly to himself, and continued to do so until he was in bed.

LOVE'S CONTEST.

"If I possess him, I may be unhappy,
But, if I lose him, I am surely so."

Meanwhile a different scene was being enacted earlier in Cowley Street, Lambeth, or, as it was more often termed, Cowley Street, Westminster--a spot now quaint and old, but then almost fresh and new; a street to which, then as now, there would come from the river a wafted scent of new-mown hay (especially in the warm days of harvest-time, when windows were open), brought up or down the river in great cumbrous barges for sale in London; a quiet place which was then as peaceful and tranquil as the streets of old country towns are now.

All through the day which preceded that night when Beau Bufton had celebrated his last hours of bachelor freedom, as he had cynically termed the conclusion of his unwedded life, Ariadne Thorne had either sat in the great parlour on the lower floor--a floor raised some three or four feet above the level of the road and narrow footway outside--had sat glancing eagerly out of the long windows which faced the walls that enclosed the grounds of the Abbey, or, pacing the spacious room, had given herself up to uneasy thoughts.

"Will he ever come?" she whispered to herself again and again, "or, coming, ever forgive me for what I have done--am about to do? I pray God he may."

Then, almost distraught, she would seize the long bell-rope and summon Mrs. Pottle to her presence, who, entering with a look of strange, hard determination on her strong features, would stand before her mistress ready to answer, for the twentieth time, any questions that might be asked her, and ready also to dispel any doubts which might exist in the girl's perturbed mind.

"He must have received my letter," Ariadne would then say; "must have had it in his hands by yesterday morning at the latest. Must he not, Pottle?"

"In truth he must," her old nurse and attendant from the first would say; "he must indeed, deary."

"And, receiving it, would come. Surely he would come, Rebecca," addressing the woman now, as most often she did, by her Christian name.

"I think so, dear heart; that is, if the frigate ain't----"

"Sailed! Oh, my God!" Ariadne cried, "if it has done that! If it has gone to join Admiral Boscawen's fleet in the West Indies. If it has done that! Then--then my heart is broken."

"P'r'aps, it ain't sailed after all. Don't weep, sweet one. P'r'aps it ain't. Look at that vane out there on the Abbey. The wind is west--doo west. He won't get out o' the Channel ag'in that, let alone off to the Injies. I remember when we were going in the *R'yal Suverin*----"

"If he would only come. Only come once--for an hour--half an hour--so--so--that I could make all clear to him. Could sue to him for pardon and for pity."

"Humph!" Mrs. Pottle exclaimed, with a snort, "he ain't got so very much to pardon nor to pity, I don't think. Pardon and pity! Hoity-toity! You've writ him, ain't you?"

"Ay, indeed I have! Yet I could not tell him all then--could not do so until he stands here before me. Oh! Rebecca, Rebecca, what have I done! What have we done!"

"Done what we oughter. That is, I have; what I agreed to do, if things turn out well. You ain't done nothin' as you oughtn't to do, and 'ave been an angel, as you always was. And cheer up, missy, he'll come; I know as how he will."

"I pray God," Ariadne said again, "I pray God he will."

A few days before this conversation took place, the girl, after considerable communing with herself, had despatched a letter addressed to Captain Sir Geoffrey Barry on board H.M.S. *Mignonne* at Portsmouth; a letter cold in tone, it is true, and one in which there was no acknowledgment, as well as no denial, of her having been false to him, or of her having received a visit from the person whom he had encountered in the lime-tree avenue of her estate. For neither, she knew, would weigh anything with him--he would disbelieve her denial, while, on the other hand, her confession that such was the case would prevent him from ever speaking to her again. And she so much desired to see him before to-morrow; to see him before he sailed, as she had heard he was about to do, to join Admiral Boscawen's squadron.

"If you will not come to me before you quit England for the West Indies," she wrote, "you will have put away from both of us for ever any prospect of our being aught but strangers. I have been a wicked, weak girl, perhaps, though never have I regarded myself as such until now, and I should have told you all that I had done on the night when you parted from me; then, at least, you would have forgiven me. Now, I ask you, I beseech you, to come to me at once on receipt of this; I implore you to do so on the strength of the love that has been between us, and in memory of the

love of our early years. If you will do that, then--then--you shall know all. No action on my part shall be hidden from you."

"Will he come?" she said, "will he come?" And, thinking of the letter she had written, she told herself that he would do so. Surely he would!

Meanwhile, below, Mrs. Pottle was engaged in the homely occupation of sewing and of ironing, and of other feminine pursuits that are dear to the hearts of women of her class. Upon a huge table were spread out a number of garments such as would befit a young lady who was about to make a clandestine marriage--a marriage which, since it must necessarily be without the accompaniment of a large and fashionable gathering of friends, would be but simple, yet a ceremony in which the bride would, nevertheless, be expected to make a proper appearance. To wit, there was a flowered brocade covered with Italian posies, myrtles, jessamine sprigs, and pinks; as well as a lace apron and stomacher, more than one fan, and several articles of *lingerie*. And upon another table was an enormous hat such as Gainsborough loved to paint, and with which an earlier master, Rembrandt, frequently adorned the pictures of his cavaliers.

"Fit for any lady to go to the altar in," Mrs. Pottle muttered to herself as she fingered all these things. "Fit even for the Princess 'Melie. And worth money too--good money; that will be of use, come what come may. Worth money; ay! that's something; and I've 'ad fifty guineas from Bufton--damn him!--I'll get no more arter he's led his bride to church to-morrow."

Then she walked to a cupboard and, taking out a thick black bottle and a small glass, helped herself to a dram, old customs of her stormy seafaring life being strong upon her still; while, as she drank so she still continued to muse, sitting down near all this finery, and occasionally regarding it.

"P'r'aps, arter all," she murmured, "I done wrong; p'r'aps I oughter not to--to let 'er 'ave him. Yet 'er 'art's on it. 'I will go through with it,' she said last night--only last night 'though the devil stood a-tween him and me. You know from the time I come back from Tunbridge I was set upon it.' And so she 'ave been set upon it. Ah, well! he oughter to 'ave 'er. And now he must 'ave 'er. Well, so be it."

After which, her eye falling again upon the clothes laid out near her, she murmured, "Worth money; that's something."

The house in which she now sat below stairs, while Ariadne Thorne was upstairs in the parlour, was one that the gentry of the county of Hampshire were in the habit of using when in London, it being an instance of the numerous better class of lodgings which were to be obtained in the town at the end of the reign of George II. It also was near the House of Commons, and had been handy for General Thorne during the time he sat in that assembly. But now that Parliament was not sitting, and when Ariadne had come to London, ostensibly with a view to visiting the mercers and other furnishers of ladies' necessaries, there were no other occupants of the house but herself and those who had accompanied her.

Presently Mrs. Pottle roused herself from a nap to which she had succumbed--perhaps owing to the heat of the summer day!--and regarded a clock that ticked in the parlour which she used in common with other ladies' servants and gentlemen's gentlemen when the house had lodgers.

"Five o'clock," she muttered, "five o'clock, and the Portsmouth coach is doo in the city by now. If Sir Geoffrey's coming, he'll be here by this, or soon. His frigate ain't started on no voyage, I'll go bail; not with that wind a-blowing. Will he come? Will he? He see that villain, Bufton, sure enough in the avenue, and he heerd her say to me as 'ow he had seen him. Pity! Pity! Might 'a' spoilt all. Lawk's sakes, what will she tell him when he do see her?"

Again she dozed, sitting in her chair; then, when perhaps she had slumbered peacefully for some quarter of an hour, she sprang to her feet wide awake, for, above, she had heard a hackney coach rumble up to the door. And, a moment later, had also heard the rush of feet across the room, and knew, divined, with woman's instinct, that Ariadne had flown to the window to peer out from behind the heavy curtains and to observe if he for whom she was waiting had come.

In another instant, Mrs. Pottle was running up the narrow stairs from below to open the door in answer to an imperious summons that sounded through the house.

With almost a look of guilt, a half look of terror, on her face, she answered the question of Sir Geoffrey Barry as to whether her mistress was within; she seeing, as she glanced at him, that he was very pale--as pale as he who was so bronzed could be--and that on his face was a stern look.

"Your mistress," he said, "has sent for me. I am here in answer to her summons. Where is she?"

"She is 'ere, Sir Jaffray," Mrs. Pottle said, opening the door of the parlour and announcing him. And then those two who had loved each other so fondly and so long were alone face to face.

"How lovely she is!" Geoffrey thought, observing the sad, pale face of the girl and her soft eyes as they were fixed on him; observing, too, however, how one white hand was pressed to her heart as though to still the tumult beneath. "How lovely, and--how false."

"Geoffrey!" Ariadne cried now. "Oh, Geoffrey! you have come to me. I knew you would. Knew it so well. You could not stay away from me," she said, sinking her voice so that the gentle tones of it sounded even more sweet than usual, "when I wanted you to come. Oh, Geoffrey!" she sighed.

"Actress!" he said inwardly, his face white--almost, it seemed, drawn. "Actress!" Then cursed himself for being there--for, in solemn truth being drawn to her against his will! But aloud, he said, so coldly that the tone struck like ice to her heart:

"I am here because you desired to see me again; because, too, Heaven help me! you conjured me, lured me with those cunning words you wrote in your letter, 'the memory of the love of our early years.' Ay, our *early* love. You did well to speak of that. That, at least, has been."

"And can there be no other? Not when----"

"Not until," he cried, his voice ringing clearly through the room, "not until you deal truthfully with me, if ever; not until you answer my question fairly as to that man--that bedizened fop--I encountered in your avenue!"

"What do you ask? What do you desire to know?"

"That you know as well as I. Yet once again. I ask you, did that man come to Fanshawe Manor; was he there by--my God!--by appointment with the Manor's owner: was he there to see--Ariadne Thorne?"

For a moment the pure clear eyes gazed into his, then they dropped and sought the floor.

"Yes," she whispered slowly, hesitatingly, "yes, he went there--to see--Ariadne Thorne----"

"Ah!" he cried, "ah! I knew it. Knew it well from the moment I heard your whispered words to your woman. I knew it. Oh!" and now he, too, lifted his hand towards his heart as though to still it. "Oh! then thus all ends; thus I bid farewell to all our love. It is enough. To-morrow I resign my command----"

"No! no!" she cried, and now she came swiftly towards him. "No! no! To-morrow! Not to-morrow! Until to-morrow at least is past--do nothing. Geoffrey! Geoffrey! I love you; fondly, madly! Not to-morrow, of all days! not to-morrow!"

* * * * *

"A long talk," muttered Mrs. Pottle, below stairs, "a long talk," and she glanced at the clock, which now struck seven even as she did so. "A long talk. She must 'a' bin telling of 'im all. Ah! poor sweet, I'll go bail she finds it pretty 'ard to do. Yet they're quiet, too. I don't hear no walking about. Surely they ain't a-quarrelling--surely"--for now her melodramatic mind, a mind perhaps attuned to such things by her own stormy life, imagined the worst--"he hasn't refused to believe her! hasn't--oh! oh! that's too terrible to think on."

"I'll go up," she whispered to herself a moment later; "I will. I'll find an excuse for busting in upon them. I'm getting the 'orrors what with Sir Jaffray being 'ere and what with thinking of all that's to do to-morrow."

Whereon, slowly, she went towards the stairs, and began to creep up them noiselessly; but, when she reached where they turned towards the passage, she paused astonished.

For the door of the parlour opened, and Sir Geoffrey came forth--yet not alone.

By his side was Ariadne, her fair, lovely face radiant with a look of happiness extreme, her hand upon his sleeve. While, as they reached the hall door and she put up her other hand to unfasten the latch, Mrs. Pottle saw, with wonder-staring eyes, that he, bending forward now, took that hand and raised it to his lips, kissing it fervently.

Then, ere he went, Ariadne being still behind the half-open door, he did even more, for now he held his arms open before her and drew her into them, and kissed her long and tenderly, after which, murmuring "Adieu, sweetheart," loudly enough for Mrs. Pottle to hear, he went forth into the street.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CLANDESTINE MARRIAGE.

"And that it may be better known, there is a porch at the door like a country church porch."

Thus advertised the redoubtable Keith (at this time languishing in Newgate, and represented by deputies), the reverend divine who, by license, performed more clandestine marriages among the upper classes than any other clergyman had ever done in London. Of course, the "scum and offal of the clergy," as Keith had more than once termed his rival practitioners in the Fleet, had, before the passing of the Marriage Act, united hundreds more couples than he had ever done; but, as he said, "What would you have? They marry drunken sailors to demireps, shopboys to their masters' daughters, who, as often as not, must secure a husband by hook or by crook, and that at once; rich tradesmen's widows to decayed gentlemen, *et id genus omne*. But I, I am a gentleman of ancient family myself, and I will meddle with none but those of my own kidney."

While, since a certain date, namely, February 14, 1752, Keith had been so puffed up and vainglorious that it seemed as though, henceforth, nothing short of peers and heiresses, or peeresses and handsome young men, were considered by him fit for entanglement in his net; and certain it is that from that date his fees went up. For on that day he had tied together in bonds, never to be loosened--and which were never sought to be loosened--James, sixth Duke of Hamilton, to Elizabeth, second daughter of John Gunning, of Castle Coote, County Roscommon, who married *en secondes nocces*, John Campbell, fifth Duke of Argyll, and was likewise created a peeress in her own right.

Indeed, he became so puffed up, that gradually he discontinued his advertisements in the papers, including the above directions, as well as his charge of a guinea, "inclusive of the license on a crown stamp and minister's and clerk's fees," and began to squabble and chaffer for three guineas and five guineas, and sometimes even ten, before he would perform his office.

Therefore it was five guineas which by his orders his deputy, Peter Symson, officiating in his stead, had extorted from Beau Bufton when consenting, on the day before the marriage, to put his chapel and his clerk and himself at that gentleman's service the next morning.

"So long," said Bufton, "as it ties me tight, I care not. That is the needful thing. That there can be no breaking of the knot."

"Be very sure there cannot," said Symson; "very sure. This is no hole-and-corner marriage shop where rakes and libertines can possess themselves of women's persons and properties, and, after having grown tired of their wives and abused their wealth, can get relief. Oh, no! And no tricks can be played here. No marrying under a false name, and claiming exemption thereby; none of that. Your name may not be Algernon Bufton, as you tell me it is, and your lady's name may not be Ariadne Thorne; but, still, that will not serve."

"It will not be required to do so," said Bufton, thrusting out his long chin at the parson and favouring him with his sneer; "we come here to get closely padlocked, not to be tied together with a piece of easily breakable thread."

"That is well; the class of marriages which I, on behalf of my suffering and injured employer, alone perform. Very well, because, once I have done my office, you are united until death you do part. You have sworn to me that your name is Algernon Bufton, and the lady's Ariadne Thorne; and though your name may be truly John Nokes, and hers Joan Stokes, as Algernon Bufton and Ariadne Thorne you will be united, and united you will have to remain. I, too, can swear oaths when necessary. Now, fail not to be here at your time to-morrow. I have another union to make at half after ten, also another at half after eleven. Fail not."

After which lengthy and iterative oration, the deputy parson of the May Fair Chapel edged the Beau out of the vestry wherein their conversation had taken place, and wherein, also, the former had pouched his five guineas, he being cautious to be always paid beforehand.

Beau Bufton did take care to be there in time, while, to make assurance double sure, he arrived with his bride, she and Mrs. Pottle having been fetched by him from the corner of a street hard by the end of Cowley Street. The girl was very nervous, as he could see plainly, as well as recognise by the manner in which her hand trembled on his arm; also, she was white and with no bloom of natural colour on her cheeks, although Mrs. Pottle had, in its place, carefully applied the contents of the rouge-pot to them that morning. Otherwise, she was all that became a bride who did not wish to proclaim her position too distinctly. For the flowered brocade (which the Beau's eyes, astute in everything pertaining to clothes and gauds, noticed was not quite new and fresh, but had indeed been a little worn) was suitable enough to a young lady going out for a day's jaunt; the great Rembrandt-like hat matched it well enough, and the fringed gloves, which were brand-new, gave a pleasing set-off to the remainder of her apparel.

Behind the happy pair, as now they descended from the hackney coach and entered the

chapel, came Lewis Granger, he having on his arm Mrs. Pottle, while testifying by his countenance that he scarcely appreciated the honour of being that lady's escort. Yet he had arranged everything as became the jackal of the lion; he had sworn deeply, and with many vows, to assist in bringing this marriage to a successful issue; even the indignity of Mrs. Pottle's company could not daunt him nor turn him from his resolution. The companionship of this stern and determined-looking woman at his side must be borne with for the next quarter of an hour. Though still he cast a glance of dismay, almost of shame, at two or three of the Beau's overnight guests who were already assembled and looked brave enough in their scarlet coats, as they all passed up with Mrs. Pottle to the spot where Keith's deputy was ready to perform the ceremony.

This deputy, Peter Symson by name, licensed by the Bishop of Salisbury as priest, seemed by his appearance to verify that which Bufton had said the evening before with regard to his habits. His face was extremely red, and the critical might have opined that it had neither been washed nor shaved this morning; his voice was hoarse and indistinct as he mumbled hastily the words of the irrevocable ceremony, as though anxious to get all concluded as soon as possible. In actual truth, he never performed the marriage ceremony without great fear that, at some moment of it, the myrmidons of Henry Fielding's successor at Bow Street might rush in on him and serve him with a warrant charging him with illegal practices.

Proudly, with a self-satisfied air--the air of one who has fought and conquered and is now reaping the spoils of victory--Beau Bufton went through with his marriage, that smile, which Granger thought so hateful, being on his lips while he uttered his responses clearly and audibly to all--as who would not do who was wedding a hundred thousand guineas? His bride also seemed to take courage as the end drew near, and ceased to shiver and shake as she had done at the commencement. She looked, too, more than once with a self-satisfied glance at the three boon companions who were by the door, as well as at Mrs. Pottle, and--once!--she looked at Granger.

"Sign the book!" exclaimed Symson now, as he closed his own, from which he had been reading in a gabbling, hurried manner. "Sign the book. Isaac, pass over the register to those whom the Lord hath joined together. There is no further fee, yet generous bridegrooms may still offer the minister a gift if they are so disposed. The clerk, too, would accept of something if it were tendered."

But Beau Bufton was deaf to these suggestions. He had paid his five guineas yesterday out of the remnants of the small stock of money left to him; he was not going to squander any of that new fortune which he had now secured. Wherefore, having signed his own name, and indicated with his finger the spot at which his wife should also sign hers, he turned a deaf ear to the reverend gentleman's suggestions, while, he turned on Granger a look of triumph--the proud glance of a successful man.

Then, as he did so, and as still the newly made wife bent over the greasy register, he heard a voice: it was that of the friend whose absence he had noticed regretfully as he entered the chapel; the voice of Lord John Dallas, saying:

"Ariadne Thorne! Ariadne Thorne! That Ariadne Thorne! My God!" While at the same time Bufton saw that the new-comer--the man who had but just arrived upon the scene--was making his way to where he and his wife stood. He saw, too, a strange look upon his face.

"Mrs. Algernon Bufton now," he said, regarding the young man with surprise; "Ariadne Thorne a quarter of an hour ago."

"Ariadne Thorne! never!" Lord John exclaimed, and, to the Beau's horror, he saw a glance of recognition pass between him and the woman at his side, who, to his further astonishment, now trembled no more, but, instead, stood erect and with a look of defiance on her face. "Never Ariadne Thorne. I knew it. Knew it. She loves Geoffrey Barry too well! Ariadne Thorne," he repeated. "Nay! Anne Tremlett, the actress--the singer at booths--the stroller. God! what have you done?"

"Tremlett! Ah!" and Bufton gasped. "Tremlett."

White as a ghost now; himself shaking, as the woman he had married had shaken before; his face terrible to behold, Bufton turned round, observing as he did so that all eyes were on him, while, pushing his wife on one side, he glared at the name she had inscribed in the register. Yet, it was not Anne Tremlett--a name of hideous memories to him--but, instead, "Anne Pottle."

"What does it mean?" he cried hoarsely, his voice changed so as to be utterly unrecognisable. "Speak! Say, wanton! Speak! I say, or I will kill you!" he continued, almost in a shriek.

"Be still," cried Granger, clasping his arm, "be still; this is a church."

"I will know all. Speak, I say, or----" and he made as though he would tear to pieces the woman who stood by his side. "Speak, damn you!"

"Begone from out this house!" cried Symson now. "Though not a duly consecrated edifice, it shall not be polluted by you. Begone, I say!"

"I will not go," the wretched man snarled, "till I have an explanation of why I have been trapped, hoodwinked like this. I will know, or----" and he made a snatch at the register as though to seize the leaf which recorded his marriage with Anne Pottle. An attempt frustrated by Symson, who, big and brawny, thrust himself between it and the duped Beau.

"Let us do as he bids, let us go," his wife said now, her voice calm, and upon her face a look of intense hatred. Yet she did not go, but, standing by her mother's side, said, while all who were present listened open-mouthed--even the curiosity of the Rev. Peter Symson being aroused:

"Let me speak now. My sister and I--she was nigh blind--came to London three years ago, I to earn a living by my voice, she to be dependent on me, since mother could not ask Miss Ariadne to keep us all, though God knows she would have done so willingly; and this snake--this thing whom I have married for retaliation--he--well, he deceived her, ruined her--so--that--she slew herself. Oh, God! my sister--my dead sister--my little helpless sister!

"It was under the name of Tremlett, my mother's maiden name," she went on, recovering somewhat from her emotion, "that I earned my living by singing at Vauxhall and Ranelagh, and, to save trouble and explanation, she, too, went by that name; while he, meeting her at the latter place, where she ever waited for me, persuaded her to evil--ruined her, cursed her life, caused her to kill herself." And now the newly made wife wept. Then, suddenly, again recovering herself, she cried:

"Do you think, all you who are here, that when I met him by chance at Tunbridge at a masquerade, and learnt that he meditated villainy of a different kind, to another woman whom I loved dearly, to that Ariadne Thorne for whom he took me, I would spare him? Never! She was there, too, at Tunbridge, though not at the masquerade, and she lent me clothes, fallals, laces, even a fan, to go and make merry myself. Ah!" she cried, "I am avenged! Avenged! This betrayer of innocent women, this fortune-hunter, is fooled to the top of his bent---Till death us do part!" she exclaimed, with a bitter laugh, breaking off, "Till death us do part!"

"This is no marriage," Beau Bufton said now, addressing Symson, "no marriage. You know that!"

"I know that it will give you much trouble to break it," the reverend gentleman said, with a leer of contempt. "I tie all tight. You were warned yesterday that false names would not save you. And, since she openly avows her name is Anne Pottle, in the name of Anne Pottle you are wed. Now, I require you to be gone. Observe, there is another ceremony to be performed."

While as he spoke he pointed to the door, through which a second wedding party was entering.

"I renounce her!" Bufton cried now, "renounce her for ever. It is a trick played by a wanton!" he cried. "A trick that shall never succeed. You shall be laid by the heels in Newgate--you--you--you hedge priest--Great God!" he almost screamed, breaking off, "what brings *you* here too?" And in his rage he made an attempt to draw his sword.

For, behind that other small party which had entered the chapel, he saw the form of a man which he remembered well--had good cause to remember--the form of Sir Geoffrey Barry, with, leaning upon his arm, a young and beautiful woman.

"I am here," the new-comer said, "to present you to a lady whom I wish you to know. Pardon me," he continued, addressing the incoming wedding party which he had followed, "if I delay your ceremony for a short moment. But I am desirous of introducing this newly made happy man to my future wife--Miss Ariadne Thorne."

CHAPTER VIII.

FOREBODINGS.

If ever a marriage was performed amidst extraordinary surroundings, it was that second marriage which Symson was now conducting, or rather the third that morning, since already a happy couple had been united before Beau Bufton and Anne Pottle had been joined together. A marriage this (between an actual heiress in a small way and an officer of Rich's Dragoons) hurried through by Symson after he had muttered, "Nigh midday, nigh midday, quick! or there will be no ceremony," while, from without, and from the neighbourhood of the porch, there came cries and jeers--these being from some idlers who had gathered outside--the hoarse voice of Bufton hurling imprecations, and the deeper one of Lewis Granger bidding him hold his peace.

And once, a shriek--from Ariadne.

For, as Geoffrey Barry, with contempt in his cold voice, and contempt, too, upon his handsome features, had calmly presented the Beau to the real Ariadne Thorne, the other had become almost beside himself--had, indeed, exhibited so awful a picture of a man transformed by rage and despair as to appal all those who looked upon him, various as their characters and experiences of life were.

"You!" he cried. "You!" addressing Sir Geoffrey, his features distorted, his lower jaw working horribly above that monstrous chin, "You in it, too! You beggarly sailor! You! You!" Then, before any could suspect to what length his fury would carry him, he had wrenched the dress sword he carried by his side from out its sheath, and would have made a pass at the other--indeed, did half do so. But, swift as lightning, that pass was thwarted--by two people! By his newly made wife, who seized his arm even as he would have plunged the blade into Sir Geoffrey's breast, she being aided by Lewis Granger, who, with his hat, which he still carried in his hand, although they were by now outside the church, struck it up--he knocking it from out his hand, so that it fell clattering on the stones at his feet.

"Madman! Fool!" Granger whispered in his ear, "do you wish to finish your morning's work with murder? To end your days at Tyburn?" Then, turning to one of the friends of overnight, he said: "For God's sake help me to get him into the coach. He is mad."

Somehow it was done; in some way the deluded rogue was pushed and hustled into the carriage which had brought him in triumph from the spot where he had met Mrs. Pottle and Anne, and half-delirious with rage, Bufton was borne away. Yet not before he had shrieked such awful objurgations, such curses and blasphemies on the heads of all around him, including Ariadne and her lover, combined with such terrible threats of vengeance, that more than one of the women present stopped their ears.

"Now," said Geoffrey, "now, let us begone, too. Come, Ariadne, I will take you home."

Then he turned to Mrs. Pottle and Anne--who stood close by her mother's side--and bade them also return to the house in Westminster.

"Yet, my poor girl," he said to the latter, "I fear it is but coals of fire you have heaped on your own head. Your revenge for your sister's wrongs has been terrible, nay, supreme; but at what a price to you! What a price! You have closed the door against your own happiness for ever."

"I care not," Anne said. "Care not at all. When her body--poor little Kate's body--was taken from out the river--oh, mother! you remember--I swore that if ever the chance came, I would avenge her. Ah! Sir Geoffrey, Sir Geoffrey, if you had known how she besought him to fulfil his promise--to marry her--to make her an honest woman--then--you--would not----"

"I am not surprised," Geoffrey Barry answered, "knowing all, as I do now, from Miss Thorne. Yet, I fear you have paid too dearly for it."

"She would do it, Sir Jaffray," Mrs. Pottle moaned between her sobs. "She would do it, though I told her there was no call. Oh! why, why, should that monster have had two of my daughters for his victims? One of whom he undone and drove to her death, the other who can never be no honest man's wife now."

"At least," said Ariadne, "you know, Rebecca, that never will she want for aught. You know that, and you, too, Anne. Now, let us hasten to Cowley Street and away from this horrid place."

Perhaps it need scarcely be set down here that overnight, when the meeting between Ariadne and her lover had taken place, all had been explained and made clear to the latter. Indeed the girl had more than once, during the passage of that fortnight since he had parted with her at Fawnshawe Manor, resolved to write to him telling everything, only, on each occasion, her pride had stepped in. "For," she had whispered to herself, again and again, "if he loves me, as he has said so oft, then surely he cannot doubt. He was enraged at the time, deeming, in truth, that that vile fop and knave could have come in search of none but me. But, surely, reflection must convince him it was not so. Surely--surely." And then, still stirred by womanly pride, she determined that she would put the depth of his love to the test. She would summon him to her side, and, if he came, would tell him all. But she was impelled to send that summons without delay, when there reached her ears the terrible rumour that his frigate was to proceed to join the squadron of Admiral Boscawen.

Then he had come, and she had told him all, with the result which has been described.

"And so," he said now, as they sat in the parlour wherein she had yesterday listened so eagerly and with beating heart for that coming, "I should not have been sent for, only it was thought I might be off and away to the West Indies. That is it, eh?" and, from where they sat side by side on the great couch, he stroked her hair.

"No," she answered, softly, "you would have been sent for anyhow, only, perhaps, that news hastened the despatch of my message," and she looked fondly at him. "You doubted me, sir," she continued, "you know you did, and you had to be punished."

"What could I think? I heard you say those fateful words to Mrs. Pottle: 'Then he has seen him.'" Then, he added, "But, still, after what we have witnessed this morning, I wish it had not been. I wish that you had not let it happen."

"Oh, Geoffrey!" she cried, "do not reproach me, do not be angry with me. Anne was so resolute, so determined. She loved that little sister whom he ruined and drove to her death; loved her fondly. I remember after it had happened last year, when the poor child drowned herself after he cast her off, that Anne was demented. Do you know, she meditated tracking him in the streets and pistolling him with her own hands, until I persuaded her to desist from such a crime?"

"Yet now," said Geoffrey, with unconscious humour, "she has married him."

"That thought came to her when she found out that he was at Tunbridge intent on pursuing me. His valet told her that his master was there to obtain the hand of Miss Thorne, the heiress, if possible--the man not knowing that she was in attendance on me--and that decided her. She vows she would have done it even though he had not ruined her sister, as a punishment for his presumption in aspiring to me."

"Yet if he knew this poor girl through her waiting at Vauxhall and Ranelagh for Anne, how is it he should not know Anne herself?"

"It was not surprising. Anne always sang and danced arrayed in some fantastic costume, sometimes as Arlequina with a vizard, another time as a Turkish dancing girl, and, as often as not, as a shepherdess with white wig and patches. And he persuaded the poor child, poor little Kate, to say nothing to her more worldly sister, nor ever to let them come into contact."

"It is a deadly vengeance, as deadly to her as to him. Yet, I vow, he at least deserves to suffer from it. But how could she ever think of, how devise, it?"

For a moment Ariadne paused; so that it seemed to him that there was something which she had not told even now. It appeared that she had not divulged all of the plot. For Ariadne whispered now, or almost whispered, "She had a helpmate, a confederate. A man----"

"A man!" Geoffrey exclaimed. "A man! Surely not young Lord John Dallas--he who arrived at the end of the marriage--when it was too late! He who exposed her?"

"Nay; instead, one whom he has deeply injured and wronged almost as much as he wronged and ruined her sister. Whose life he blasted----"

"Ariadne! who is he?"

"The man who pretends to serve him as his creature, his hireling. He who stood by his side at the marriage; his best man."

"Great God! what duplicity, what vengeance! How has Bufton wronged any man so much that the other should do this thing? Forgive me, Ariadne, I would not say aught to wound you, nor aught against your sex, but--but--such vengeance is a woman's, not a man's."

"Yet I do think the scheme was more his than hers. Oh, Geoffrey!" she cried, suddenly, "I am terrified; terrified at what has happened, and doubly terrified at what will, I fear, happen yet. Oh! why, why, did I let it continue? Yet Geoffrey, upon my honour as a woman, I did not know all; had I done so before we came to London, I would have striven to prevent it. But, now, I fear----"

"Fear what?"

"Something worse that remains behind. For she laughs--she laughed but now when we returned here after that terrible scene, and when she was upstairs with me--laughs and says that, if she is truly tied to him by the laws, yet it will not be for long. She says, too, that the other man has not finished his business yet."

"What has this man, this Bufton, done to him, then? Surely he had no sister to be betrayed also. What can it be?"

"That she does not know, or swears she does not. But that they have met before, that he helped her to plan this scheme, I feel assured. Oh, Geoffrey, how can we put an end to further mischief?"

"Pity 'tis that it was ever begun. And, though I say it not unkindly, that you ever countenanced it."

"Nay, nay!" Ariadne cried, "misjudge me not; I never knew what was being done until the last moment. You must believe that, Geoffrey, or--or--there is no happiness in store for us. I never heard that they had met at Tunbridge, and that he was deceived into thinking she was Ariadne Thorne. I never knew, until a quarter of an hour before you came on that night, that he had been in the lime-tree avenue. And I should not have known it then but by an accident."

"An accident?"

"Yes. I was awaiting you as ever, was wondering why you were late, when I saw--it was easy enough to distinguish in the glow of the sunset--a scarlet coat in the avenue. And then--then--Anne came in hurriedly a little later, with her cloak and hood on."

"The hood I saw lying there. The one I thought you had worn, and which made me doubly suspicious."

"The same. She removed it from her head while talking to me, and, laying it down, forgot it. I asked her who the man could be who was wearing that scarlet coat, and then she told me all, or, at least, almost all. But, knowing you were coming, and wishing to tell her mother who was heart and soul in this scheme of vengeance, she left me and forgot that hood."

"Thank Heaven!" Sir Geoffrey said, "that you knew so little; as well as that you had no part in the plot. Knave, vagabond as the fellow is, I should not have liked my Ariadne to have had part in hoodwinking him."

And the girl seeing, understanding by his words, that he believed her, was happy.

After this they were silent a little while, though each was thinking, in a different way, upon the same thing. He, of what a thousand pities it was that a brave girl such as Anne Pottle should have ruined her future to obtain revenge; she, of what the future might bring--a future that, she could scarcely have told why, she dreaded and looked forward to with extreme fear.

"There are two persons," she whispered now, unconsciously drawing a little closer to her lover's arm even as she did so, "two persons whom, if he had the power to injure, he would. Geoffrey, you know those two?"

"You and I, sweetheart, is't not so? Well, what can he do--this discredited, ruined rogue? What! We shall be man and wife soon now, since there is no truth in the report that I take my ship to join Boscawen; since, too, it seems likely that she and I are doomed to inaction. Ah! if Admiral Hawke could but bring the French to action nearer home and I might be with him. Then--then--there would be a bright future before me."

As he spoke of their being man and wife the girl's heart gave a great leap. Surely, she thought, he must know how much she, too, desired that; and still, as thus she thought, she drew closer to him. But, even as she did so, she whispered:

"How that man can injure you or me I know not, my own. Yet--yet--I saw his face to-day, saw the look, the hideous look of rage and spite, he cast at you--and--oh! oh! my love," she wailed, "I fear, I fear."

"Fear nothing," he whispered back. "Fear nothing. He is a broken, bankrupt knave, and I am a king's officer; while you are to be my wife. He is harmless."

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OF THE FIRST ACT.

"The question now is," said Lewis Granger to Beau Bufton that night, "what is to be done? How are you, and I, which latter is perhaps of more considerable importance, to continue to exist? I have had no money for a long time, and in a short time you also will have none. What do you intend to do?"

As he spoke, he cast his eyes upon the man who now sat the picture of despair in his rooms in the Haymarket, and was, in truth, in about as miserable a frame of mind as it was possible for any person to be. Miserable and broken down in more ways than one; through lack of money as well as a lack of knowledge of where any was to come from; miserable also through the certainty that by to-morrow all London would ring with the manner in which he had been tricked and deceived. While, which was perhaps the worst of all disasters, his long-meditated plan of espousing some heiress or another was now and for ever impossible. Who would marry him, a man who might or might not be the husband of the singing, dancing girl of Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and Marylebone Gardens; what heiress, even though he could get free of Anne Pottle, would not know him in his true colours: those of a fortune-hunter?

There was no gibe nor jeer left in him now, not even of that lower-form schoolboy order, which Granger had so often derided with savage contempt. How could he ever jeer and jest at others henceforth? He, who had stood so pitiful and exposed a fool before others that morning. In the

future, whatever became of him, he could sneer or scoff no more, for fear that in his teeth should be thrown his own idiocy.

But, in place of the little quips and contemptuous insolence he had been wont to pride himself upon, there had come now into his heart a passion, black and venomous, that had taken the place of those other qualities which once he had considered all-sufficient--a passion that was a thirst, a determination for revenge. Yet, against whom it was to be exercised he scarcely knew, even now. His wife, if she were his wife, perhaps; and then--afterwards--against all who had aided and abetted her, all who, knowing what was to be done, had stood by and had not interfered in the doing thereof. Undoubtedly there were two such persons, if no more. Surely the real Ariadne Thorne had known; surely, too, the man who had proclaimed himself as her future husband. The man who, on the two occasions when they had come together, had treated him with icy contempt and scorn; who had driven him from the avenue with ignominy; and had spoken to him as though he were dirt beneath his feet. Who had spoken thus to him!--to him!--whose whole system had been to treat others so.

"You do not answer me," said Lewis Granger, filling his glass as he spoke. "I have asked you what is to be done. How are you and I to live? You owe me five thousand pounds, which, as you have not married the lady who possesses twenty times that amount, I presume it is little use dunning you for. But the wherewithal to live, that is the question of the moment."

"I am ruined," Bufton said. "The Fleet Prison will ere long be my home----"

"Tush! tush!" exclaimed Granger. "Never. What! A bold cock of the walk like Algernon Bufton languish in the Fleet? Never, I say. Are there not the clubs, the gaming-houses, the credit given by dupes? You are skilful at--well--sleight of hand----"

"Clubs! gaming-houses! credit!" exclaimed Bufton. "Who will give me credit now; who play with me? Man, I am ruined. Lost. Sunk. I have but thirty gold pieces in the world."

"You will have but thirty in an hour or so, when you have shared what you possess with me; but at present you have sixty, or had when you went to your wedding to-day, and you have spent nothing since then."

"Curse you!" cried Bufton angrily. "Before God, I think you are my evil genius."

"As I was when you were at Cambridge, eh? In the Glastonbury affair?"

"No! no! I meant not that. But--but--Lewis, what is to become of me?"

"Make money. If you cannot enter clubs here, or gamble, you can do so elsewhere. There is Bath--Tunbridge I do not suggest, for reasons--painful reasons--but there is Bath. Your cleverness with your--well!--fingers and hands--should stand you in good stead."

"It will be known at Bath as well as in London. I can show my face nowhere."

"What then to do? What are you thinking of? You are burdened with me, you see; you have to keep me for ever--until, at least, the Glastonbury affair is wiped away. You do it devilish ill; I live in a garret, you in sumptuous rooms; yet it is something. Am I to keep myself henceforth? Wherefore again I say, what are you thinking of doing?"

"At present I think but of one thing. Revenge! A terrible revenge!"

"On whom?"

"On him. That man, Barry. The man who is to marry the true Ariadne Thorne; the man who, since he appeared at the church, knew very well what was taking place and let me fall into the snare like a rat into a trap."

"It will be hard to do. He is a sea-captain, a brave, stalwart-looking fellow, and--he has beaten you once. He may do so again. Moreover, I do not think he would meet you if you challenged him."

"There are other ways. Men can be hired even nowadays to do the work. A month ago Lord D'Amboise's nose was slit to the bone--perhaps his Ariadne would not like Sir Geoffrey so much if he were equally disfigured! There are many ways if one will pay----"

"But you cannot pay," said Granger, with a swift glance at him, which the other saw well enough; "that is, unless you have a secret store. You would be like enough to have one, and keep the knowledge from me."

"I have nothing; nothing but what you know of."

"Humph! perhaps. 'But what I know of!' Well, at least I know of your sixty guineas which you had when you went to your marriage this morning--your wedding with the heiress," Granger said emphatically, observing how the other winced at the word "marriage"; "I know of that. Well! come, let us decide. You say you can support me no longer, therefore I must now support myself. We must part, grievous as so doing will be to me."

"Part! You and I! When we have been so much to each other. Part! Oh, no! I--I might find a little more money somehow yet--if--if--a letter were sent to my mother saying that I was dying--now--she might consent. She----"

"I do not doubt you will find more money somewhere," Granger replied, with a very profound look of disgust for the knave on his face, "no more than I doubt that, in some way, you will wheedle the wherewithal to live out of your mother. But--you must do it by yourself. We part now. I can earn my living in a fashion. Come, divide."

"Not now; you will not take all at once--the full half? Think of my debts."

"Damn your debts! Though I have confidence in your powers, Bufton; you will by some means discover how to avoid their payment. Divide, I say."

By strong persuasion, by the force of some hold which Granger had over the Beau, the latter was at last induced to draw forth his purse, and to divide into two heaps the sum of sixty guineas which it contained, though not without much protest on his side, nor without, indeed, almost a whimper at parting with both his money and his friend. But the latter was inexorable, and he took the thirty guineas.

"And we shall meet no more?" Bufton said, "after so long a friendship. Oh! it is hard. And how--how are you going to make a living? Can you not put me in the way of doing so too?"

As he asked the question, the other started. Put him in the way of making a living! In the way of making a living! Rather, he thought suddenly to himself, put him in the way of going to a more utter ruin than that which had yet fallen on him. He must think of this. His whole life for two years had been devoted towards ruining, crushing this man who had ruined his own career at the outset of it; and, although by tricking him into the marriage made that day he had gone far towards fulfilling his purpose, he was not yet content. Anne Pottle had spoken truthfully when she told Ariadne that he had not finished his business with Bufton yet.

"It might be," he said more gently now, and speaking in a friendlier tone, "that I could put you in such a way--later. Perhaps! It may be so. We will see. You must, in truth, disappear from the Beau Monde for a time; where, therefore, can news be found of you?"

"Are we not to meet again?" Bufton asked, his face haggard from all he had gone through that day; and, perhaps--since, although half-knave and half-fool, he was still human--feeling doubly wretched at this withdrawal of his principal ally and bottle-comrade.

"Not yet. I, too, leave this part of the town now. The other, the east of the city, will be my portion for some time to come."

"What is it?" almost whispered Bufton, "what? What have you found?"

"A commercial pursuit," the other answered; "one connected with the sea and the colonies of America. Enough! No more as yet. Say, where shall I write you if aught arises that may be of benefit?"

"Send word to the 'Rummer'--no! no! they know me there. Instead, give me a house to which I may send to you. I pray you do so."

For a moment Granger paused, meditating; turning over in his mind more matters than one. Then he said, "Write to the 'Czar of Muscovy' on Tower Hill. It will find me. And," he added to himself, "it is not too near." Then, aloud, he exclaimed finally, "Now, farewell!"

And so these two men parted for the time.

That night, as Granger sat alone in his garret, while he occupied himself with flinging hastily into a valise a second suit of clothes which he possessed, some odd linen, and other necessaries, he muttered more than once to himself:

"The first act is played out, and so far it is successful. He is married to that girl, and much I doubt if he will ever free himself from the yoke. Yet it is not enough. Enough--my God! What can ever be enough? What can repay me for my own wasted life; my mother's death; the loss of the woman who loved me; and--Heaven help us both!--believed in me? Enough! What can be enough?" While, even as he mused thus, he went to a cupboard and took from out of it a bottle. "Still half full," he whispered, "still half full. Ah, well! it will be empty ere day breaks."

He sat down after he had brought forth a glass also, into which he poured a dram of spirit, and, supping it, continued his meditations, though still they were on the same subject, and still, therefore, full of bitterness.

"Some men," he whispered to himself, "would stop here--would be content. Yet I will not stop--will never stop so long as Sophy's face rises before me every night--aye, and rises more plainly as I drink more; so long as there rises, too, the dank, reeking churchyard into which I stole at night--the night after my mother's burial. I will never stop," he continued, as he poured more spirits into the glass; "never. Only--what to do? how to go on? None would believe me now--none. None

believed then that I was an innocent man and he the guilty one. None! My mother died with her heart broken, Sophy married the man whom she thought I had tried to rob. Curse him! I will never stop."

Again he emptied the glass of spirits down his throat; yet, fiery as the drams were, they did not make him drunk. Instead, only the more resolute, the more hard, if the set look upon his face was any index to his mind.

"He is ruined," he said to himself now. "Ruined. Still--that is not enough. Yet, how to do more? How! how! Short of murder I cannot slay him. There is no way. And I have sworn to slay him--his soul, if not his body. I have sworn to slay him, and there are no means. None. I shall never stamp on those grinning features; I can do nothing now."

Sitting there, with on one side of him the glass--again empty, and soon again to be refilled--and on the other a guttering rushlight which imparted to his face a sickly, cadaverous appearance, he continued racking his brain as to how more calamity might be made to fall upon Beau Bufton, the man who, if his meditations might be taken as a clue to the past, had once brought terrible ruin to him. He wondered if this man Barry (who was, beyond all doubt, the future husband of the woman, the heiress, whom he and Anne Pottle had contrived to make their tool believe he was himself about to marry) could in any way be used as a means to the end; he pondered this, and then discarded that idea as worthless. "Sir Geoffrey Barry is a gentleman, an officer," he said. "Bufton is now an outcast. It is impossible. Impossible. Barry would not condescend to kick him."

Again he drank--the bottle being almost empty by this time--and still his mind did not become clouded; still he was able to think and plot and scheme. And once he muttered, "He wishes to participate in my new method of earning a living, not even knowing what that method is. Ah!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet and knocking over the miserable rushlight as he did so, whereby he was now in the dark, "he wishes that. He wishes that! Oh, my God!" he cried, gesticulating in that darkness, "he wishes that to be. And so it shall! So it shall! He shall participate. Somehow, I will do it. He shall participate, even as the sheep--which his accursed, gibbering face is something like--participates with the butcher in the shambles to which it is led. He shall indeed participate."

Then, in the darkness, and half-frenzied both with the drink he had already partaken of--which was not the first that day--as well as with the thoughts of a new scheme which had suddenly dawned in his mind, he put out his hand and, groping for the bottle, found it, and drained the last remnants of its contents.

After which he stumbled towards where his bed was and sought oblivion in sleep--an oblivion that, however, was not altogether complete--that was disturbed by dreams and visions of a girl's face, a girl's form shaken with piteous sobs; and, also, of a newly made grave in a country churchyard, on which the rain poured without cessation through the night.

CHAPTER X.

"THE MIGNONNE."

Eight months had passed; March of the year 1759 had come, and a bitterly cold east wind blew up Bugsby's Reach, causing the pennons on countless barges and frigates and brigs, to say nothing of great ships of war lying in that classic piece of water, to stream out like pointing fingers towards where, above all else, there glistened in the wintry afternoon sunlight the cross surmounting St. Paul's. It whistled, too, through the shrouds of a French-built frigate, one that in earlier days would have been spoken of as "a tall, rakehelly bark," a fabric that was beautiful in all her lines, in her yacht-like bows and rounded stern, in her lofty masts, stayed with supreme precision; in her shining afterdeck brasswork, her wheel carved and decorated as though the hands of dead-and-gone Grinling Gibbons might have been at work at it; upon, too, her brass capstan and binnacle. A French frigate pierced also with gun ports below, and bearing for her figurehead the face and bust of a smiling, blue-eyed child, which figurehead represented the name she bore upon her bows, *Mignonne*.

Yet French as she was, and as any Jack Tar would have informed you in a moment had you not known--after he had run a fierce eye along her shape and marked other things about her as well--there flew above her no flag proclaiming that she was owned by Louis le Bien-aimé (Bien-aimé by countless women, perhaps, but never, surely, by the subjects whom he taxed and ground to the soil they sweated over). For instead, streaming out from her mainmast there flew, because it was

war-time and she lay in the King's chief river, the Royal Standard of England; from her foremast, the Anchor of Hope, the flag of the Lord High Admiral; and from her mizzen, the white flag, with the red St. George's cross; also she flew the same flag from her jack-staff.

French though she may have been, none who saw those noble ensigns could doubt what she was now.

In fact, she was a capture, taken by an English ship, which in her turn had once been French--*Le Duc d'Acquitaine*--and she lay, on this wild, tempestuous March day, off Blackwall and the historic Bugsby's Hole, under the temporary command of Captain Sir Geoffrey Barry. There are ironies in the life of other things besides human beings--in ships, perhaps, more especially than amongst other inanimate creatures--and the *Mignonne* was an example that such was the case. In her thirty years of existence she had been fighting fiercely on behalf of France against her hereditary foe--England; now she lay in the Thames, serving as a vessel into which were brought scores of impressed men, as well as scores of others who were burning to fight as willing sailors against her former owners.

For at this time there was a hot press wherever men could be found; all along and around the coast of England it was going on; every vessel of war was being stuffed full of Englishmen who, willingly or unwillingly, had to take part in the deeds that were doing and that still had to be done.

Were not privateers and merchantmen being taken daily? Was not Boscawen raging the seas like a devouring lion; Sir Edward Hawke hurling insults at the French fleet in an attempt to bring them to action; Rodney bombarding their coast? Were not those French also swearing that, ere long, their invasion of England should take place, and should be final, decisive, and triumphant?

No wonder, therefore, that sailors were wanted--and found! No wonder that husbands were torn from their wives, and fathers from their children; that men disappeared from their homes and were never more heard of, since, often not more than a month later, they were lying at the bottom of the sea, after having been sunk with their ships in some great naval fight, or, having been slain on board those ships, had next been flung over their sides--legless, armless, headless.

Geoffrey Barry was not alone in the *Mignonne*. With him, as sharer of that old after-cabin, with its deep stern walk, whereon she sat sometimes for hours regarding all the traffic of the great and busy river, was his wife, sweet Ariadne, who (until the *Mignonne's* anchor should have been catted and fished, and her canvas sheeted home as she set out on her voyage round England, to distribute the men she had gathered to the various great ships of war in need of them) would remain ever by his side. For she could not tear herself away from him to whom she was but newly wedded; she could not look with aught but tearful apprehension to the moment, the hour that must inevitably come, when, for the last time, she would feel his arms about her and his lips pressed to hers. The hour when he would go forth to distribute those men, and would then, after putting his own ship into fighting trim, join either Rodney, Boscawen, or Hawke, as their Lordships might see fit to direct.

"Oh, Geoff! oh, Geoff!" she cried, as now on this afternoon she sat by his side, their dinner and their dish of tea both over, "oh, Geoff! who that did not love him fondly, madly, would be a sailor's wife? But three months married are we, and the time has come, is close at hand, for us to part. What will become of me?"

"Heart up, sweet one," her husband said in answer, even as, while he spoke, he glanced through the quaint square ports, across which were pulled back the prettily flowered dimity curtains that had adorned the windows of the *Mignonne* when a French captain had sat in the selfsame cabin, with, perhaps, his own wife by his side. "Heart up, mine own. 'Tis glory, my flag, I go to win. Glory for thee and me. What! shall my Lady Barry give precedence to any in our old Hampshire, where for many a long day the Barrys have ruled the roast. You must be an admiral's wife, sweet; an admiral's wife."

"Alas! 'tis you I want, not rank nor precedence. My poor father died a sailor, and--and--it broke my mother's heart later, I think. So, too, will mine break if now husband follows father."

"Tush, dearest, tush! Your father was a gallant seaman, your mother should have lived long to love his memory. A sailor's wife must be brave. Why! look, now, at Mrs. Pottle. She, too, lost her husband, yet she hath not succumbed. And," discontinuing his bluff heartiness--assumed only to solace his girl-wife, and not truly felt--"I will not be slain. Fortune is not my foe--I know it, feel it--I shall not follow Henry Thorne nor Ezra Pottle. Be cheered, my dear."

But still Ariadne could not be cheered, knowing that he was going from her side, though she made strenuous efforts and smiled wanly through her tears; while she said she would behave as became a seaman's wife. Yet, all the same, she could not refrain from asking him timorously, though hoping all the time that his answer would be in the negative, whether he had yet found all the seamen necessary for the ships he was told off to provision with them.

"Why, see now, Ariadne!" he exclaimed, as he took from an inner cabin his boat-cloak, holding it over his arm as he talked, "they do not come in fast. In honest truth, I do think I have drained all this fair neighbourhood of its men. Down there," and he nodded his head forward, towards the

forecastle, "I have a hundred and a half of old sea-dogs who will fight till the flesh is hacked from off their bones."

Here Ariadne shuddered, while he continued, "God knows, in many cases they have not much left to hack, most of 'em having fought a hundred fights under Lestock, Martin and Knowles, and two even under Vernon. But for others I know not what to do. Drunken swabs are brought to me by the crimps; young boys from citizens' offices offer themselves--ofttimes they have robbed their masters and hope thus to evade the gallows; husbands who are sick of their wives; or, better still, men who would make houses for the women they love. But all of the right sort do not come my way as fast as the King and I would wish."

"Thereby," said Ariadne, "you cannot yet sail. Not yet. Ah!" And beneath her breath she said, "Thank God."

"Thereby," he replied with a smile, understanding well enough her mind, "I cannot yet sail. But, dear heart, it must be soon, whether I have gotten all I want or not. At least, I have some. Yes, it must be, for De la Clue is about, and Conflans broods ever on a descent. We must check them. We must. We must!"

"What do you go to seek now?" Ariadne asked, as, approaching the cabin stairs he summoned his coxswain and bade him call the gig away. "What? More citizens' boys, or--or--" and she laughed a little at the words and blushed, "drunken swabs, as you term them?"

"Not," he answered, "if I can get others, though even those can use a match-tub if their hands shake not too much, and can put their puny weight on to a halyard. But there are others. There is a fellow hard by, ashore, in Jamaica Court, who, I do hear, can find what is wanted. Likewise--and this is better if it can but be accomplished--lying further down the river is a schooner a-filling up with indented servants for our American colonies. There should be pickings there, and *they* will cost the King nothing. Not a groat."

"Why?" asked Ariadne, open-eyed, "why? Can the King get men without paying the two pounds press-money that you say he gives?"

"He can get these," Geoffrey replied, with a laugh, "if I take them. I, or any other of his officers. Because, you see, these are hocus-pocussed men; fellows who have been made, or found, drunk by the crimps, and sold on board to the master. He has paid for them, and 'tis illegal. Wherefore the King--represented in my person--will set 'em free to serve him. God bless him! His service is better than that in the plantations."

"Is it honest to do this, Geoff?" Ariadne asked, a look of doubt on her young face.

"Honest, my dear! Why, child, there is no spot of honesty in't at all. Honest, i'faith! Is it honest to buy men's bodies as one buys dogs and cattle? honest to drench and drug men with gin, and then fling them aboard as one would fling a side of beef aboard? Nay, 'tis honest to rescue such, to give them a chance of serving King and country; to have a mort of food and rum into them two and three times a day, as much 'baccy as they can smoke, and many a guinea to spend on Sal and Sukie when they get ashore. *That's* honest, my dear, and what the sky-pilots call 'Christian.'"

"If they ever do get ashore to see Sal and Sukie; if the French do not kill them," said Ariadne.

"Well! come what may, *I* must get ashore," said Geoffrey, as now he saw his gig tossing on the turbulent waves of the windswept river; "so fare ye well, sweetheart, until to-night. You have that new-fangled novel thing to read, and Anne and her mother are with you, wherefore you will not be dull till bedtime."

Then, changing his blustering, good-natured tone for one more serious as he stooped and kissed her; while noticing again, as he held her in his arms, as he had often noticed before, how slight and delicate a thing his child-wife was, he whispered:

"Oh! my love, my love, how I do worship thee. Sweetheart, will the hours be long till I come back?"

"As ever and always they are," she whispered too, her arms around his neck and her cheek against his. "As ever and always they are."

"You do not regard me as only a rude, rough sailor," he asked now; "one ruthless in his duty? Nor cruel?"

"Nay, nay, never; but as the man of my heart--my only love, my husband."

"So! that is well. Again, farewell till to-night. Farewell, dear one," and, reaching the deck, he grasped the manropes when, entering his gig, he was rowed ashore.

Arrived at Brunswick Stairs, he sent back his boat, giving orders for the coxswain to return in two hours, "For," said he, "I need no accompaniment to-day. What I have to do I can do very well by myself." After which he set out from the river inland towards Stepney, threading, as he did so, some quaint old streets and lanes in which each floor of the houses overlapped the one below it,

so that, at last, the top floors almost touched each other. As he progressed he noticed, as often enough he had observed before, with what disfavour he was regarded by all the idlers in the place, including slatternly-looking women leaning against doorposts; rough-looking men who shrunk away, however, directly his eye lighted on them (they, perhaps, thinking that he was appraising their value as "food for the Frenchmen"); and miserable, cadaverous-looking young fellows, some of whom had no hesitation in instantly disappearing into the passages of houses, they being generally those in which they did not happen to live.

For all knew that this stalwart young captain, who wore the undress of the new uniform of the Royal Navy (new now for some ten years); whose sword-handle had a gold knot to it, and whose three-cornered hat had in it a gold cockade, was he who, aided by his myrmidons, tore them away from their wives and mothers to roam the seas as well as to fight, and, probably, be killed by some of Conflans' Frenchmen. They knew him well enough for the captain of the "*Mignion*," as they called his craft, and they hated and feared him in consequence.

"May he be blasted!" said one hideous, blear-eyed old woman as he passed by, she taking no trouble to lower her voice; "he's got my Jenny's man in his cussed fock'sle even now. And she married to George but two months! He've got a young wife of his own--I seen her ashore with him but yesterday--a sweet young thing too. How'd she like it if som-un ravished 'im away from her!"

"Curse him!" said a man, who regarded Geoffrey from behind a blind, he being afraid to show himself, knowing well enough that the captain of the *Mignonne* would be as like as not to make a mental note of the house if he saw him. "Curse him and his King, too, and all the Lords and Commons. Why should we fight and die for them? They wouldn't do it for us."

And he heard much of their mutterings, knew how he was regarded, and regretted that such should be so. But, he told himself, it was duty. It must be done.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COLONISTS.

"The hag spoke truth," Geoffrey thought, as he progressed towards his destination, Jamaica Court, "spoke only too true. If something should tear me away from my sweet Ariadne, how would she feel? Alas! that it must be so with these poor souls. Alas! Alas! Yet how else is it to be done? France has never beaten us, and never must. Even though against their will, against their happiness, all must go. They talk now of a press for the army as well as for us. Yet the sea forces need men more than those of the land. It must indeed be so."

He had arrived at Jamaica Court in Stepney by now, a little narrow place in which there were shops whose trade was principally devoted to supplying marine wants--one was a ship's chandler's; the second was a slop-shop, the owner of which announced himself as a marine store dealer; a third shopkeeper was a rope, tar and twine "merchant," while, also, there were brass-plates on two doors announcing that pilots lived within. And, at the entrance, there was a dram-shop, having for sign, "The Spanyol Galleon," with, painted rudely on a board outside, the hideous words, "Here you may have good London gin for tuppence, and be drunk for sixpence."

None of these was, however, that which Geoffrey Barry sought; instead, he made his way towards a house, over the full diamond-paned window of which, on the ground floor, there were inscribed the words, "Lewis and partner, ship's furnishers," and into this place he entered, descending two steps into the room as he did so.

"I am," he said, seeing that a man sat at a high desk by the window, with his back towards him, "the captain of the *Mignonne*, and I require men for His Majesty. It is told me that you can find them. Is that so?"

As he spoke the man at the desk turned round--a young man, with a short-cropped beard--while, regarding Geoffrey, he said quietly, "That is part of my affairs. How many do you want? But do you desire--well!--willing sailors or the 'kids?'--the latter word being the usual expression for shore men who were obtained as sailors by any means, no matter how foul.

This person spoke calmly enough, yet, while he did so, there came a flush into his face as he regarded his visitor; a flush that tinged all of his cheeks that was visible and uncovered by hair.

"I must have them," the captain of the *Mignonne* said, "somehow, by hook or by---- Why!" he exclaimed, "who are you? I have seen you--we have met--before."

"Yes, we have," the other said, very calmly now. "At Keith's Chapel last summer. When Mr. Bufton espoused Anne Pottle. I was," and he laughed a little, "his best man."

For answer, Geoffrey stared curiously at the other across the oak counter that ran between them--stared for some moments very fixedly; then he replied:

"Ay, and so indeed you were, when the sorry rogue thought he was espousing the lady who is now my wife. Yet your beard prevented me recognising you before as one who played that part. But----"

"But," said the other, who now flushed again, and even more deeply than before. "But what?"

"If the beard you wear now prevented me from recognising you as that fellow's groomsman, it has led to my recognising you, or rather remembering your face, in some other situation. Sir, have you not been a sailor?"

"I have been a sailor," the other said, with what was truly marvellous calm, considering the feelings within him, "and once bore the King's commission."

"I felt sure. Yet I cannot recall--I cannot----"

"Let me do so for you. You formed one of the Court-martial on board the *Warwick* which broke me, drove me from out the sea service. Do you remember now?"

Then, in a voice as cold as ice, Geoffrey, after regarding the man before him for another minute, said--

"Ay, I remember. Your name is Lewis Granger. I remember very well. I remember the Glastonbury affair."

"I was innocent. Though found guilty."

"Innocent! Innocent! Though you restored----"

"I was innocent, I say!" the other cried loudly. "But enough! Lewis Granger is no more. The man you are talking to is called Lewis. Well, you want men! How many, and what will you pay?"

"The King's price. Two pounds for experienced sailors; two pounds for willing men; one pound for landlubbers--'kids.'"

"It is not enough. There are no more sailors to be had, and the willing hands are all taken, by you and others. As for 'kids'--yes. But at the price of sailors--my price, not theirs--three pounds. Two for them, one for me."

"I shall not pay it. There are still others hereabouts whom I can take."

"If you mean the schooner which is lying off the Marshes, you are mistaken. She flies the Dutch colours; you cannot touch her. That is not my affair, however; take her and welcome, if you will. She has my stuff on board, and--has paid for it."

"We will see for that. If the order comes, I must have her. Meanwhile, have you nothing?"

"Something. Not much, though. The schooner has gotten them all. Come and see if you choose."

"So be it. Where are they?"

For answer Lewis Granger, or, as he now said he desired to be termed, Lewis, lifted up the flap of the counter and signalled to Sir Geoffrey to come behind it. And this being done, the former led the way through a passage to the back of the house and then up a pair of stairs, arriving at a room still farther back, from which, as he and the captain of the *Mignonne* approached, there came an indescribable hubbub. A noise of singing and shouting, a yelling from other voices, and, in one or two cases, cries, as though some were fighting.

"One man at least in there has been a sailor," Sir Geoffrey said. "That lingo has never been learned ashore. But the others, who are they?"

"All sorts. Some good, some bad. One fellow is so desperate to get away to sea that I doubt not the runners are after him. 'Tis he who sings. Listen!" While, as he spoke, above all the hubbub there arose a voice singing--

"And was she not frank and free,
And was she not kind to me?
To lock up her cat in the cupboard,
And give her key to me--to me.
To lock up her cat in the cupboard,
And give her key--e to me--e."

"Ha! ha!" the voice cried, "to me. She gave the key to me. My God! I wonder what she's a-doing of now!"

"A-giving the key to another, you fool," answered a hoarser, more rasping voice. "Damme! didst ever know a woman who kept all for one! Drink some more and cease thy croaking."

"Ah, no! No," cried a young voice within; one soft and rich. "Ah, no! Abuse not women. They are true. True ever--or else we are sunk. Shall we not think often of them when we are far away in the colonies, a-making of a home for those we love?" Whereon the owner of this voice also began to sing, in tones silvery and sweet--

"I did but look and love awhile,
'Twas but for one half-hour;
Then to resist I had no will,
And now I have no power.
To sigh and wish is all my ease,
Sighs which do heat impart
Enough to melt the coldest ice,
Yet cannot warm your heart."

Evidently this song was more to the liking of the company than the ribald one of the former singer, since now there were cries and yells for another stave from many voices. But, at that moment, Granger, drawing a key from his pocket, put it in the lock and opened the door, ushering in Geoffrey.

It was a strange sight which met the latter's eyes, or would have been had he not in the past month seen several such at the establishments of various crimps in the neighbourhood to which his duty had forced him to resort. For, within the room, there were some twenty men of all ages and descriptions, and all, unhappily, more or less drunk. Mostly, they sat upon the floor, their backs against the dirty whitewashed walls, their vests apart and their shirts open, as though to give air to their heated throats. And, between the legs of each, were cans, either full or empty, of beer or spirits, a few having liquor still in them, though they were for the most part dry. Of all ages and descriptions were these men, old and young. One there was, a monstrous great fellow, herculean in size, and with a huge head like a bull's, his grizzled hair curling all about it, while his arms, which were visible (since his coat was off--it being used now as a cushion to his back--and his sleeves rolled up), were seen to be tattooed all over with weird as well as quaint devices. Devices such as a snake with red eyes striking its fangs into a heart, a mermaid ogling an imaginary person, and the usual anchor, flags, and so forth.

"The fellow that has been a sailor," said Sir Geoffrey to Lewis. "One cannot doubt."

"Ay, a sailor. Worth having, he. He is the last I can get of that sort."

"Ay, a sailor!" roared the man, hearing Lewis Granger's words. "Ay, a sailor, damme! such as you do not see now. A sailor, noble captain," he went on, recognising Geoffrey's gold cockade and saluting with a huge hand, "such as there ain't many like. Sir, I sailed with Anson in '40--ain't that enough? Ho! With Anson. You know. In the *Centurion*. Ain't that enough, I say? When we took the *Acapulco* ship--the plate ship. And what takings there was! Sir, we sailors was the first that ever made the gals eat bank-notes--twenty-pun notes--there weren't no others then--a-tween their bread and butter. What cared we for money? We had won it, and the gals were kind."

"Yet," said Geoffrey, "you are now here, when you should be serving your King, getting more money for the girls. Why is this, when the *Mignonne* lies close by, waiting for such as you; when all the Admirals are calling out for sailors who know their duty?"

"He took me," the man cried, nodding his head towards Granger; "his men took me when I was drunk. Had I not been, fifty crimps couldn't a-done it. Now I'm in this place, awaiting to be sold, like a great black nigger in the Injies."

"How much does he owe?" asked Geoffrey of the man by his side--the crimp who had once worn the King's uniform as he himself now wore it--and speaking with disdain, "how much?"

"I want his press-money--that and another guinea would suffice. He will not go in the Dutchman to the colonies, otherwise I would have fifteen pounds or nothing."

"Will you serve the King again," asked Geoffrey, "if I buy you off?"

"At what rating? I was foretop-man with Anton. And later, with Captain Howe."

"And perhaps may be that again. Come, I will have you."

"Have me, then, and welcome. Get me out of this hole, anyway."

"Finish your drink, then, and stand up. Down with it. It's the last ashore. Stand up; what is your name?"

"George Redway."

"So be it. Now," turning to Granger, "have you any more?"

"You see them. Take your choice or leave 'em. The Dutchman still wants more."

Geoffrey did see them as he looked round, his eyes noting that amongst the number there might be metal for the ships of war. The youth with the sweet-toned voice who had sung the love-ballad of past days, was, he observed, endeavouring to evade his glance, whereby he judged that he was hoping to go to the colonies and thus to become eventually (as the young man doubtless supposed) a prosperous farmer or dealer. Only, because Geoffrey knew well enough what his real fate would be, he determined that he would have him too, and said so to Granger (as we will still call him) loud enough for the other to hear.

"No! no!" the latter cried, learning what his lot was. "No! no! Not that. I have offered myself voluntarily to this man to be sent to Massachusetts. I want a home--to make a home for Dolly; my Dolly. I want to be a colonist."

"My lad," said Geoffrey, "you are deceived. Never will you be a colonist. Once you are in that ship which is lying off the Marshes, you will go to the colonies, it is true, but not as you think. Instead, as an indented sla---"

"For Heaven's sake," whispered Granger, "do not ruin my last chance of a livelihood. I have been ruined once, and--I was innocent. Have some mercy."

For a moment the captain of the *Mignonne* looked at him coldly, contemptuously, as an honourable man looked in those days at a crimp, even though he did not hesitate to avail himself of his services in the cause of his duty; as, in those and these days, too, an honourable man looks at one whom he knows to have been disgraced; then, scarcely understanding what secret feeling moved him, he murmured to Granger, "So be it"; while, turning to the young fellow, he said, "I cannot spare you for the colonies. You must serve your country against its enemies. I choose you, too"; and heedless of the other's cries and remonstrances, he bade Granger name the price.

He took also three others, all of whom he marshalled outside Jamaica Court under the superintendence of the ex-foretop-man, George Redway, and so marched them off to the landing-steps where the boat was to come for him.

Yet, as they went along, he was not thinking of them, but of the man, Lewis Granger, whom he had once more come face to face with that day.

"Innocent!" he said to himself. "Innocent! he protests. Yet in our eyes, in the eyes of all of us--his brother sailors!--his guilt was proved up to the hilt. But to-day--to-day--there was a look in the man's face--a tone in his voice--oh! my God, if, after all, it were so! If it were so! Then, indeed, has Fortune been his foe!"

CHAPTER XII.

VENGEANCE IS SWEET.

During the passage of those eight months from the time when Bufton had fallen into the snare set for him by Anne Pottle and Lewis Granger (who had recognised the former as the singing girl of half the gardens round London the instant he set eyes on her at Tunbridge Wells, they having met before), the latter had more than once encountered his old enemy; that enemy with whom--in a manner which would quite have suited with the ethics of more modern, of present, days--he had lived on an apparent footing of friendship while planning a scheme of vengeance for a cruel wrong done to him earlier. He had visited Bufton in the southern suburb of the town, where the man once known as "Beau Bufton" now lived a miserable kind of life upon money sent to him by his mother from Devonshire, and also upon anything which he could pick up at cock-fights, racecourses, and similar places, he being always careful to avoid the West End. For, like many others who imagine that they are masters of the art of ridicule, he dreaded, winced under ridicule himself, especially when that ridicule had a very substantial base from which to operate, as any that might be hurled against him must have had at this present moment.

Bufton had also himself paid a visit to Stepney more than once to see his quondam confederate--a visit which, although made under the garb of friendship, had really for its object the desire of finding out what Lewis Granger was doing, how he was living, and (which was the principal thing), whether there was any likelihood of his being able to obtain a share in such prosperity as might have fallen in Granger's way.

Now, it happened--as so often it will happen in real life, in spite of the jeers of imbeciles who regard, or profess to regard, coincidences as things which occur only in the more or less hard-bound brains of dramatists and romancists--that on the evening previous to the rencounter between Sir Geoffrey Barry and Granger, Bufton had written to the latter that he intended to be in Stepney on that night. And he informed him that, from an unexpected source, he had gotten some little money together, and, if Lewis pleased, he might possibly be able to join him in his "affairs."

Wherefore, at eight o'clock on this boisterous March night, the two men who had once been friends were again seated together; this time in Granger's house in the East End instead of in Bufton's fashionable lodgings of the days of his prosperity.

"And so," said the host--as he passed over to his guest some spirits and water, he having stated, without apology and with a fine sneer on his lip, that tokay and champagne, such as had once flowed freely (on credit) in the old apartments of the Haymarket, were beyond his means--"and so you have found some money, eh? How have you done it? *Trickeries des Grecs*--'packing,' 'marking,' 'substitution,' or what not? Or has Madame la mère been kind? Has she consented to a little more blood-letting? Eh!"

"Nay, nay," Bufton replied. He looked more like his old self now than when Granger had seen him last, since, doubtless owing to the welcome advent of a little ready money, he was adorned in a manner better corresponding with the old style than he had been lately.

To wit, he wore now a neat brown frock, a brown silk waistcoat, and black velvet breeches, while upon the table by his side lay a brand-new three-cornered hat, neatly fringed.

"Nay, but sometimes fortune befriends us. I have been a-racing at Drayton, and--and--well, I have won a few score guineas!"

"Wherefore, I presume," said Lewis Granger, "you have come here to pay me some of them. I should be rich--that is, rich for me--if I had all you owe me. All," he added emphatically, "that I hold your acknowledgment for."

"Oh! I protest, my friend----" exclaimed the other.

"Protest nothing. But, instead, remember. Recall two years ago. There is a sum of two thousand pounds for Glastonbury's bill; two thousand pounds, and my ruined life; for which latter I do not hold any acknowledgment, though, also, I do not forget."

And he regarded Bufton with so strange a glance that the visitor looked uneasy.

"Lewis," he said, "I have repented of that. You--you--know I have. And at my mother's death it will be paid. I can do no more," and he rubbed his chin as he spoke, which action, for some reason that Granger could not have explained, irritated him as much as ever. Perhaps it did so because it recalled other instances when he had sat and watched him doing the same thing.

"Then," continued Granger, he repeating with emphasis, "there is the bond for five thousand guineas--the marriage bond--the marriage bond. I worked hard in that matter----"

"Curse the marriage bond!" cried Bufton. "Curse it, and the marriage, and all concerned with it. That has sunk me, ruined me for ever. Oh! Lewis," he went on, "do you know what I live for now? Now! now!"

"Annulling it; breaking it, I imagine."

"No!" the other almost shrieked, "no! it cannot be broken; they say I am bound, tied for ever! No! it is not that, but vengeance on the cat who snared me, and--and--vengeance on the man who has married the true heiress. He insulted me in her park, he defeated me; me--I who knew every trick of fence; and he drove me forth. And I do believe he was aware of that scheme while, if he did not aid in it, he at least did not prevent it."

"You ruined Anne's sister, drove her to her death. You have much to answer for," Granger said, his voice hard and stern; so hard and stern that almost it would seem as if he were egging the man on to frenzy for a purpose.

"Bah!" cried Bufton, "I would have provided well for the girl--have done all except marry her. That was impossible. I needed an heiress, and I got that other. That thing; that dancing, singing thing; fit only to be the wife of her mistress's coachman, or some porter."

"Wherefore you desire vengeance?"

"Vengeance! Oh, my God! if I could but have that on her and him--this insolent, supercilious sailor. If I could. If I could."

"Yet you were always an admirer of superciliousness yourself."

"Bah!" he cried again, "amongst wits and men of fashion, yes! There it is suitable. But this fellow, this broken-down, impoverished man of birth, who can do no better than go a-sailing. And

to be supercilious to me!"

"Vengeance, eh?" said Lewis Granger, meditating--pretending to meditate. "Vengeance."

"Ay, vengeance on both; but I know not how to obtain it."

"Do you know," said Granger quietly--softly, indeed--"that both are in this neighbourhood? Not two miles away from where we now sit."

"What!" cried Bufton, full of astonishment. "What! Both here; two miles away! It is impossible."

"Nevertheless it is true. Sir Geoffrey is in command of a French prize called the *Mignonne*, which lies off Bugsby's Hole. Anne--Bufton," with his eyes full on the man before him, "is in attendance on her mistress, Lady Barry."

"Oh! And Anne--Bufton. Damn you! Why call her that? Why----"

"You say your wedding is unbreakable. Therefore she is--Anne Bufton."

"How do you know all this? Do not play with me. Answer me truthfully, in God's name!"

"I know it well. Barry has been with me, trying to get men for the fleets. But," and now the clear tones in which he always spoke became, if possible, more distinct than ordinary, more--if the term may be used--metallic, "I have a better market than supplying the fleets with men. There is a Dutch schooner--the *Nederland*--lying further down the river, whose skipper pays me higher. She is in truth a--well! a kidnapper. Those who get on board of her, men and--and--yes!--and women--she takes women too!--think that they are going out to become planters, farmers, people to whom land is granted. That is, the men think so, while the women--oh! it is in truth cruel----"

"The women. Yes, the women! What of them?"

"They think they will find husbands. But they, too, are sold. All are sold to the plantations, or as good as sold; they are indented for a term of years. They are, in solemn fact, slaves--slaves herding with those whose death-warrants have been commuted, with the scum and offal of the old world. The women die fast, the labour is terrible. Their hearts are broken."

"But how do you, how does the Dutch skipper get such?" Bufton asked, his eyes glistening. Already there was a hideous idea dawning in his mind, accompanied by a horrible vision of "women dying fast, their hearts broken," in the slavery of the colonies.

"It is not hard to do," Granger said, still speaking slowly and very calmly. "Some are enticed with flowery promises, some are made drunk, while some--poor rustics these--going along lonely ways near the river, have been set upon and carried, gagged, to a boat, and sent off to the *Nederland*. You scorn me," he said, with an appearance of frankness as well as of self-depreciation, "for being concerned in such a trade as this! Yet, remember, I am a ruined, degraded man. Remember also by whom, and so forgive and pity me."

"I do! I do!" Bufton exclaimed with heartiness, thinking, even as he did thus exclaim, what a fool this old tool and creature of his was to so expose his method of business. Yet he had something else to think about now besides Granger's simplicity--something of far more vital importance than that to meditate upon.

"How," he asked, "did you tell me it was done? How? With, let us say, the women. Will the master of this ship receive any taken to him? And--and--is he not in danger of being overhauled? How can he slip away to sea past the guns of Woolwich and Tilbury?"

"They let him come up the river," said Granger, "why not, therefore, let him go down and out to sea? For his papers are examined when he *comes*, when he is empty of such stuff as he departs with. And till he is at sea, they--his cattle--are under hatches."

"Under hatches," Bufton muttered, his long chin stuck out before him, "under hatches. So that screams--the screams of women--oh! yes--they could not be heard. Of women wrenched away from----"

"Loving husbands, eh?" said Granger while controlling his features, which he feared would betray him.

"Bah! Loving husbands. No! Who cares for loving husbands? None! none, you fool!" and now there came upon the man's face that hateful sneer which always made Granger's blood boil, and, as of old, a desire to strike him on those curling lips arose. "No, dolt! I am thinking of the screams of women wrenched from those whom they have snared into a noose, those whom they have tricked and hoodwinked. My friend, you are but a simpleton."

"Oh!" exclaimed Granger coldly, with a well-assumed air of indifference, "oh! that's it, is it? It is only Anne--Bufton--you seek vengeance on?"

"Only Anne! Only Anne Bufton, as you elect to term her. Who else, in God's name, should I

seek to vent vengeance on--in such a way?"

"I know not," Granger said, with an inimitable shrug of his shoulders, while at the same time he turned up the backs of his fingers and appeared to be regarding his nails with interest, "if you do not know yourself."

"What do you mean? Speak. There is something in your mind. What is it?"

"I thought," Granger replied, "that you sought revenge on Barry, too."

"On Barry! What can I do with him? Damme! The Dutchman would not take him, the captain of a King's ship, would he? Even if we could get him there."

"Perhaps he would, if he did not know who he was: if he were disguised and did not appear as a naval officer. Such things have been. Yet it was not of him I thought."

"In Heaven's name, who then?"

"I fear 'tis you, Algernon, who are the dolt, the idiot, not I; or perhaps your own marriage made you forget that he too has lately entered into the holy bonds. He, too, has a wife, on board the *Mignonne*."

"My God!" Bufton exclaimed. "My God! You have thought of that! You--you whom but a moment ago I derided. Ay! ay! you are right, 'tis I who am the fool. Oh! what a vengeance. Oh! oh! On him, this haughty bully, this blustering sailor. But--oh no! no! no!" he cried, "it is impossible; it could never be. Get her out of an armed vessel and sell her into slavery in the colonies. It is impossible! Impossible!"

"Doubtless it is impossible," Granger agreed. "'Tis true. It is not to be thought on. I am a fool. Yet," he continued, again speaking very slowly and incisively, "she will get herself out of it, out of the *Mignonne*, ere long. He sails in a day or so, and then she, Ariadne--the heiress whom you by rights should have had--comes ashore with Anne and her mother, the woman Pottle. They cannot go in his craft."

"How do you know this?"

"Partly from what Barry said to-day, after he had got men from me; partly from encountering his wife by Stepney Church a day or so ago. She speaks kindly of you now, Bufton; protests she thinks often of you--and--would pass her life by your side if you would have her."

One must not write down the horrible exclamations that issued from Bufton's lips as he heard these words--the execrations on the woman who had entrapped and ruined him. Yet even when he was calmer, he continued wildly--

"'Thinks kindly of me!' 'Would pass her life by my side!' Ay! she shall think kindly of me--in the colonies. In the fields, where she shall toil till her heart bursts, till she drops dead. Lewis! Lewis! Can it be done? Can it? Can it? And you have power here; have men at your call. I will pay. I have two hundred guineas. Help me, and we will ensnare them both. Oh! what a vengeance on that wanton and on Barry! Help me, Lewis!"

"I will help you," the other said; "vengeance *is* sweet."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BROKEN SWORD.

Ariadne had been happy for five days beyond the time she had expected to be--five days beyond the one when her husband selected those men out of Lewis Granger's house to go forth and serve the King. For Geoffrey, still looking about in likely quarters, while sending also a press-gang ashore under the command of an old grey-haired lieutenant who had never found promotion--a man old enough to be Geoffrey's father--and still another gang under the command of his master-at-arms, had been enabled to thus long delay his departure. But now--now--the time had come to part; he had the full complement of men their Lordships had directed him to procure, and from their Lordships also had come a message by an Admiralty tender, bidding him sail for the fleets at once.

Wherefore poor Ariadne, tearful and woebegone, was now superintending the preparations

necessary for quitting the *Mignonne*, while Geoffrey was intent on comforting her in every way in his power.

"Yet, cheer up, dear heart," he said again and again to her. "Remember, 'tis not for long at present. Once I have delivered these men into the ships requiring them (and some are no farther off than the Nore), then back I come to seek for more. We shall not fight Conflans yet; he advances not in spite of all his threats to invade us. So, heart up, mine own; in a week the *Mignonne* will be anchored here once more, and thou on board with thy fond husband."

"But a week, Geoff--a week! Alas! to me it seems an eternity. And then to think of what is to follow. And they say that that corsair, Thurot, is at the mouth of the river. If that should be so!"

"I hope it may. If I could but seize him now, what a feather in my cap 'twould be. He is a brave sea-dog, although he is a Frenchman."

"I shall be distracted during thy absence. I know not what to do. Oh, Geoff, what is to become of me!"

"You are to stay in the lodgings, my dear one," her husband said, "which we have chosen over there;" and he nodded his head towards the shore. "They are sweet and clean, and you can observe our anchorage. Therefore, you will see the *Mignonne* sail. Also," he added, with a happy thought, "you will see her return. Think on that."

Ariadne did think on it in the hours after he had left her, her husband going on board at midnight in preparation for his departure at dawn. Think on it--ay! indeed she did--as also on his last kiss pressed to her lips before he left, and of many, many others he had given her as the hours flew by and evening turned into night. She thought on it each time she crept from her bed to the window of the lodgings he had taken for her, to see if yet the daybreak was at hand (though she knew well enough that it could not come for still some hours); if yet the ship that held her husband, her lover, was making ready to depart. And always by her side stood Anne, who had been bidden to come and sleep with Ariadne on this the first night of her desolation since she had been married; Anne, who had long since determined never to part from her mistress again.

She had done it once when--in the exuberance of her youthful spirits, and proud of the possession of a good voice, which she knew how to manage in the *bravura* style, as well as a considerable facility for dancing in a manner fitted to obtain popular applause--she had left her home at Fanshawe Manor to earn her own living in London as a public performer. But, alas! what had been the result? Her little sister who had gone with her as companion, after both had pleaded long and frequently to her mistress and their mother for permission to do so, had encountered ruin at the hands of a scoundrel, and death as the result of her shame; while, for herself, what had happened? What! A life destroyed through her impetuous determination to exact a terrible atonement from the villain who had done her sister to death; an existence destroyed and rendered barren, loveless, and blank, through her tempestuous desire for vengeance.

She had left her mistress once; now she vowed often that never would she do it again. Never again.

"I have indeed made myself an Iphigenia, as Sir Geoffrey calls me," she would say to Ariadne during the passage of those eight months, "by wandering from your and mother's side; but, no more. Henceforth I stay with you, if you will let me."

And the two girls, who had never been parted since they were children, except for that year of a wild life on Anne's part in London: the two girls, of whom one had now become a happy wife, and the other a wife loathing and despising the man whom she had trepanned into marrying her--the man on whom, if chance came in her way, she would exercise still further vengeance--had kissed and embraced each other, and vowed that they would always remain together. For, although Anne called Ariadne her mistress, and was spoken of as the latter's maid and servant, they had from infancy been always more like sisters than aught else, and had grown up together loving each other fondly, while Anne's three extra years of age had made her like the elder and graver sister.

Now, together and alone--since Mrs. Pottle had departed some day or two before to Fanshawe Manor, to which they were to follow later, when the *Mignonne* would have sailed on her final cruise to join the fleet and take part in fighting France--they watched for the dawn to come; watched knowing that, with it, the lights on the frigate's masts would be put out, the sails be bent, and then--then--Ariadne would be desolate.

At last, the dayspring was at hand. Towards the east, beneath the dark blue and windswept heavens, they saw the primrose hue coming; soon they knew that there would appear a brighter, more vivid yellow, and then the sun, and with that sun, departure. Already poor Ariadne could see, even without the perspective glass which Geoffrey had left behind for her use, that all was excitement and bustle aboard the ship. For by now the pipes were sounding, they could hear the hawsers coming on board, and the men singing too; and then Ariadne, her hand clutching Anne's arm, saw the outer jib loosed to the light south-westerly breeze which was blowing from where

London lay.

"Oh, Anne!" she whispered, "it is the first time he has left me since we were wed. The first time, and now he is going. Look at those hateful sails, and--oh! how can they sing?"

"Be brave," said Anne, whose husband was not going away to sea; Anne, who, had he been doing so, would certainly have felt no regret; "heart up, you are a sailor's wife."

But that did not comfort the girl, who watched now, without understanding, everything taking place; for--although she knew not the meaning of fore and main top-gallant sails and spankers, nor anything of mainsails, nor mainroyals and mizzen top-gallants, nor staysails and jibs--she could see that the *Mignonne* was moving, going down the river towards where the sea was, with on it, perhaps, the great French fleet and also the dreaded Thurot who was reported to be lurking near.

"He sees me!" she cried; "he sees me! Oh, God! he waves a handkerchief from--what is it?--the waist! He sees me--ah! Anne--Anne--look--oh!" she cried, "the ship is passing round that point. Oh! Anne, she is gone."

"Heart up," again said Anne, comforting, yet still resolute. "'Tis but for a week. He will come back, my dear."

Then she led the girl to her bed, and, getting into it herself, took her in her arms and caressed and soothed her.

* * * * *

Meanwhile, not more than a mile off from where the two women were, Lewis Granger was himself preparing to begin a new day. It was necessary that here, he who in London had rarely left his bed until the morning was almost gone, should rise early, for he had much business to attend to besides that of trafficking in what he termed his "cattle" business, such as supplying all kinds of vessels with flour and meat and provisions of every sort. He was not actually the owner of this concern which he conducted, but, instead, only the superintendent or manager of it for a very wealthy man whom he had known when he was himself a gentleman--a wealthy man who, having lost his former superintendent and meeting Granger by accident about the time of Bufton's marriage, suggested that, as the latter said his circumstances were low, he should take the position.

"You have been a sailor yourself, you know; you are also an Essex man," this person remarked, as they sat in a coffee-house; "therefore you understand something about the requisites of the sea. And you may make some money. There is, of course, a good percentage, and, in absolute fact, you can grow well-to-do." After which he explained to Granger what his occupation would be.

Whereon he, knowing that, henceforth, even the beggarly keeping which he had received from the man who had once ruined him was certain to come to an end after the latter had been tricked into marrying Anne Pottle, took the position. It would at least be food, he told himself.

And now he was indeed growing well-to-do; in those eight months which had gone by since the day he had parted from Bufton he had been making money fast, both for himself and his master; making money by ways which once he would have scorned and have reviled himself for--by crimping and kidnapping, by hocus-pocussing men and making them drunk, by inducing simpletons to believe they were going to freedom and wealth in Delaware and Virginia and Massachusetts, or in Jamaica or Barbadoes, when in truth they were going to slavery, and as often as not to death. But also helping to fit out ships which, calling on the West African coast, should purchase from one successful tribe of negroes the prisoners they had taken from another they had defeated, and, transporting those who lived--the dead, as well as the sickly ones, being flung over to the sharks--should sell them also into slavery.

He was growing well-to-do, was putting by money, even while he stifled his conscience as to the way in which it was acquired; almost he had begun to forget that he, a gentleman, a King's sailor, with no worse faults originally than those of dissipation and a love for gambling, had been ruined, degraded, disgraced by a scheming scoundrel. And, also, almost was he forgetting that he had sworn to have an awful vengeance on this scoundrel, this man who had deprived him of the woman he loved and had caused her to cast him off. He came nigh to forgetting that his mother died of a broken heart--a heart broken by his ruin and disgrace.

"Ay," he said to himself, as now he dressed in preparation for his day's work, "ay! I had almost forgotten. Almost! And then he must needs find his way here, as full of evil as before. And the bait took--he swallowed it greedily. Anne's sister--I--my mother--the woman I worshipped, are not enough. He is a cormorant of cruelty, and seeks still more victims. Well--there shall be more. His

craft and devilish subtlety shall find another. Yet how--how--how is it to be done? I must think."

It was still early, not yet seven o'clock, but because of evil habits which he had contracted of late years, and which he could not now break off, much as he endeavoured to do so, he went to a side table where, taking up a dram bottle--a thing always to his hand now--he drank from it.

"It nerves me," he muttered. "It will serve me till it kills me at the last. And it clears my mind. Others it makes drunk, but me it fortifies--at present!"

He did not drink again, however; did not pour down glass after glass--such an act as that was reserved for the nights when he stupefied himself regularly ere seeking that sleep which never came easily; instead, he put the bottle away, after standing regarding it fixedly.

"Strange," he muttered, "strange. Glastonbury is drinking himself to death at Ratisbon, they say, because he possesses Sophy, but not her love; I am drinking myself to death here because she loved me--perhaps loves me now--and I have lost her. Through him, that venomous snake; that reptile!"

An onlooker might almost have thought, could one have been present, that the wretched, broken man had taken his dram and was indulging in such thoughts with a view to strengthening himself in some resolve that he had made. Would have thought so could he, that observer, have seen Lewis Granger go to a cupboard next, and, plunging his hand in, draw forth a sword in its scabbard. A naval sword, the handle of which he grasped, bringing out from the sheath, as he did so, but half a blade--a blade broken short off halfway down. The onlooker might have thought so if he had seen the man turn up the scabbard now, and let the other half of the weapon fall out with a clang to the floor.

"I broke it," he whispered once more, and from his eyes the tears welled forth and rolled down his cheeks, "on that night, the night after I saw its point towards me when they led me back to the main cabin of the *Warwick* to learn my doom. That I was condemned! I broke it as my life was broken--my future--my all. Ruined by him."

Then he replaced the two pieces of the blade in the sheath and returned the latter to the cupboard, kissing the former ere he did so. "I loved you so," he whispered again, his lips trembling, "I hoped so much from you; that you would bring me honour and renown; make my mother proud that she had borne me, Sophy proud to be my wife. And now. Now!"

He closed the cupboard after thrusting the weapon back, and prepared to descend to his room below. Yet, by this time his mood had changed again; again he was the Lewis Granger of everyday life--sullen, evil-looking. And he wept no more. But instead, there was upon his face the sardonic expression most usual to it.

"Barry did believe yesterday--at last--not that I was innocent, but that I might by some strange chance be so. He did, he did! I saw it in his softer look, heard it in his gentler speech. And, for reward, I am about to send his fair young wife and Bufton's own wife to worse than death. I am about to do that!"

Whereon he laughed so loud and long at this thought that the crone preparing his breakfast below shook her head ominously and wondered if her master was beginning a fresh day with a fresh drinking bout.

CHAPTER XIV.

BUFTON IS IMPLACABLE.

The *Nederland*, the Dutch schooner--she was a two-topsail one--would have been out of the river some day or so ago--and would have slipped down past Woolwich and Tilbury and the Nore on one of these dark, moonless nights, and with no more lights showing than necessary, had it not been for three facts. One was that her master was not at all sure that the infernal captain of the *Mignonne* might not see fit at any moment to slip after her and make an inspection of what she contained, if he observed the slightest sign of her departing in a more or less mysterious manner--although the aforesaid person did not think Barry would dare to board her while she lay in the river, and was consequently under the protection of the colours she flew. Another reason was that "Mr. Lewis," who was a great help to the worthy master, had requested him not to hurry his departure more than was necessary, as the former considered he might be able to provide the latter with further suitable merchandise; while, also, there was still a third and more powerful reason behind the other two. This was that François Thurot, of Boulogne, who had been a

licensed corsair, but was now a naval officer of the French King, was reported to be cruising outside in the Channel, and would be as likely as not to seize on any ship coming out of the Thames, no matter what flag she flew. For it was Thurot's system to attack anything he observed leaving English waters, on the plea that he mistrusted all vessels found in them (or quitting them) sailing under false colours, and if he discovered he was wrong, it was easy to allow them to proceed on their voyage. Nor; as a matter of fact, did he often find himself wrong, he being well served by his spies, especially by a despatch-boat he owned called the *Faucon*, and another called the *Homard*, nor would he have done so in this case.

For, in absolute fact (as any one, no matter whether it were Sir Geoffrey Barry or François Thurot, would soon have known, had they gone on board the schooner), though she might be called the *Nederland* at the present moment and might be sailing under the Dutch flag, she was nothing of the kind, but was instead the *Amarynth* of Plymouth, in Massachusetts, her captain being an Englishman, that is to say, a colonist.

None had, however, up to now, attempted to molest the ship in the Thames, since all connected with the navy were otherwise busily employed in preparing to resist the threatened attack of Conflans; and the master was now only waiting to hear from "Mr. Lewis" to depart. That is, to depart if he should also get the information that the dreaded Thurot was anywhere else than where he was at present reported to be. But, whether he got it or not, he would have to go ere long. For his "merchandise" was an eating and drinking cargo, and, consequently, an expensive one.

He stood on his poop on this present morning, after having seen the *Mignonne* glide down the river under a pretty full spread of canvas, and after having respectfully dipped his ensign; but now it was two hours later than that occurrence, and he was watching a shore-boat sailing out under a lugsail, and undoubtedly making for his ship. A shore-boat which he did not put himself to the trouble of hailing, or causing to be hailed, since he recognised its occupant and passenger as "Mr. Lewis."

"Good-morning, sir," he said, with due down East emphasis, as now the boat came alongside his schooner. "Good-morning, sir. I thought I should see you again before I up'd."

"Ay," said Granger, "I thought so too. I felt sure you wouldn't have up'd and gone away without seeing me. Don't you require my services any more?"

"Oh! well--why, yes. There's more room in the hold yet, you know. All the same, sir, I've got a cargo, and I may as well be getting along with it. Come into the saloon." Whereon he led the way to a cabin under the poop which he kept for his own private use. While, as he went, he asked, "Where is that Thurot?"

"You're safe enough from him," replied Granger, "if all accounts be true. They say he is at Gottenburg victualling. And there are too many of our ships of war about. The *Mignonne* went out, too, this morning."

"I saw her. I'll go out also--afore she comes back. A week I suppose, eh?"

"Indeed, it may not be so much. Barry, her captain, bade me have some more men ready for him by Sunday night, and this is Tuesday. That's not a week."

"I'll shift," said the master of the so-called *Nederland*; "I'll shift afore he comes back. I don't want him taking any of my children away from me. They're valyble."

"Do you want any more?" asked Granger, looking at the master over the glass which he now held in his hand, the Puritan colonist having produced liquid refreshment from a locker, "Could you avail yourself of two--or even one--more?"

"The trouble is a-making of 'em com-*fort*-able till I get 'em to sea. Then it is of no account. But if they aren't com-*fort*-able till we're away they might suspect. However, p'r'aps I could make shift with one or two. Dos't know any, friend Lewis?"

"I might do so. Perhaps, as you say, one or two. Yet," he said, after thinking a moment, "it could not be till Monday night."

"Till Monday night! Why! sir, that will never do. By then the captain will be back. And I am mortal afeard of him. If he boarded me," he said, sinking his voice to a husky whisper, "he'd find seventy on 'em below! Seventy thirties is over two thousand. Two thousand guineas' worth of stuff, male and female. A mort o' money."

"He will not board you. I know a way to prevent him. I will tell him that I can provide all he wants further and--and--well, the flag protects you. England will never quarrel with the Dutch; at this time--even now--the Government hopes they will join her against France."

"They eat a fearful deal," the Puritan said, with an eye cast down to the lower decks, "*now*. Later they won't eat so much. I must away--unless--unless I could be certain of getting something."

"You shall get something. I promise you. Only your men must fetch it. Send your quarter-boat ashore on Saturday night and, if there is nothing for her then, do so again on Sunday night; and I guarantee you something. Only, by Monday morning, by midnight of Sunday, you must be off and away."

"What will it be," the skipper asked, "a he or a she?"

"It might be either. But--this is good stuff that I shall send you. Listen. That which will come will not do so willingly; there is a family feud in this matter, such as has often been gratified before in similar ways. If it is a man, he may show fight, protest it is all a mistake, cry for help and make a disturbance; if it is a woman, she will weep and scream. Your ruf--your men must be prepared for a scuffle, as well as to silence all."

"Trust me," the skipper replied, with a loathsome wink. "If a female, we know how to stop all cries. If a man--ha!--so long as we don't kill him all is well. He will have the sea voyage to recover in. That's good for broken crowns to heal in."

"So, so. Now listen. The man you get--or both, if I can send two, but at least one--must be sold so that he finds no chance of ever returning to England. His family hate him; he is--well! no matter. What can you do?"

"I can go bail he never gets back. Only--only--thus! he will not be worth much to me. How can I pay you for what is no good, or very little?"

"The family pays me. I shall not want the 'usual' from you. And--if--when next you revisit us you can tell me that his relations are never likely to be troubled with him again, why--then--there will be something for you."

The New Englander thrust out a brawny freckled and sunburnt hand, and seized that of Granger, then he said--

"So be it. The family of this--this--'tis I suppose some flyblow--may be at ease. And--as you may send more than one--I will be very sure to treat all alike. I shall put into Charleston for the sale of some goods I have, and your men, or man, or woman shall be sold to a buyer from the French possessions. He will not let him, or them, ever return to England. All, or one. Is that it?"

"Ay, all or one," Granger said; "do that, and there will be no confusion." Though to himself he added, "There can be no confusion. There is no 'all.'"

"And the place?" the skipper said; "the place is--where? The same as before! In the Marshes, eh?"

"In the Marshes; that is it. Plaistow Level is best, this side of the creek. 'Tis bare and desolate even by day; at night not even a solitary gunner seeking for snipe is about. And--and--along the road that follows the river bank the stuff will come. Be ready with your boat and men on the night I warn you of. Thus you shall snare your bird."

"You will warn me, and it will most like be Sunday?"

"It will most like be Sunday. The hour you shall know. As well as how to distinguish your prize. And then you will away to Charleston. Be ready to sail at once with the cattle who are for the French colonies."

"Fear me not. I will be ready. Ere Monday morning comes we shall be out of the river."

They shook hands on this, the skipper filling the glasses once more, and so they parted, Granger dropping into the boat and being rowed ashore after having again promised to warn his confederate of the certain hour and day when his new victim might be expected.

"And," he repeated in a whisper, so that none of the crew who stood near should hear, "remember, this is a prize. You pay nothing for it; and if, when you return, you can give me good news for the family, you will have--well, I dare to say--fifty--a hundred guineas. Is't enough?"

"It is enough, I shall not fail."

In less than an hour Granger was once more back in his office attending to his master's business, checking accounts brought in to him by dealers and ships' furnishers; paying money and receiving it. But, ever and again, his eyes glanced at the clock which hung above the fireplace, while he muttered to himself, "He should be awake by now."

Buften had been accommodated with a bed that night by his "friend," there being a spare room in the house, and now, since it was eleven o'clock, the latter went up to arouse him. He found him, however, leaving the apartment at that moment, and, after some banter as to the late hours he kept, Granger escorted him to the parlour, where he took his own meals and sat when not occupied in his office.

"Well!" he said, when some breakfast had been put before his guest, "Well! I have been about your business to-day--your great revenge; and--and all is arranged. Only I have one fear--that you

will repent; that your heart will turn to kindness."

"Will it, think you?" said Bufton, with a cruel sneer. "Will it! Never fear. Yet tell me, what is it that is to be done?"

"They are to be inveigled, those two helpless women--they are very helpless, remember!--in some way to Plaistow Level. How that is to be done, you--we--must think over; then, once there, they will be seized upon by a boat's crew from the *Nederland* and carried on board. Being in the ship--well! you know the rest."

"But when? When, man? That cannot be done in a moment. We must have time wherein to inveigle them. When is it to be?"

"I have thought of that. Of how to give you time. Only, it must be done before the husband returns, and that is on Wednesday." (Surely Granger's memory was failing him!) "On Wednesday--to-morrow week. What say you, therefore, to Sunday night? By then, some scheme can be contrived to lure those two helpless women to their doom."

"Contrived! Contrived! Faith! my mind is not quite so quick as it was. Contrived! But how?"

"It may be done, perhaps. Yet, Bufton, think of what you condemn them to. Think, I say. To what is slavery, though not called by that name--to misery, despair. And both are young and both are fair. If they fall into the hands of unscrupulous planters, or of the French colonists in the South, then--then!--well! one is your wife, Bufton, while the other is an innocent gentlewoman, though your enemy's wife. Think on it."

If Lewis Granger was, indeed, trying to arouse some sentiment of humanity in Bufton's heart, he had taken the very worst way to do it; while, if he was but working on one of the worst sides of the man's nature--if, indeed, he was laying a spark to a train of fire already prepared--he had taken the surest way. For, now, with his most evil look upon his face, and with a glance that was revolting to Granger, he said--

"What in the devil's name care I what befalls them? Anne Pottle was merciless to me; let her die in the colonies, or go to the first Southern planter's arms that open to her. Either way it quits me of her. While for that other--that white-faced wife of the insolent sailor--well! he will have missed his heiress as much as I have done. And," he continued, chuckling, "if both of us lose our wives, maybe we can find others."

"You are implacable."

"I am implacable. Curse them all, have they not ruined me between them!"

"With Anne I could, perhaps, understand your desire; but with the other--she has not wronged you. And--you have a sword--there is another revenge open to you."

"Help me, or don't help me," Bufton cried, rapping his fist upon the table; "but curse your infernal preaching! Only, if you refuse, never now shall you have one farthing of that money at my mother's death. Never; never."

"I will help you once again. But this is for the last time. I have helped you too often, have ruined myself for you once. It is for the last time."

"Ay! for the last time. I swear it."

"So," said Granger inwardly to himself, "do I. For the last time."

After which they put their heads together as to how Ariadne and Anne were to be entrapped to Plaistow Marshes, and to the spot where the boat would be waiting to convey them to the schooner, and afterwards to slavery, or disgrace, or death.

CHAPTER XV.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

"A letter is the way," Granger said, as they continued their discourse; "a little letter. Only, who is to write it? Your Anne--your wife," he added, observing Bufton wince, "knows your handwriting. You used to pen some charming *billets-doux* to 'A. T.,' you remember. Unfortunately it was the

wrong 'A. T.' But then we did not know that."

As he spoke, his eyes, which now missed nothing, saw Bufton's hands close on the knife and fork which were in each, as though he would commit murder with them--on one person, at least!--and he knew that the poison of madness which he was distilling was sinking into the rogue's soul. Sinking in, and doing its work!

"And," he continued, "although neither of our 'A's '--neither the true heiress, whom Barry has gotten; nor the false, whom you possess--know my handwriting, Barry himself does so, and he might find the precious thing when the women are gone. Yet, somehow, a letter--a lure--must be written."

"But how? How? Who is to write it, then?" and Bufton's voice seemed hoarse, raucous with emotion, as he spoke. "You have a clerk. Is he----"

"Bah! And let him know our secret! To sell it to Barry, and--and--land us at Execution Dock! No, let me think." Whereon he thought, or appeared to think, and to be sunk in meditation. Yet, if he were only now working out a further strain of his revenge, it was somewhat remarkable! Then, presently, he spoke again--

"There is," he said, "hard by here a man who keeps a small shop and sells necessaries to the sailors. And, because they are ignorant creatures--not one in fifty can read or write--he indites letters for them to their wives and mothers ere they sail; sends their fond love to their Mollys and Pollys. Since he knows me, I scarce can ask him to----"

"Write a letter for you," Bufton interrupted. "And can I, with a coat like this?" and he touched his sleeve. "With my appearance? He would suspect."

"I will prevent him from suspecting," Granger replied, his eyes upon the other. "You have finished your breakfast, I see. Therefore a little walk will refresh you. You shall go and ask him to write you a letter." Saying which, Granger rose from the table and, going to a sea-chest in the corner of the room, took out a large roll of linen for bandages, such as he sold amongst other things to skippers of ships and surgeons' mates. This he twisted into the usual shape of a sling for a wounded arm and bade Bufton bend his elbow, while the latter muttered, "I do not understand this tomfoolery."

"You will," said Granger, while, as he spoke, he enveloped the other's right hand in a swathing of the stuff.

"Now," he said, with an easily assumed smile, "away with you. The fellow's name is Gibbs, the place he lives in is Orange Row. And you are a gentleman who has arrived from Harwich, whose arm is injured. You have a sprained wrist--a whitlow on your thumb--anything will do. And you must have a letter written at once, since you cannot write it yourself. At once. You understand."

"My God, Granger!" the other exclaimed, "you are too clever." And there was such a look in the man's face as he spoke--a look almost of consternation at the other's scheming mind--that Granger began to fear Bufton would become alarmed at his astuteness, especially as the latter added, "What trick can you not devise?"

"Nay. Nay," cried Granger, with heartiness, "'tis for a friend, an injured friend--misjudge me not. Remember, too, the money that is to be repaid me at your mother's death. I work for that--friendship apart. Now be off to Gibbs."

"But what can I say? What to have written?"

"Ha! I protest, almost had I forgotten. I am but a sorry schemer after all. Let me think." And again he pretended to be immersed in thought.

"Say," he went on, a moment or so later, "say--only mention no names--not one--my clerk shall address the letter; say that--that the captain's ship is aground near the Creek. That, also, he is injured sorely--an arm broken--a fracture--therefore that he cannot come nor write, but wishes--to--see--his wife. Tell her the road is through Plaistow Marshes; that if she follows it--the road that runs by the river bank--'twill bring her to where the ship is aground. That will be sufficient. She will take Anne with her for a surety; thus we nab both."

"But will she not know that Barry cannot yet be back?"

"Nay! We do not send it to-day. He will not be back until Tuesday or Wednesday, though to appease her qualms, he has told her he comes on Sunday. Dos't see? On Sunday afternoon she will get that letter. On Sunday night by dark--it still gets dark early, Bufton--she will be in the Marshes. We can easily silence their jarvey, and--and--by Monday morning, if the wind is good, they will be out to sea. While, if it is not, they will still be on their way. The tide--which I have studied--will take them."

"You forget nothing."

"I never forget anything. Now, since your wounds are dressed," and again Granger laughed,

"and since you are equipped, as well go on to Gibbs. You know what to say. Can you remember?"

"Every word. Fear not my memory. And--no name mentioned."

"No. No. Gibbs. Orange Row. That's the man. And tell him to sign the letter in the name of Bertram Norris."

"Bertram Norris. Who is he?"

"The first lieutenant. The officer who would write in such a case."

Whereupon, having received his last instructions, Bufton departed.

When he was gone, Granger threw himself into a deep chair by the fireside, and, to his astonishment, found that he was in a slight tremor, that there was a palpitation going on within his frame.

"So!" he thought to himself, as he sat there, "this will not do. I, am a long, long way off success yet; a long, long way from the end of what I have set myself to do, and already my nerves are ajar. I must quiet them. In the old way, the old cursed way that grows on me day by day."

Whereupon, as he had done so frequently, he did again, and finding his bottle, drank a dram. "If I could do without it," he whispered to himself. "If I could do without it! Yet, why should I? It brings oblivion, forgetfulness. It shuts out the picture of my mother's grave, of Sophy's face."

It was now the time of day when few people visited his place of business--for in this region all the world dined at midday--and he sat on and on waiting for Bufton to return with the letter. Sat on meditating, thinking always.

"I did not like the look he gave me as I disclosed my ruse for getting that letter written," he reflected; "almost I feared I had scared him, alarmed him with my astuteness. I must not do that! No. No. For if he once takes fright I lose him and--the chance is gone forever. I must not do that."

He looked at the bottle eagerly--wistfully--then, strong in his determination, rose from his seat and thrust it almost violently away from him into the place where he kept it.

"Later, when all is accomplished," he muttered, "when there is no more to be done, I can drink myself to death. And--with satisfaction."

"Pity, pity," he continued now, still musing, "that it could not take place to-night or to-morrow night. Yet that must not be. Barry must be back, as he will be on Sunday night. It must be Barry whom he attacks in the Marshes, or, at least, thinks he will attack. That will make assurance double sure. Double sure. Oh! my God," he cried, "let me make no mistake now. None!" While as the unhappy man uttered this cry he sprang from the chair on which he sat, and commenced to pace up and down the room.

"If Anne aids me," he whispered, "if she is staunch, we have got him in the net. He is ours. She will be free, and I--no--no--not I!--but those two women whom I loved better than my life, avenged."

Later that evening, when Bufton had returned to his end of London, leaving in Granger's hands the letter which the writer, Gibbs, had penned at the former's request and for the sum of a shilling; and leaving also the entire management of the whole of their scheme to the other, Granger set out to walk towards the place where Ariadne and Anne were installed in their lodgings. He had not, however, let his confederate, or, for such he was--his victim--depart without a few words of impressive counsel to him.

"If," he said, "you fail to be back here again on Saturday night, and ready for your part in Sunday night's work, namely, to assist the Dutchman's sailors in carrying the women off in their boat--and also to assist in identifying them to his men--your last chance is gone. You will never get rid of Anne, and you will have had no revenge on Sir Geoffrey Barry. I shall be unable to help you farther."

"Never fear. I shall not fail if I am alive: Yet one thing troubles me."

"What is it?"

"This. Even though that wanton, Anne, goes to the colonies, it does not free me. She may live for years there if she falls into good hands--she might even live to return."

"Might she?" said Granger, in a low voice, while as he spoke he directed a glance into the other's eyes that spoke as plainly as a thousand words would have done. Then, sinking that voice lower, he said, "I know the master of the *Nederland*. I have had transactions with him before. You understand?"

"Yes," whispered Bufton, fascinated, as the eyes of the other seemed to pierce him with the fire they emitted. "Yes--my God!--I understand." Then, a moment later, after a pause, and while still held by that glance, "Yes--I understand. *How much?*"

"Bring," Granger said hoarsely, "a bag of fifty guineas; he shall know that you will hand it to the coxswain in command of the boat, and--and--and you will be a wid----"

"Soon?"

"The first dark night at sea. She will throw herself overboard in despair."

"Throw herself overboard! Throw herself over---- Ah! Yes. Yes. I comprehend. Throw herself overboard!" And, laughing and chuckling, Bufton departed, though not without muttering once more, "Throw herself overboard."

And now, rejoicing over the dust he had cast in the man's eyes--while wondering, too, how he could ever himself have been tricked and ruined by so easy a knave and fool as Bufton was, Granger went on towards Blackwall steps, and, when there, stood listening for eight o'clock to sound from Stepney Church. Then, as he heard the hour strike, he walked swiftly towards a woman dressed in black who was approaching him.

"Well!" she exclaimed, coming close up to him and letting her veil fall away from her face. "Well? Does he take? Is the trap set?"

"Ay, with his own bait, Anne. See here," and he took a paper from his pocket and held it out to her; "'tis his own ratsbane with which he has set his own springe. And he paid a shilling for it."

The girl took the paper and read it beneath the light of an oil lamp shining hard by, while laughing a little in that soft, musical voice of hers as she did so; then she gave it back to him, whereon he tore the letter into shreds and, walking to the quay-side, dropped it into the water. "It was a shilling wasted," she said, as he came back to her.

"Nay, a shilling well spent. While deluding him with the idea that he has set a snare for you and Lady Barry, it induces him to walk into it himself."

"And," she asked, her bright, wicked-looking eyes glistening beneath the sickly rays of the lamp, "what is to do next? What will happen?"

"Terrible things. Amongst others, you will be so overwhelmed with your horrid fate that you will fling yourself overboard one dark night at sea. Lady Barry, too, will become the prey of a licentious Southern planter. Sir Geoffrey will perhaps go mad with despair. Is it not terrifying?"

"Nay, do not bite," she answered, while still she laughed softly. "But tell me what is to be done--with him?"

"He will await you in the Marshes with the Dutch skipper's men. Only--you will not come. Instead, Sir Geoffrey will do so. At least, I hope he will do so. And our good friend, who will learn that by some ill fate you cannot meet him, must be content with having Barry set upon and transported to the colonies."

"A likely tale!" Anne said. "Can you make him believe that?"

"I think so. I can induce him to lead Sir Geoffrey to his doom. All depends, however, on Barry getting back. If he returns not by Sunday afternoon we may fail."

"He will return," Anne said. "A Redriff lugger which he met outside at sea has come in with a letter from him, saying that he has distributed almost all his men amongst the ships of war at the Nore and Chatham; that soon he will be back. Perhaps before Sunday."

"So! That is well. There is, however, one other thing to do. Namely, to get Barry to the Marshes, so that thereby we may secure the other. Or rather *keep* him in them. For if you and your lady came not he might take alarm and thus depart himself."

"But will he not go there expecting us, and, waiting, be seized upon? Cannot that be done?"

"It is impossible. At once he would suspect. No, he must go with me to the Marshes; then, but not before, he must know that you are not coming, but that Barry is. And he must make sure of Barry before he will approach anywhere near where the boat's crew is. Anne, we must get your master there somehow. Remember, we have a coward to deal with; a man who, if he is half a fool, is also wholly knave. We know that."

"God knows we do," sighed Anne, laughing no more as she thought of her dead sister. "Well! how is it to be done? Neither Ariadne nor Sir Geoffrey would join in any further plot. She regrets the other one--the plot of the marriage."

"Somehow," said Granger, "it must be done. This is our chance. If we miss it now it will never come again. And we have three clear days still to meditate upon it. Meet me here again in forty-eight hours; by then I will have devised some means."

CHAPTER XVI.

WEAVING THE NET.

Ariadne was happy again; happy once more for a short time. The *Mignonne* lay at her old anchorage on the Saturday night following the events just detailed, and in her stateroom, or main cabin, Geoffrey sat at the head of his table, and she was opposite to him. The solitary lodgings were discarded for a time--if they were ever to be occupied again, which was not likely, since, when the frigate went to join Hawke's fleet, Ariadne would retire to Fanshawe Manor, there to wait and wait and watch for his return, and pray to God that that return might be allowed. The lodgings were therefore given up now, and for ever, and she was with her husband. Oh! how happy she would be, she said again and again, if only they had never more to part, or, parting, that he had not to go forth upon so perilous an enterprise as that of fighting the French.

But to-night, as they sat together, she would not allow even this sad prospect to distract her. To-night she was resolved to be gay and bright, and to make her husband's return to what she called "home" a happy and cheerful one.

"For," she said to him, "who knows but that, after all, you may not have to go to the fleet, that you may not have to fight the French----"

"Hush, Ariadne, hush," he said. "No more of this, I beseech you, if you are a true wife of mine. What! I a sailor, with war going on, and not take part in it. Great heavens! what kind of a sailor then should I be, and what likelihood of ever obtaining my flag? Nay, Ariadne, my sweet, never speak like that."

"Forgive me, oh! forgive me, Geoff. But I love you so, so fond and true. And it breaks my heart to part from you even for an hour. Yet, alas! I know that it must be, will be, until you are a great man. Oh! I wish you were an Admiral. Then you would have all you desire."

"Then," he replied, "I should be commanding fleets instead of single ships. Ariadne, you must be brave."

He was very gentle to her as he spoke; gentle always, not only because he loved her, but because he knew what a sad lot was that of a sailor's wife in those days. The whole world was one more plunged in war, although but two great Powers, England and France, were the principal combatants; and between those two it was war to the knife. One side or other had to triumph, and the triumph would be final for many years to come. We were determined to possess ourselves of Canada, the American fisheries, the sugar trade of Guadeloupe, and the whole of the African trade at last if it could be done, and, already, we were fast possessing ourselves of India; while, to draw off our attention from those far-off places, Conflans was meditating an invasion of England herself. The year, which was afterwards to be termed and known as the "Great '59," was indeed likely to prove a stormy one. And, amidst this storm, none would play a greater part than the Navy of England. Hawke, Dennis, Boscowen, Speke, and Keppel--the most illustrious names of the time--were all upon the seas; men were being sought for everywhere and obtained by every means possible, through crimps and impressment, by large bounty and offers of increased pay. Even now, Geoffrey Barry had returned with the *Mignonne* empty of all the men he had taken away with him five days before, and an Admiralty tender had brought him instructions to procure more and more. And what he was doing was being done by scores of naval captains in other parts of England.

He recognised, indeed, that the lot of the sailor's wife was a hard one in those days--a mournful, heart-breaking one. For loving women might be parted from their husbands for months and years, even supposing that the latter lived through the storm and stress of their careers; while even this was, after all, the brightest side of both the sailor's and the sailor's wife's existence. The reverse side was a violent death at any moment; or, which was perhaps almost as bad, captivity of considerable duration in a French prison, and with no knowledge of that captivity coming to those at home who were waiting for the loved one's return.

Even now, as Geoffrey sat in his own cabin facing the wife whom he worshipped so fondly and truly, he knew that ere long he would have to leave her side for months--to return, it might be, a successful conqueror; but, as was equally likely, a crippled, wounded man. Or, which also was equally probable, never to return at all.

"I have to find a hundred more men somewhere," he said to her, "to take away from here next week. And how to do it I do not know. I wonder if that man Granger, or Lewis, as he now calls himself, can be of any further assistance."

He had told Ariadne, before he went on the short cruise from which he had this morning returned, of his discovery of Granger, the man who, she would remember, had been Bufton's best

man at the marriage into which he had been entrapped by Anne Pottle; and he had also told her of how this man had once been an officer in his own service, from which he had been court-martialled and removed for scandalous behaviour. And he had stated that the man had again asserted his innocence, as he had asserted it on the day of his trial, and that, at last, he was inclined to believe in his assertion.

"For," he said, "there was something in his manner, something in the ring of his voice, that had the appearance of truth. My God! if he was innocent he has been cruelly dealt with."

But, now, the very mention of Bufton's name caused Ariadne considerable agitation--agitation of so extreme a nature as to remove from her mind any feeling of interest or compassion which she might otherwise have felt in Granger's fate.

"Oh! Geoffrey," she exclaimed. "That man! That man! Your mention of him recalls to my mind what I meant to tell you. I saw him here, in this neighbourhood, but the other day. The day on which you sailed. What can he--that beau--that fop--be doing here?"

"You saw him here! In this locality!" her husband exclaimed in astonishment. Yet only in astonishment for the first moment, since he added instantly--

"Yet perhaps it is not so strange either. Those two, Lewis and he, were fast friends."

"Friends! How could they be friends, Geoffrey? Have you not said that this man, Lewis, or Granger, accused him of being the absolute scoundrel in that affair for which he was ruined and disgraced? And, also, Anne says that it was Granger who assisted her in the self-sacrificing vengeance which she exacted from him. How can they be friends?"

For a moment Geoffrey sat meditating deeply, then he replied--

"In truth, it does seem impossible they should be so. Unless--unless this man Granger also considers that he too was avenged by Anne's act--or--or--not being satisfied with that, still seeks for more."

"What further vengeance can he take on him?"

"Heaven alone knows. Yet one thing I can imagine, can guess from Granger's manner. He is a strong, resolute man, as is easy to see. If, as I do believe is the case, that other ruined him, he would never forgive. He helped to lead him towards Anne's vengeance; he would not falter in exacting his own."

"Yet what could he do against Bufton here? In such a place as this?"

"I cannot guess. Indeed, all I can hazard is but guess-work. Still, I cannot understand that fellow being here."

"Suppose," said Ariadne, "that he himself, this man Bufton, were here on a mission of revenge. Against----"

"Against whom, child?"

"Against Anne. Doubtless he has never forgiven her for what he must regard as the ruin of his existence. Suppose that! And, perhaps, he hates you for obtaining the wife he thought he was himself going to possess."

But at this latter Geoffrey laughed loud and long. Was he not, he asked his wife, the most powerful man in the neighbourhood at the present moment? Did not the *Mignonne* lie armed in the river, and was she not manned by a stalwart crew?

"As well," he said, "might the rogue meditate harm against the old Tower of London lying farther up the stream. While as for Anne," he continued; "well! Anne is aboard my ship, and, when ashore, is able to take her own part, especially as she never goes on land at night. And, dear heart," he concluded, "this is not Naples nor any part of Italy, where people can be hired for a handful of silver pieces to take the lives of others."

Yet, all the same, his girl-wife was not convinced, and although she would not say so, she dreaded the time when she and Anne should be left behind, and Geoffrey gone to join the fleet. Meanwhile, not a mile away from where the frigate lay, namely, at Granger's house, a different conversation was taking place between that person and Algernon Bufton, who (true to his word and his deep desire for revenge, which he had been brooding over ever since he had had the idea instilled into his mind) had now returned to the neighbourhood of Blackwall. And here he meant to remain, or, at least, in the locality, though farther down the river, until midnight next day (Sunday). By which time he hoped to see the topsails of the *Nederland* fill, and the schooner depart with, on board of her, Anne Pottle, his wife, and Lady Barry, her mistress, bound for the American plantations.

"All is arranged, all settled now," said Granger. "I protest," and he laughed a little as he spoke, "that you in your most brilliant days--and you were good at schemes in those days--never could have arranged anything more cleverly."

"Tell me the scheme," Bufton almost growled now, wishing at the same time that his old dupe would not for ever be harping upon his whilom aptitude for tricking other people. "Tell it to me," he said. "Though," he continued, "I must aver that, if I was once good at schemes, I found an apt pupil in you. You have profited by my instructions."

"The scheme is this," Granger said. "The letter will be delivered to Lady Barry by a sure hand when she comes out of church to-morrow. And you may be very confident she will lose no time. Be sure that she, with her companion--your beloved wife!--will hasten towards the point named, where the creek runs into the river. And the boat will be there to take them off, no matter how they resist."

"One thing alone I fear," said Bufton. "Supposing that she, the mistress, proclaims her rank and position; declares that she is known to be his wife--is Lady Barry. Will the master not be afraid?"

"Never. Not he! His sails will be bent, he will be ready to drop down the river at once. For," he added, "I have taken good care to warn him that, whatever protest may be made by the victim or victims--no heed shall be paid to it. No heed paid to any statement as to position or rank. The master is warned that they will be lies."

"Good," chuckled Bufton. "Good. All lies. No heed will be paid to them."

"None at all," Granger said, with emphasis. "They will be absolutely useless. Likewise it is a common thing for persons brought on board to make such protestations. Women often enough declare themselves to be people of position, ladies of rank, in the hopes of being released; and men call themselves gentlemen, noblemen. But never are such things of avail."

"Good. Good," cried Bufton again, snapping his fingers in ecstasy. "Oh! good. So that there is no chance! No hope!"

"None. Once on board that schooner there is no hope until America is reached. Instead, such despair that---"

"That people sometimes throw themselves overboard," Bufton interrupted, rubbing his chin, and with a baleful look in his eyes.

"Ay--'tis so. But," and now Granger's eyes seemed to pierce those of the other, "the master expects those fifty guineas we spoke of."

"He shall have them," said Bufton. "Oh! he shall. Alas! poor Anne. I fear she will be driven to the despair you spoke of. Later, I shall assume mourning for her--when I have heard the news. 'Twill be but decorous perhaps."

"I *know* she will be so driven. Now, listen to what you have to do. It would be best that you keep here until to-morrow afternoon. Then, when dusk is coming, we will proceed towards the creek (pray Heaven the *Mignonne* returns not first!), having taken care to have the letter delivered, and there we will await their coming. Once they arrive at the spot, 'tis done in a moment."

"You are a marvellous man!" cried Bufton. "Oh! a marvellous one. We shall succeed. We shall. I know we shall."

"We cannot fail. Now let us to bed. Tomorrow we have much to do."

Bufton would not, however, go to bed at once, declaring that on this night they must drink success to their great scheme; to his revenge and freedom, as he termed it. But at last Granger induced him to do so, and led him to a room at the back of the house, from the windows of which a fair view down the river could be obtained. He had also another spare room that looked up the river, and from which all the shipping lying in it was to be observed; but to put Bufton there would not have done. For amongst other masts and yards might have been seen towering the tall top-gallant yards of the *Mignonne*, with, flying above them, her streaming pennon. That would not, indeed, have done, since, thus, the deluded man might have understood that Sir Geoffrey Barry was back, and that, consequently, the letter he supposed was about to be sent to Ariadne on the morrow would be useless.

"Sleep well," said Granger, "sleep well; and wake up brisk and hearty in good time. And when you gaze out on to the Marshes in the morning, pray Heaven that you do not see the *Mignonne* coming up stream." With which benediction, and turning his face away from the candle's gleam so that Bufton should not observe it, he quitted the room.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DISCOVERY.

The March wind died down during the night, so that, when the dawn came, the whole neighbourhood was enveloped in one of the many exhalations which are constantly arising from the Marshes hard by. And, all through the day, there was still an absence of breeze, so that the fog and mist remained hanging like a pall over the locality, and shrouding everything from observation which was more than a few yards distant.

"You see," said Granger, as now he and Bufton made their way on foot early, and not waiting for the afternoon--on foot, because thus attention would be less likely to be attracted--"how fortune favours us. A better day it would be impossible to desire. Until the victims are near at hand, close to where the boat will be alongside the shore, all will be invisible. Yet not that it matters much, for down where that will lie none ever come after dark, and not many by daylight."

They neared now an inn which, in the days of George II., and those of his successor--at this time so close at hand--stood in the Marshes. It was a low-roofed, one-storied place; whitewashed so that, it was said, vessels coming up the river might discern it as a landmark; and it was used for more than one nefarious practice. For smuggling purposes it was not particularly well adapted, since, by the time vessels had got so far up as to be off it in the river, they had little enough in them which had escaped the revenue officers; yet, even then, they occasionally had something to dispose of. Sometimes it was a small barrel of spirits inside a larger one, the space between the two being filled up with fresh water, whereby, if tapped, the latter fluid alone ran out, leaving that which was more valuable intact in its case; sometimes, too, bottles of cheap common wine on which a small duty had been paid, but which, below the first and second layers, contained things far more valuable and subject to a higher duty, such as Mechlin, Brussels, Valenciennes, and Château Thierry lace stuffed into them; and also other matters. There was not, however, as has been said, much to be done in this way, the place being so far inland and twenty miles from the sea as the crow flies, and it was more in the traffic of human beings than aught else that the landlord of the "Red Rover" made his money. For many a man had been taken off drunk from his house (who had come into it perfectly sober, and meaning only to have "one half-pint" before continuing his journey) to some ship lying hard by; many a girl and woman now slaving their hearts out in the colonies had been inveigled into the inn by pretended lovers and sold in the same way. Thus the landlord had done a roaring trade, and still did one--or would have done if men had been forthcoming--by supplying sailors to His Majesty's fleet; while, to add as well to his income, the fellow was under the rose a fence of the worst description, and over and over again the proceeds of successful housebreaking in the surrounding counties--proceeds such as silver salvers, coffee-pots, and antique tankards--had, after lying in his vaults or being buried in his *fumier* at the back of the house for some time, gone to grace the sideboards of Carolina or Virginia planters.

"Here," said Granger, "you can rest at your ease until night comes. The house is of none too good repute, yet 'twill serve your purpose. Also, the landlord is away. I protest we are a strange people in this England of ours! Vagabond as the man is, he is now serving on a jury at Chelmsford, where it should be strange if he does not help to try many of his own kidney. Strange, too, 'twill be if, some day, he is not tried himself."

"What will you do?" asked Bufton, when they had been shown into a private parlour, a fire had been lighted, and something brought to warm them, he ignoring Granger's description of the landlord's present occupation. "You must help me, you know; I rely on you."

"Have I ever failed?" Granger asked, with a fierce glance--a glance of assumed fierceness. "And--as to what I have to do! Why, man, countless things. First, to warn the master of the schooner that he must be ready to drop down the river at any time after six this evening. Next, to get the letter delivered, and also to see that the women set out. That is, unless now, even at the last, you resolve to spare them."

"Spare them!" repeated Bufton contemptuously, fiercely. "Let us not talk folly."

"So be it, since you are resolute. Well! I must away. Now, keep close and snug; but quit not this room. No questions will be asked: though, should any arise, you are a gentleman, a planter, taking passage to Delaware. That will suffice."

"You think of everything! Granger, at my mother's death you shall be paid in full----"

"No matter for that now. Evilly as you once treated me, I know that I shall be paid in full," the other said, hoping, even as he did so, that he had not emphasised his words too strongly.

"I will sleep, and eat, and drink," said Bufton; "thus the time will pass. And I did not sleep very well last night; to-night, when all is accomplished, I shall rest. I shall be content."

"Doubtless! I hope so." With which words Granger turned and left the other. Yet, as he reached the door he uttered another word or two--

"The master of the *Nederland* will expect that fifty guineas," he said, "if-if-Anne is--to--well! to fling herself overboard. You understand?"

"Ay, I understand. And I have them here," touching his breast pocket. "When will he desire to receive them?"

"As they go on board, as they are taken on board. To-night, when I return, hand them to me. Then, since you will scarce desire to appear too prominently, I will give them to the man in the boat."

"I have a vizard mask," whispered Bufton.

"So, too, have I. Yet I may not need it. Now, till to-night, farewell."

After which Granger went away, leaving Bufton to his reflections.

He went away, that is to say, so far as to descend the stairs with the intention of at once departing for Blackwall, there to have an interview with Anne. For, although the girl had told him that he must contrive to inveigle Bufton into the neighbourhood of where the schooner was lying without any assistance from her, he still hoped that such assistance might be obtained. Otherwise, he knew that Bufton would depart from the "Red Rover" by the time night had come, and the last chance would then indeed be gone. Nothing, he knew also, would have drawn the man to the Marshes but the hope of wreaking his vengeance on his wife and on--through Ariadne--Sir Geoffrey Barry.

Granger paused now, however, to take a glass of spirits before setting out to walk the two other miles of his journey, and, indeed, the atmosphere which prevailed outside would have justified any one on those Marshes in doing so, on such a day as this. For the raw, damp mist had by now turned into a thicker, more raw and clammy fog, so that one could scarcely see thirty yards ahead, while, in the house itself, it seemed to be creeping along the passages and into rooms, and up the flight of stairs which led to the next and only floor above.

"If it continues like this," Granger muttered to himself, as now he pushed open the door of a bar-parlour, and went into the room, "it will serve our--my purpose. That is, if at night one can see at all."

The bar was attended by a slatternly-looking girl, the one who had lit the fire in the sitting-room above and served Granger and Bufton with what they had called for; though, because it was early in the morning, she had no customers to draw for. Whereupon, after giving Granger the drink he desired, she locked up the bottles and glasses in their cupboard and went away, leaving him alone. Alone, and as was ever the case when he found himself so, meditating deeply on the past. Yet now--and he was surprised at the feelings which had taken possession of him--on this morning of all others--when his last act of revenge was close at hand and Bufton was about to pay for the ruin he had brought upon him--now it almost seemed as if he had grown listless in his desire for that vengeance; as if he scarcely cared to go on with what he had hitherto pursued with such eagerness and tenacity.

"What is it?" he asked himself, as he stood with the glass in his hand, looking over the red blind of a window in the bar-parlour which gave on to the passage; a window at which the landlord sometimes passed hours in the observation of those who entered and quitted his house--"what is it that is influencing me, slackening my desires?" And, being no student of ethics, he was not altogether able to tell himself how often listlessness comes, accompanied by a cessation of desire, when, at last, that which we have striven for so hard is within our grasp; is to be had for the taking. Nevertheless, he continued his musings, saying again, "What is it? Am I forgetting my hatred of the man above, forgetting all my vows of retaliation because I am growing well-to-do and am making money fast by my loathsome calling? Is that possible--or does the passion for revenge die out at last, as every other passion we possess dies in time? Shall I spare him now, at the last moment? Or tell him to-night that the plot he imagines I have concocted has failed--and--let him go free? Shall I do that, or must I force myself to think of my dead mother again, of my lost love, thereby to spur myself on to finish what I have begun?"

Meditating thus, Lewis Granger was at his best; his worst--which was what Fate and a scoundrel had made him--was away falling into the background. He was at his best! and that best was triumphing, was triumphant. He became resolved; to-night Bufton should be told that nothing could be done, that neither Ariadne nor Anne could come, that their trick had failed since the *Mignonne* had returned. Thus the man himself should be spared. Bufton should go free and his own vengeance sleep for ever. Truly Granger was at his best!

Deciding thus, determined that even now--at once--he would return to the room above and tell its occupant that this had happened, he was about to turn away from the window through which he was still glancing heedlessly as he ruminated, when he saw a man enter the passage, and, after looking round and about the place in a cautious manner, proceed, with an evident attempt to avoid observation if possible, towards the foot of the stairs.

"Where have I seen that fellow before?" he thought, even as he edged himself to the blind so that, thereby, he could follow the newcomer's movements along the passage. "Where? I know him, have seen him lately. That bulldog-looking form and those earrings are familiar to me!"

Then, in a moment, he recalled who the man was. He remembered that he was the mate of the *Nederland*, and that he had observed him at work on the deck of the schooner, and giving orders to the sailors as to the bestowal of casks and bales in the hold only a day or so ago when he had visited the master.

Not knowing, or scarcely knowing, why this man's presence here should surprise him, or why, indeed, he should feel any surprise at all, except at the stealthy, cautious way in which he skulked along the passage in so surreptitious a manner--since the "Red Rover" was the only place of call on this side of the river for some mile or so--he determined to see where the man was going. Whereon, opening the door of the bar-parlour as quietly as might be, he looked out into the passage and was in time to observe the back of the mate vanishing round the landing of the stairs.

"Strange," he thought to himself; "strange. What business can he have up there? He is not, cannot be, living ashore in the house; who then can he desire to see, or what desire to do?"

While, as he so thought, he heard a slight rap given on a door above and a voice call out, "Who is it?"

The voice of Bufton.

Then, standing at the foot of the stairs, but sheltered from observation overhead by the dirty ceiling beneath the landing floor--sheltered too from observation by the fog that now filled the house--Granger heard the door of the room Bufton was in opened, and a whispered question and answer. After which the door was closed to again, and he heard no more. The visitor had been admitted.

"So," Granger said to himself, "I am not to have it all my own way, it would seem. The good Bufton has evidently two strings to his bow. Yet how in Heaven's name has he done it! How has he formed an intimacy with any one on board the schooner? Later, perhaps, I shall know, as well as his reason for doing so. At least let me try for the means of knowing as soon as possible."

The means he took were to proceed at once up the stairs himself, doing so very quietly and as stealthily as he who had gone before him had done; and then, when on the unclean stone passage, he went quietly past the door of the room where the men were until he came to another door next to it.

"This may do," he said. "I think it may. I have slept in most of these rooms when my affairs required my presence here. And if I remember aright--nay! as I know it is, there are communicating doors between these two rooms. I should indeed learn something."

With every precaution that it was possible to take, he opened now the door of the second room, seeing at once as he did so that it had not been let nor occupied overnight; then he shut it, and, finding the key within, locked it. After which, sitting down upon the bedside, he drew off his shoes and laid them on the bed.

"If no one comes to this room for a quarter of an hour," he thought, "as no one is likely to come, since it requires no attention, I ought to hear all I desire."

Upon which he crept quietly to the communicating door, and listened to the conversation that was already being carried on upon the other side of it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RUSE CONTRE RUSE.

"If it could be done," Granger heard Bufton say, those being the first words he caught, "it would ease me for ever. He is a weight upon my existence, and I would pay you well. Have you thought of it since we met two days ago across the water at Charlton?"

"Across the water! At Charlton! So," muttered Granger, "that is it. While I supposed my friend was in London, he has been on the other side planning his own schemes. And who is the man who is a weight upon his existence? Who? Can I guess? Perhaps!"

"Yes, I have thought of it," he heard the voice of the mate reply, and he knew at once that the owner of that voice was neither Englishman nor English colonist, in spite of his speaking the tongue well. Perhaps, instead, a Swede or Salzburger, such as the colony of Georgia was much

peopled with. "Yes, I have thought of it. Very much I have. But it is hard. You see he is a friend of the master's. He sells him many men and women. The master knows him well."

"So do I," Granger whispered. "So do I know him well. I know the man who is a weight on your existence, Bufton!" And, even as he thus mused, his hand dropped into the pocket by his side and touched the butt of a pistol in it. Though at the same time he muttered between his teeth, "Not yet. Let me hear more."

"That would not matter," Bufton said now, his voice low, but still distinct enough to be heard by the listener in the next room. "Would not matter much. He would lie in the 'tween decks during the voyage--is't not so? And if he did not, what matter--when once you are at sea?"

"He would come back," the mate said, "in two--three--four--months. What good that?"

"He might," said Bufton, "*throw himself overboard* in despair. I have--heard--of such--things--happening--on dark nights. Such things are done--will--perhaps be done by others; by one of the women you will take to-night. If--he--did do so--if you brought me the news when you visit England again, there would be a purse for you."

"Devil," whispered Granger on the other side of the door. "Devil incarnate, you have learnt your lesson well." And again he felt for the pistol, withdrawing, however, his hand quickly, in fear that his passion would overmaster him and cause him to precipitate matters.

"Oh yes! he might," the mate replied, with a deep gurgling laugh. "He might. Such things are done----"

"Have happened," interposed Bufton.

"Yes. Oh yes! Have happened. It could be done--could 'happen.' But that is not all. The master will see him brought on board. He sees all before they go below."

"He will be masked. We have provided ourselves with them, so that the women shall not know us. He will be masked as well as I. And, in the fog and the darkness of the night, how can the skipper recognise him? Turn him face downwards, too, and say that he is drunk. None will know that he has been stunned instead."

The white-faced listener on the other side of the door--white-faced not from fear, but from passion--muttered nothing now. Instead, he nodded his head reflectively, as though conning weighty matters; but still he never took his ear from the door.

"That might pass," the mate said, "that might pass. Only how to get him?"

"This way. Listen. The women come first----"

"*Do they?* thought Granger.

"Then, when they are secured and sent to the boat (the sailors who go with them saying that a man is also being brought from the spot two or three hundred yards away), I will start to follow, bidding him come after me when he has discharged the carriage. Therefore, your men will know whom to take. It will be the second man."

"The second man," repeated the mate.

And Granger also repeated (but to himself), "The second man."

"Ay, the second man. Both being masked."

"We can attempt it," the sailor said now. "But though we shall doubtless get him on board and down below, I would be sworn the master will discover all when we are at sea. He will inspect his live-stock, and then----"

"Then," said Bufton, "there will be the accident which will follow--the casting of himself into the sea in despair. Will there not, my friend?"

"Perhaps," the other answered, in a voice that sounded like a dubious one. "But--but--these things----"

"Are worth money. True. Yet listen. He will have a bag of fifty guineas on him which I shall have handed over to him for another purpose."

"Fifty guineas!"

"Ay. And when you return to England another fifty for you, if he--has--fallen overboard. Also still another fifty----"

"Another fifty! Making a hundred!"

"Making a hundred, if a woman on board that ship has also--by accident--or through despair--fallen over. A woman calling herself Anne Bufton."

"Why! That is your name!"

"Calling herself by my name. You understand?"

"Yes. I understand. And about the money too. Fifty guineas in the man's pocket; a hundred more when I return if--if--these accidents, or suicides, have happened. And it will be the second man."

"The second man. Masked."

"Shake hands," said the mate, and Granger heard a smart clasp given, or rather the contact of their hands when brought together. The compact was made.

"And I had faltered in my purpose," Granger whispered to himself, "had resolved to spare this man. To bury the past!"

He drew on his shoes again now, feeling sure that the interview in the next room was concluded, or almost concluded; and knowing that he must be gone either before the mate came forth or wait until he had departed. Yet, while he was doing so he still heard the others talking--his ears having grown accustomed by now (as well as quickened) to catch their words easily. He heard Bufton ask--

"How long--if they, the woman calling herself by my name, and this man who is my evil genius, do not kill themselves at sea--how long are they bound for in the colonies?"

"Four years," the mate replied. "Four years. The planters will not have them for longer now. They say they are worn out by then. And so indeed they are. By the climate, by labour, and by hard usage."

"Do they use them hardly, then?"

"Often, though not always. Yet they do not spare them much. I have seen a redemptioner at death's-point digging the grave he was soon to fill, so that his owner should get the last piece of work out of him that he would ever obtain. But now people begin to talk, to curse the King here for letting such things be. There is a man out there who says King George should have nests of rattlesnakes sent him in return for the convicts and 'kids' that are sent over to the colonies."

Bufton muttered something in reply to this which Granger could not catch, but a moment later he did hear him say, "Well, one more sup before you go. The bottle is not empty," and his words were followed a moment later by the sound of glasses clinking.

"This is my time," the latter thought. "I must go. There is much to do ere night." Whereon, unlocking the door gently, he stole out into the damp and reeking corridor, and through the fog that had penetrated into all the house, and so away downstairs and out into the Marshes.

He knew the road and could have found it blindfolded in spite of all the gloom that was around him, and he sped along it as fast as he could go without running. For now it was all-important, vital, that he should see Anne; that he should get her to help him, as he had helped her in the scheme of vengeance which had formed the first and least important part of his own plot. To help him in what, this morning, he had decided to abandon. But now--now--he swore to himself--he would never abandon it; to-night it should be brought to completion.

"The second man," he muttered as he went along, and once or twice he laughed aloud even as he so muttered "the second man." But beyond those words he said little else.

Arrived at the Brunswick Stairs, he scribbled a note to Anne, which he sent off to the *Mignonne* by a waterman, and then retreated from the raw fog and damp into a tavern where he was well known, when, ordering a private room, to which he gave orders she should be shown at once, he sat awaiting her coming.

"She will do it," he told himself again and again. "She will do it, I know. And thus we win at last."

Presently Anne arrived, anxious to hear what had happened, and if anything had arisen to, in any way, circumvent their doing that which they had decided on. Though, if she had been nervous as to whether some impediment might have cropped up to prevent the fulfilment of their schemes, that nervousness vanished as Granger told her almost in a whisper--for even in this private room he was cautious as to how he used his voice--of the conversation he had overheard at the "Red Rover." And, when he came to the description of how "the second man"--who was himself--was to be betrayed into an ambush, and, whispering even lower still, said something else to her, her bright eyes glistened, and she laughed wickedly.

"Oh! Granger," she said, "I protest you are a schemer, a plotter. Next, you must try the theatre----"

"Mock not," he said; "be serious. To-night ends all our woes. And, as to theatres, where are your clothes? That apparel in which you figured when you played----"

"Alas!" she said, "all are at Fanshawe Manor, locked up by my mother in her old sea-chest. She would have burnt them in her rage, had I not begged them off."

He thought a moment, evidently pondering deeply, then she saw his face brighten, and he said he could contrive very well, only she must come to his house with him.

"You are a fine, upstanding girl," he said, "and as tall as I am, I being none too lofty myself. Come with me at once, will you, Anne?"

"Ay," she answered, "or go to--well--no matter where--to do this thing. For God's sake, let us not fail. I think ever of my little murdered sister, not of myself."

"Nor I of myself. But of others slain through his cursed machinations. And to-day, this very day, when I would have let all sink into oblivion, when I would have buried the past, he was again scheming to ruin me once and for all. My girl, we will not fail. Come, Anne."

As they went along she told him, however, that what they had to do must be accomplished as early in the evening as possible, so that she should get back to the frigate to be with Ariadne.

"For," she said, "I do think--nay, am very positive, that my mistress will be alone this night. Granger," she continued, "Sir Geoffrey means to take a boarding-party down to that schooner and capture some of her live cargo. The sailors heard him say that it would be at midnight."

"That," Granger answered, "would ruin all. Yet I doubt his being in time. The boat will be ashore for the 'victims'--for you, Anne, and for your mistress, and for the 'man'--for me, it seems now"--and he smiled wanly--"as soon after nightfall as may be. Yet," he asked, "why this sudden determination?"

"A tender came from the Admiralty this morning. The fleet is to sail almost at once, in a few days, for Minorca, and Sir Edward Hawke requires more men. If Sir Geoffrey boards the schooner, or catches her, he will take all the able-bodied men he can obtain."

"Some--I, for instance, if I get knocked on the head--will not be very able-bodied," he said, with a quick glance at the girl.

"*Not if the blow should kill,*" she replied, with another glance equally as significant.

They reached the house now, and, since time was pressing, he took her into a room, and, when there, bade her cast her eyes around and see if she could find that which was necessary. While the girl, glancing into the cupboards and at pegs on which hung various garments, put her hand first on a long cloak--a boat-cloak, much frayed and worn--and then on a slouching, sombrero hat, that would, hang well over the features of the wearer; a hat vastly different from the stiff, felt, three-cornered ones of the day.

"I have seen you wear these," she said, looking at him.

"Ay, you have. And so have others, too." Whereon, with a hurried reiteration of some directions which he had already given her, he went away, telling the old woman that the lady above was not to be disturbed, and was to be provided with a meal when she required it.

Two or three hours later, he burst into the room where Bufton sat--he having passed the interval in a visit to the *Nederland*, and in warning the captain that he was to be ready to depart the moment his victim was on board, and in telling him, too, that there would be no female captives since his plot had fallen through--burst in, and, without any premeditation, said--

"Bufton, we are undone. I doubt much if the women can come. The *Mignonne* is back, she has passed up the river in this accursed fog."

"Not come!" Bufton exclaimed. "Not come. What, then, is to be done?"

"Hope for the best, but be prepared for the worst. How can they come, if Sir Geoffrey is back? They will know the letter was a lie, a concoction."

"What to do? What to do now?" almost whined Bufton, his hand to chin.

"There is but one thing to do! They might have got away before he moored--have been on their road. The frigate could not be seen till she was close to her anchorage. We must go to the spot where they were to be attacked, and wait their coming."

"Ah!" exclaimed Bufton, and, try as he might, could not prevent a look of exultation from appearing on his face. "Yes, we must do that."

While Granger, seeing that look--what was there he would not have seen on the features of the man he had watched like a lynx for so long?--said--

"Yet, 'tis a pity, too. Not to have one victim--not one!"

"Ay, not one," Bufton repeated aloud, though to himself he said, "All the same, there will be

one. And one that must be made sure of!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SECOND MAN.

The evening had come; it was seven o'clock. Towards where London lay, something--a murky, grimy-looking ball, had sunk away half an hour ago, its disappearance being followed after a very short interval by darkness and an increase of the fog, so that those who were out in the night could not see thirty paces ahead of them. Nor of artificial light was there any hereabouts in these gloomy, miserable marshes, except a glimmer that shone from one window of the "Red Rover." Yet, nevertheless, another light was dawning that, later, served to brighten somewhat the dense mist and to make it possible by degrees to see objects fifty yards away, but no further. The light of a moon approaching her second quarter and consequently rising at this time.

Nearer to London than where the inn was--nearer by some three or four hundred paces--and upon the bank close by, where there was a rough causeway running out into the river and down to the point which the lowest tide touched, two men paced slowly--Algernon Bufton and Lewis Granger. Each was now wrapped in a long cloak, that which the latter wore being almost the counterpart of the one that Anne had laid her hand upon that morning in his house--nay, in the mist and grime through which the sickly light of the moon shone fully, it was the counterpart, Bufton's being very similar to it. Each, too, held in his hand, though he had not yet assumed it, a vizard mask.

"You hear that sound?" Granger said to his companion, as now upon his accustomed ear, if not upon the other's, there came a deep grunting noise, a noise as regular as the ticking of a clock. "You hear it and know what it is?"

"I hear nothing yet. Ah! yes; now I catch it. What is the noise?"

"The thumping of oars in rowlocks. It is the quarter-boat of the schooner coming ashore for its victims. And, alas! I fear now that it will get none."

"I fear so, too," said Bufton, glancing under the flap of his hat at the other, who was peering forward along the river-bank as though he might be imagining that still there was a hope of Ariadne and Anne coming. "I fear so, too," Bufton repeated, though as he spoke he knew that nothing could now well prevent there being one victim.

"No time must be wasted," Granger said. "The schooner sails to-night as soon as the boat returns to her. Empty or full, that boat must go back within half an hour."

"What shall we do?" Bufton asked, feeling that he was trembling with excitement.

"Best go on a hundred yards or so up the road they should come. Then, after a quarter of an hour, bid the boat put off. Tell them that we are unable to provide what was expected."

"Yes. Yes. Quick. Let us do that," his companion said, while as he spoke they heard the keel of the boat grate against the causeway. They heard also a whistle given.

"A quarter of an hour," cried Granger, casting his voice towards the spot where the sound had come, "a quarter of an hour. Wait so long," and, doubtless because of the filthy reek and mist around, that voice sounded different in Bufton's ears from usual.

"Ay, ay," was called back hoarsely, in a subdued tone, from the boat. "Shall we come ashore? Shall we be needed?"

"What shall I say?" asked Granger, appearing to hesitate. "What need of---"

"Nay," his companion replied, feverishly it seemed, and in great agitation. "Tell them to do so. To--do so. They may be needed. The women may come."

"So be it." Then Granger called back, "Ay, get ashore, and be ready. You know your work."

"We know it."

"The fool!" thought Bufton. "He has signed his own death-warrant--or as good as a death-warrant."

"Come," said Granger now. "Let us go on a few hundred yards. Then, if nothing appears when ten minutes are past, 'tis very certain we have lost them."

"Ay, of course. Come."

So they walked forward those few hundred yards--they were, indeed, but three hundred--when Granger stopped near a dry dyke, along the bank of which some stunted, miserable bushes grew that, in summer, had sparse leaves upon them, but were now dank and dripping, and said--

"'Tis useless waiting. All is still as death; if wheels were coming we should hear them, as well as the jangle of harness or crack of whip. 'Tis useless. Best go back and send the boat away."

Bufton was trembling even more than before with excitement by this time, and could scarcely stammer, "Yet--yet--'tis best that one--should wait. One go back--to--the boat--and--one wait. They may--they--the women--may come yet."

"'Tis so. Well, go you back! If Anne should see you!--if--go back, I say--I--will--follow--I will follow;" and he, ordinarily so cool and collected, stammered somewhat himself.

"So be it. You will follow? Soon! Will you not?"

"Ere you have gone a hundred yards, half the distance. Go. Go. Walk slowly--to--to--give--them--the women time even now to come. Yet--stay--those guineas--for--the master."

"He has not earned them," Bufton said, appearing to hesitate about parting with his money. "He has not earned them. He----"

"No matter! Give them to me. When I come up to you we will send them off by the man in charge of the boat. The master will earn them--later. When he returns to England."

With still an affectation of disliking to part with the money, Bufton, nevertheless, drew a silken purse forth and handed it to the other, chuckling inwardly to himself at how Granger, who was now to be the "second man," would carry upon his own person the price of his enslavement--of his doom.

Then he prepared to set forth towards the causeway, where the boat was.

"Walk slowly, there is no hurry," Granger whispered; "the quarter of an hour is not yet passed. And pause once or twice--look--back; may wish you to return--to assist, if--if--at the last moment I should hear them coming."

"I will," Bufton said, "I will"; and added to himself, "I will walk slowly, and look back more than once--to make sure of you."

Whereon he set out.

As he did so, and before he had gone thirty paces Granger went off swiftly at left angles to the path the man was following--off into the mist and fog, so that none on that path, not even Bufton could see him. Yet, still, there was a figure standing where he had stood--a figure enshrouded in a long cloak, with, hanging over its brows, a flapping broad-brimmed hat--a figure that, as Granger vanished, stepped out from behind the bush by the dyke's side and stood there for some moments.

And that figure saw the man ahead turn back and look at it, while, when Bufton had done so a second time, it called out in a gruff, fog-choked voice, "Hist! I am coming now. 'Tis useless."

"Ay, come on," replied Bufton. "Come on now. 'Tis useless."

While, as he spoke, he went on himself.

Yet, because of the state of the atmosphere, he did not know that ahead of him a "first man" (who had been listening with straining ears for his oncoming footsteps--who had, by a detour, come panting to the spot sixty yards ahead of where he was) was now walking along towards the causeway. A figure, masked as those behind him were, which, hearing a deep, husky voice close by say, "You are the 'first.' Is the 'second' coming?" answered from beneath the folds of the cloak he held across his mouth, doubtless to keep out the fog--

"Ay, he is coming."

"And--he is to be taken at all hazards?"

"At all hazards."

In truth the other was coming, though still turning and turning again, to see that his supposed victim was following him. And he did see that that supposed victim was following in his footsteps. Then he turned for the last time, gloating in his triumph, rejoicing that now--in a few moments--Granger would be gone from out his path for ever; turned to find himself confronted by three shadowy forms close to him, which, ere he could utter a cry, had sprung at him; one, the biggest

and most burly, almost choking the life out of him with the brawny hands that were clenched upon his windpipe. Yet now he struggled to be free, as the rat in the trap, the panther caged, will struggle for freedom when snared and doomed; struggled so, that, at last, one of those figures struck him on the head with a bludgeon, and knocked him senseless.

"Away," that burly figure cried now. "Away with him to the boat. The time is past. Hark to the anchor cable grating through the hawse-hole; they are making ready. Away with him."

Whereupon they bore the miserable man off to the causeway, carrying him face downwards, and with still upon his face the vizard over which blood streamed now from the wound upon his crown, when, throwing him into the boat, they made off for the *Nederland*.

Then Granger stepped out from the dark obscurity to which he had retreated after speaking to the sailor who had greeted him as the "first man" and had asked if the second was coming, and went back to meet that other shrouded figure which had taken his place.

"He is gone," he said; "we are avenged and you are free. You heard?" Then, suddenly, he cried, as he saw Anne reel towards him, "What is it? You do not regret, surely?"

"Nay," the girl replied, falling almost fainting into his arms. "Nay. There is no regret, and he deserves his fate--whatsoever it may be. Yet--yet--actress as I have been--the strain was too much. Granger, help me now to get back to your house to change my clothes, and, next, to get on board the *Mignonne*."

"First come to the 'Red Rover' and have something to revive you. Come."

"Hark," she said, pausing in the step she had taken towards the inn, "hark. What is that out there in the river? That shouting?"

"It is the men's cries as they haul on to the halyards, so as to be ready when the wind comes. Yet the schooner has enough tide beneath her to carry her swiftly down to the open. Listen, Anne, their voices are becoming fainter.

"I hear. They are moving."

"They are moving. In ten minutes they will be gone."

As they sat together later, and he ministered to her wants, recognising well that, without her bravery to assist him, he could never have turned the tables so thoroughly upon Bufton's villainous scheme as he had done, he remembered the fifty guineas which the latter had handed over to him at the last moment. Whereupon he passed them over to the girl.

"They are yours, Anne. You are his lawful wife--soon, doubtless, you will be his executrix. He has still money about him, which I make no doubt the skipper of the *Nederland* will appropriate. He will land a beggar. Heaven help him!"

"You say that?" Anne exclaimed, "Heaven help him! Help him who ruined you. You can say that?"

"No," he cried savagely. "No. I do not say it. I retract. Damn him! he forged Lord Glastonbury's name, but passed the bill to me, since he owed me one-half the sum, and I paid it into Child's bank. Then, when Glastonbury caused me to be arrested on board the ship I served in, and I stated where I had obtained the bill, that craven hound now going to his fate swore he knew nought about it--that my story was a fabrication. But that his lordship and I loved the same woman, and she sacrificed herself to save my neck--unknown to me--as well as paid the money to the bankers, I should have swung at Tyburn."

"Wherefore," said Anne, "you forgave him for the time--with an end in view."

"With an end in view. An end, my determination to reach which never slackened. And it is reached. Anne, it is borne in on me that he will never come back. If he does, then----"

"He never will return," said Anne. "It is also borne in on me. Now let us go," and she moved towards the door, throwing over her the great cloak which she had removed after the drawer had quitted the room, and replacing the hat.

"You have forgotten the guineas," said Granger, noticing that she had let them lie unheeded where he had originally placed them.

"The guineas!" the girl cried. "The guineas! His money! I will never take them--never touch them. Except," she cried, seizing on the packet, "to fling them into the river. Never! Never!"

"Be not foolish. They are yours. Can you devise no means to which you can put them?"

"Ay," she said a moment later, and after thinking deeply while she stood gazing down at the table. "Ay, I can. Kitty's grave is a lonely, desolate one. Now it shall be brightened and made cheerful with the money of the man who drove her to death. Come," and as she spoke she took the packet and dropped it into her pocket. "Come, I must get back."

So Lewis Granger took the girl back to Brunswick Stairs and sent her off by a shore boat to the *Mignonne*, he learning on shore, and she when she, stepped on board the frigate, that Sir Geoffrey had set out an hour ago to board the *Nederland*, so as to take from out of her some of the men who were now so much required.

"For," said Ariadne, whom she found in the state cabin, "Sir Edward Hawke sails in a fortnight for Torbay, thence to set out and attack the French. And, Anne, the *Mignonne* goes as one of the frigates. Oh, Anne!"

"It must be so. Be brave, darling. Sir Geoffrey is a sailor, as your father and my father were. It is duty. But--Ariadne--be cheered also with one small thing. Sir Geoffrey will be back to-night in an hour."

"In an hour?"

"Ay, in an hour. The *Nederland* has sailed."

"Sailed! With all those wretched trepanned creatures on board!"

"With them all. And with one other besides, trepanned as he would have trepanned you and me had he had his will, and as he would have done to Lewis Granger, too."

Whereon she told her foster-sister everything.

CHAPTER XX.

ARIADNE'S COMPASSION.

That Sir Geoffrey Barry should be in a considerable state of exasperation when he returned with his boarding-party from their frustrated intention to capture the *Nederland*, and take from her as many able-bodied men as he required, was no more than natural. For now he scarcely knew where to turn to procure the extra men whom the Admiralty continued to strenuously instruct him to obtain, and he began to fear that the great fleet preparing to go to sea and attack Conflans would not owe much more to his endeavours. Yet, exasperated as he might be, astonishment obtained the mastery over that feeling when Ariadne--who had refused to go to bed till he came back--informed him of what had happened in the Marshes that night.

"Great heavens!" he cried, in his first surprise, "this is too awful. What a vengeance! What a vengeance! And Anne in it, too. Yet," he continued, "she could scarcely have taken a more effective way of ridding herself of the man. The schooner will be captured beyond all doubt by Thurot, or Boisrose, or some of those French sailors, half corsairs and half naval officers. And then--well! then--at best it will be months, nay, perhaps years, of detention in a French fortress."

"And at worst?" asked Ariadne.

"At worst! Why--this," and he pointed downwards to the deck. "That, with perhaps a broadside into them."

"I pity the others," said Ariadne; "him I cannot pity. Oh! he was willing to undertake such a fiendish scheme to smuggle Anne and me into that loathsome ship, and would have succeeded had not Mr. Granger, who hoodwinked him into believing that he would help him, found means to catch him in a trap instead."

Whereon, in answer to Geoffrey's desire to be told all, his wife related everything that Anne had divulged on her return.

Extreme as Geoffrey's anger was--and in that anger he felt almost inclined to go ashore and punish Granger in some way for having dared use his wife's name as a means whereby to lure Bufton to his doom--surprise once more took possession of him when he heard Ariadne say--

"Poor Mr. Granger! What a sad fate has been his. Oh! Geoffrey, why did not you tell me before that, Lady Glastonbury was--was----"

"Tell you, child! Why, how could I tell you anything I did not know? 'Lady Glastonbury!' What was she to him that you speak thus?"

"Sophy Jervis was my dearest friend once at Gosport, and--as you know--she married Lord

Glastonbury."

"Well! Ariadne."

"And Sophy Jervis was loved by, and herself loved madly, Lewis Granger."

"My God! And sacrificed herself to save him. Is that it?"

"It is, as I know now. Though not until to-night, when Anne told me all and enabled me to put one thing with another. And to-morrow," she continued, "I will show you her letters to me. Short of saying what the name of the man whom she loved was, she has told me all."

In the morning she did as she had said she would, and put in her husband's hands a small packet of letters which he read later, not without a man's compassion for the wrecked love of the unhappy pair, and with, too, much, doubt upon his part as to whether these letters from one woman to another should not have been sacred from any man's eyes. Yet, also, ere he had concluded the perusal, he understood that it was well that Ariadne had shown them to him.

For in these letters the whole story was narrated, as Granger had briefly told it to Anne overnight in the "Red Rover"; the story of the girl's mad love for the handsome young lieutenant and of his for her; of the delirious bliss of the earliest days of that love; days full of softest wishes and tenderest fears and hopes of happy years to come. Of happy years with him who, so cold to and disdainful of all others, was to her a slave--a slave, but a loving one! Then, while Geoffrey read on--knowing that, as he did so, the tears were in his eyes--the tale was told of how the blow had fallen; of how the man she loved was ruined and disgraced; and that he had committed a crime which would drive him forth from the society of all honest men, and out of the service he belonged to--nay! worse, might bring him to the gallows. Yet she saved him, saved him at last, at the cost of her own happiness in this world; by the perdition of her own soul. The man he had robbed, or attempted to rob, was, by Fortune's favour, one who had wooed her long and unsuccessfully; now he would spare him upon one condition. The condition that she resigned the man she loved, and wedded the man who loved her.

"And then," the last letter went on, "oh! my God, then, Ariadne, when I had been Lord Glastonbury's wife for six months, we learnt that the man I had loved was innocent, and that he was the tool of a designing villain. We learnt it through a letter written to my husband by a woman who had been the friend of that villain and was cognizant of the robbery he was meditating; by a woman who, discarded and cast off, had found means to communicate with Glastonbury, she imagining that the theft had succeeded. And, darling," the unhappy writer concluded, "my husband, though dissolute, is an honourable man; if he could find my unhappy lover he would tell him all, he would send him that woman's letter. It might yet go far to restore him to his proper place in the world. Meanwhile, he intends to write to the Lords of the Admiralty."

Geoffrey called Ariadne to him when he had finished the perusal of the letters, and told her that he had done so; then he said quietly--

"It was a pity Lady Glastonbury never mentioned her lover's name to you. By chance (since I have spoken of him so much of late) we should have been able to help him. Now, it is too late."

"Geoffrey!" she exclaimed, after a moment's meditation, "let me see him. Perhaps--perhaps--if I let him hear those letters read it might do much to reclaim him, low as he has fallen, and horrible as is the calling he follows."

"Yet the calling which I profit by," her husband made answer. "Therefore is he little worse, if any, than we who employ him. But," he continued, "what use in seeing him, Ariadne? What can you do?"

"If I told him all that Sophy has written; if I should plead with him to lead a better life--now that he has exacted so horrible a vengeance on the man who destroyed him--might I not prevail?"

"Prevail! What is there for him to do?"

"God knows! Yet something better than that which he does now. Surely! surely!"

For a moment Geoffrey stood reflecting. He was profoundly impressed by all that he had learnt, as it was most natural he should be. Had not he himself sat upon the very court-martial which condemned Lewis Granger to ignominy; had not all upon that awful tribunal regarded him as a common knave; had not all refused to listen to his protestations of innocence? Yet now--now!--he was innocent. Everything proved it. Not only the letters of his lost love, but surely, also, the terrible retribution he had exacted from him who had so ruined him. If--if by a pure, good woman's pleading he could be induced to lead a better and more honourable calling, should he stand in the way of helping him to do so, even though that woman was his own wife?

Later that day, as Geoffrey inspected some men who had been brought off from the shore--they having been taken by a press-gang overnight after a hard fight--a boat came away from the stairs with, seated in it, Lewis Granger. He had come in answer to a summons from Geoffrey, in which the latter simply said that he wished to speak to him in connection with something in his

past life in which they had both played a part. But he had added at the foot another line: "I wish to make you acquainted with Lady Barry."

And now the unhappy man was close at hand, his mind filled with wonder at the strange summons.

"To make me acquainted with his wife," he had whispered to himself a dozen times--nay! a hundred times, since receiving the message. "I! the exposed forger--the man driven out of the Navy for an ignoble crime--the crimp of to-day. And this in connection with something in my past, of which her husband knows as well as I! What does it mean?"

Yet, soon, he was himself to know. At once! The boat had reached the side of the ship, the man-ropes were in his hands; above stood Sir Geoffrey Barry, watching him coming on board, with, upon his face, a pleasant glance.

"My God!" Lewis Granger thought to himself, "he looks as once he might have looked at a comrade across the mess-cabin table; as he has never looked yet at me before. And--and--I am to be made acquainted with his wife!"

Geoffrey held out his hand to Granger when he reached the deck, noting as he did that the man had come as a gentleman to visit a lady. He was clad now in a quiet but good black costume; he was also clean-shaven and neat, which he had not been before. His wig was new and freshly powdered, and his lace was faultless. A different person this from the one who sat day by day in Jamaica Court, consigning drunkards and kidnapped men to their fate.

"Granger, I sent for you to tell you some news that has come to me. Through my wife, who has heard it from a lady--from----"

"Sophy!" the other whispered, divining all--or, perhaps it was not a whisper, his lips alone forming the word, though uttering no sound. While as they did so, he turned white as death.

"Yes. She has heard--her husband has heard--strange news. Nay, Granger, be steady," he said, breaking off as he saw the other put out his hand and touch a gun-carriage as though he feared to fall.

"What has--she--heard?" the latter asked a moment later, his voice almost inaudible.

"That--that--we who sat in judgment on you--that--that--all were wrong. I think it can be proved."

"It is too late," Granger said. "Too late. I have fallen too low. Do you know that since it all happened I--God help me!--have been drinking myself to death? That, now I have avenged myself on the man who ruined me, I shall do so even more furiously? To end all."

"No! No! Think! Think still on what may be. If--if their Lordships are but satisfied that you were misjudged--I do not know--but--perhaps--it might be possible in these times of war to reinstate you. I do not know, I repeat. But it may be."

"Could that restore to me the woman I loved--the woman whom, Heaven help me, I love madly still? Can anything do that?"

"No," Geoffrey answered, his tone low yet full of sympathy. "No. Nothing can do that. But it might make her happy, might ease some of her pain. If she could know that you were righted in the world's eyes, if she knew that the shame which has covered you was swept away for ever--could not that make her happy?"

"It would perhaps make our lot easier to bear," Granger answered. Then in a clearer voice, he said, "I knew that Lady Barry and Sophy--had been friends from girlhood. That was one, though but one reason why I helped Anne to ensnare that scheming scoundrel."

"For that at least I thank you--for punishing him for his vile and wicked insolence. Now, tell me, did he in truth design to put her--great heavens! to think of it--on board the *Nederland*?"

"He swallowed the bait I held out to him; jumped at it. He was so eager to see the plan carried out that, thus, he fell into my power. Yes, even at the last, and meditating further a double treachery, he fell into my power. You have heard that?"

"Yes. I have heard all. But--how can I pity him? Now come and see my wife," and Geoffrey made a step towards the cabin aft.

"Not yet. Not yet. Give me one moment to recover myself. To meet her--Sophy's friend--will be an ordeal to me. Let me collect myself."

Geoffrey busied himself about the deck, giving orders for the bestowal of raffle and other things until he thought Granger might feel sufficiently calm to meet Ariadne, then, turning to where the latter still stood with his eyes fixed on the river, he said again--

"Come. She desires so much to see you."

"Go on. Lead me to her."

Whereon, conducting Granger past the sentry and through the outer cabin, or office, he tapped gently on the door of the saloon, and opening it, said--

"Ariadne, Mr. Granger is here," while, motioning the other to enter, he closed the door, not going in himself.

"'Tis best that they should be alone," he thought, his mind delicate and manly as ever. "Far better. It is indeed an ordeal for him."

And Granger, entering that saloon--while thinking how long it was since he had been admitted as a visitor to such a place--how long since he had stood face to face and on terms of equality with a gentle, refined woman!--knew that before him, and gazing pityingly at him, was Ariadne Barry, the dearest friend of the woman whom he had loved and lost.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DIVINE DESPAIR.

At first he did not dare to raise his eyes to the slim girlish figure standing there, his emotion being too great. Nor, if he saw it, had he dared to take the hand held out to him, but dropped a moment later at its owner's side.

But then, at last, he lifted his bowed head and gazed at her, seeing at one glance that she also was looking full at him. Seeing, too, that the sweet, delicate mouth was trembling, and that the pure, clear eyes were welling over with tears. And he observed also that, as he became witness of her emotion and deep sympathy for him and his despair, she turned her face away, while, moving towards a chair, she made a sign for him to also be seated.

"God bless you," she heard him mutter in a low, deep voice. "God bless you for your womanly compassion."

"Mr. Granger," she said a moment later, and still the sweet mouth trembled and her eyes were full of tears, "I have sent for--asked you to come to me--because I know so much of your past--your hopes. So much, too, of your unhappiness. Oh! Mr. Granger, I was Sophy Jervis's greatest friend."

"I know it," he murmured. "I know it. She told you all: Of my love--nay--it was not love, but idolatry!--of its too bitter ending. Though it is not, never can be ended."

"Ah! Mr. Granger, now you must live for other things. Live to see your wrongs redressed, your honour restored, your name cleared. You have heard from my husband that there is proof of your innocence."

"Yes," he said. "Yes, I have heard." But, still with his head bent, he whispered the same words he had said to Sir Geoffrey outside on the quarter-deck, "It is too late."

"No. No. It is not too late. Geoffrey and I have talked together, and to-morrow he will go to see their Lordships. Oh! Mr. Granger, if you could return to your old calling, if you could once more serve the King in these troublous times, even in a subordinate position, yet with hope before you, would you not do so? Would you not lead a different life?"

"God knows I would, bankrupt as are all my hopes, all my future. Yet--you are aware of what I have been? Of what I am?"

"Yes, I know," and, although he could not see it, there was in her face a look of sublime pity for him. Pity that this man, still young and handsome--how handsome he must have been when first he won Sophy's love she could well understand, even though judging only of him now as he sat before her in his desolation and abasement!--should have fallen to what he had.

"There is," he went on, "no baser thing in all this world than he who traffics in his fellow-men. Yet I elected to do it in my despair and bitterness. I might have earned a living otherwise, but this consorted with what I was, with what I had become."

"It is not too late. Will you not leave this life for--for--in memory of Sophy?"

"Yes," he whispered, "if you bid me do so for her sake--her memory. Yes. If my honour is cleared, but not otherwise, for otherwise it would be useless. If Sir Geoffrey, or any other captain, will take me, I will go back, even though as a seaman before the mast. I will do it for her sake, in return for your gracious pity of me."

"Thank God!" she cried. "Oh, thank God!" Then she rose and went to the 'scrutoire and, opening it, took out the packet of letters that she had shown her husband. "Read them; do with them what you will. Read them now, if you desire." Whereon she put the little parcel in his hand, and, leaving him alone, went into the next cabin.

"My love, my lost love," he murmured, as he glanced at them hurriedly, not knowing that she had gone away to give him ample time for their perusal. "My sweet. And we are parted for ever. For ever! To all eternity. Nothing can bring you back to me."

That he had wept she knew when she returned, yet a man's tears for her whom he has loved and lost need no pardon from another woman's heart; and so she gently bade him take the letters and keep them, extorting only from him a promise that he would in no way endeavour to communicate with Lady Glastonbury.

"For that," she said, "must never be. Neither sorrow nor trouble must ever come to her again. Have I your promise?"

"On my word of honour. As a man--who was once a gentleman--I swear it, yet, oh God! it is hard. Hard to think that I can look upon her handwriting again and the words that are not addressed to me, although concerning me. It is so long," he added, his voice deep and broken, "since a line has come from her. Yet I have promised, and I will keep my word."

"I know it. I take and believe your word."

"But," Granger continued, "if--when you write to her, you could tell her that--that--born of these letters," and he touched his breast as he spoke, he having placed them there, "has come the promise of a better life for me--a life loveless, but no longer smirched and blemished--then I know she would be happier. If you could promise that!"

"I will do it," Ariadne answered, the tears again rushing to her eyes, and all her emotions thrilling at the sorrow and despair of the man before her. "I will do it."

And, now, Granger turned away, knowing there was no more to be said, yet inwardly blessing her who had that day been as a ministering angel to him.

"Farewell, madam," he said; "I cannot thank you--but--but----" Then, seeing that now she held out her hand again to him, and in such a manner that this time he could not fail to perceive her action, he took it in his own. And, o'er-mastered by her womanliness and supreme sympathy, he raised it to his lips.

"God bless and keep you and yours," he whispered again as he had whispered before; "God bless you for your sweet compassion."

* * * * *

Outside, Sir Geoffrey Barry was still engaged with the manifold duties pertaining to a ship which was soon to take part in a war that would doubtless be long, and must be deadly--as was and is ever the case when England and France contend for mastery. Already many things on deck were being stowed away which, when the time came, would be encumbrances. The cutter, too, had just come off from shore, bringing with it, this time, some willing sailors. Sailors who, having been paid off from a disabled privateer, and having spent all their money on sickening debauches on shore, were only too ready to again go to sea and earn some more. A fine band of brawny, dissolute men were these whom George Redway--now installed as captain of the cutter--brought on board with him; men who on shore were nothing but maddened and intoxicated devils, but who, when the enemy hove in sight and when they were at close quarters, would become heroes, nay, almost demigods. For then the old English blood became roused to its fullest and best; then woe betide those who encountered these men.

"A brisk crew of sea-dogs," said Sir Geoffrey, observing the traces of recent emotion on Granger's face but making no remark for the moment. "If I had not my full complement, these are the fellows I should wish to keep."

"There is one at least whom you can keep if you so please," Granger said; "one who will work like, live with, those men there," and he pointed to where half a dozen sailors were swabbing the deck.

"Yourself!" exclaimed Geoffrey, his face lighting. "Yourself! She has spoken to you of a

different life?"

"She has spoken to me. In her mercy and goodness! And I have promised."

"Thank God! The trade I found you at a few days ago might well become the man you were supposed to be, not the man you are."

"That trade ends to-day. To-night, I tell the man who employs me that he must seek another tool. Almost directly, if you will have me; I can join your ship."

"We can perhaps do better than you say. Yet, to-morrow, I must speak to their Lordships. As an officer you cannot of course go----"

"I--an officer! I do not dream of that."

"But," Geoffrey continued, "the *Resolution* wants a gunner's mate. If I can transfer mine to her, you could come in this ship. If I cannot, then the *Resolution* must have you."

"What can I say? How utter----"

"Say nothing. Granger," he continued, "you have suffered deeply, and--and--we have been brother sailors. If I who sat in judgment on you once and wronged you unwittingly can now help to right you, I will do it." And he laid his hand upon the other's arm as a firm friend might do. "I want to see you once more the Lewis Granger who was known and spoken enviously of when he was in the *Revenge*," he continued. "I want to see my gunner's mate--if I can have him--back again in his old place amongst us when this coming war is over."

For a moment Lewis Granger stood there looking at the man before him--the man whose life was so bright and prosperous, yet, who, nevertheless, could feel such pity for one whose existence had been so broken.

"You forget," he whispered; "you forget. My disgrace, my ruin was not all. That, it seems, may be wiped out for ever. But what of the rest of my life? What have I been? Even during the past months. And--and--I have sent that man to death, a death in life, if nothing else."

"That counts not. What would he have done? To you--to Anne--to Ariadne! My God! Granger, you have instead saved him--from me. Had he been here now, were he within my reach, I would slay him myself as I would slay a snake."

"Yet I suggested the scheme to him, meaning thereby that he should fall into the trap."

"But not meaning that it should be carried out. He was the villain, and his villainy has recoiled on his own head. Dismiss all recollection of that. Live now to be prosperous and happy."

"Happy--never! Happiness and I are parted; henceforth our ways are far asunder. Let me go," he said, turning towards the side where the boat he had come in was waiting for him, "and if you can do what you say, if you can take me with you, let me know to-morrow after you have seen their Lordships. I shall be ready ere long."

"Farewell," said Geoffrey, with one hand grasping that of Granger, the other on his arm--and on his face the look of noble compassion that not often, but sometimes, passes between man and man--"farewell! To-morrow you shall hear from me--and--fear not. We sail together as comrades yet. I know it. Feel it."

Whatever Lewis Granger had to do to free himself from the hateful life which he had lived for the last few months was quickly done; and, ere another day had passed, he--in spite of protestations and remonstrances from the man whom he served--had cast that life behind him for ever. But still there remained one other thing to do, a journey to make.

He took the coach as the afternoon drew on, and so proceeded some dozen miles into the heart of the country, when, quitting it, he made his way on foot towards a village lying a mile or two from a great town. A little village that, here, rose upon a slight hill and was surmounted by an old church built of flint stones which, in the late March gloom of evening, stood up hoar and grim. And, striding through the village in which now lights were beginning to twinkle through the diamond-paned windows of thatched cottages, Lewis Granger made his way to the wicket-gate that opened into the churchyard, and so round to the farther side, and to a grave--a grave over which was a stone, having inscribed on it the words that told how, very suddenly, the Lady Hortensia Granger had died two years before.

"Ay," her son murmured to himself, as he stood there in the desolate place and felt the night wind rising over the flat country around. "Ay. Suddenly! The blow killed her as it fell--perhaps in God's mercy. Yet, if I could have seen her ere she went--surely, surely, she must have believed my vows that I was innocent. And now, she can never know."

That is the bitterness of it! The bitterness that those who have gone can never know what we would have told them had we not been too late. That that which has happened after they have gone can never be told now. And such bitterness had come to the racked heart of Lewis Granger: the grief and misery of knowing that, of the only two creatures in the world whom he could love,

the one had died of horror engendered by belief in his shame; the other had not died, but she, too, had believed.

"Oh, God!" he muttered, standing there in the swift-coming darkness, "if they could only have trusted me; if they could have waited patiently in that trust."

A bitter cry this from an overcharged heart, yet one that has found an echo in thousands of others, and in other circumstances. "If they would only have had faith in us: would only have waited patiently in that faith!" Or, better still, if we who erred and felt and suffered had not scorned to justify ourselves in their eyes; had not defied the present and trusted to the future to right us, and had not taught ourselves to laugh at doubts and be willing to love and lose and leave it to the morrow to make amends. The morrow that is never to be; the future that is never to come! For there is neither future nor morrow on this earth for the loved ones whose ears are dead and cold, and cannot hear our bitter plaint--nor ever any future for us either. The word has not been said--and it is too late! Too late! and only because that word, which would have righted all, has not been uttered. We were innocent, and scorned to proclaim our innocence; we loved and cloaked our love with assumed indifference, with pretended infidelity; we worshipped, and were ashamed to acknowledge our worship. And, now, those are gone who hungered for the avowal, and to whom it would have sounded as the sweetest music ever heard, and we are left, and--again!--it is too late.

CHAPTER XXII.

"AS YE SOW."

To roam the seas for months, storm-beaten and tempest-tossed, chilled to the bone with cold at one moment, burnt black by the sun at others; without food sometimes, and sometimes without drink--such has often been the lot of the English seamen in voyages and war-time, and so it was now in "The Wonderful Year," the year 1759.

Only with, perhaps, more added miseries and discomforts during the present hostilities than had been present in earlier times, since, in those days of the past, our enemy--our one great and implacable enemy, with whom it seemed almost that God created us to strive--had ever sought us as eagerly as we sought him. Yet, now, all appeared changed. The more we sought him the more he evaded us; upon the open sea we could never bring him--or very rarely bring him--to battle with us; and, vaunt as he might his determination to crush us, to invade our land, to sink us into a third-rate Power, yet, when we put forth to seek him, he was never to be found. Instead his fleets were in harbour and his ships far up inland rivers; the sight of our topsails was sufficient to cause his own to instantly disappear beneath the horizon. Yet that, at this period, there had been innumerable encounters was still true. Had not Boscawen shattered De la Clue off Cape Lagos, Pocock defeated the French in the East Indies, and countless ships of war and frigates been captured by us? But still the great action--the one that was to be decisive--seemed as far off as ever when "The Wonderful Year" was drawing to its close, and when, after many returns to English ports, Sir Edward Hawke once more put to sea from Torbay, on November 14th, to find, if possible, the great fleet of Conflans, which was known to be lurking somewhere in the neighbourhood of Belleisle.

November, 1759! a month of terrible storm and stress--yet, what is storm or stress to the seaman bent on finding his foe and vanquishing him?--a month when tempest after tempest howled across the seas, when days broke late and nights came early, when land-fogs and sea-fogs enveloped all for hours, so that inaction was forced to prevail. Yet, through all those furies of the elements the gallant fleet went forth, the Royal George (she flying proudly the Admiral's flag) leading twenty-three ships of the line and many frigates and bomb-ketches. It went forth, to be joined later by numerous other vessels, including amongst them the *Mignonne*, under the command of Captain Sir Geoffrey Barry.

On board the old French capture was Lewis Granger, too, again a sailor, though not yet again an officer; that, Geoffrey said, would come--after the war was over.

"After the war is over," Granger would repeat to himself; while sometimes he would repeat the words aloud as the captain uttered them, "After the war is over."

Then he would turn away, saluting his superior if with him, or uttering some muttered ejaculation if alone.

He was not all unhappy now; the work which he had been allowed to resume occupied him

sufficiently to distract his memories, and, for the rest, he had fallen easily into his duties. Moreover, he was better situated than he might have hoped to be. Their Lordships had made no objection to his being borne on the books of the *Mignonne* after hearing her captain's story of the man's innocence, more especially as that captain was one whose destiny seemed of great promise; and so Granger had gone on board the frigate ere she sailed from the Thames. Though that was months ago now--months spent, as told above, in scouring the seas, in hardships, and sometimes disaster. But, during those months, an accident had placed Lewis Granger in an even better position than that which he had at first assumed.

The master-gunner had been killed in a conflict between the *Mignonne* and a French corvette, which the former was chasing, and Granger had stepped into his shoes. And, though such promotion was not much to one who had once worn the uniform of a commissioned officer, yet it was something. It gave him a cabin to himself where he could brood and meditate--as he did too often!--it enabled him to take his meals alone and be alone. And so, with his various duties, his charge of the ordnance and ordnance stores, his long hours devoted to the instruction of the raw hands who as yet scarcely understood the gunnery exercises, and a thousand other matters, he passed those months away. Passed them thus--and in forgetting, or, rather, in striving to forget.

For he could not forget. That was the curse laid on him and beneath which he had to bow.

"If I could do that," he would say to himself, again and again; and most often when he lay awake for hours in his berth--"if I could do that. If, at last, her sweet, innocent face, her braided chestnut hair, the look of love that never failed to greet me as I drew near, might vanish for ever from my memory! If, too, I could think that she also forgets--then--some day, I might obtain peace. But--I know it!--she no more forgets than I."

Stubbornly, doggedly, as it ever is when a man wrestles with himself, so he wrestled now. And it was all of no avail. It was useless! But one woman had ever dawned a star above his existence; the woman who--star-like!--had fallen away from him for ever.

"Such love should never have been," he would continue musing, "never have been, or, coming into my life, should have stayed always with me. Other men knew better what to do than I--could fool women, for a pastime, into loving them, could lead them on to madness and then grow weary and fling them contemptuously aside. And I despised such men. Do I despise them now?"

But only a moment later he would find his own answer to his own question, and would whisper to himself, "Yes. Even as it is, ours was the fonder, better love."

Keeping much to himself--as much as could be in a ship of war full of action, and chasing sometimes a vessel of the enemy's that hove in sight, or fleeing on others from two or three of their ships with which it would have been madness to risk an encounter--he went about his duties, performing each and all as though he lived for them alone; as though, too, his frame was impervious to fatigue or the burden of a rough, hard life. With Sir Geoffrey he could hold but little communion--that, considering the different positions each was now filling, would have been impossible!--though sometimes they could be together in the captain's cabin for a short time. And then the latter would say words to the other of approbation and approval, as well as comfort, which, had it not been that all his future was blank and hopeless, must have cheered him. But, because such was the case, those words could not do so, and murmuring again, as he had murmured so often, "It is too late," he would withdraw to his solitude.

Yet, now, every day brought it more home to those in the English fleet that, at last, the great conflict was drawing near. Before they had been two days out of Torbay on this their last putting to sea, a French bilander had been captured, from which the Admiral obtained some news of Conflans, while, on the morning of the 17th, the *Magnanime* (also a capture) let fly her top-gallant sheets as a signal that she had sighted something that might be, or might belong to, the enemy. And a moment later the *Mignonne*--which had been abreast of the lee line--was signalled to stand to the north to see what she could discover. What she did discover, when under full sail she had set forth in the direction ordered, was a French privateer making off as fast as she could go in the direction of the French coast. Also, ahead of her, some two or three miles away, was a fleet of vessels, which, cruelly enough, did not stand by to assist their slower sister.

"She must be ours," cried Sir Geoffrey now, as, flinging the waves off from her forefoot contemptuously, the *Mignonne*, with every sheet fisted home, tore through the turbulent waters. "She must be ours. We gain upon her, too." Then he cried to the master, "Lay me alongside of her, as soon as possible. And tell the master-gunner to be ready."

That the privateer knew she was outpaced was evident from the manner in which she tacked--as the hare tacks and twists before the hound unleashed; while she showed that she did not mean to yield without a fight if she yielded at all. Coming round suddenly when the *Mignonne* was almost close upon her, she fired three of her lower deck guns, the English vessel only escaping being hit by the tossing of the waves which carried her high upon their crests, while the balls passed harmlessly beneath her.

That Granger was at his place was evident a moment later, when, from the gun-deck of the frigate, there poured forth a broadside that, as it struck the privateer, sent her keeling over to her larboard side. Then, as she recovered herself and the *Mignonne* came round on the wind,

another broadside belched forth.

"That has done it," cried Geoffrey. "Fire no more. She will sink in ten minutes. Lower away there to save as many as may be. They are taking to the water already."

However many might be taking to the water, as he said, it was certain that none would escape in the privateer's boats. For now she lay over so much that it was impossible any such should be lowered from her; and that she would founder in a few moments, sucking down with her everything in the immediate neighbourhood, was not to be doubted. There remained nothing, consequently, but for those in the ship to throw themselves into the sea and to take their chance of either being picked up by the *Mignonne's* boats, or of being engulfed by the sinking vessel, or--which was equally likely--have the breath beaten out of them by the waves that ran mountains high.

Of such who were picked up at last, there were only three--one, a young man, who swam towards the *Mignonne's* boats with all the vigour of despair; the others being two middle-aged men. As for the privateer herself, she was gone for ever, leaving behind her no traces except a flag tossed on the water, some floating barrels, and a few coops full of drowned fowls.

"Bring brandy," cried Sir Geoffrey, as these men were carried over the side of the *Mignonne*, more dead than alive, and with one alone, the sturdy swimmer, still conscious. "Bring brandy, and pour it down their throats. They must not die. They can tell much, and tell they shall."

Then, to his astonishment, the man who had swam so stoutly--the youngest of the three--opened his eyes and looked up at him, saying in English--

"What is it you would have us tell?"

"First," said Sir Geoffrey, "what was the name of that privateer? Next, how you, an Englishman; came in her? You, an Englishman, in a French ship at such a time! Man, do you know what may be your fate?"

"The privateer was *La Baleine*, of Dunkirk. As for myself and scores of others, we were not there willingly. We were bound for the colonies, and taken out of a schooner called the *Amarynth* some months ago, and kept---"

"The *Amarynth*," said a voice--deep and low as ever--in Sir Geoffrey's ear, "was the right name of the *Nederland*."

"Great heaven!" said Sir Geoffrey, turning round suddenly on Granger, and himself speaking in a whisper now, so that the officers and men who were about should not hear him. "Great heaven! The *Nederland*! The ship that carried that scoundrel who, had he had his will, would have placed Ariadne and Anne in her."

"Ay," replied Granger, "if he had had his will. He who would have kidnapped them and me."

"Speak," said Sir Geoffrey now, "speak and tell all. How has this thing happened?"

"Thus," said the man, looking up defiantly at his questioner: "Some were kidnapped into her, some went willingly. Bah! you both know that: both of you, sailors though you be. You were the one who led and encouraged the press-gang, who came to *his* house for men; that other by your side was----"

"Silence!" said Sir Geoffrey, white, and speaking sternly--though hating himself for having to do so. "Silence! and continue your narrative. I command here, and desire no opinion on my conduct. And I, at least, did not press you. Go on."

"We were half across the Atlantic," the fellow said moodily, "when her captain, a Frenchman called Boisrose, took us, and, after fighting contrary winds for weeks, was nearing France to hand us over as prizes. Now--well? now, you have altered all that. What are you going to do with us?"

"That you will know later. At present, thank your God that you are saved--from death, if not worse. At least you are in an English ship. You shall be well cared for. Take them below," he said to the master-at-arms, "and give them food and dry clothes."

"Yet first," said Granger, "answer me one question: There was a man on board named Bufton. Was he *there*?" and he directed his eyes to the spot beneath which the privateer had sunk.

"There was no man of that name to my knowledge."

"A man whom one could not mistake. A man with a strangely long and pointed chin."

"Oh! He! Oh! yes, he was there. But he was a cur. He could not stand his fate. He had been a dandy, it seems, whose heart was burst."

"Why?" asked Granter, in an even deeper voice, "why? What did he do?"

"Threw himself overboard in despair one dark, rough night--as they told us--a week before Boisrose captured the schooner."

Instinctively Geoffrey and Lewis Granger both turned away at the same time, the latter looking at the other with hollow eyes.

"Take heart," whispered the former, "it was the fate he had prepared for--for----"

"Ay, it was. Yet still his death is on my soul."

"Had they not slain him, his death would have been at my hands. For he would have been killed to-day. He who would have killed others. Take heart. Take heart."

CHAPTER XXIII.

QUIBERON.

The storm was at its height, the darkness was intense, and from the black heavens the rain poured down in torrents. Yet, by now, all those who for thirty-one weeks had been on board their ships had become inured to toil and travail, to wet and cold and misery, relieved only by an occasional putting in to Torbay or Plymouth before going out again.

They had once more been at sea for some days, and, though driven to the westward by rough south-easterly winds, were, with pressed sails, directing their course towards Brest--towards Quiberon. For it was the night of November 19th which was passing away amidst darkness, cold and storm; it was the dawn of the 20th which was coming. And, although none in the great English fleet knew it for certain--though many suspected such to be the case!--that dawn was to herald one of those great English triumphs which are to be for ever blazoned on her scroll of fame--a victory which, if not as great as that of La Hogue in the past, nor of Trafalgar yet to come, was to take a worthy place beside them in our annals.

Ere that horrible night which was to usher in the great day had fallen, the fleet had been joined by frigates left behind to bring the last words from England--the *Maidstone* and *Coventry* being amongst them--and, if there was aught that could add to the happiness of all on board, it was the news of how, with official despatches, letters had come for some few amongst the number--bringing news from home. Letters from loving wives and mothers, all breathing prayers for safety and a happy future; letters full of sadness, yet which, though bitter, were sweet, too, to those who received them.

Amongst the recipients of such correspondence was Sir Geoffrey Barry, who, when he could snatch a moment from his duties, retired to his cabin to peruse that which had come to him--from his beloved and darling Ariadne! Need one write down for those to read who have themselves wandered across the seas, or taken part in storm or stress of battle, with what joy such a letter would be eagerly perused, or how, from the pen of the woman who wrote it would fall the words of gentle regret at the adored one's absence, as well as the hopes of bright and happy days to come and to be passed for ever side by side with those they loved? No need to tell these words, yet all were there--as we who have been parted from the one we value most in the world know well. We who have been parted, if even for a week or less!

But there were other matters besides--matters strange and full of significance, to one at least in that ship.

"Lord Glastonbury is dead," Ariadne wrote; "he was found dead and cold in his bed. And, oh! Geoffrey, she is free. Is it wicked of me to write like this, and as though I rejoiced in it? I hope not, yet I think ever of poor Sophy's broken happiness, of Mr. Granger's sad lot. Now they can be--but I will say no more. It is too soon."

The first impulse that rose to Geoffrey Barry's mind was to at once send for Granger and inform him of the tidings that had come. But, then, after a moment's reflection, he decided that it would be best not to do so. To-night, to-morrow, at any moment, they might be in conflict with the enemy, whom all knew now to be in their neighbourhood. After the victory which none doubted they would achieve, it would be time to tell him. Therefore he would not disturb Granger at his duty, nor agitate him with thoughts best not indulged in while there was work to do. So, for the present, he held his peace.

That there was work to do was soon apparent, when, at last, the dawn broke. Some English transports had been fallen in with a day or so before, and from them Hawke learnt that the

French squadron of twenty-four sail had been seen several leagues west of Belleisle, and that there could be no doubt that this was the Brest fleet under Conflans. Now, at daybreak, all knew that this information was correct, for, as the full light came, the whole French squadron was observed chasing some English frigates and bomb-ketches in the hopes of destroying them. Then, when the enemy saw the English fleet so near, they desisted from the chase, and, although they formed a line to receive Hawke's attack, a moment later they ran before the wind to seek safety.

In an instant there flew the signal from the *Royal George* for every ship to make her way towards the enemy, no regard being paid to the line of battle; the first to engage the French being the *Warspite* and the *Dorsetshire*, while from almost every vessel might be seen the strange sight of men tossing their caps overboard in defiance of that enemy. And from each ship was heard ringing cheers as the fleets drew near to one another. The battle had begun.

Amidst the tempest and fury, amidst the strife of the elements themselves, that battle commenced, while, so thick was the reek and smoke of the powder, that soon neither the white flag spangled with lilies nor the Union Jack could be distinguished as they flew from their respective masts and staffs. Yet each knew where his enemy was, and towards that enemy each pushed upon the rolling, tossing waves.

Amongst those distinguishing themselves upon this fateful day was that great ship of honoured and long-transmitted name, the *Swiftsure*. Never did any noble vessel that had served to make England's fame widespread perform greater feats of valour than did she upon this occasion. Forcing her way towards the enemy, she encountered Conflans' flagship, the *Soleil Royal*--a name of evil omen to France, as some recalled who brought to their recollection another *Soleil Royal*, crushed and destroyed at La Hogue--attended by two great French seventy-fours; and in an instant the *Swiftsure* had flown at them as flies the gallant hound at treble the number of wolves. Broadside upon broadside she poured from her seventy guns--above their roaring being heard the ringing cheers from those on board her as well as the howls of contempt and hideous oaths of the British bull-dogs; and so she fought and fought till her guns were almost too hot to touch. Yet still she fought, not with the courage of despair, nor with the doomed energy of one o'ermastered, but with the spirit of some wild and savage tigress, recking neither of death nor wounds nor destruction to herself, so that, amidst them, she tore and mangled and destroyed, while still thirsting for more death and destruction. Tossed on the rolling seas, hurled backwards and forwards as were those other three with whom she strove, she poured forth her deadly venom, until at last, outnumbered, with her main topmast shot through, her main top-gallant mast gone, and her tiller-ropes cut away, she broached-to in the tempest, the three enemies rushing forward to encounter next the English Admiral in his flagship.

That all the rest were fighting with grim determination, be very sure. The *Resolution* was pouring a terrible cannonade into the *Formidable* (flagship of the French Rear-Admiral); the *Royal George* had been laid alongside the *Soleil Royal* by now; the *Torbay* was sinking the *Thesée*--with an awful cry from all on board, the latter went down amidst the turbulent waves! the *Magnanime* was destroying for ever the *Héros*. Meanwhile the *Royal George* was driving the *Soleil Royal* from out the fray, she being followed by the *Tonnant* and three others. The *Superbe* had drawn the *Royal George's* fire next, receiving the whole of the latter's broadsides, and was sinking close by her victress. And because of how she, this gallant French ship, had fought; because she was a foe worthy of England's best shot and steel; because she bore bravely the hell of fire rained into her by the great English vessel as she went down with her colours flying, there arose from her enemy's decks a long and ringing cheer of applause. She was a conquered foe, but still a noble one, and the hardy British throats could not refuse to her the tribute she had so nobly won.

And then there came the greatest incident of this terrible fight. Upon the *Royal George* there sprang seven great French ships, and they surrounded her while pouring their broadsides out from all their guns, so that those in her consorts, because of the vessels which hedged her round, could do nought to help her--could, indeed, do nought but bewail her sad fate and gnash their teeth with rage. Yet, too, Providence watched over her: the guns that should have sunk her were not well served, the enemy were in a terrible state of discomposure, and the turbulence of the sea was now such as to make their broadsides uncertain. It almost seems a miracle to relate, but of all the balls hurled against her, not more than fifty struck the mark, and not one was below the water-line. But there were others of her own side crowding to her assistance now--amongst them was the *Mignonne*, with her captain shot through the arm, yet giving his orders as calmly from the quarterdeck as though he were upon some tranquil cruise, as well as the *Hero*, the *Mars*, and the *Union*; while, to leave England the conqueror in this great fray, there was something else coming.

That something was the night. And the French, taking advantage of it, sheered off--they had had enough! The *Soleil Royal* soon ran ashore with the *Héros*, when both were burnt. The *Juste* was on the rocks and overturned; beneath the water were several others, and a dozen more were aground. Well might the ten thousand French spectators ashore who had witnessed the great fight turn white and weep as night closed in on all around.

Of our losses the principal were the *Resolution* and the *Essex*; the remainder were not important.

And so the great fleet which was to have invaded England was utterly destroyed, Conflans'

threats were idle and empty now, France had received another death-blow to her ambitions, and Hawke's peerage was assured.

It was enough.

* * * * *

In the darkness of the November night they called the roll on board all the English vessels and wrote down the names of the dead and dying, as well as of the missing.

In the *Mignonne* they were doing it now, as slowly, with her topmast shot away, she followed in her turn. Two of her lieutenants did not answer to their names--never again would they reply to them!--and her master also was silent.

"Mr. Granger," next called out the quartermaster, himself uninjured.

But neither to his name was any answer given.

"Is he dead or wounded?" asked Sir Geoffrey Barry, pale from his wound.

"Who's seen him?" roared the quartermaster. "Has any one seen the master-gunner?"

"I saw him," cried a man, himself wounded and bleeding, "not half an hour ago. He was at his post then--where he've been all day."

"Call his name again," said Sir Geoffrey.

But still no answer was returned, as indeed no answer was returned to over forty names similarly called.

Then, later, they set forth to go the rounds of the ship and find those who had not replied, the captain going first, accompanied by a midshipman with a lanthorn. And many were found dead at their posts before, at last, they came to Lewis Granger.

He was lying upon his side by the middle-deck port-sills with his face turned downwards, while all around and beneath where his head lay was a great pool of blood--his own and others--that slowly drained towards the scuppers and so ran out to mingle with the heaving waves beneath.

"Is he dead?" asked Sir Geoffrey, gazing down at him while the midshipman held the lanthorn so that they could see his face. "Is he dead?" And as he spoke there were tears in his voice.

Was this to be the end of all, he thought; the end of the man's hopes for a better life, the end of his unchanging, unchangable love for the woman who, even now, was free?

"He is not dead, sir," the boatswain answered, kneeling by Granger's side and supporting his head above his own knee, "but he is dying; must surely die. Observe the great wound in his throat."

"Granger," said Geoffrey, kneeling by his side, "Granger--do you know me?"

Then the dying man opened his eyes and looked up at the other, who by that glance understood that he did know him.

"Shall I tell him?" thought Geoffrey. "Shall I tell him now, at the last moment? Will it make him happier? What is best to do?"

"He is going, sir," the boatswain whispered, "he is going. His heart is getting more feeble, growing fainter."

"Granger," then whispered Barry, "can you hear me--understand me? Listen, ah! listen, and so part happily. She whom you love is free--free now to come to you. Does that in truth make you happier?"

"It--is--too--late," the dying man muttered hoarsely, for the last time!

His head lay even heavier now than before upon the rough sailor's knee; while the man, with a glance at his captain, put up his hand and removed the cap he wore--he being followed in the action by all present.

Yet, still, Granger was not quite dead; still some life was left in the strong, suffering heart. Once again he spoke.

"Tell her," he whispered, as Geoffrey bent his ear, "that--I--died--blessing--loving her--to--the--"

last. Tell her--I never loved but one; and that--my first--love was my last. Also--in your mercy--leave her picture upon my--breast--where it has always lain since--I lost--her."

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FORTUNE'S MY FOE: A ROMANCE ***

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