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TALE OF THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERIES ***

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"WHAT HAVE WE HERE? S. JOSEPH HELP US!"

Page 3.

The Last Abbot of Glastonbury.

*A Tale of the Dissolution of the
Monasteries.*

*By the
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Havenstreet, I.W.;*

*Author of
Fairleigh Hall, The Chronicles of Æscundune, The Camp on the
Severn, etc., etc.*

*Oxford and London:
A. R. MOWBRAY & CO.*

HISTORICAL PREFACE.

[i]

he Author humbly ventures to offer the ninth of his series of original tales, illustrating Church History, to the public; encouraged by the favourable reception the previous volumes have found.

In the tales, "Æmilius," "Evanus," and "The Camp on the Severn," he has endeavoured to



describe the epoch of the Pagan persecutions, under the Roman Empire; in the "Three Chronicles of Æscendune," successive epochs of Early English history; in the "Andredsweald," the Norman Conquest; in "Fairleigh Hall," the Great Rebellion; and in the *present* volume, one of the earliest of the series of events ordinarily grouped under the general phrase "The Reformation," the destruction of the Monasteries.

It is many years since the writer was first attracted and yet saddened by the tragical story of the fate of the last Abbot of Glastonbury, and amongst the tales by which he was wont to enliven the Sunday evenings in a large School, this narrative found a foremost place, and excited very general interest.

A generation ago, few English Churchmen cared to say a good word for the unhappy monks, who suffered so cruel a persecution at the hands of Henry the Eighth and his vicar-general, Thomas Cromwell. Many, indeed, confessed a sentimental regret when they visited the ruins of such glorious fanes as Tintern, Reading, or Furness, and reflected that but for the vandalism of the period, such buildings might yet vie with the cathedrals, with which they were coeval, and if not retained for their original uses, might yet be devoted to the service of religion and humanity, in various ways; but the fear of being supposed to betray a leaning to the doctrines once taught within these ruined walls, has prevented many a writer from doing justice to the sufferers under atrocious tyranny.

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Yet did an act of parliament now pass the legislature giving the various episcopal palaces, deaneries, rectories, and vicarages in England, with all their furniture, to the Crown, and were the present occupants ruthlessly ejected, and hung, drawn, and quartered in case of resistance, active or passive, the injustice would not be greater, the outrage on the rights of property more flagrant, than in the case of the monasteries.

The late Rev. W. Gresley, in his tale, "The Forest of Arden," was (so far as the writer remembers) the first writer of historical fiction, amongst modern Churchmen, who attempted to render justice to our forefathers, who, born and bred under the papal supremacy, could not disguise their convictions, or transfer their allegiance to a lustful tyrant.

But even he spake with "bated breath" when compared with Dean Hook, who, later on, thus writes in his lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury:—

"To an Englishman, taught to regard his house as his castle, these acts of invasion on property appear to be monstrous; our blood boils within us when we learn that by blending the Acts of Supremacy with the Treason Acts the Protestant enthusiasts under Cromwell condemned to death not fewer than 59 persons, who, however mistaken they were in their opinions, were as honest as Latimer, and more firm than Cranmer.

"Of the murders of Bishop Fisher and Sir Thomas Moore, the former the greatest patron of learning, the latter ranking with the most learned men the age produced, both of them men of undoubted piety, the reader must not expect in these pages a justification or even an attempt at palliation; we should be as ready to accord the crown of martyrdom to the Abbots of Reading and *Glastonbury* and to the Prior of S. John's, Colchester, when rather than betray their trust they died, as we are to place it on the heads of Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer. Although the latter had the better cause, yet we must all admit that atrocious as were the proceedings under Mary and Bonner, the persecutions under Henry and Cromwell fill the mind with greater horror."

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But it may be asked, were not the atrocious crimes laid to the charge of the monks in the celebrated "Black Book," the "Compendium compertorum," a sufficient justification? Did not the very parliament at the recital cry "Down with them."

The opinion of such parliaments as those which passed the absurd and bloody treason acts dictated by Henry, or which condemned so many innocent victims by Acts of Attainder, or passed those most atrocious acts, "the Vagrant Acts," by which a cruel form of slavery was established in England, only England would not put it in practice,—the professed opinion of such parliaments will weigh little with modern Englishmen.

But it appears that the very accusers themselves, or at least the Government who employed them, could not have believed in the accusations; for no less than eleven of the Abbots were made Bishops to save the Government their pensions, and some of them men against whom the worst charges had been made; others became deans, and others were put into positions of trust, as parochial priests, under Cranmer himself.

And who were the witnesses? Their leader, Dr. London, was put to penance for the most grievous incontinency, and afterwards thrown into prison *for perjury*, where he died miserably. Another, Layton, who figures in the tale, becoming dean of York, pawned the cathedral plate. Upon the testimony of such witnesses one would not hang a dog.

But this is not the place for an investigation of the subject, nor is it one to be commended to the pure-minded reader, such garbage did these venal and foul-mouthed spies invent to justify the rapacity of their employers. Not that we would maintain the absolute purity of the monasteries, or that there was no foundation whatsoever upon which such a superstructure was reared: many of the brotherhoods had fallen far below the high ideal of their profession, or even the spiritual attainments of their brethren in earlier and better days; but there is absolute proof that in many instances the reports of the visitors were pure inventions. No just Lots were they, "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked," but men of evil imaginations, who were paid to invent scandal if they could not find it.^[1]

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I have not, therefore, hesitated to make the sufferings of the last Abbot of Glastonbury the theme of a story, but while I have adhered to the main facts of the tragedy, I have availed myself somewhat of the usual license accorded to all writers of historical fiction, justified by the example of the great and revered founder of the school, Sir Walter Scott.

In particular, the words put into the mouth of the Abbot, both in his last sermon at Glastonbury and in the trial at Wells, were actually used by his fellow-sufferer, the Prior of the Charterhouse, John Houghton, under precisely similar circumstances: the reader will find the whole of the touching story in the second volume of Froude's "History of England;" it is well worth perusal.

It may be objected that one so young as the hero of the latter portion of the story, "Cuthbert the foundling," could scarcely have been exposed to the operation of the Treason Acts, or required to take the oath of supremacy, in his twenty-first year; but there are examples of sufferers under this *régime* at a more tender age: a month or two, more or less, made small difference in the Tudor period, especially when the interests of the Crown were concerned, or the will of the despot expressed. The concealment of the Abbey treasure, and the sympathy of the Abbot with the Pilgrimage of Grace (how could he be otherwise disposed) are matters of history.

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An attempt has been made, within our memory, by a modern historian, to whitewash the memory of the royal "Blue Beard," under whom such fearful atrocities were committed; we are asked to believe that the Carthusians, dying dismembered and mutilated in so horrible a manner, or in the filth of the fetid dungeons in which they were thrown, that the aged Countess of Salisbury flying about the scaffold with her gray hairs dabbled in blood, that the Protestants who were burnt, and Catholics who were drawn and quartered, sometimes on the same day and at the same place, that such victims as Fisher, More, and Surrey, were all unwilling sacrifices to a high sense of duty on the part of the king who slew them, who also was a right honourable husband, plagued by unworthy wives, and hence deserving of the pity of married men.

But to the writer, the following paragraph from a deservedly popular history, appears more nearly to represent the truth:—

"The temper of such a legislator as Henry the Eighth, and the thorough subservience, the otherwise *incredible* cowardice and baseness of his parliaments, can only be fully exhibited by an enumeration of their penal laws, which for number, variety, severity, and inconsistency are perhaps unequalled in the annals of jurisprudence.

"Instead of the calmness, the foresight, and the wisdom which are looked for in a legislator, we find the wild fantasies and ever-changing, though ever selfish caprices of a spoiled child, joined to the blind fierce malignant passions of a brutal and cruel savage. It would seem as if the disembodied demon of a Caligula or a Nero, the evil spirit that once bore their human form, had again become incarnate upon earth, let loose for some wise (though to dull mortal eyes, dimly discerned) end, to repeat in a distant age, and another clime that same strange, wild, extravagant medley of buffoonery and horror, which is fitted to move at once the laughter and execration of mankind." (*Knight's Pictorial History*).

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This is strong language, but when one rises from a perusal of the deeds committed during this reign of terror, it seems justified.

The destruction also of the monastic libraries, and the decay of solid learning (Latimer being witness), must ever be regretted by the scholar. Fuller tells us that "the English monks were bookish of themselves, and much inclined to hoard up monuments of learning." But all these treasures were ruthlessly destroyed or scattered, including books and valuable MS., which would now be worth their weight in gold. John Ball, by no means a *laudator temporis acti*, wrote to Edward VI.:—

"A number of them which purchased these superstitious mansions (the monasteries) reserved of their library books, some to serve their jakes, some to scour their candlesticks, and some to rub their boots, some they sold to the grocers and soap sellers; and some they sent over sea to the bookbinders—not in small number, but at times whole ships full. ... I know a merchant man, which shall at this time be nameless, that bought the contents of two noble libraries for forty shillings a piece. A shame it is to be spoken. This stuff hath he occupied instead of grey paper by the space of more than these ten years, and yet he hath store enough for as many years to come."

It is true the monks were accused of leading idle lives; but to the unlearned, especially those who get their bread by physical labour, the student poring over his books is always "a drone."

It may be most true that the monastic system, so serviceable in the middle ages, the only shelter for peaceful men in the midst of bloodshed and strife, the only refuge for learning amongst the densely ignorant, had had its day; that the hospitals, the almshouses, the workhouses, the schools and colleges, do all the work they once did, and do it better, than in the ages, then to come, they could have filled no useful purpose had they survived.

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Well! supposing this granted, does it in any way justify the cruelty of the suppression? The judicious Hallam well observes, that "it is impossible to feel too much indignation at the spirit in which these proceedings were conducted." Had vested and life interests been respected, had the admission of further novices been prohibited, and the buildings themselves, when no longer needed, utilized as hospitals and colleges, and the like; whatever men might think of the change, they would at least admit the moderation of the government; but what consideration can justify the intolerable barbarity of the persecutions.

Two questions may be asked, first, what became of the monks, nearly a hundred thousand, in a population of some three millions, who were thus, with the most meagre of pensions, cruelly turned out of house and home.

It must be replied that a large number, in fact all who could by any contrivance be brought under the scope of either of the numerous laws involving capital punishment, perished by the hand of the executioner. For example, begging in the first instance was punished by whipping, in the second by mutilation, and in the third the beggar was doomed "to suffer pains and execution of death as a felon, and enemy of the commonwealth."^[2] This cruel law, which was probably drawn up by Henry himself, was doubtless aimed especially at the unfortunate monks, who unfitted for labour by their sedentary lives, and unable to obtain work, would often be forced to the dreadful alternative of starvation or hanging. How many starving monks must have fallen into this dreadful trap, for their pensions even if regularly paid were miserably insufficient, and preferred to hang than to starve; doubtless they formed a large proportion of the eighty thousand criminals, who are said to have perished, by the hands of the executioner, in this dreadful reign.

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Secondly: what became of the monastic property amounting, it has been said, to a sum equivalent to fifty millions sterling of our present money, which was to have almost superseded taxation, and accomplished other wonderful ends? It disappeared under Henry's incomprehensible extravagance, and at the hands of his greedy courtiers; and not only was he forced in his latter days to debase the currency, but moreover in the last November of his life, his venal parliament conferred upon him the absolute disposal of all colleges, charities, and hospitals in the kingdom, with all their manors, lands, and hereditaments, receiving only in return his gracious promise that they should all be applied for the public good. Had God not summoned the tyrant to give an account of his stewardship, within two months of the act, we might not have had a college, school, almshouse, or hospital left in England, any more than a monastery; "had he survived a little while longer," says the impartial writer I have before quoted, "he would not have left an hospital for the care of the sick, or a school for the instruction of youth."

But I have already taxed the patience of my readers; I have promised them a tale and instead I am writing an essay.

A. D. C.

December, 1883.

FOOTNOTES

- [1] The reader will find this subject fully and fairly treated in the sixth chapter of the Rev. J. H. Blunt's "History of the Reformation" and the first introductory chapter of the first volume of the new series of Dean Hook's "Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury," from which I have already quoted.
- [2] 22 Henry VIII. Cap. 12, and 27 Henry VIII. Cap. 25.

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***ERRATUM.***

*Page 169, line 5, Read appetens for appietens.*

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PART I.

The Last Abbot.

They built in marble; built as they
 Who hoped these stones should see the day
 When Christ should come; and that these walls
 Might stand o'er them till judgment calls.



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[1]



**THE
 LAST ABBOT OF GLASTONBURY,
 A TALE OF THE DAYS OF HENRY VIII.**

Prologue.

It is a cold wintry night in the year 1524, the fifteenth of the high and mighty Lord, Henry, Eighth of that name, "by the grace of God King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland," as the heralds



vainly style him.

All day long the clouds have been hanging over the forest of Avalon, heavy and dull as lead, and now towards eventide they descend in snow, an east wind arises, which blows the flakes before it, with such frantic violence, that their direction seems almost parallel to the earth, penetrating every nook of the forest, filling each hollow.

Darkness descends upon the earth, as the storm increases; it is dark everywhere, but darkest in the depths of the sombre wood, amidst the tangled copse, beneath the bare branches of the huge oaks, which wave wildly as if in torture, and anon fall with a crash which startles the boldest beasts of the forest. [2]

A road leads through the heart of this mighty wood, leads towards the famous Abbey-town of Glastonbury, where as folks say Joseph of Arimathæa arrived long ago, and planting his staff, which grew like Aaron's rod, and put forth buds, determined the site of the future Benedictine Monastery. Do they not yet show the strange foreign thorn tree which grew from that holy staff? [3]

But we are in the wood, and happy were it for us, if we could but rest before the huge fire which imagination pictures in that far off great chamber of the Abbey.

Through the darkness comes a step softly falling on the snow; it draws nearer, and dim outlines become distinct. It is a woman and she carries an infant.

A woman and her child out to-night! the Saints preserve them, especially S. Joseph of Glastonbury; with what a timid glance too she looks behind her from time to time. Does she fear pursuit?

See how she clasps the child to her breast, how she wraps her robe around it, regardless of the exposure of her own person: poor mother, what has brought her out in this wild night? Alas, her strength seems failing; see she stumbles, almost falls, the wind blows so fiercely that she can hardly stand against it,—she stumbles again. [3]

We, as invisible spectators, stand beneath the shade, or what would be in summer the shade of a spreading beech; around its base there is a mossy bank, gently rising, or rather *would* be were it not covered with snow.

She approaches the tree and falls on the slope as one who *can* do no more, who gives up the struggle.

Still she shelters the poor babe.

An hour passes away, she lies as if dead, only there is a ceaseless cry from the child, and from time to time a faint moan from the mother.

Look, there is a light in the wood; it is moving, and now a heavy step, crushing the frozen snow; it is a countryman, and he carries a horn lantern.

A dog, a shepherd's dog, runs by his side.

Will the man pass the tree?—yes *he* may but the dog will not; see he is "pointing," and now he runs to his master, and takes hold of the skirts of his smock.

"What have we here? S. Joseph help us! a woman! Why mistress what doest thou here? Get up, or thou wilt be frozen stiff and stark before morning." [4]

Only a moan in answer: he stoops down and gently, for a rustic, looks at her face; he does not know her, but he sees by the dress and by something indescribable in the face, that she is one of "gentle blood."

"Canst thou not move?"

Another moan.

He strives to raise her, and the dog looks wistfully on, as if in full sympathy. Thy canine heart, poor Tray, is softer than that of the men who drove her forth to-night.

Ah, that is right; she takes courage, strives to rise,—no, she is down again.

"I cannot," she says, "my limbs are frozen; take the child, save my Cuthbert."

"I would fain save you both," says the man, but he strives in vain to do so, it is beyond his power to carry them, and *she* can move no further; she but rises to sink again on the bank, her limbs have lost their power.

"Take my child," she says once more, "and leave me to die; heaven is kinder than man, and the good angels are very near."

The yeoman, for such he is, hesitates, "No one shall say that Giles Hodge forsook thee in thy strait, yet, there is the keeper's cottage within a mile, if I run and take the babe, I may come back and save thee." [5]

"Go, go, for heaven's sake, my boy *must* live, his precious life *must* be saved, then come back for me; he is the heir of"—

Here her voice failed her.

"She speaks the words of wisdom," says Giles, and he takes the babe, leaving the shawl wrapped round the mother.

"Nay, the shawl, take the shawl for the babe."

"I can carry it 'neath my smock, and 'twill come to no harm, thou wouldst die without it."

She starts up, imprints one fervent kiss upon the babe ere it leaves her; alas, it is the last feeble outcome of strength.

Giles runs along the road, as fast as the ground, heavy with snow, and the wind, will permit him; he reaches the house of Stephen Ringwood, the deputy keeper; it is now Curfew time, and the honest woodman is just putting out his fire to go to bed.

"Stephen, Stephen," shouts Giles, as he knocks at the door.

A loud and heavy barking from the throats of deep-chested dogs.

"Who is there?"

"Thy old crony, Giles Hodge; open to me at once."

The door opens. "What Saint has sent thee here! and a babe too?"

"Oh, Stephen, come directly, and help me bring the *mother* in; she is out in the snow, spent with toil, and if we arrive not soon she will be *dead*."

"I have some warm milk on the fire; here, Susan, give some to the babe and give me the rest," and putting it into a horn, the two started back, leaving the infant with the keeper's wife.

They reach the tree again.

How still she is.

Giles trembles, bless his tender heart. It is no discredit to thy manhood, Giles.

"Yes, she is dead, she has given her last kiss to the babe."

They put together some short poles and cord they have brought, which make a sort of litter.

"Carry her gently, Stephen," says Giles as he wipes his eyes with the sleeves of his smock, "carry her gently, she said the good angels were near her, and I believe they are watching us now, if they are not on the road to paradise with her soul."



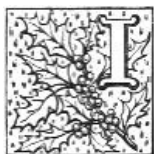
FOOTNOTES

[3] See Note A., Antiquities of Glastonbury.



CHAPTER I.

ALL-HALLOW EVEN.



It was the All-Hallow Even of the year 1538, and the first Evensong of the festival of All Saints had been sung, in the noble Abbey Church of Glastonbury, with all those solemn accessories, which gave such dignity, yet such mystery, to the services of the mediæval Church of England.

The air was yet redolent with the breath of incense, the solemn notes of the Gregorian psalmody yet seemed to echo through the lofty aisles, as the long procession of the Benedictine brethren left the choir, and passed in procession down the church, the Abbot in his gorgeous robes closing the procession.

A noble looking old man was he, that Richard Whiting,—last and not least of the hundred mitred Abbots who had filled that seat of honour and dignity since the first conversion of England. A face full of sweet benignity—one which inspired reverence while it commanded love. His life had been distinguished throughout by the virtues which had ever found congenial home at Glastonbury—piety towards God, and love towards man.

And now the lay congregation who filled the noble nave and aisles, beyond the transept, were

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leaving the church; the lights were slowly extinguished, and the gloom of the wintry evening was filling the church, save where the one solitary light burnt all night before the high altar.

In the porch, after the doors were closed, stood the sacristan and a young acolyte—one of the choristers, for since a large school was attached to the monastery, they had the assistance of a youthful choir. It was a bright happy face, that of the boy, upon which the moon shone brightly, as he bade “good night” to the sacristan—saying that he had leave to spend the evening at home, and should not return till morning—then passed with light footsteps through the Abbey precincts, and then across a green, to some distant cottages which skirted the common land. Let us describe him more fully. He was somewhat sunburnt in complexion, with brown hair, and had those blue eyes, beneath long dark eye-brows, which give a sort of dreamy expression to the face, but the features were redeemed from the charge of effeminacy by the bold open brow, the firm thin lips, and by the nose which was slightly aquiline.

His dress was studiously simple, yet very unlike that of modern days, but if my youthful readers have ever met a “blue coat boy” they will have no difficulty in picturing the attire of the period. To sum up, he was a lad whose appearance inspired interest, as we hope his fortunes, to be herein depicted, will do, for they were passing strange. [9]

It was a picturesque house before which he stopped—a cottage overgrown with ivy, not unlike those cottages, now alas fast vanishing, which may be met in many an Oxfordshire village—and which strolling artists delight to paint, lovely to look at, but not so comfortable, it may be, as the new style of brick and slate tenements, which painters would disdain to transfer to canvas.

The fire within shone brightly through the windows, and the flickering light made the heart of Cuthbert, for such was his name, leap with the anticipation of the joys of the ingle-nook,—the endearments of home.

He lifted the latch without knocking, and entered; an aged man and woman sat by the fire, a comely old couple, who were eager, in spite of their infirmities, to greet the darling of their old age.

And was not there a meal spread on the table near the fire? It was not “tea,” that beverage was yet unknown, but there was plenty to tempt a boy’s appetite, and the frosty air had sharpened Cuthbert’s. [10]

And when it was over, and the old man sat in his high-backed arm-chair, the grandmother went out and the lad went into the “chimney corner” to his favourite seat.

“Chimney corner!” what a nook of delight on the winter’s evening, when the snow-flakes steal gently down the chimney and hiss as they meet the blazing logs! Well does the writer remember filling such a seat many winters ago.

“Grandfather, do you remember that this night is Hallow-e’en, when all the ghosts are abroad? I want you to tell me something about them—the old tales which used to make my flesh creep when I was younger.”

“Why, boy, it is thought to be a night when the dead can’t rest quiet in their graves, though why they should not rest on a holy night like this I can hardly tell.”

“Did you ever see a ghost? Oh, here is grandmother with nuts, apples, and ale! Why do we always eat nuts and apples on Hallow-e’en?”

“They always have been eaten to-night, that is all I know; sometimes they tie up an apple with a string to the beam, and when they have tied the hands, set the young ones to eat it with the help of their teeth only—catch who catch can.”

“And about the nuts?” [11]

“Oh, lads and maidens who are in love with each other will take two nuts, and call them *lad* and *lass*: if they burn quietly together they conclude that they will have a happy wedded life, but if *lad* or *lass* bounce out of the fire, that there will be strife and quarrels between them, in which case, dear boy, I think they had better not go together to the altar; better live apart than have nought but strife and quarrels.”^[4]

“But I wanted to ask you about something more wonderful than this; the boys were saying, when we were talking about Hallow-e’en in the cloisters, that if you went into the church porch at midnight, you would see the *fetches*^[5] of all the folk who are to die this year come and choose the place for their graves.”

“I have heard the tale, and don’t believe it; it is all nonsense, my boy.”

“Anyhow I promised that I would go and see to-night.”

“Nay, my child, you must be in bed and asleep at midnight, and I do not think you would *dare* to try.”

“That is what they said, the other boys I mean, and they *dared* me to go.”

“I don’t think you would catch a ghost, but I think you would catch your death of cold, it is freezing sharply to-night.” [12]

Cuthbert thought it best to drop the subject, lest he should be forbidden to make the adventure, upon which he had set his heart, not without some trepidation, but still with the longing to be the hero of the occasion, who should test the truth of the legend—for he had bound himself to his schoolfellows to make the experiment, and there was much speculation as to the

probable results.

After a very pleasant evening the hour of bed-time approached. Our ancestors thought Curfew (8 p.m.) the proper time for retiring, and nine was looked upon as a very late hour.

So, soon after Curfew had rung from the tower of the Abbey, the embers of the fire were "raked out," and the old couple retired to their rooms, after seeing Cuthbert safe in his little chamber, which opened upon the roof.

The rudeness of the furniture in those days has been somewhat exaggerated by modern writers; indeed we are apt to conclude, because in this nineteenth century such progress has been made in the arts of civilization as puts us quite upon a different footing from our grandfathers, that a similar difference existed between those grandfathers themselves and *their* ancestors. But it was not so, there was scant difference between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries in this respect. [13]

So in Cuthbert's room there was a comfortable bed, on a carved wooden bedstead, a chair, a table, a chest for clothes, and the like, much as in the present day.^[6]

The lad did not undress, but, after he had said his prayers, lay down on the bed in his clothes, and did what he could to keep himself awake, till the time came for his adventure.

He counted the hours as the Abbey clock struck, until *eleven* boomed forth, when he rose, put on his doublet, opened the door, and went very softly down stairs.

He listened at his grandfather's room as he went by—they were fast asleep, he heard their breathing. He descended to the "living" room, opened the outer door carefully, and stole forth.

Once on the green, the freshness of the air and the bright moonlight revived him; he felt his spirits rise in spite of the involuntary chill which now and then crept over him.

He reached the grave-yard of the parish church, for this had been selected as the scene of the experiment, since the monks would be singing the night office in the Abbey.

And as he went through the church-yard to the porch, he could not help looking timorously from side to side, it seemed so strange to be alone with the dead, when the living were asleep; he was glad to get inside, the shadows of the yew trees looked so ghastly on the cold graves, and the chill moon looked upon the last low resting places with such a ghostly light. [14]

He tried the door of the church; it was locked, as usual at that hour.

There was a broad bench on each side the porch; he sat and waited.

And I think he fell asleep and dreamt, but this was the story he told.

When the clock tolled the hour of midnight the last sound of the bell was prolonged, as if the organ in its softest tones had taken up the note; the music grew louder, until the introit of the Mass for the dead pealed out distinctly.

"Requiem æternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis."

Then as he started up in amazement, the door swung open, and the "fetches or doubles" of those who were to die that year, that is, their ghostly likenesses, came out to seek their graves.

And there were many whom the boy knew, but last of all came out from the church the form of his benefactor, Richard Whiting, Lord Abbot of Glastonbury.

And around his neck there hung a ghastly cord, and close by his side followed Prior and Sub-Prior, and cords were about their necks too. [15]

Then the boy grew faint, and knew no more till he awoke, or recovered from his faint, whichever it was, and returning home, undressed, shivering as he did so, and went to bed.

When he afterwards told this tale, there were many who refused to believe that he had ever left his bed, and always insisted that he had *dreamt* the scene in the porch.

But if it was a dream, it was not without inspiration.

Coming events cast their shadows before.

FOOTNOTES

[4] See Note B.

[5] See Note C.

[6] An ancient inventory of the furniture of such a house lies before the writer as he pens these lines.



CHAPTER II. RETROSPECT.



Three centuries and more have rolled away since the dissolution of the monasteries, which once rose in architectural beauty in each district of mediæval England, gladdening the eye of the wayfarer with the assurance of hospitality, and of the poor with that of help and protection.

Their pious founders built in marble—

“Built as they
Who hoped those stones should see the day
When Christ should come; and that those walls
Might stand o’er them till judgment calls.”

Alas! for such hopes; the tyrant Tudor, taking advantage of the palpable declension of the inmates from their first love, levelled them with the ground, and left the country shorn of such glorious fanes as arose over the conquerors at Battle, or the tombs of the mighty dead at Glastonbury. Yet still they had welcomed the wayfarer and the stranger, tended the sick, taught the young, found labour for the poor, were good masters to their tenants, built bridges, made roads, and were the centres of civilization in their several districts. [17]

Two rebellions ruthlessly extinguished in blood—the pilgrimage of grace, and the later rising in Devon and Cornwall—testified to the popular sense of loss when the servile courtier, ever the tyrant at home, had succeeded to the gentle old monks.

For all that is now done for the poor, and too often in a wooden kind of way by workhouses, hospitals, and the like, was then done by the monasteries, and their suppression was a cruel wrong to the poor.

Reformed, they needed to be, or they had never fallen, but that the treasures given by their founders in trust for God and His poor should pass into the hands of Henry’s fawning courtiers was too monstrous an iniquity.

The legendary history of Glastonbury has been told by the author before,^[7] its supposed foundation by S. Joseph of Arimathæa, devoutly believed in in that credulous age, and the holy thorn-tree which blossomed from the staff which he there struck into the ground; *there* King Arthur was buried, and his body found after the lapse of ages; *there*, like a city set on a hill, the lamp of faith had been kept burning for forty generations, if alas, tarnished (which we sadly own) by superstition and credulity. [18]

Amongst other good works, they educated the young of Christ’s flock, for at Glastonbury there was a school of two or three hundred boys, who were taught by the learned Benedictines of the Abbey; for the Benedictines were the scholars of the day.

The discipline was somewhat severe, and the life hard, as modern boys would think it.

The hour of rising, summer or winter, was four; they breakfasted at five, after the service of Lauds in the chapel, upon beef and beer on ordinary days, and on a dish of sprats or herrings instead of meat on fast days.

Then to their lessons, and we shall grieve our younger readers when we tell that Solomon was held in much respect, and therefore the rod was freely used in case of idleness or insubordination; but of the latter there was very little under monastic discipline.

There was a short space for recreation before the chapter Mass at nine o’clock, which all attended, after which work was resumed until Sext, which was followed by a simple but hearty dinner.

There was again another period of work in the afternoon, after Nones, but as it was necessary that the boys should not be behind the world in physical prowess, ample leisure was afforded for exercise and rough sports. [19]

Modern schoolboys complain of compulsory football; their remote ancestors had little choice in such matters, whether schoolboys or rustic lads on the village green. By Act of Parliament, tutors in the one case, or magistrates in the other, were bound to see that the lads under their jurisdiction, omitting idle sports, did exercise themselves in archery, the broad-sword exercise, the tilt yard, and such-like martial pastimes.

Fighting, or mock-fighting—and the imitation was not altogether unlike the reality—was alike the amusement and the chief accomplishment of life, especially in England, which had then, not without cause, the reputation of being the “fiercest nation in Europe.” “English wild beasts,” an Italian writer calls them, yet who would not prefer the manly and honest Englishman to the

Italian of the day, with his poisoners and bravoos?

And our readers must imagine how the Glastonbury boys were excited by such stories as that of the four hundred London apprentices, who went out as volunteers to the garrison of Calais, and kept all the neighbouring districts of France in terror, until they were overwhelmed by *six* times their number, and died fighting with careless desperation to the last.

[20]

So, even in the calm atmosphere of a monastery school, the world intruded.

As for their book-lore, they learned Latin practically, for they were forced to use it during a great part of the day in conversation, while they read daily in the Fathers and classical authors. Fabyan's Chronicles and other old English historians supplied their history, and they were fairly instructed in the rudiments of mathematics. Altogether it was a sound education which the monastic school supplied.

We will now proceed with our story, after a digression which may be easily omitted by those who dislike to understand what they read.

The reader has, we doubt not, already identified the hero of the midnight adventure in the church porch, with the babe of our prologue.

Honest old Giles Hodge had told the whole story to the Abbot, within whose jurisdiction the babe was found, and with whom he sought an early interview. Strict search had been made after the surviving parent, if perchance there was one upon whom that epithet could be bestowed.

But no trace was found; only the delicate apparel of the lady, and the fine linen in which the child was wrapped, led to the conclusion that they were members of some "gentle house." Upon the linen there were marks: a crest which had been picked out, and two initials yet remaining, "C. R."

[21]

"The poor little foundling shall be our care," said the good Abbot, "but here alack, we have no nursery, and your good wife, who has so recently lost her own babe, must be his foster mother if she be willing. I will provide for his maintenance hereafter, whether in the cloister or the world, unless his friends claim him."

"And what name shall we give him, your reverence?"

"Let me see, C must be his Christian name; let us call him Cuthbert, better patron than S. Cuthbert he could not have; the R must yet be a mystery—he will not need two names yet."

So the years rolled by; Cuthbert grew up strong and hearty, but no one ever came to claim him. And he was still known only by *one* name, a peculiarity little commented upon where his story was so well known.

He grew up a general favourite, especially, it was supposed, with the Abbot; and yet the self-restrained austere old man showed little traces of such weakness, save to very observant eyes.

He loved the young, one and all, and often visited the school. He knew every face there, and it was a great delight to him to watch them at their sports, perhaps recalling his own younger days, when Henry the Seventh was King.

[22]

In time little Cuthbert was chosen to be a chorister, and soon afterwards, by the Abbot's desire, he was made an "acolyte,"—one who served at the altar,—and there his reverent and unassuming demeanour won him yet further regard.

But my readers must not think him the least bit of a milksop; they know, I trust, that the bravest lad is he who fears God, and fears nought besides. Cuthbert was not one of those lads who *talked* much about religion, if there were such then, nor again one who courted notice by obtrusive acts of devotion—his religion was of a manlier type.

And meanwhile, as we shall show, he gained the respect of his companions by his proficiency in many sports and exercises; he was one of the best archers, one of the best at fencing and sword play; in the tilt yard he was always up to the mark. In the same way some of the best boys I remember at a certain school were conspicuous at football and cricket, the modern equivalents.

It was a fine evening in May, and all the lads of Glastonbury School were in the archery ground. A silver arrow had to be contended for as a prize—the prize of the year—and there were many competitors.

All Glastonbury looked on at the sport; many were there who had been great archers themselves in their youth, and who, like Nestor of old, were never tired of talking of the great things that had been done when they were young.

[23]

For full two hundred years had gunpowder been in common use, yet all that time the bow held its own; an arrow would fly much farther than the bullets of that day, nay of much later days, for it was actually ordered by Act of Parliament, in the directions to the villages, for the maintenance of "buttes," that no person of full age should shoot with the light-flight arrow at a less distance than two hundred and twenty yards, that is a whole furlong; under that distance the heavy war arrow had to be used in all trials of skill.^[8]

And now four lads of fourteen stand forth to contend for the prize; the target is a furlong off, the arrows, light ones, in regard to the age of the competitors.

We will introduce them to our readers in proper order.

There stands Gregory Bell, son of the squire of a neighbouring village, tall and slim, but tough in muscle, and very sound in wind and limb; his round face and laughing black eyes will be remembered many a day. His long-bow is long indeed,—three fingers thick, and six feet long, well got up, polished, and without knots; few English boys could bend it now, it came of practice. [24]

He draws the bow—the light arrow cleaves the air—he has struck the first circle of blue, not the bull’s-eye itself—a cheer from his schoolfellows.

“Well done, Gregory, well done, old fellow.”

“The lad will do well enough,” said an old bowman, “yet not like his father; but where be the bowmen of Crecy now? At the last bout we had with them, the French turned their backs upon us at long range, and bid us shoot, whereas had we been the men our sires were, they would have paid dearly for their fool-hardy challenge.”

Then stood up Adam Banister, a round thick-set youth, with brown hair and rosy face.

“Good luck to thee, Banister,” was the cry.

How easily he drew his ponderous bow: the arrow whizzed—alas, only the *second* circle was attained.

And now the third champion.

It is Nicholas Grabber. Let our readers mark him, he will often figure in these pages.

A lad of average height, with a head of very bright red hair, which seems positively to shine; his face is deeply freckled, but his appearance not altogether unprepossessing, save for a certain expression of slyness which would indicate a mixture of the fox in his character; those who believed in the transmigration of souls might recognize the *retriever* in Gregory, the *bull* in Banister, the *fox* in Grabber, and—well we will leave them to designate the fourth after reading his history, for it was Cuthbert. [25]

One after the other they discharge their arrows; the first shaft strikes the bull’s-eye, but amid shouts of admiration, the second, that of Cuthbert, pierces as near the centre.

“Hurrah!” “Grabber!” “Cuthbert!” and the names were repeated again and again by the crowd.

“Move the target fifty yards further, and let them shoot yet again.”

They were rivals, these two boys, and not such good friends as they should have been. Grabber envied Cuthbert his place in the Abbot’s favour, which *he* had utterly failed to attain; for had he not run away, and had not his father sent him back to school, coupled between two foxhounds, under the charge of the huntsman, a story never forgotten by his schoolfellows.^[9] However, he was a good shot, a ringleader in boyish mischief, and not without his friends.

Again the arrows flew, but at this distance Grabber failed the bull’s-eye, just alighting on the rim.

A few moments of breathless anticipation, and Cuthbert’s shaft, soaring through the air, attains the very centre, amidst shouts of wonder and admiration.^[10] [26]

Grabber turned away disgusted, as Cuthbert advanced to receive the silver arrow from the chief forester, who superintended the “buttes.”

Then rang out the Abbey bell for Compline, and the field was deserted to the townsfolk, who kept up the pastimes of archery, cudgel playing, bowls, and the like, till darkness set in.



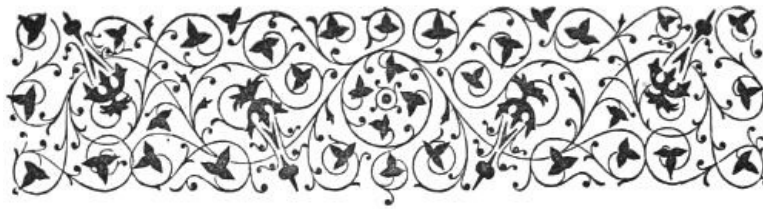
FOOTNOTES

[7] See “Edwy the Fair,” and “Alfgar the Dane,” by the same author.

[8] Froude, vol. I, p. 67. He well observes that he could hardly believe the figures from his experience of modern archery, but such was the Act 33, Henry VIII., cap. 9.

[9] See Note D.

[10] A far more remarkable instance of English archery is given in Scott’s “Anne of Geirstein.”



CHAPTER III. THE SECRET CHAMBER.



he Compline service was over, and the lads, many of whom slept in the abbey, while others lodged in the town, were retiring to their beds, when a lay brother arrested Cuthbert's progress, and said in a low voice, "The Abbot requires thy presence."

Somewhat startled,—for the summons was an unusual one at that hour, although he often acted in turn with other lads as a page-in-waiting on the Abbot, an office none would then despise,—Cuthbert followed the laic.

Threading various passages, they reached the Abbot's lodgings, and there the messenger knocked and retired, leaving Cuthbert to obey the summons, "*Enter.*"

Richard Whiting, the last of that long line of mitred Abbots, sat near the window of his study, which was a plainly furnished room, simple as the personal tastes of the Abbot.

He was now but a weak and infirm old man, yet of many good brethren the best;—"small in stature, in figure venerable, in countenance dignified, in manner most modest, in eloquence most sweet, in chastity without stain; not without that austerity of expression which we often notice in the portraits of these great mediæval ecclesiastics."

[28]

"My son," he said, "I have somewhat to say to thee ere perchance I be taken from thee."

"Taken from me, Father?"

"Yes, the clouds are gathering thick around our devoted house, and the shelter thou hast long received may fail thee and all others here, ere long."

Cuthbert looked amazed.

"Tidings have reached me, my child, that I must be taken to London, there to answer to certain treasons of which they falsely accuse me; the bolt may fall at any moment, and I have to discharge two duties, the first towards thee."

The Abbot took up a little chest from the sideboard.

"Thou hast long been *my* son, and hast not needed thy natural parents, but dost thou not oftentimes wonder who they were?"

"They come to me in dreams."

"And as yet *only* in dreams, my child; perchance thou art an orphan, but in that chest are the few relics of thy poor mother, which we possess; these are the little clothes which swathed thee when thou wast found in Avalon forest—there a ring which encircled thy mother's finger, and a full description of the circumstances of thy arrival here."

[29]

"But what use would they be to me didst thou leave me alone in the world, Father?"

"Thou wilt never be alone, God will be ever with thee, He is the Father of the fatherless; should aught happen to drive thee hence, thee and others, take refuge with thy foster-parents until one seek thee, bearing this ring which thou seest on my finger, to him thou mayest safely commit thyself, and the secrets I am about to entrust thee for him."

Here the tapestry moved in the wind, and a knock was heard at the door, which stood ajar; a fact the Abbot had not noticed.

To Cuthbert's surprise there stood Nicholas Grabber.

"Quid vis fili?" was the Abbot's interrogation.

"The lay brother Francis said that thou wantedst me."

"It was an error, I sent for Cuthbert, and he is here. Pax tecum, go to rest."

"My son," said the Abbot, when Grabber was gone, "I am about to reveal to thee a mystery which thou alone mayest share, until the friend I have mentioned seeks thee, and presents thee with this ring, which thou now seest on my finger; it will not be till I am gone."

[30]

Cuthbert felt his spirits sink within him at the sad words of his protector, but he restrained himself, and listened reverently as to the words of a saint.

"Shut the door carefully, and draw the bolt."

Cuthbert did so.

"Now touch the rose which thou seest in the carving of the cornice there, the fourth rose in order from the door, and the third from the floor."

The wainscotting of the room was divided into small squares; in each one a rose—S. Joseph's

rose—formed the centre.

“The third and the fourth, canst thou remember?”

“Third from the floor, fourth from the door.”

“Now press the centre of the bud sharply with thy thumb.”

Cuthbert did so, and a bookcase, which seemed a fixture in the wall, and which none could have suspected to have been aught *but* a fixture, flew open in the manner of a door, and revealed a flight of circular steps, such steps as we see in old towers to this day.

“Follow me,” said the Abbot, as he took a lamp and descended the steps.

Thirty steps down, and as the Abbot’s room was on the ground-floor, they must have been below the foundations of the Abbey when they came upon a solid iron door; the Abbot touched a spring, bidding Cuthbert observe the manner in which it worked, and entered. [31]

“Fasten the door carefully back by this stay,” said the Abbot, “for should it sway to, we are dead men; the lock is a spring lock, and opens only from the outside, nor is there other exit save into the vaults of the dead. Dost thou see this chest? Here is the key, open it.”

Cuthbert turned the lock, raised the ponderous lid, and let it rest against the wall behind, then gazed upon the contents.

There were the most precious jewels of the Abbey, gemmed reliquaries, golden and jewelled pixes, chalices of solid gold, coined money, and the like, but beyond all this enormous wealth were rolls of parchment, and bundles of letters.

“My son, I have marked in thee from childhood a nature free from guile, and incapable of treachery, therefore do I place this confidence in thee. Those golden and jewelled treasures are not the most important things in the chest, but the *parchments*, the *letters*. They contain secrets, which, if made known, might cost many lives—lives of some of the truest patriots and most faithful sons of Holy Church. [11] I need not detail their nature to thee, nor why I may not destroy them now. The secret thou hast learned is not for thee, thou wilt keep it until the arrival of the hour and the man.” [32]

“His name?”

“I will but tell thee this much, he will be known to thee as the Father Ambrose.”

“Have I never yet met him?”

“Never, he has lived abroad; and now, my child, I will tell thee why I have chosen thee for the repository of this secret. He, who will be thy guardian and guide, when I am no more, who has undertaken the care of thy future, will also share alone with thee this knowledge. Ordinarily it has been confined to the Abbot, Prior, and Sub-Prior of this Abbey, and by them handed down to their successors. They share my danger, and may not survive me; otherwise they may be taken when inquisition is made for these papers, and put to torture to make them declare the hiding-place, and the like danger would hang over all high in office, but not, I trust, over one so young as thou art. Therefore thou must live quietly at thy stepfather’s home, until the day come when thy future guardian shall arrive, and may He, Who is the Father of the orphan, ever guard thee, my Cuthbert. But let us hasten to leave these vaults; I am old, and the damp air affects my aged breath.”

FOOTNOTES

[11] See Note E.



CHAPTER IV. THE ARREST.



o event of importance followed immediately upon the disclosure of the secret chamber;—the summer passed swiftly and pleasantly away, the orchards were already laden with the golden riches of autumn, ere the bolt, so long foreseen, fell.

We can hardly, ourselves, enter into the difficulties and trials which beset the Abbot of Glastonbury. We are accustomed to the spectacle of a Church, divided, at least externally, but to men who had grown up with the belief, that outward unity was essential to

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[33]

the preservation of Christianity, the absolute command to abjure the Papal Supremacy, to break off all relations with Rome, and acknowledge the King as the "Head of the Church of England," was a matter of life or death.

So Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher, not to mention hosts of others, died sooner than comply, while the more timid, shocked at the scandal, for such it was to them, gave outward obedience, and in their hearts prayed fervently that "this tyranny might be over past." [34]

Let it not, however, be inferred that therefore they were right in contending for the supremacy of Rome, only in the right, inasmuch as it is far nobler to die, than to deny one's belief, or to swear falsely to what one does not believe in one's heart.

And so while we reject their teaching on this point, we can feel the deepest sympathy with the sufferings of these noble, yet mistaken souls.

On the first visitation of his monastery, three years previously, the Abbot had taken the Oath of Supremacy, feeling that it was not a cause for which a man was bound to die, but he had never been a happy man since, he was too old to change his convictions. Therefore he absented himself from the place in Parliament, which was his as a mitred Abbot, who was ranked as the equal of a Bishop, and strove to hide his sorrows in obscurity. No fault was then alleged against him, the earlier visitors reported that his house was, and had long been, "full honourable."

But the eye of the "Malleus Monachorum," the arch enemy of the monks, Thomas Cromwell, was upon him, and at last this vigilant enemy, equally cruel and unscrupulous, found the pretext he desired, for sending the Abbot of Glastonbury, as also the Abbots of Reading and Colchester to the gibbet and the quartering block. Most of the Abbots had been led to save themselves by a voluntary surrender of their house and estates; those who did not thus bend to the storm, had to be destroyed on one pretence or another. [35]

It was the sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, in the year of grace 1539.

The day was a bright day of early autumn, one of those sweet balmy days, when summer seems to put out all her parting beauties ere she yields her dominion to winter,—the air was laden with fragrance, and there was a dreamy haze upon the scenery around, which seemed typical of heavenly peace.

But there was a sad despondent feeling, which weighed like lead, upon the hearts of all the elders present at the High Mass on that day, in the great Abbey Church, whose majestic ruins yet strike the beholder with awe.

After the Creed, the Abbot ascended the pulpit and gazed round upon the congregation, as upon those to whom he was about to preach for the last time; he took for his text the parting words of S. Paul at Miletus,—“And now behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.” [36]

As he uttered the words there was an audible expression of feeling on the part of the monks in the choir, the boys in the transepts, and the citizens in the spacious nave: was the text prophetic? One or two sobs might be heard.

Danger was at hand, and he knew it, and after a brief exordium he told it out plainly: the Royal Commissioners, with charge to bring him before the Council, were already on their way.

“Very sorry am I,” said he, “for you, my brethren, and especially my younger friends, of whom I see so many around. They will destroy this House of God, as they have so many others, they will spare you in the flesh, but if you are taken hence, and sent into a cold-hearted and wicked world, for which you are unfitted, having begun in the spirit, ye may be consumed in the flesh, and what shall I say, or what shall I do, if I cannot save those whom God has entrusted to my charge?”

Here a common utterance broke forth from the brethren which could not be suppressed.

“Let us die together in our integrity, and heaven and earth shall witness for us how unjustly we be cut off.”

“Would that it might be even so,” continued the preacher, “that so dying we might pass in a body to our Father’s home above, but they will not do us so great a kindness. Me and the elder brethren they may indeed kill, but you who are younger will be sent back into the world ye have once forsaken, where divers temptations assail you. Alas, who is sufficient for these things?” [37]

Here he paused, and then continued, “This may be the last time we meet within these sacred walls: the last time that they re-echo the tone of thanksgiving, which has arisen for nigh fifteen centuries on this spot.^[12] But it is meet that we prepare for the stroke, and that we may do so the better, let us ask pardon for all the faults we may have committed against each other, and let each forgive, that so we may say the divine prayer, ‘Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.’”

A solemn pause followed, during which there came a strange interruption, a sweet soft sound as of angels’ voices singing in harmony: not from the organ came that strange music, nor from any visible orchestra, but all felt it as it thrilled into their hearts. The venerable preacher was so moved that he sank down in tears, and for a long time could not resume his discourse, while all in the choir sat as if astonished, yet rejoicing in the token, as they believed it was, of God’s presence amongst them. [38]

And the burden of the song seemed, "O rest in the Lord, wait patiently on Him."

That sermon ended in broken words of faith, love, and hope—words of deep emotion never forgotten by any present—and then the Celebration proceeded, with its stores of rich comfort and celestial joy.^[13]

The following day the Abbot left early in the morning for a small country house belonging to the Abbey about a mile-and-a-half away. This he did that the scandal of an open arrest, and a probable conflict, might be averted, for he felt that his people might not peacefully bear the spectacle of their venerated Father led away like a criminal.

But he made no concealment of his retreat, so when the Commissioners arrived, later in the morning, they had no difficulty in learning the place, and they followed him to the country house.

In an old oak-panelled apartment sat the once powerful Abbot, writing calmly a few parting directions, chiefly concerning the disposal of such personal property as might serve as mementoes to those who loved him, when they should see his face no more. [39]

He was calm and resigned, although once, as he wrote, tears issued from fountains which had been long dry, and rolled down his aged and worn cheek,—he was but human.

In the window seat, his eyes fixed upon the road which led from the Abbey, sat Cuthbert.

Suddenly he rose hastily.

"Father," he said, "they are coming; a number of mounted men are in sight, wilt thou not fly? We may yet hide thee, they will be ten minutes ere they arrive; fly for *our* sakes, for *my* sake—thy adopted child."

"My son, I cannot; life has little yet to tempt me, and far better for me that I should bear witness to my faith with my blood, and receive the martyr's palm which God hath already granted to many of my brethren, than live a few more miserable years, and see the wild boar rooting up the vineyard of the Lord, and the beasts of the field devouring it."

After a pause he continued,—

"Dost thou see them plainly? Who is their guide?"

"Shame upon him, it is Nicholas Grabber; rather should they have cut my feet off than have forced me to do the like."

"Nay, my child, I left word where I was, and strict directions that no concealment should be attempted." [40]

"Yet some other guide were more fitting than one of thine own children, shame upon him. Oh, my more than father, *do* fly; they will drag thee to a shameful death, like thy brethren of Reading and Abingdon. Is it not written, 'When they persecute you in one city flee ye into another?'"

"Too late, my son, they are at the gate."

"We will hide thee; there must be some place to hide in here, some secret chamber."

"They are on the stairs, my son; do not let them see thee weep, be manly."

Cuthbert strove to repress his emotion and to maintain outward composure, when the door opened and three men entered, rude of aspect.

"My name is Layton," said the foremost, "and these two worthy men be Masters Pollard and Moyle; we be pursuivants of the King, and in his name, and by virtue of his warrant, we have charge to arrest thee, unless thou clear thyself by thy answers to certain questions."

"What are they?" said the Abbot, calmly.

"Hast thou taken the Oath of Supremacy?"

"I have, to my great sorrow."

"To his great sorrow, mark that, Master Pollard; and why to thy great sorrow?"

"Because it was a treason to the Church."

"Then thou wilt not renew it?" [41]

"Never."

"That is enough to hang thee, proud Abbot, but thy talk interests me, and I would fain hear a little more from thee; what dost thou think of the King's divorce?"

"I am not fain to answer thee on that matter."

"But the law enables us to *compel* an answer from every man, and construes silence as treason; loyal men need not conceal their thoughts, and there is no room in England for disloyalty."^[14]

"Construe my silence as treason if thou wilt, I have naught to say on the matter."

"There is something more for *me* to say. Dost thou love life, Master Abbot? For if so, in spite of thy treasons just uttered, thou mayst save it; we know full well that the names of the men who supplied money and arms for the late most unnatural and parricidal rebellion in the north, which men call the Pilgrimage of Grace, are known to thee, only reveal the secret, and thou art safe." [42]

"Get thee behind me, Satan; dost thou think I would save my life at the expense of others, and take reward to slay the innocent?"

The Abbot's manner was so firm and decided, the answer so bravely given, that the villain started. "I will patter with thee no more, thou hoary sinner," he said at last; "thou hast the papers concerning this rebellion concealed somewhere, and we know it; we will pull thy Abbey down, stone by stone, if we find them not: thy answers are cankered and traitorous, and to the Tower thou shalt go, the Tower of London. Ah, who is that boy?"

"Thou mayst take me too," said Cuthbert, as he stood before them, emerging from the curtained recess of the window with flashing eyes and burning cheeks, "for all that the Lord Abbot hath said, *I say also.*"

"Ah, thou young cockatrice, we see well what a dam hath hatched thee—another treason to the account of the wily priest here."

"Cuthbert," said the Abbot, "thou art running into needless danger—God calls thee not to suffer."

"What is good for *thee*, Father, must be good for me also."

"We may as well take him up to town too," said Master Pollard.

[43]

"Nay, it is not our business," said Layton; "if we arrested every young fool this traitor hath taught, we should go up to town with three hundred boys behind us, and should need their nurses to take care of them; the ground-ash were fitter for this young master's back, but we have no time to waste on his folly, let us be moving, we have to search the chambers at the Abbey, perchance we may come across these papers."

Need we say they searched in vain.

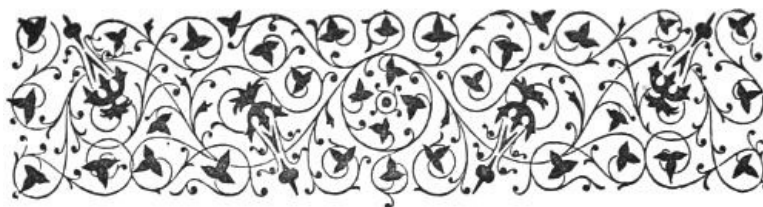


FOOTNOTES

[12] The Abbot's history is wrong, but he is under the belief that Joseph of Arimathæa founded Glastonbury Abbey, or at least first preached the Gospel on that spot.

[13] See Note F.

[14] This was actually the case. Henry would not allow his subjects the privilege of concealing their thoughts. It is scarcely possible now, to believe the fact that the treason statute touched the life and enacted the fearful penalties of high treason against all who would not admit and assent *in words* to the royal supremacy; it made it treason not only to *speak* against the king's prerogatives, but even to "*imagine*" anything against them. "Malicious silence," which was assumed to imply such evil *imaginings*, was to be interpreted as treason and punished by death. See Perry's History of English Church, p. 112-3.



[44]

CHAPTER V. THE ROAD-SIDE INN.



he evening of Tuesday, the twelfth of November, in the year of grace fifteen hundred and thirty-nine, was closing in.

The day had been very fine, such a day as we sometimes enjoy, even in November; the golden sunbeams had brightened the foliage which yet hung upon many of the trees of the forest, and turned the russet plumage into gold. Now and then, in the calm atmosphere, a leaf would flutter down, and break the oppressive silence of the forest of Avalon.

It is broken more seriously; hark, that is the tread of many feet, and those voices are the voices of lads out for a day in the woods. See here they come into this lonely haunt, where no road or path exists, startling yon raven from his perch; see how sulkily he flies away, as if to say, "What

right have these intruders here?"

A large chestnut-tree has dropped its fruit on the ground, and amidst the dead leaves the lads are searching, and loading their pockets with the spoil; there are about twenty of them, evidently a band of the Glastonbury boys, and amidst them we recognise two old acquaintances, Cuthbert and Nicholas Grabber.

[45]

"It is time to be moving," says Cuthbert; "we promised the Prior to be home in time to sing vespers."

"Sing vespers! how pious we are!" said Nicholas, and the irreverent fellow clasped his hands together affectedly, and began to chant in a ridiculous voice the Psalm "Dixit Dominus."

"Stop that," said several voices at once, and Nicholas obeyed, finding the general feeling was against such mockery, as it ought to be with sensible and manly boys.

"Well, thank God, there will not be many more services in the Abbey; I am for *freedom*, for shaking off the yoke of bondage under which the old monks have kept us: those visitors who have been taking an inventory of the goods and chattels at the place, are only a token that the end is near; and it can't come too soon for me."^[15]

"More shame for you to say so, after you have been educated at the cost of the Abbey, and eaten and drunk its fare for many years," said Cuthbert.

[46]

"And poor fare I have found it: I daresay the Abbot's favourites get better," replied Nicholas.

"'Abbot's favourites,' what do you mean?" said Cuthbert, colouring.

"Let those who find the cap fit, put it on."

"He means it for *you*, Cuthbert," said two or three voices at once.

"I suppose one can't help being liked," said Gregory Bell.

"Nay, but one should not curry favour at the expense of others."

"That isn't fair," cried Adam Banister; "no one can say Cuthbert is a sneak."

"Sneak! who guided the commissioners to find the Abbot? that was the part of a sneak," said Cuthbert; "but I know one way in which I could avoid favour; by running away from school and being brought back tied between two foxhounds, on all fours."

A general burst of laughter, and then Nicholas lost all self-control, and struck Cuthbert in the face.

"A blow!" "A fair blow!" "A fight!" "A fight!"

Yes, a fight was inevitable under the circumstances; according to the moral (or immoral) code of the fifteenth century, no one could receive a blow from an equal without returning it, unless he wished to be exiled from the society, whether of boys or men. Nothing was clearer to their eyes than that the duty of all good Christians was to fight each other.

[47]

So the blow was returned, straight between the eyes. But a fight was too good a thing to be lost in that irregular manner: a ring was formed, two seconds selected, Gregory Bell for Cuthbert, and a cousin, like-minded with himself, for Grabber.

Now we are not going to enter into the details of the fight—those who like a scene of the kind will find one well described in "Tom Brown's School Days,"—suffice it to say in this instance, that the contest was long and desperate, not to say bloody, and that in spite of Grabber's greater physical strength and weight, the skill and endurance of Cuthbert gave him the advantage, as indeed I think he deserved to have it.

So intent were the twenty lads upon the scene, that they did not notice how the sun went down amidst rising clouds, how the wind began to sigh through the forest; darkness was gathering over the spectators and combatants, who had now fought many rounds, lasting nearly an hour, when at last, to the great joy of many present, Grabber, at the conclusion of a round, in which he had exhausted all his strength, got a knock-down blow, and was unable to "come up to time," so amidst deafening cheers, Cuthbert was hailed as the victor.

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He advanced to Grabber who was supported on the knee of his second.

"Give me your hand, Nicholas, and let us forgive and forget. I hope you are not much hurt."

Grabber sullenly refused.

"That shows a bad heart; a fellow should never bear malice for a fair thrashing, one can only do his best after all," said Gregory.

And the majority shared his opinion.

"We must make haste out of the woods, or we shall lose our way and be here all night."

Three or four boys remained with Grabber, for he was not without his sympathizers,—we are sorry to say there are black sheep even in the best schools,—and these would not leave the spot with the rest, but said they could find their own way home.

The others struck boldly towards the west, which was easily distinguished, owing to the reddened and angry clouds, which showed where the monarch of the day had gone down.

But soon these also disappeared, and the road was not yet attained; darkness fell upon the scene, and the lads who were with Cuthbert wandered about lost, utterly lost, until a distant light

[49]

gladdened their eager sight, and with a joyous cry they bent their course towards it.

In a few minutes they emerged from the woods on the high-road from London, where a well-known inn, "The Cross Keys," hung out a lamp as a guide to travellers.

They all knew their way now, and would fain have started home at once, only Cuthbert was faint after his late exertions, and a cup of "Malmsey" seemed the right thing.

"You had better let him have a good wash; cold water will revive him, and remove the blood from his face too," said the landlord, who saw the lad had been fighting, and a fight was too common a thing, we are sorry to say, to excite any further comment or enquiries, on his part.

So they adjourned to the pump, where, with the help of a rough towel, Cuthbert soon made himself presentable, although he still bore very evident traces of the conflict.

This necessary task accomplished, the boys entered the inn, ordinarily a forbidden place to them, and the landlord brought a cup of wine for Cuthbert.

But while they were there a body of armed men entered the house.

They wore the uniform of the King's guard: there was no regular army in those days, every man was a soldier in time of need, but there was a small body of men kept about the King's person, who were sent from time to time on special services, and were called the King's "beef-eaters."

[50]

And these were some of them.

"Landlord, bring us some mulled sack," said one who appeared to be their leader, "and tell us, have you seen that fox the Abbot of Glastonbury pass this way to-day on his road home?"

"He has not yet returned from London?"

"Nay, but he is on his way,—we have no listening ears have we?" The boys were separated by a partition. "Are you for Abbot or King?"

"I am a friend to the King."

"Well said, so should every good Englishman be; and we have charge to arrest this wily Abbot on his return, as a foe to King Harry, and take him to Wells to be tried for his life."

"Has he not been tried and acquitted?"

"He has been solemnly condemned in a Court where Thomas Cromwell sat as prosecutor, jury and judge: but that is not quite the law, so he has been dismissed home, and we have been sent by an after thought to take him to Wells for a *regular trial*."^[16]

"On what charge?"

[51]

"Robbing the Abbey Church."

"Good heavens!"

"Why, I thought thee a friend of the King."

"So I am, but what can all this mean?"

"That he hid the Abbey plate, so that the King's visitors could not find it, when they wanted to make an inventory, and confiscate patens and chalices for the King's use."

"But it was his own."

"Only in trust, you see."

"Still he might hide it in trust for the Abbey, that would not be robbery."

"Friend, I should advise thee to *consider* it robbery in these days; it is better for all men who do not want their necks stretched to think as the King and his minister, Thomas Cromwell, think; don't fear but we shall find men to bring him in guilty."

The poor inn-keeper was silent; perhaps he remembered that one of his predecessors had been hanged for saying he would make his son heir to the "Crown," meaning the "Crown Inn."

The boys stole out unobserved.

"What shall we do?"

"Go and meet the Abbot and warn him, he will pass Headly Cross."

"But then we may but share his fate," said several.

"I shall go if I go alone," said Cuthbert.

[52]

"And so shall I," said Gregory Bell.

"Well, two are as good as the lot of us, and better; more likely to pass unobserved," said Adam Banister; "the rest of us had better get home, and tell the monks all we have heard and seen."

It was a wild place, Headly Cross, where two woodland roads crossed each other. Report said that a cruel murder had been committed there years ago, and that the place was haunted; every one believed in haunted places then.

But as there was a choice of routes, and the Abbot might come *either* way, it was the right thing to await him where the roads converged.

And there Cuthbert and Gregory waited all alone, as the dark hours rolled away, until they heard the "Angelus" ring from a distant tower, and knew it was nine o'clock, when decent people, in those days, went to bed.

The chime had hardly died away, when they heard the tread of horses, and soon three riders came in view in the dim light of the stars; and the boys recognised the Abbot, with two attendants, one his faithful serving man, the other a stranger.

Cuthbert dashed forward. "My Lord Abbot," he said, "one moment, it is I, Cuthbert, and here is Gregory Bell." [53]

"Cuthbert and Gregory Bell; why are you here, boys?"

"We have heard a plot against you: men are waiting at the 'Cross Keys' to arrest you, and take you for trial at Wells; they say it will cost your life."

"On what charge?"

"Concealing the Abbey plate."

The Abbot smiled sadly.

"My children," he said, "this can hardly be true, yet if it *be* as you say, I will not fly a jury of my countrymen."

"Neither could he," said the stranger on his left hand, "if he *would*; my duty is to see him safe to Glastonbury, unless relieved beforehand by royal authority."

"You see, my Cuthbert and Gregory, that your devotion is all in vain; neither *would* I avail myself of it if I *could*. Mount on the pillion behind me, Cuthbert; my good Ballard here will take Gregory behind him, and you may return with us to Glastonbury, if such return be permitted."

"It never will be, never will be," said Cuthbert, with sinking heart.

And how that young heart beat, as they approached the "Cross Keys," and as a line of men, forming across the road, stopped the cavalcade.

"My Lord Abbot, we arrest you in the King's name." [54]

"On what charge?"

"Robbery of the Abbey Church."

"This is a base pretence, to deprive me of the credit of martyrdom for my convictions: but there was One who suffered more for me."

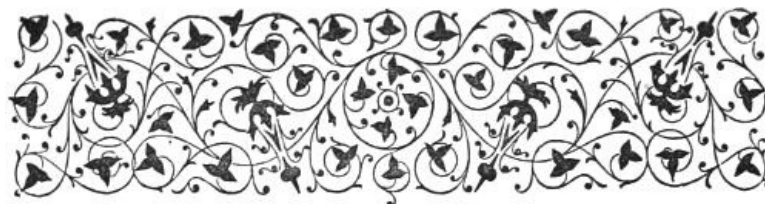
And the Abbot yielded himself peacefully to those who sought his life.



FOOTNOTES

[15] Advantage was taken of the Abbot's compulsory absence to take the necessary steps for the dissolution of the monastery. (Froude.)

[16] In some private memoranda of Thomas Cromwell, which still exist in his own handwriting, occur the words,—"Item. The Abbot of Glaston to be tried at Glaston, and also to be *executed* there with his accomplices." The trial, however, took place at Wells, the execution (a foregone conclusion) at Glastonbury, as related in the story.



CHAPTER VI. THE TRIAL.

he period of English history of which we are now writing has been aptly called "The Reign of Terror." England under Thomas Cromwell, and France under Robespierre, were alike examples of the utter prostration which may befall a mighty nation beneath the sway of one ruthless intellect.



To make the King absolute, and himself to rule through the King, was the one aim of the man whom Fox, the Martyrologist, grotesquely calls "The valiant soldier of Christ:"—for this end he smote down the Church and the nobility: Bishop Fisher and the Carthusians represented the ecclesiastical world, the Courtenays and the Poles the aristocracy, Sir Thomas More the new-born culture of the time; and Cromwell chose his victims from the noblest and the best. The piety of Fisher, once the King's tutor, to whom his mother had committed her royal boy on her death-bed, could not save him; nor his learning, Sir Thomas More; nor her grey hairs, the Countess of Salisbury. Spies were scattered through the land; it was dangerous to speak one's mind in one's own house; nay, the new inquisition claimed empire over men's thoughts; we have seen that the concealment of one's sentiments was treason. [56]

Will my more youthful readers wonder then that men could be found to convict upon such charges as those preferred against the aged Abbot of Glastonbury? They need wonder at nothing that occurred while Bloody Harry was King, and Thomas Cromwell Prime Minister.

The juries themselves sat with a rope around their necks; when the Prior and the chief brethren of the Charter-house waited upon Cromwell to explain their conscientious objections to the Oath of Supremacy, loyally and faithfully, he sent them from his house to the tower; when the juries would not convict the ecclesiastics, he detained them in court a second day, and threatened them with the punishment reserved for the prisoners, unless they found a verdict for the crown; finally, he visited the jurymen in person, and by individual intimidation forced the reluctant men to find a verdict of guilty, whereupon the unfortunate monks were hanged, drawn, and quartered, with every circumstance of barbarity, suspended, cut down alive, disembowelled, and finally dismembered. [17]

Thursday, the fourteenth of November, 1539, was a gloomy day: black leaden clouds floated above, the ground was sodden with moisture, the leaves, fallen leaves, no inapt emblem, rotted in the slime, a heavy damp air oppressed the breath; the day suited the deed, for on that day the aged Abbot of Glastonbury was formally arraigned at Wells, together with his brethren the Prior and Sub-Prior, on the charge of felony,—“Robbery of the Abbey Church with intent to defraud the King.” [57]

They might well have proceeded against him under the Act of Supremacy, but variety has charms, and this new idea of felony commended itself to the mind of Cromwell, as a good device for humbling the clergy.

Lord Russell, one of Henry's new nobility who supplied the places left vacant by so many ruthless executions, whose own fortunes were built on the plunder of the Church, sat as judge, and there were empannelled, we are told, “as worshipful a jury as was ever charged in Wells.”

The indictment set forth that the prisoners had feloniously hidden the treasures of the Abbey, to wit, sundry chalices, patens, reliquaries, parcels of plate, gold and silver in vessels, ornaments, and money, with the intent of depriving our sovereign lord the King of his rightful property, conferred upon him by Act of Parliament.

“What say you, Richard Whiting, guilty or not guilty?” [58]

The aged prisoner looked around him with wondering eyes; he scanned the crowded array of spectators, then the jury, who looked half ashamed of their work, and finally rested his eyes upon his judge.

“How can I plead guilty where there can be no guilt? These treasures were committed to my care to keep for God and Holy Church; it is not meet to cast them to swine; no earthly power may lawfully take to itself the houses of God for a possession, or break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers. Am I tried before an assembly of Christian men, or before heathen, Turks, infidels, and heretics?”

“It is not meet for a prisoner to revile his judges,” said Russell; “as an Englishman you are bound by the Acts of Parliament.”

“Talk not to me of Parliament; you have on your side but the Parliament of this sinful generation, and against you are all the Parliaments who have sat from the Witan-agemot downwards, who have granted and confirmed to us of Glastonbury, those possessions which you would snatch from a house which has been the light of this country for a thousand years; to resist such oppression and sacrilege is not *guilt*, and I plead in that sense, ‘Not Guilty.’”

“Thou showest but little wisdom in pressing thine own opinion against the consent of the realm.” [59]

“I would fain hold my peace; but that I may satisfy my conscience, I will tell thee that while thou hast on thy side but a minority in a single kingdom, the whole of the Christian world, save that kingdom, is dead against you, and even the majority here condemn your proceedings, although the fear of a barbarous death silences their tongues.”

“Of whom art thou speaking?”

“Of all the good men present.”

“Why hast thou persuaded so many people to disobey the King and Parliament?”

“Nay, I have sinned in dissembling my opinions, but now I *will* speak. I disallow these changes as impious and damnable (general sensation); I neither look for mercy nor desire it; my cause I commit to God, I am awary of this wicked world, and long for peace.”

He sank upon the bench behind him, as did his fellow prisoners, and none of them took any further obvious interest in the proceedings.

Formal evidence was brought to prove the discovery of treasure hidden in secret places, but all this fell very flat upon the audience, the fact was tacitly admitted on both sides, *the* difference of opinion only existed as to the guilt thereof.

There was no room for doubt in Lord Russell's mind; he summed up the evidence against the prisoners, and reminded the jurymen that their own loyalty was on trial, a very forcible hint in those days, and one which few men dared disregard. [60]

They retired; returned with downcast looks, and gave a verdict in accordance with the evidence: theirs not to argue the point of law, the fact was sufficient.

"Prisoners at the bar," said the judge, "you have been convicted on the clearest evidence of an act of felony—of seeking to deprive the King of the property willed to him by the high estates of the realm, in trust for the nation. Into your motives I need not enquire, but no man can be a law unto himself; born within these realms you are subject to the authorities thereof, and for your disobedience to them you must now die. The only duty remaining to me is to pronounce upon you the awful sentence the law provides against your particular crime—that you be taken hence to the prison whence you came, and from thence be drawn on the morrow, upon a hurdle, to the summit of Glastonbury Tor, that all men far and wide may witness the royal justice, where you are to be hanged by the neck, but not until you are dead, for while you are still living, your bodies are to be taken down, your bowels torn out and burnt before your faces; your heads are then to be cut off, and your bodies divided, each into four quarters, to be at the King's disposal, and may God have mercy upon your souls."^[18] [61]

A dead silence followed, broken at last by the Abbot's voice.

"We appeal from this judgment of guilty and time-serving men to the judgment of God, before Whose bar we shall at length meet again."

It was late in the same evening, the curfew had already rung, the rain was still falling at intervals in the streets of Glastonbury, as if nature wept at the approaching dissolution of the venerable fane which had been the ornament of western England so long.

In spite of the weather, many groups formed from time to time outside the gatehouse of the Abbey, for there the three prisoners had been brought from Wells, and there, in the chamber over the gateway, in strict ward, they were passing the last night the royal mercy permitted them to live.

A youth, repulsed from the door which gives admittance to the upper chambers, retired with despairing gesture; his face bore marks of intense emotion, the tears had worn furrows therein, and from time to time a sob escaped him. [62]

A companion pressed up to his side.

"Will they not let you in?"

"No, Gregory, I have begged in vain these three times."

"Why not try the sheriff, he is said to be merciful?"

"I can but try, I will go to his house at once."

As due to his office, the high sheriff of the county was charged with the details of the morrow's tragedy; he liked the task but little, still he viewed it as a simple matter of duty, and could not flinch from it.

He was resting after the fatigues of the day, and in truth, thinking very uneasily over the events of the trial.

"What if, after all, he is in the right—that appeal to the judgment bar above was very solemn—when that great assize takes place, in whose shoes would it be best to stand, in the place of the judge or the felon of to-day?"

A domestic entered—"A lad craves a moment's speech."

"Who is he?"

"I know him not, but he has been weeping bitterly, as one may see by his face."

The sheriff hesitated, but he was in a merciful mood; he suspected the object of the visitor, and it was a good sign for the success of the suppliant that he permitted the visit. [63]

"Well, my lad," said he, as Cuthbert entered, "what is the matter now?"

"I have a boon to crave, your worship; you will not refuse it me?"

"Let me first hear what it is."

"The Abbot has been my adopted father, my best friend from childhood; let me see him once more, let me receive his parting blessing, ere wicked hands slay him."

"Wicked hands, my lad, you forget yourself, and where you are."

"Pardon me, I meant no offence; I know it is no fault of your worship."

"It is but a slight boon, after all," said the sheriff, "and one which *may* be conceded;" and as he spoke he wrote a few lines on a slip of parchment. "They will give you admission for half-an-hour, if you show them this at the gateway."

"May I not stay longer?"

"It would not be kind to those who are to die; they need their time to make their peace with God."

"That is already made, your worship."

"I trust so," said the sheriff, with a sad faint smile at the boy's earnestness.

"Who art thou, my lad?" he said.

"The Abbot's adopted son."

"But who were your real parents?"

"I know not."

"What name do they call you?"

"Cuthbert, I have none other."

"Poor lad," said the sheriff, as the boy departed, "it seems almost like a familiar face, yet I have never met him before; some accidental likeness, I suppose."

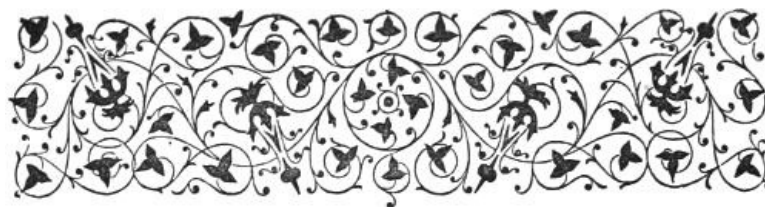


[64]

FOOTNOTES

[17] Lingard v. 19.

[18] This terrible sentence is copied from the form in actual use until the present century.



[65]

CHAPTER VII. *GLASTONBURY TOR.*



dead silence reigned around the precincts of the once mighty Abbey, many of the monks had fled, fearing lest they should share the fate which had befallen their superiors, and having no decided predilection for martyrdom; but many still shuddered in their cells, or wandered aimlessly about the doomed cloisters, so soon to be a refuge for bats and owls.

Only a few lights burned here and there in the darkness of that November night, but one shone steadily from the window of the strong room over the gatehouse, where the three fated monks awaited their doom.

Scantly furnished was that chamber; three wooden chairs with high backs grotesquely carved, a massive table in the centre, a huge hearth decorated with the Abbey arms, upon which smouldered two or three logs, for fuel was cheap, and the night was cold and damp. Against the wall hung a crucifix, and there, with their faces towards the memorial of the martyrdom which redeemed a world, knelt the three.

[66]

We cannot follow their mental struggles, which found relief in prayer—in intense prayer, in burning words of supplication, which wafted their spirits on high, and gave them strength to say "not my will but Thine be done."

A step on the stairs, but they rose not from their knees; they felt that one had entered and was kneeling behind them, and at length they heard sobs escape from their visitor, which he could not repress.

They rose slowly from their devotions, and the Abbot grasped Cuthbert's hands and raised him from the floor.

"My child," he said, "dost thou grieve for me?"

A sob was the only answer.

"Listen, my child, which is best, heaven or earth, Paradise or Glastonbury?"

Still no answer.

"And they but rob us of a few brief years, which to aged men like us must be years of suffering; they separate us from the ranks of the Church Militant, but not from those of the Church Triumphant, that is beyond their power; they may kill the body, but after that they have no more that they can do."

"But the shame, the disgrace!"

"Is it greater than the Son of God bore on Calvary? Nay, my son, let us not grieve that it has pleased Him, of Whom are all things, to ordain this painful road, which He Himself has trodden before us; nay, sob not, nor sorrow as those without hope, but live so that thou mayest rejoin us in the regions of Paradise."

[67]

Cuthbert gazed upon the calm majestic face of the old man, and it seemed to him irradiated by a light from above. He repressed his grief, and listened to the last words of his friend.

"It is written that in the last days perilous times shall come, and we have fallen upon them; happy then that God removes us to His secret chambers, where He shall hide us until the iniquity of a world be overpast, and His redeemed come with triumph to Zion. Before us now is the *via Dolorosa* of a brief hour, but from the gibbet we shall scale the skies. For *thee*, my son, is the lifetime of trial and temptation, wherefore I pray for thee, and *will* pray for thee when thou shall see my face no more. Remember, dear child, he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved, and let neither men nor devils rob thee of thy crown."

"By God's help I will endure."

"I believe that thou wilt strive, yea, and prevail. But *one* more thought to earthly things, and I resign the world for ever. Thou rememberest the secret chamber?"

"I do, Father."

[68]

"And the ring which is now on the finger of him who shall claim thy promise?"

"Well, my Father."

"Await him, my son, in Glastonbury, not in the Abbey, that will be destroyed by wicked hands, but in the house of thy foster father, Giles Hodge, whose name thou must take, and be content to pass as his foster son till the time comes, and thy services are claimed. He who bears the ring will provide for thy future."

"Oh, think not of that."

"I *have* thought of it, and now, my child, thou mayest again join us in prayer."

"The half-hour has passed," said a rough voice at the door.

"Thy blessing, Father."

"It is thine, my child: Benedicat et custodiat te Deus omnipotens, Pater, Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus, nunc et in sæcula sæculorum."

Upon the summit of the hill men are working all through the storms of the night, erecting a huge gibbet, from the cross-beam of which three ropes are now dependent; beneath is a huge block, like a butcher's block, and a ghastly cleaver and saw rest upon it; hard by stands a caldron of pitch, which but awaits the kindling match to boil and bubble.

[69]

Through the dark shadows of the clouds, or in the bright light of the moon when the winds open a path for her rays, ghostly figures flit about. It is well that they should work in darkness,—it were better that such work were not done at all. Thus they execute the will of the ruthless Tudor, the Nero of English history; well, he and his victims have long since met before a more awful bar.

The winds blow ceaselessly all through the night, but in the morn the clouds are breaking; in the east a faint roseate light appears, and soon brighter streaks of crimson fringe the clouds, which hang over the dawn; anon the monarch of day arises in his strength, the shadows flee away, and from the summit of the hill a vast extent of sea and land is beheld, rejoicing in his beams.

A crowd gathers around the gatehouse, some few royal parasites to jeer, men at arms to guard the prisoners, and prevent any attempt at rescue, more sad and tearful faces of women, or sternly indignant visages of bearded men.

"Here they come."

The trampling of horse, a train of strong wooden hurdles, each drawn by a single horse, appears; hard carriages these on which to take the ride to eternity, but many an innocent victim has fared no better.

[70]

The doors are opened, and the Abbot appears first: a blush overspreads his aged cheeks, as the indignity thus palpably presents itself, but uttering, "And this, too, I offer to Thee," he lies down upon the hurdle, and they bind his hands and feet to the crossbars, carefully, that they may not

touch the ground, for those in charge of the execution would not willingly offer additional pain—some of them are sick at heart as they fulfil the will of the tyrant Tudor.

The Prior and Sub-Prior submit to the same painful restraint, and the *via Dolorosa* is entered.

All through the streets of the town, where the Abbot has often ridden in triumphant processions, the highest in dignity of all far and wide, the hurdles jolt along: the aged frames of the sufferers are fearfully shaken by the rude joltings, but they remember that *via Dolorosa* which led to Calvary, and accept the pain for the sake of the Divine Sufferer, in Whom our sufferings are sanctified.

There are those present who are paid to raise hisses and hootings, and to revile the passing victims, but they are awed by the attitude of the spectators in general, and forfeit their wages.

Up the hill with labouring steps the horses tread: at length the rounded summit appears, and the gibbet looms in sight. [71]

The sufferers see it not, owing to their prostrate condition, until they are beneath it. "It is easier to bear than the cross, brethren," says Abbot Richard.

The victims are unbound from the hurdles, and one after the other resigns himself to the rude hands of the executioners; for now, under this reign of terror and bloodshed, ecclesiastics are led forth in their *habits* to die without being first stripped of their robes, and degraded. There is a meaning in this, it is not of mercy. [19]

The Abbot yields himself first, calmly reciting the words of the 31st Psalm, "In manus tuas, Domine, commendo Spiritum meum." The *two* pray for him until their own turn comes.

"Go forth, O Christian soul, from this world, in the Name of God the Father Who created thee, of God the Son, Who redeemed thee, of God the Holy Ghost Who hath sanctified thee; may thy place be this day in peace, and thine abode in Mount Sion."

Their faces did not grow pale, neither did their voices tremble—they declared as they died that they were true subjects of the king in all things lawful, and obedient children of Holy Church. [72]

So one after the other they suffered—we spare the reader the sickening details, which Englishmen could *look* on in those days, and which innocent men were called upon to suffer, but which we shudder even to read.

But we will conclude with a letter written by Lord Russell to Cromwell on the 16th of November, being the day following the tragedy.

"My Lorde—this shal be to assertheyne, that on Thursday the xiii. daye of this present moneth, the Abbot was arrayned, and the next daye putt to execution, with ii. other of his monkes, for the robberyng of Glastonburye Churche; on the Torre Hill, the seyde Abbottes body beyng devyded in fower partes, and his heedd stryken off, whereof oone quarter stondyth at Welles, another at Bathe, and at Ylchester and Brigewater the rest, and his hedd upon the abbey gate at Glaston." [20]

As the traveller, in modern times, passes swiftly along the Great Western line between Weston and Bridgewater, he may see, on his left, a round conical hill, rising abruptly from the flat plain, a plain which was once a sea, a hill which was once an island. This is Glastonbury Tor. [73]

Fair and beautiful it looks in the summer sunlight, but it was once the scene of the foul judicial murder which we have endeavoured to describe. [21]

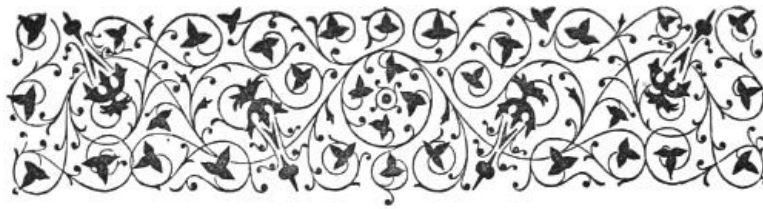


FOOTNOTES

[19] "While he was waiting for the hangman, he was questioned again by Pollard as to the concealment of plate, but he had nothing more to say, and would accuse neither himself nor others, but thereupon took his death very patiently."—*Blunt*.

[20] This letter is authentic, spelling and all.

[21] See Note G. Death of Abbot Whiting.



CHAPTER VIII. ON THE TRACK.

"We grieve not o'er our abbey lands, e'en pass they as they may,
But we grieve because the tyrant found a richer spoil than they;
He cast aside, as a thing defiled, the remembrance of the just,
And the bones of saints and martyrs he scattered to the dust."

Neale.



It was in vain that Bishop Latimer besought the tyrant, mad after the spoils which a venal parliament had given him, to let at least *some* of the monasteries remain as the houses of learning. Few countries could boast of such shrines as those which adorned like jewels the shires of England—but all were ruthlessly sacrificed, from the fane which rose over the mighty dead at Battle, to the humblest cell which but sheltered half-a-dozen poor brethren or sisters.

Such was the value of the noble library at Glastonbury that Leland, an old English antiquarian, tells us, when first he beheld it, "The sight of its vast treasures of antiquity so struck me with awe, that I hesitated to enter."

[75]

Yet we learn from Bale, that such noble collections were sold to grocers for waste paper, and that he knew a man who had bought for that purpose two large monastic libraries at the dissolution, and added that he had been using their contents for ten years, and had hardly got through half his store.

So strongly built were many of the Abbeys, that they had to be blown up with gunpowder, after they were stripped of all that could be sold; the lands were given to greedy favourites, Cromwell himself is said to have secured thirty Abbeys, and the ready money was spent at court in gambling and dissolute living.

So, in a few years, all the wealth which flowed into the hands of the crown was dissipated, and instead of the remission of taxation, by the hope of which many had been bribed to assent to the fall of the monasteries, the burdens laid upon the people were heavier than before.

Four months had passed away since the tragical events recorded in our last chapter, and the blustering month of March was in mid-career; the winds swept over the ruined Abbey, now in great part roofless, and dismantled, the abode of bats and owls; they swept over the bare and rounded summit of Glastonbury Tor, stained so lately by a foul deed of blood. Many a violent storm of rain had beaten upon that blood-stained summit, and the traces of the butchery had long since vanished; but the peasants yet gazed up to the hill top with awe and wonder.

[76]

But the storm which had desolated the proud Abbey had left the humble cottage of Giles Hodge untouched: there the old man and his wife lived in peace, like their neighbours, and went through their daily round, their trivial task—

Each morning saw some work begun
Each evening saw its close.

Their foster son was often present to their remembrances, but he had not been with them in person since the martyrdom. They had wisely judged it best to remove him from the immediate neighbourhood of such harrowing recollections, and as old Giles had a brother who lived at Lyme Regis, a seafaring man, thither he had sent Cuthbert to spend the winter.

The change of scene had wrought good. The poor boy had gone there broken-hearted, and suffering from the nervous excitement which he had passed through; the shock had been very great, but youth is elastic, and soon recovers from such a strain. The sea and its wonders, the romantic scenery around, all contributed to the beneficial change. Sometimes Cuthbert would go out fishing with his uncle, as he had learned to call the brother of his foster father; the fishing awakened all his interest: on the deep all the night, watching the moonbeams on the waves, the gradual breaking of the dawn, the "many dimpled smile of ocean:" all this was new to the land-bred youth, and exercised a most happy effect upon his health and spirits.

[77]

But it must not be supposed that he forgot the Abbot, or that he was unmindful of the secret entrusted to him; he had told his foster father that he expected some communication from the friends of the late Abbot, and old Hodge had promised that if anyone arrived, and presented the ring which was to serve as a token, he would send for Cuthbert without any delay.

And at last the message came, just when Cuthbert returned home with his "uncle," after a most

successful night at sea, bringing the scaly spoils of the deep in their boats. A rustic messenger had ridden across the country from Glastonbury, through Langport, Ilminster, Chard, and Axminster, a distance of from thirty to forty miles.

Old Giles could not write, he only sent word by his envoy, "Come home, I have seen the ring, he expects thee to-morrow." [78]

We have not hitherto explained fully the social position of Giles Hodge. Well, he was a yeoman, having no lands of his own; only he had a farm of three or four pounds a year,^[22] and hereupon he tilled as much as kept five or six men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and his wife milked thirty kine. He was able and bound to provide one man and horse, with "harness" for both, when the king had need of him; for this species of feudal tenure yet lingered, and supplied the want of a standing army. In short, he was an English yeoman, "all of the olden time."

The fire was burning brightly on the hearth in old Giles' cottage, which looked as pleasant as in days of yore; he and his old dame occupied their chairs on either side, for the day's work was over, and they were resting after its fatigues, whilst they anxiously awaited the arrival of their foster son, their Cuthbert.

It was only just dark, not yet seven o'clock; the evening meal was already prepared, and set forth with many a tempting dish upon a comely white cloth, to tempt the appetite of the darling of their old age. [79]

A knock at the door—the hearts of the old couple beat with anticipation—yet the knock! Would Cuthbert stop to knock? "Come in," they cried.

The latch lifted, and their parish priest entered, Doctor Adam Tonal.

"Good even to you, my worthy friends; I have come for a chat with you about a matter of importance."

"Nothing amiss about Cuthbert, I hope," said the old dame, anxiously.

"No, there is naught amiss, *yet* still my errand is about him. Are you not expecting him home?"

"Yes, thank God, this very night; we thought when you knocked that it was he."

"Well, I know you will be glad to see him again, for he is a worthy lad, and there are few who have not a good word for him, but it will be just as well not to let anyone know of his arrival, and to get him away again as soon as possible. My object was to warn you against allowing him to return, and also to advise you not to tell anyone where he may be found."

"But why," inquired Giles, aghast, as soon as he could get a word in; "what harm hath the poor lad done?" [80]

"Harm, forsooth!" then lowering his voice, "what harm had Richard Whiting done?"

"But Cuthbert is too young to be answerable for such weighty matters."

"I know *that*, but not too young to be an object of interest just now. You see it is reported that he was deep in the Abbot's secrets."

"They would indeed be weighty secrets, which the Abbot would entrust to a mere boy."

"Ordinarily your remarks would be just, but the case is peculiar. The Abbot was suspected to be in possession of lists of names, of papers, nay of treasure, in connection with the rising in the north, which had been entrusted to him after the disastrous collapse of the Pilgrimage of Grace: we are all friends here," added the priest, fearing lest he might have committed himself, for had such an expression as "disastrous," applied to the royal triumph, been reported to Cromwell, it might have been his death-warrant.^[23]

"We are alone, my wife and I, and we be no tale-bearers."

"Well then, it is said that there must be a secret chamber, somewhere in the Abbey, not yet discovered, in spite of all the search made for it by Sir John Redfyrne, the administrator of the property of the Abbey for the king; who is also an ally of Cromwell, that arch-heretic, and oppressor of the Church. You are sure there is no one in the house save yourselves?" [81]

"Quite sure, don't fear; but what has this to do with Cuthbert?"

"Only that a lad named Nicholas Grabber offers to make oath that he heard the Abbot reveal the secret to Cuthbert, when the two were in his private chamber, and bid him await the arrival of some mysterious person, with a ring: Grabber's account is very defective, but he says the Abbot discovered his presence, and ordered him roughly away."

"As I live,"—said Giles.

"Of course you know nothing," said the priest, interrupting, "but I have learned through friends that a warrant is about to be issued against the lad: now if he is taken——"

"But they can lay no *crime* to his charge, to know a secret is no crime."

"But they *may*, and probably *will* consider that secret of sufficient importance to the State to insist upon its disclosure, and if the poor boy, as will very likely be the case, refuse to tell, they will see what the thumb-screw, or failing that, even the rack, may effect." [82]

"Good heavens! Saint Joseph forbid."

"Amen; but the best way is to keep Cuthbert out of the way."

"Too late; for here he is!"

The door opened and our hero entered, all flushed with travel, and with the delight of meeting his old friends, whom he embraced warmly; after which he saluted the priest with a lowly reverence.

"How well he is looking, poor lad," said the dame: for his face was flushed with pleasure, or she might still have seen some traces of his recent trial. A more thoughtful expression sat on his features, such a period as he had gone through had done the work of years in sobering his boyish spirits, and bringing on, prematurely, the thoughts and cares of manhood.

"Now, Cuthbert," said the good priest, "I will take a turn on the green, while you tell all your news to your kind friends, and satisfy your hunger, and after that I will return for a little talk with you;" and he went out, but only to pace up and down the green, keeping the cottage still in sight.

And we too will leave the good souls within to their endearments for the same space of time; they will soon know the extent of the danger in which their foster boy is placed.

But the priest knows it, and he walks up and down, peering sometimes into the darkness beyond the green, in the direction of the town, scrutinizing the faces of the passers-by, until curfew rings from the tower of his own church. Then he re-enters the cottage. [83]

Cuthbert, hunger satisfied, is seated in the chimney-corner; the logs sparkle in the draughts of wind, which find their entrance through every cranny; the aged couple are seated as before.

"Father, we have told Cuthbert that you think he ought not to stay here, but he says he is bound to remain over the morrow; that will not hurt, will it?"

"Not if he is unseen, and the news of his coming has not got abroad."

"Did anyone see thee, child, as thou enteredst the town?"

"Alas, I fear *one* did; Nicholas Grabber was hanging about the gate on the common."

"Nicholas Grabber; then, my boy, thou must not tarry an hour; it is he who hast already betrayed thee."

"Betrayed me! how?" said Cuthbert, alarmed.

Then the priest told Cuthbert all that our readers have already learned from his lips, and the lad at once recognized his danger, for he remembered how Nicholas had lurked about the Abbot's chamber that eventful night, when the secret was revealed to him. [84]

"You are right, Father," he said, "I must go."

"Too late!" said the priest, "too late!"

For at that moment the tramp of many feet was heard without, followed by a violent knocking at the door, which the priest fortunately had barred when he entered.

"Hide him," said the good man; "I will keep them at bay for a few minutes."

And the old people hurried Cuthbert out of the room.

"The back door," said the boy.

"Nay, that is watched too; I hear them whispering without."

"Then I am lost."

"No! no! my boy," said the old woman, "come up stairs, and get into the loft."

They went hastily up the stairs, into the old people's bedroom.

There was no ceiling, but that which plain boards overhead, separating them from the attic beneath the roof, afforded; knocking one of these aside with his staff, the old man bade Cuthbert mount on his shoulders, and get into the loft. The lad did so easily, for the roof of the room was low, and then replaced the boards, so that no one could see that there had been any disturbance thereof.

The loft was often used for the storage of fruit, corn, *flax*, and the like, and there was a quantity of the latter material stored therein; on this Cuthbert lay. [85]

Meanwhile the priest below fulfilled his task.

"Who are ye, disturbing an honest family after curfew?"

"Officers of the law, constables; open, in the name of the law."

"There be many who avail themselves of that name, with very little title; robbers be about, and I must have surer warrant ere I admit you."

"*Open*, or we will break down the door."

"Nay, and thou come to *that* game, there be those within, good at the game of quarter staff; meanwhile we will blow the horn and rouse the watch."

"Thou old fool, we will break thy bones, as well as the door; we tell thee *we* are the constables—the watch."

"'Tisn't old Hodge's voice," said another; "ask the fellow who he is."

"Who art thou, fool?"

"That is for wise men like thee to find out."

"Well, then, here are Roger Hancock, John Sprygs, James Griggs, Denis Howlet, the four constables, and Laurence Craveall, a body servant of Sir John Redfyrne."

"I fear me, friend, thou art taking the names of better men in vain; more to the token, thou showest thyself a liar: for well do I know that neither Jack Sprygs nor Jim Griggs ever leave the ale-tap after curfew, until it is time to tumble, drunk, into their sinful beds." [86]

"Break open the doors," cried the two impugned worthies, in a rage.

"I will loose the mastiff upon you."

But in spite of this direful threat, which it would have been difficult to fulfil, as no mastiff was in the house, the men commenced breaking down the door.

At that instant old Hodge appeared, and signifying by a sign all was right, cried aloud—

"What are you doing at my door?"

"Breaking it down, with a search warrant for our justification."

"Thou mayst save thyself the trouble; I have nought here to hide;" and the old man withdrew the bars.

Four ill-looking men, Jacks in office, entered, and behind them two faces appeared, whose owners preferred to stay without; the one was the valet of Sir John Redfyrne, the other Nicholas Grabber.

The two constables whom he had so grievously aspersed fixed their eyes upon the priest.

"So it was thou, was it, who kept us waiting?"

"Your pardon, if I mistook you; doubtless you have good cause for your untimely errand." [87]

"We have pulled down monks, and your turn may come next," said the surly John Sprygs, "and then you may not have the chance of taking sober folks' reputation away; but enough of this, where is that young rascal, Cuthbert Hodge, if that is his name, we have a warrant for his apprehension?"

"Why, he has been away ever since November."

"But came home to-night; here is the witness. Nick Grabber, when didst thou last see Cuthbert Hodge?"

"This evening, riding with another lad through the common gate, on the Langport Road."

"And does thy worshipful father permit thee, now thy school days are over, to spend thy time in Glastonbury as a spy?" said old Hodge.

"My worshipful father has given me to the care of Sir John Redfyrne, as a page, old man, so thou hadst better keep a civil tongue in thine head, and it will be better for thy young bastard's bones; he shall pay for it."

"I think, my son," said the priest very quietly, "that when thou wast coupled between two hounds, as a truant, thou must have learnt from them to bite and snarl."

"We have no time for all this nonsense," said the head constable, "where is this youngster?" [88]

"Since you say he is here, you had better find him."

"He has not gone out by the back door," said Grabber.

"Or you would have grabbed him."

"Even so, with right good will."

They proceeded to search the house, but all in vain, and they were at length about to conclude that the boy had left the place before their entrance, when Grabber remarked to one of the constables, that he might be above the boards of the bedroom. "When we were schoolfellows," he said, "I have often heard him say that very good apples were kept there."

"The boy has got the right sow by the ear," says James Griggs, and followed by the others, he went upstairs again, whereupon the old lady began to cry.

"Ah," said Nicholas, "the scent is hot, the old lady gives tongue."

A board was withdrawn, chests piled beneath, and John Sprygs cried out, "Now, young Nick, you go and grab him."

"After you," said Nicholas, who remembered the weight of his young opponent's fist that night in the woods.

John Sprygs mounted, and was no sooner in the loft than he cried,— [89]

"The place is as dark as pitch, pass me up the torch."

"Nay! nay!" cried Giles Hodge, "the place is full of flax."

"We will take care of that; thou dost not want thy precious brat found."

Up went the torch which the men had brought with them, a flaring pine torch, to assist in the operations; in very wantonness Nick Grabber tossed it into the fellow's hand, crying "Catch." He

missed it, and it fell into a heap of flax. The man started back to avoid the blaze which instantly sprang up, and so put the fire between him and the moveable planks—the only moveable ones—which served as a trap-door.

“Come down, come down,” called out the appalled voices below.

But the wretch could not face that sea of flame, until, maddened by desperation, he took a header as boys might say, at the opening through the fire, and falling head foremost on the bedroom floor, split his skull and died on the spot. The others could do nothing for him, the loft was one mass of flame, and shouting “Fire! Fire!” they ran to get water, in a vain attempt to save the cottage. But of this there was little hope; the roof was of thatch, and the building mainly of timber, so they saw in a few minutes that there was nothing for it but to help the aged couple to save their furniture.

[90]

But what of Cuthbert? they had forgotten him, for the time, then they said,—

“The boy couldn’t have been there, nor in the house, or he would be driven from his hiding-place now. See how unconcerned the old man looks; he wouldn’t look so if his precious boy were in danger.”



FOOTNOTES

[22] Multiply by twelve for the modern equivalent. See Note H.

[23] A priest of Chichester, named Christopherson, suffered death for saying that the king would be damned for the destruction of the monasteries.



[91]

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE RUINS OF THE ABBEY.



o, Cuthbert was not burnt, as the reader has already conjectured, or our tale would come to an untimely close, untimely as the death of our hero, and we will now explain the manner of his escape.

Once in the loft, he remembered that in the innocent confidence of his boyhood, he had prated of its treasures to Grabber, who he doubted not was with his pursuers, and he felt that there was scant safety in his hiding place.

But there was yet an avenue of escape: a little opening at the end of the loft, which the ill-fated constable had overlooked, like a dormer window, admitted light and air to the loft; if he could force himself through that, and it was only a very small opening, he would emerge on the roof, and in the darkness might descend and escape unseen.

He tried and succeeded, and sliding down the long sloping roof, as he had often done when a small boy, alighted at the back of the house, while all the officers were within, those who had kept guard without, having joined the rest, when they judged by the uproar, that the lad was found.

[92]

But one yet watched there,—the priest who rejoiced to see him. He had left the house when Grabber told the secret, from reluctance to witness the capture of the harmless boy.

“Thank God, my boy,” he said, “thou hast outwitted them; go and hide in the Abbey ruins, I shall be there at midnight, I have business there, in the desecrated church; I will tell thy friends thou art safe; go at once.”

The boy darted away for the Abbey, but soon he heard loud shouts of “Fire!” “Fire!” and saw the reflection of the flames in objects around. Full of anxiety for his foster parents, he could not help turning back, and would again have run into danger, for the officers, anticipating such a result, were looking everywhere amongst the crowd, and would surely have seen him, had not his wise friend, the good parish priest, also anticipated the same, and met him.

“Nay, nay, my lad, thou canst do no good, and wilt only add to their troubles; go into the Abbey

church and wait there till midnight; thou art not afraid?"

"No," said Cuthbert, "only take care of *them*," and he retraced his steps to the Abbey.



"THE BOY DARTED AWAY FOR THE ABBEY."

Page 92.

The moon had arisen, and illuminated the scene, when through a gap in the boundary wall Cuthbert entered the once sacred precincts; his heart was very heavy as he gazed upon the mutilated cloisters, doors torn from their hinges, windows dashed out, roofless chambers from which the lead had been torn,—gazed as well as a moon struggling amidst clouds would allow him to gaze, gazed and wept.

[93]

The same ruins seen now, after the mellowing influences of time have toned down the painful features, excite interest unmingled, in the case of most visitors, with regret, and they say, "What a beautiful ruin;" but it was different then: a visit to Glastonbury, Tintern, or Furness, must have rent the heart of any one who could feel for the victims of injustice, or grieve over the wanton mutilation of all that was beautiful in architecture, or sacred in religion.^[24]

When our hero entered the once beautiful Abbey church, when he saw the ashes of the holy dead scattered abroad, their tombs defaced; above all, when he saw the altar which had been stripped and rent from its place, and this by a people who had not yet renounced their faith in the sacramental presence, by a king who at the same time sent men and women to the stake because they disbelieved in Transubstantiation,^[25] he fell upon his face and sobbed, while the words escaped his lips, "How long, O Lord, how long?" All his early teaching had led him to revere what he saw thus desecrated, and he was shocked to the very core of his heart.

[94]

He saw the moonbeams fall through broken windows and chequer the mutilated floor with light; he sought in vain a place of rest, until it occurred to him that the organ loft which was over the entrance to the monk's choir, and which was reached by a winding staircase, would be the best place of refuge, in case he should be sought, which he deemed *unlikely*; there were but few who would harm him, and they were off the scent.

I do not attempt to analyse his feelings towards Grabber, neither would it have been well for the latter to have met Cuthbert just then; warm-hearted and loving to his friends, nay, Christian in heart as Cuthbert was, it would have been hard at that time to put in action the spirit of forgiveness as one ought.

Up the spiral staircase he crept into the loft; there some cushions were left by chance amongst the remains of the organ; he contrived to make a couch out of two or three of them and slept.

How long he knew not, but at length he seemed to hear the bells ring out the midnight hour, and he began to dream that he was assisting at a solemn office for the dead. He awoke and raised himself up; the same sounds he had heard in his dream were actually ascending from below.

[95]

“Requiem æternam dona eis Domine et lux perpetua luceat eis.”

Then followed the words of the psalm:—

“Te decet hymnus Deus in Syon, et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.”^[26]

He gazed around him in amazement. He discovered the familiar odour of incense, he perceived the glimmer of many tapers. He dared at last, not knowing whether he beheld ghosts or living men, to look over the edge of the gallery, and saw a company of monks in the familiar Benedictine habit, standing around an open grave, while beyond them the desecrated altar was set up, and furnished with its accustomed ornaments, and the Celebrant with his assistant ministers, stood before it.

Then he was convinced that he beheld living men and no phantoms, and that he saw before him those who survived of his former preceptors and teachers, the monks of Glastonbury.

Whom then were they burying? for whom did they chant the requiem Mass?

And now the epistle was read, and afterwards the solemn sounds of the sequence arose:—

[96]

“Dies iræ Dies illa
Solvat sæclum in favilla
Teste David cum Sibylla.”^[27]

He hesitated no longer, he glided down the stairs, and soon his boyish voice was heard in the sweet verse:—

“Recordare Jesu pie
Quod sum causa tuæ viæ
Ne me perdas illa die.”^[27]

As he sang Cuthbert saw he stood by the good parochus.

The gospel followed, telling of Him Who is the Resurrection and the Life; after which one of the brethren, a man with the aspect of one in authority, stood forth, and began a short address:—

“We are met to-night, brethren, like the faithful of old, to render the last rites of the Church to the mutilated remains of our beloved brethren; gathered, at what risk ye know, from the places wherein the tyrant had exposed the sacred relics, which were once the home of the Holy Spirit, wherein Christ lived and dwelt; yea, and which shall rise again from the dust of death, when body shall unite with the redeemed regenerate soul, and soar from death’s cold house to life and light.”

[97]

He was interrupted by a sob (it was from Cuthbert), but he went on.

“And now we bury them in peace, we place the bones of the last Abbot,—and one more worthy has never presided over Glastonbury,—with those of his sainted predecessors: together they sleep after life’s fitful penance, together they shall arise, when the last trump shall echo over the vale of Avalon. Nor do we forget his faithful brethren, once the Prior and Sub-Prior of this holy house; they were with him in his hour of trial, they rest with him now, their mortal bodies, all that was mortal, here, but their souls, purified by suffering have, we doubt not, entered Paradise, where they hear those rapturous strains, that endless Alleluia which no mortal ear could hear and live. In peace; but secure as we feel for them, we have yet to implore God’s mercy for ourselves, and His suffering Church, upon which blows so cruel have fallen. In these holy mysteries, while we commend our dear brethren to His mercy, our supplications are turned (as saith Augustine) to thanksgivings; but for ourselves, oh, what need of prayer that we may breast the waves, as they did, and when the Eternal Shore is gained, who will count the billows which roar behind?”

The service proceeded, and when all was over, the stone was replaced over the grave, which was made to appear as though nought had disturbed its rest in its bed, the tapers were extinguished, and but one solitary torch left alight.

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He who appeared the leader of the party, now approached Cuthbert.

“My son,” he said, “dost thou know this ring?”

“I do,” and Cuthbert bent the head.

“Thou meetest me fitly here; and here, over his grave who loved thee, I take thee to be my adopted child; thou hast found another father in the place of him thou hast lost; fear not thy foes, I know thy danger, ere the dawn break thou shalt be in safety.”

End of the First Part.



- [24] See Note I. The Abbey Church.
 [25] The Six Articles became law the same year, enforcing nearly all Roman doctrine.
 [26] Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.
 Thou, O God, art praised in Sion, etc.
 [27] 398, Hymns A. and M.

“Day of wrath, O day of mourning.”
 “Think, good Jesu, my salvation, etc.”

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PART II.

~~~~~  
*Cuthbert the Foundling.*  
 ~~~~~

O fair Devon!—
 Land of the brave and leal, how bright thy skies!
 How fresh do show thy rich and verdant meads!
 How clear the streams! which from thy hills do run:
 How grim the tors! which granite rocks do crown:
 How sweet the glens! whose depths the forest hides:
 How blue the seas! which ruddy rocks do bound:
 Fain would I seek amidst such beauty—rest:
 And bid the world—Adieu.



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 [101]



CHAPTER I. THE OLD MANOR HOUSE.



here are few districts in England more picturesque than the southern slopes of Dartmoor; the deeply wooded glens, the brawling mountain torrents, the huge tors with their rock-crowned summits and the mists curling around them, the fertile plains beneath with their deep red soil, the blue ocean girdling all with its azure belt; all these unite to form a picture, which *once* seen, recurs again and again to the memory, while life lingers.

A few years after the scenes recorded in the first part of this tragical history, a young traveller left the inn of the “Rose and Crown,” Bovey Tracey, late one September evening, bound for the moorland. The sun was sinking towards the western heights which bounded the plain, the giant bulwarks of the moorland—Hey Tor, with its fantastic crown of gigantic rocks, Rippon Tor, with its cairn of stones,—were already tinged with the glorious hues of sunset, and the purple heather which covered their slopes, looked its best in the tints of the departing luminary.

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Our traveller was a youth who had perhaps seen some twenty summers, but whose smooth face was yet undignified by the beard of manhood; his attire was of the picturesque style made familiar to us by the pencil of Holbein: over a close-fitting doublet and nether garments hung a mantle, flowing open and sumptuously embroidered; his velvet cap was bound round with a golden band, and adorned with a bright feather and a jewelled clasp, a silver-hilted sword hung by his side.

"You must ride quickly, Master Trevannion, or you will hardly climb the pass before dark, and it is a bad road by the side of the Becky, especially opposite the fall," said the landlord, kindly.

"I know every foot of it, my Boniface, and so does my steed; never fear for us."

"It will be dark early, and perhaps wet; look at that cap of mist upon Hey Tor."

The youth glanced at the little cloud. "I shall be home before it descends," he said; "Good night, landlord," and he rode quickly away.

"Who is yonder stripling?" said a dark-browed stranger, as the landlord re-entered the inn.

"The son and heir of Sir Walter Trevannion," replied the landlord respectfully, for the stranger had announced himself as "travelling on the King's business," and was evidently a "man of worship." [103]

"And how do you name him?"

"Cuthbert Trevannion, some day to be *Sir* Cuthbert, when Sir Walter, now past his fiftieth year, is gathered to his fathers."

"And this Sir Walter, what was he doing in *his* father's life-time?"

"That is hardly known—some say that he was a monk before bluff King Hal pulled down the rookeries, and that he keeps up the old cloister life with a few brethren in the old hall, which he seldom leaves; but that can hardly have been the case, for then how could he have been married and become possessed of so goodly a son?"

"And the son—does he confine himself much to the hall?"

"Oh, he hunts and hawks like other young men, only he keeps somewhat to the home preserves, and seldom shows abroad."

"Are there any other children?"

"No, this is the only child."

"And the mother?"

"Died before Sir Walter came home."

"What year was that?"

"I cannot remember—but—"

"Go to, refresh thy memory with a cup of thine own best sack at my expense, it is before thee on the table." [104]

"Well, I think it was in forty."

"And this youngster seems about twenty years old; he would have been a boy of fourteen then."

"Your worship has some interest in him?"

"Nay, only a passing recollection."

We will leave the worthies to their talk, and follow the traveller.

He had now ridden about three miles from Bovey, when he entered a long pass between two ridges of hills; by his side a trout stream, called the Becky, tumbled along, larch trees grew on the banks, and the heights above were crowded with dwarf oaks, beeches, and other forest trees.

Whistling to himself he rode along, hastening to get home ere it was quite dark, for the roads were both difficult and dangerous, save to those who knew them well.

Soon the valley contracted, and there was only room for the torrent and the road, while the craggy wooded heights rose yet more lofty above: sometimes, over their summits could be seen the rounded heights of the moorland.

The tumbling of a cascade to the left, was heard as the road parted from the river, and began to ascend a dark pass, where the faint decaying light was almost excluded by the foliage. [105]

In devious zig-zags the road ascended to the upper plateau, and our rider, the summit attained, looked back at the valley. It was a mass of foliage, which hid the depth; the upper branches glimmered in the rays of the departing sun which was just disappearing behind a wild-looking hill, whereon appeared a mass of rocks, so closely resembling the ruins of a castle, that it needed a keen eye to discover the deception at a glance.

But the rocks of Hound Tor were too familiar to our youthful friend to detain him a moment, and riding through a few meadows, he drew up at the gate of an ancient manor house, beneath the slope of a rock-clad hill, which was crowned by a mass of granite resembling the human form, and from the protuberance of what represented the nasal organ, called "Bowerman's Nose."

The reader will search in vain for that manor house now; the park in which it stood has been disafforested, and subdivided into numerous farm holdings; the stones which formed that mighty wall which encircled the pleasaunce or garden, or which composed the stately pile within, may yet exist amidst the materials of many cottages, where beside poverty and squalor one beholds a carved architrave, or shattered column; but we are writing of days long gone by. [106]

Cuthbert Trevannion, to give him the name by which mine host of the "Rose and Crown" distinguished him, rode up an avenue, and throwing the bridle of his horse to a groom who stood ready to receive it, asked—

"Is my father at leisure?"

"The supper bell has just sounded."

Retiring for one moment to wipe off the sweat and dust of the road, our youth entered the "refectory," as they called it at that house.

It was indeed to all appearance a monastic house—within a room, wainscotted with dark oak, nine or ten grave old men sat on each side of the board, and at the head sat Sir Walter Trevannion; all present wore the dress of the Benedictine order, which, banished from the stately abbays founded for the exercise of its splendid worship, lingered on by the charity of a few worthy knights or nobles in many a similar asylum, where, until death the poor brethren still kept up the exercise of their self-discipline.

To this, Henry had no objection, now that he had their money; for had not the statute of the six articles just declared that vows of celibacy were binding until death; a piece of cruel sarcasm, when everything which could render them *tolerable*, had been taken away, so far as the power of the crown extended. [107]

During the supper, all were silent, while one of the brethren read a homily of S. Augustine; but the meal ended, Sir Walter beckoned to his *son* to follow him into the study.

But it is time that we drop the mask, and explain ourselves.

Cuthbert Trevannion, now so called, *was* our Cuthbert; Sir Walter was that Ambrose, the bearer of the ring, who had received him into his care, as related at the conclusion of the former part of this tale; where he had passed six eventful years: years which had witnessed the dastardly end of the life of the "malleus monachorum," Cromwell,^[28] the divorce of one queen, the execution of another, and had seen the tyrant pass into the last stage of his sanguinary reign—burning the Reformers, and butchering the Romanists who would not acknowledge his supremacy; the only tyrant upon record, who had the privilege of persecuting both sides at once. [108]

The inn-keeper's account of Sir Walter was true so far as it went; we will supply the necessary details.

He was the second son of Sir Arthur Trevannion, the head of an old Devonian family, but against the will of his father he had assumed the Benedictine habit, and become the Prior of the famous Abbey of Furness, in the far north, under the name of Ambrose, so that his father and he did not meet for many many years.

Under that name he became implicated in the rising called the Pilgrimage of Grace, and when his Abbey was dissolved found refuge abroad, where the news of his elder brother's death reached him. It was then thought expedient that he should return home in the guise of a layman, where owing to the fact that he had taken the monastic vows under an assumed name, his identity with the Father Ambrose of Furness, proscribed by the government, was not suspected, and he was received by his father as a returned prodigal, fresh from abroad.

The old knight only survived his return a few months, and for the sake of offering a home to the poor houseless Benedictines whom he gathered round him, Father Ambrose accepted the facts of his position, and became, without question, Sir Walter Trevannion of Becky Hall, and the protector of Cuthbert, to whom he had conceived so great an attachment (which the lad well deserved) that he adopted him as his son, whereas his first intention had been to place him in a more subordinate position until he should shew himself worthy of higher promotion. [109]

Thus to the outward world he was the country knight, but when the gates were shut and he was alone with his brethren, he was Prior Ambrose.

Thus six uneventful years—uneventful, that is, to them—had passed away, in the quietude of their moorland home, beneath the shade of the mighty hills, far from the scenes of political strife.

And there Cuthbert's education had been completed; when we reintroduced him to our readers he was already in the bloom of early manhood.

"Happy the people, who have no history," says an old well-worn proverb; for history is only interesting when it deals with those days of war and excitement which were miserable to contemporaries, but lend a charm to tradition: "nothing in the papers to-day," say we moderns, almost vexed that no train has run off the lines, no steam-boat exploded, no murderer exercised his art, to fill the columns.

Similarly those six years of Cuthbert's past life would have no interest for the reader, but they had been happy ones to him— [110]

"The torrent's smoothness ere it dash below."

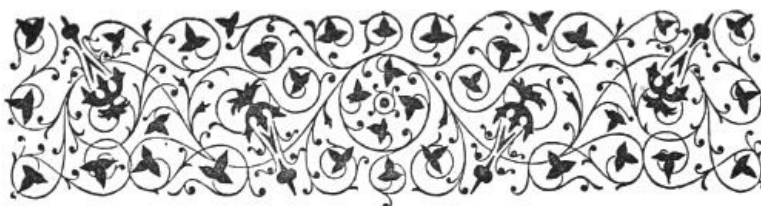
And often in later years did he recall them with regret.

And although he and his adopted father knew it not, another period of deep excitement and great trial lay before them, upon the eve of which we draw up our curtain and arrange our *dramatis personæ*.



FOOTNOTES

[28] “Dastardly,” for he who had with such cruel indifference sent others to the stake, the quartering block, or the axe, lost all his own courage when a like doom impended over himself—when, without a trial, he was sentenced, by the process of a “bill of attainder,” which he had first invented. In the most abject manner he fawned on the tyrant, and besought mercy in terms which were a disgrace to his manhood. Innocent of intentional treason against Henry no doubt he was; but was he more so than many of his own victims, whom on the fifth of July, 1540, he went to meet before the bar of God?



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CHAPTER II. AN EVENTFUL RAMBLE.



uthbert, my son,” said Sir Walter, “thou hast brought letters from the town.”

“Here they are, father,” said Cuthbert, producing a packet which bore the traces of a long journey, “letters from across the sea.”

The good knight, or father, whichever we may call him, perused them eagerly, and Cuthbert sat patiently gazing at a black letter martyrology to wile away the time.

“My news concerns thee, dear son,” said his adopted father. “Cuthbert, thou hast now attained years of discretion, and thy education has not been neglected; thou art a fair master of English, French, and Latin, with some knowledge of German; thy mathematics are tolerable as things go; meanwhile thou hast not neglected the divinest of studies—theology.”

“Nor, father, have I forgotten that in this world we must learn to fence, wrestle, shoot, and if need be, fight.”

“Nor hunting and hawking, alack-a-day; ‘vanitas vanitatum,’ all is vanity; but, my son, we must seriously consider now what thy future life shall be. Here I have letters from two quarters, amongst others, which concern thee; my good brother, the Abbot of Monte Casino, in far off Italy, would gladly receive thee as a neophyte, and fit thee to make thy profession in that holiest and most learned of houses, where as yet the wild boar rooteth not, neither doth the beast of the field devour.”

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The old man looked eagerly on the youth, but no answering response met his gaze.

“And again,” continued he, “my friend the Baron de Courcy, descendant of an old and famous Norman house, distinguished even in the days of the Conquest,^[29] offers to receive thee as an esquire and candidate for the future honour of knighthood, in the service of France, now happily at peace with England.”

Cuthbert’s face brightened now—this was the lot which he desired.

“Ah, my son, I see the world hath hold of thee; would thou could’st feel the noble ambition to die for the Church, like thy once revered preceptor.”

“Father, dear father, believe me no ingrate; for the Church I would willingly die; but let it be as a warrior, sword in hand, fighting for her rights, she needs such,—the warrior’s death if need be, but not the stake or quartering block, unless God call me to it,—and then thy child may not disobey.”

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“I have ever foreboded this decision, yet it ruins my fondest hopes—but if God has not given the vocation man can do nought—and therefore I have sought the double opening for thee; thou chooseth, then, the soldier’s life, under my old friend of Courcy, whom I know to be as valiant and devout a warrior as one could find, yet withal one who will not spare correction, and who can be

stern at need.”

“I do choose it, since you leave it to me, yet I grieve to cross thy will.”

“Take till to-morrow to consider of it; a ship, under a captain whom I know, will leave Dartmouth shortly for France, and thou mayest go under his care. But first there is a duty to discharge; we must both go to Glastonbury, where the lapse of time will have obliterated thy remembrance from the towns folk, and destroy those papers; there is no longer any occasion for their existence.”

“When shall we travel?”

“I have engagements which detain me here for another week, then we shall set out; and now, my son, commend thyself to God, and seek His grace to guide thee at this solemn turning-point in thy life. *Benedicat te Deus, et custodiat te semper, noctem quietam concedat Dominus.*” [114]

It was not till the midnight hour had passed that Cuthbert could sleep; he realised that he had come to a point in the road of life, where two ways branched off to right and left, either of which, fraught with diverse issues, he might follow, but which?

And the same figure continually haunted him in his dreams, even the two roads; sometimes the strife of battle and death in the forlorn hope, or in the deadly breach, seemed the goal of the one, and then the other appeared to lead to a desert of racks, stakes, and other appliances, too familiar to the proselytizing zeal of that era.

There were other visions, but visions of peace—of a home of rest beyond some fearful toil, some deadly peril which had preceded it in the dream.

Wakeful, but not refreshed, Cuthbert rose with the sun; the words of Sir Walter, “Take a day to consider,” rang in his mind; it should be a day of solitude.

He took a slight breakfast, and then ascended the hill above the house, crowned with the Druidical idol of a long vanished day; through furze and crag he scrambled to the summit; before him lay a land of desolation; moor after moor, swelling into hills, subsiding into valleys, tinged with light or shade as the shadows of the clouds drove over the wastes before the wind; like the restless ocean, it had a strange charm in its very boundlessness; its vastness seemed to calm one, as if an image of the illimitable eternity. [115]

And above rose the mis-shapen token of a faith and worship long extinct; a few huge blocks of granite composed the figure, so arranged, whether by nature or art, that they looked human in outline; and before, on that flat slab of stone, many victims must have bled—human victims perhaps, in honour of the Baal-God.

That distant ridge of serrated teeth-like mountains, perpetuates the name Bel Tor; perchance Phœnicians of old, brought over the worship dear to Jezebel, and in these latter days, the name still speaks of that dread idolatry.

So man passes away like the shadows of the clouds over the moor, and yet these bare hills and rocky tors remain the same, as when the smoke from the idol sacrifice ascended.

Then Cuthbert descended; he reached the valley, climbed the opposite ridge—that strange pile so like a ruined castle which men call Hound Tor; onward again up a deep valley, then a scramble amidst rocks and heather, and the huge granite blocks which form the summit of Hey Tor, are gained. [116]

Oh, what a variegated view of land and sea—the wild hills over the Dart, nay, over the Tavy; the huge bulk of Cawsand in the north; the estuaries of the Dart and Teign; nay, across the sea, a cloud-like vision of Portland Isle, full sixty miles away.

But our young mountaineer has seen enough, and his thoughts are ever busy; he descends the hill and enters the forests which then fringed their bases. Has he an object in view? Yes, there is one he would fain see near Ashburton, pure and fair Isabel Grey, daughter of a neighbouring squire, whose beauty had revealed to him the secrets of his own heart, and steeled him against entering the ranks of a celibate priesthood.

This is not a love story, and we shall not follow him to listen to his vows, to hear him implore his charmer to tarry till he can return crowned (he doubts not) with glory gained in the wars, and offer her the heart of a would-be bridegroom.

He returns at length by the lower road, strikes the pass he ascended, last night, at about the same hour, but the long ramble has fatigued him; he rests for one moment at the summit of the ridge.

It wants an hour to sunset, he will go to the point of Hound Tor Coombe; it is but a few steps, and is a projecting spur of the range which separates the two wooded, rock-strewn valleys, Lustleigh and Becky, just before they unite in one beautiful vale, above Bovey Tracey. [117]

There he lies listening to the streams which babble on each side far below, and anon—shall we tell it to his shame—falls asleep.

He is awake by the murmur of voices.

“I tell thee the old fellow is worth a mint of money, and Jack Cantfull, who is the ostler at the ‘Rose and Crown,’ says he rides all alone to Moreton, and goes through this pass, but why he takes this road instead of the other I know not, only Jack is to be his guide.”

“He will pay for knocking on the head!”

"Jack will expect his share when the deed is done."

"Nay," said another voice, "no throat cutting or head splitting, if it can be done without."

"Thou hast become scrupulous, Tony; hast thou forgotten the colour of blood?"

"Nay, as I am a true Gubbing,^[30] I mind it no more than ale, when called upon to shed it, but we need not make the country too hot to hold us."

"Dead men tell no tales."

"Well, we must be moving, he was to start at six." And soon Cuthbert heard them climb down the slope from a cave (well known to him, but which happily he had not entered) below the summit on which he had been reposing. [118]

They had gone to beset the pass higher up.

So soon as the sound of their footsteps had ceased, Cuthbert descended or rather *slid* down the hill into the road beneath, behind the men, and in spite of his fatigue, walked rapidly back towards Bovey.

Soon he came to the junction of two roads—the one, the upper way, leading through the pass and so to Chagford, and by a circuitous route to Moreton; the other a branch road which led more directly to the latter town, which the traveller had abandoned: to take, for his own reasons, a more circuitous and difficult route under a treacherous guide.

At the point where the ways met Cuthbert waited, and shortly heard the sound of horses; he then beheld the riders—the one a tall dark looking man, evidently of rank and importance, the other a sort of stable helper from the inn at Bovey.

"Stand," cried Cuthbert, "I would fain speak with you, sir."

"Who is this, who cries 'stand' upon the King's highway?"

"A friend, one who would save you, Sir John, if you be Sir John; danger lurks ahead; three cut-throats, 'Gubbings,' they call them about here, a half-gipsy brood, lie in wait at the pass, and lurk for your life." [119]

"How sayest thou, my lad? Look, sirrah, what sayest thou to this?"

But the treacherous groom had heard all, and rode on at full gallop, barely escaping a pistol-shot his indignant employer sent after him.

"He will bring them back in no time: take the lower road."

"And thou, my poor lad, they will avenge themselves on thee."

"Nay, I know every turn in the woods; I can run home."

"Sore uneasy should I be for thee. Ah, see, the rogues appear, they heard the shot."

About half-a-mile along the road, moving forms rapidly running towards them might be obscurely discerned as they turned a crest of the hill.

"Jump behind, thou canst ride 'pillion.'"

Cuthbert complied, and Sir John spurred his horse and galloped along the lower road; even then, by cutting across a shoulder of the hill, the Gubbings, as Cuthbert called them, gained upon them and shot two or three useless arrows, and then they could do no more, for the road lay straight forward, and they had no further advantage.

After a little while Sir John said—

"I think we may now take our ease; thou hast saved my life, lad, and I shall not forget it. What is thy name?" [120]

"Cuthbert Trevannion; and thine, sir?"

The rider started perceptibly as he heard the name, and Cuthbert noticed it. After a moment he said, with emphasis—

"Sir John Redfyrne, a poor knight of his sacred majesty's household."

Cuthbert remembered the name too well, and his earnest desire was to get away without any further revelations.

"I have lately come from Glastonbury," said Sir John; "dost thou know the place?"

Cuthbert could not lie. "I have been there," he said.

"There was some talk of a lad of thy name when I first knew the town, who was educated at the Abbey."

"It may be, sir; but see, that road will take me home, and there is no danger now; may I dismount?"

"Not just yet; here is a roadside inn, thou must at least grace me with thy presence over a cup of sack."

"But my father will be uneasy."

"I will answer for him."

Not to increase Sir John's suspicions, Cuthbert dismounted at the inn, and allowed himself to be led into a private chamber. Sir John waited for a moment, and descended the stairs. [121]

“Dost thou know that youth?” he asked of the landlord.

“The son of Sir Walter Trevannion.”

“He lives near here?”

“Yes, at Trevannion Hall.”

He returned to Cuthbert.

“My lad,” he said, “I owe thee many thanks, and grieve that I may not stay longer to repay them than suffices to discuss this sack; my road now lies to Moreton, and I shall soon have quitted these parts; perhaps I may call some future day upon thy father, who, I hear, lives near, to thank thee in his presence.”

“I may go then, sir?”

“With my best thanks; nay, wear this chain as a memento of the giver and the Gubbings; fare thee well.”

And Cuthbert hastened home.

But Sir John remained yet a little while, seated in the saddle, as he made several innocent enquiries of the landlord.

And they were all about Trevannion Hall.



FOOTNOTES

[29] Read “The Andredsweald,” by the same Author. (Parker’s Oxford.)

[30] See Note J. The Gubbings.



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CHAPTER III. AN ACT OF GRATITUDE.



ir Thomas Stukely of Chagford, gentleman, was a type of the old English justice of his day; a hundred pounds a year, equivalent to a thousand now, represented the condition of the squire of the parish, and heavy duties had he to perform; to wit, it was his duty to know everything and everybody; did any parent bring up his child in idleness, it was his place to interfere and see that the child was taught an honest trade; did any vagrants go about begging, it was his duty to see them tied to a cart’s tail and flogged, or even in extreme cases of persistence to see them hanged out of the way, for the days were stern days.

It was his to bridle all masterless men, and, if they would not work, to send them to gaol; and to see that all youths, forsaking idle dicing and gaming, or the frequenting of taverns, gave themselves to manly exercises, archery, cudgel playing, and the like; that each might be a soldier in time of need.

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His hour of rising, in summer, was four o’clock, with breakfast at five, after which his labourers went to work, and he to his business; in winter, perhaps an hour later was allowed to all. Every unknown face, met in the country roads, was challenged by the constables, and if the stranger gave not a good account of his wayfaring, he was brought before the justice; did the grocer give short weight, or the cobbler make shoes which let water, it must all come before Sir Thomas, as he was called in courtesy, for he was only “a squire.”^[31]

At twelve he dined in company with his household: good beef, mutton, ale, and for the upper board wine—Canary, Malmsey, or the like; bread was plentiful, both white and brown, vegetables, before the advent of potatoes, scarce,^[32] the ladies made the pastry with their own fair hands.

The doors stood open to all comers at the hours of dinner and supper; they of gentle degree

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fared at the squire's table, of simple at the lower board with the servants, which formed with the upper one the letter T.

Free board and free lodging to all honest comers; it might be rough but it was ready; as the squire and his household fared, so did the guests, both in bed and board.

Early after his dinner, the squire went hunting, or rode about the farms and looked after his tenants; saw that the fences were in good repair, the roads well kept; and returned at sunset to supper.

In his old wainscotted hall, panelled with black oak, its ceiling decorated with the arms of the Stukelys between the interlacing beams, a fire of logs in the huge hearth, and two favourite hounds lying before it, sat Justice Stukely and his wife at supper.

A ring at the bell, and the porter ushered in a stranger.

"My name is Redfyrne, Sir John Redfyrne, travelling upon the King's business, and craving your hospitality."

"It is thine, man," said the host, "sit down there," as he pointed to the vacant seat of honour by his side; "beef and bread are by thee, and here is good October, or there fair Malmsey, to wash it down."

Sir John ate heartily; and his host did not ply him with many questions until he had finished a huge platter of meat, and discussed a jorum of ale. [125]

"Hast ridden far, Sir John?"

"From Bovey only."

"Which way, round Moreton or by the Becky?"

"By the Becky, where I narrowly escaped the Gubbings."

"The Gubbings!" and the squire with difficulty repressed a malediction, which rose to his lips. "They are like wasps, kill one, a hundred come to his funeral. Only last month we caught a party of them red-handed, and hung them up on the spot, for they are not Christians or Englishmen, and we thought it wasn't worth while to trouble judge or jury over them. There we strung them up from the beeches of Holme Chase, the prettiest beech-nuts honest eyes could rest upon—five men, two women, and three boys; yet they are not frightened away from these parts yet."

"Nor ever will be unless you hunt them from the moor with bloodhounds."

"It *may* come to that; they are a plague-spot in the Commonwealth, and especially upon our fair country of Devon. But what news from court, Sir John?"

"The King's Majesty's health is better, but he hath been sorely tried by the humour of one Dr. Crome, who preached in a sermon, that no one could approve of the dissolution of the monasteries, and at the same time admit the usefulness of prayers for the souls in purgatory; his majesty thought the speech levelled against himself, and Dr. Crome being examined before the Council, criminated ex-Bishop Latimer and many others. Crome and Latimer saved themselves by recantation, but Anne Askew, a maid of honour about the court; Adlam, a tailor; Otterden, shame to say, a priest; and Lascelles, a gentleman in waiting, have all been burnt alive at Smithfield. Shaxton, late Bishop of Worcester, smelt strongly of the faggot, but he recanted just in time, and preached the funeral sermon over his late allies as they smouldered." [126]

"That reminds me of the old song," said the Justice, "which they sang in France when I made my first essay in arms there, the King was young then.

"Apotre de Luthere,
Si l'on brule ta chair,
C'est seulement que tu saches d'avance
Les tourments d'enfer."^[33]

"Well, for the witch and for the heretic a faggot is the best cure. What else is going on?"

"They say that an ingenious mechanist has invented a machine to move the King upstairs and down in his chair without difficulty; he is so corpulent that little trace is left of the princely gallant of the Cloth of Gold." [127]

"Queen Catharine has a hard time of it?"

"She is a good nurse, but she is careful not to cross the royal temper."

"There are five good examples set before her in her predecessors."

And so the talk went on, over the recent peace concluded with France in the previous summer; over the disputes in court between the party of Cranmer and the Seymours on the one hand, and that of the Duke of Norfolk, and Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester, on the other. But we will not weary the reader with any more of the chit-chat of the latter days of Henry VIII., now drawing near his end, furious as a wild beast at the slightest contradiction, worshipped by his courtiers on bended knee, and putting to the death Catholic and Protestant alike, if they varied from the doctrines stated in the "King's Boke."

The supper over and the servants dismissed, the real purpose of Sir John's visit came out, and the Justice learned with deep surprise mingled with disgust, that he sought a warrant for the arrest of Sir Walter Trevannion and his reputed son Cuthbert, and men to execute the same.

"Sir Walter Trevannion! why, what has he done?"

"Nought as Sir Walter, but much as Father Ambrose of Furness Abbey."

"Pooh! pooh! if the old man has been a monk it was lawful to be so once; and if they still play at monkery, why the King has their money, let them play."

"It is, I fear, a more serious business than you imagine, Sir Thomas; this Father Ambrose was art and part in the northern insurrection, which they call the 'Pilgrimage of Grace,' and moreover, attainted for that very crime."

"But how dost thou identify him with Sir Walter, who seems a harmless country gentleman?"

"I have been on his track for many years; it was I who detected that traitor, the some-time Abbot of Glastonbury, in correspondence with him, and I am well assured that buried somewhere beneath the foundations of the ruined pile of that Abbey lies a secret chamber containing papers and documents, which would reveal the names and machinations of many traitors to his royal highness; but there is only one who knows the secret of its whereabouts, and that one is the adopted son of Sir Walter."

"The *adopted* son, young Cuthbert, is he not the real son?"

"No, Sir Walter was a monk till the dissolution; this young Cuthbert was a foundling, brought up at Glastonbury, who disappeared when we were on the point of seizing him, and has never been heard of since, till, being on the trail of Father Ambrose, I unearthed him as Sir Walter Trevannion, and at the same time, killing two birds with one stone, found my master Cuthbert. It is a glorious stroke of luck, and will make my fortune at court."

[129]

"And the poor Trevannions,—for there is no doubt Sir Walter *is* Sir Walter?"

"None at all, his father denounced him for becoming a monk against the paternal will."

"Well, the poor Trevannions, what of them? what will be their fate?"

"If, Sir Thomas, you are a friend to King Harry, as holding his commission you must be, you will accompany me with the dawn of day to the manor house, with a guard of constables in case of resistance, and so enable me to seize the couple of traitors, and lodge them safely in Exeter gaol."

"It must be done, since you yourself, who are the accredited agent of the King, answer for it, and since you say your evidence is sure; but I would sooner you had some other errand than to put me on this job. It is hard upon a man to seize his own neighbours and equals in this way. Can you prove the identity? there is the question."

[130]

"A monk, an apostate if you care to call him one, is at my beck and call, who was at Furness with Prior Ambrose, and knows every hair on his head."

"And the lad?"

"An old schoolfellow at the Abbey is with me, who saw him, himself unseen, at Bovey yesterday, and can swear to him."

"Then we had better go to bed, for we must rise betimes."

"Only write out the warrants to-night. You can lodge me?"

"As I would the devil if he came on the King's service. Nay, be not offended, I love not this butchering work, chopping up men into quarters; but still the King is the King, and justice must be done. I have had my bark and will not fail you when the time comes to bite."

When Cuthbert reached home that night, he lost no time in telling Father Ambrose, or Sir Walter, by whichever name the reader likes to call him, the story of his meeting with Sir John Redfyre.

Sir Walter looked very serious as he heard it; he did not like the look of the affair.

"It might have been well for *thee*, poor lad, hadst thou let the Gubbings finish their work."

[131]

"But would it have been right, father?"

"No, that it would not, and as thou hast done thy duty, so I doubt not thou may'st look for divine protection and the guardianship of saints and angels; but one thing is certain, we must anticipate danger by doing at once what we should have deferred for a week—to-morrow we ride for Glastonbury."

"To-morrow; and must I leave this place, perhaps for ever, so soon, no good-bye said?"

"Thou may'st never leave it at all otherwise, save as a captive; yes, to-morrow, as soon after dawn as arrangements can be made for my absence."

The sun had just risen on the following morning when two powerful horses, saddled and bridled, furnished with saddle-bags, and a third with a servant already mounted, were in the court-yard. The aged monks clustered about the door, their Lauds said, to bid their benefactor a short farewell; his favourite servants awaited his parting commands, when all at once a man came hurriedly forward to say that Sir Thomas Stukely, with a strange gentleman and a band of constables, was coming up the avenue.

"Cuthbert, mount," cried Sir Walter, and the two cutting short their good-byes, jumped upon their steeds, surprised out of their calmer senses, by this sudden and unlooked for announcement. "This way, my son," cried the old knight, and led the way across a paddock behind the house; disappearing in a copse beyond, just as the pursuers reached the court-yard, and found the old men and servants trying to look as if nothing had happened.

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"My life upon it, they are but just gone," cried Sir John Redfyrne, as he gazed around.

The two fugitives rode through the copse by a narrow path, and then emerged on the road just at the brink of the pass described before; here the way descended to the level of the Becky by several zig-zags: and they were forced to ride very cautiously.

Not so cautiously, however, but a trivial accident happened, involving most tragical consequences.

Sir Walter's horse trod on a mole hill, just thrown up, and his foot sank in the loose earth; causing him to stumble and throw his master to the ground; Cuthbert was down in a moment, and at his foster father's side, and, to his joy, he saw his benefactor arise and sit up as if unhurt, but when he tried to get on his legs, he groaned and said—

"My son, I fear my poor leg is broken, the stirrup held and twisted it."

"Nay, nay, my father, let me help you."

[133]

Sir Walter almost swooned with pain as he made a desperate effort to arise; then said, "Cuthbert, ride on, it is *you* they seek, remember all that depends on you, ride on to Glastonbury, and wait for news of me; if I come not, you know what to do, ride on: ah! here they come, gallop forward ere you be too late."

"Do you think I can leave you now, father?" said the poor youth. "Oh, try once more. Nay, it is useless, here they are."

"Put the best face you can on the matter; do not let them see we were flying from them."

"Help, help, Sir Walter Trevannion has fallen from his horse, and broken his leg."

"What," cried Sir Thomas Stukely as he rode up; "how is this, Sir Walter, not much hurt I hope; we must help you home,—come, men, bear a hand."

"No more of this trifling," cried Sir John Redfyrne, sternly; "while it goes on, that lad may escape, and he is worth his weight in gold; do your duty, constables, and you, Sir Thomas."

"By zounds, I want no man to teach me my duty, least of all a cockney knight: look here, Trevannion, tell me the truth and I will act no knave's part to spite an old friend whose father was my crony, and so serve some one else's grudge; art thou, or art thou not, the man they seek as Father Ambrose, Prior of Furness? say *no*, and we will help thee home, and leave thee in peace; now man, why dost thou not speak?"

[134]

Sir Walter looked upon his friend, such a sad look, in which gratitude struggled with pain.

"Stukely," he said, "do thy duty, thou art ever a true man."

Stukely groaned aloud, but he offered no further opposition, and the party, escorted by the constables, took the road for Bovey, *en route* for Exeter gaol.



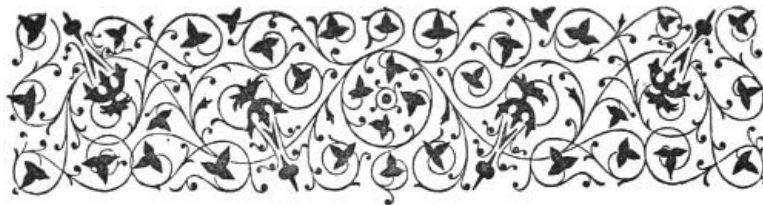
FOOTNOTES

[31] The title "Sir" did not in these days *necessarily* imply knighthood; it was commonly given to Justices of the Peace, scions of noble family, and even to Parish Priests, although we have not used it in that connexion for fear of creating confusion in the mind of the modern reader.

[32] Until late in this reign no edible roots were grown as food in England.

[33] These cruel lines are authentic; the martyrdoms related really occurred on July the sixteenth, 1546, but perhaps the news had not reached Devon, and was not "stale news" there.

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CHAPTER IV.

EXETER GAOL.



ne of the foulest disgraces resting upon mediæval England, but not upon her alone, was the state of her prisons. In such filth were the prisoners kept, that a peculiar fever, called the "gaol fever," broke out from time to time amongst them, and swept off the poor wretches by hundreds.

But often this malady, the source of which was neglect and cruelty, avenged itself upon the gaolers, and not upon them only, but upon judges, jury, and officers alike; thus at Oxford the assizes known as the Black Assize, in the reign of Elizabeth, became historical.^[34] It was convened for the trial of some Catholic recusants, when the foul miasma spread from the wretched prisoners, and judges, jury, sheriff, and officers alike sickened and died.

Thus at the time of which we are writing, rosemary, rue,^[35] and sweet smelling herbs were scattered about the court house at Exeter, where "as worshipful a jury as ever was seen," was convened for the trial of the Trevannions, "father and son," for the crime of high treason. [136]

Their condition evoked great sympathy, and the county town, or rather cathedral city, was crowded upon the day of trial by sympathizers with the accused. It took place in the ancient citadel called Rougemont, which for five centuries offered defiance to the English—when held by the early British or Welsh—until the days of Athelstan; and only a century and a-half later, in the hands of the English, it bade a brief defiance to the Norman conqueror.

Tradition, falsely enough, assigned its origin to Julius Cæsar, and derived its name more truly from the red sandstone which forms the substratum of the castle hill; but whoever founded it, it shared the usual fate of our edifices, both secular and ecclesiastical, in being rebuilt by the Normans, who were rarely contented with aught their old English predecessors had done.

Here, during the brief period of Anglo-Saxon domination, many of the royal race of Cerdic held their court, when they visited their western conquests.

Here also the conquering Norman took up his abode, and to secure the castle to his interests, following therein his usual crafty policy, gave it to be held, in feudal tenure, by one of his chief nobles, Baldwin de Biron, who had married his niece, Albreda. [137]

Here was the county gaol, and here the governor occupied the tenantable rooms in the ancient castle, two of which were assigned to the prisoners, in consequence of their position amongst the Devonian aristocracy—few expected aught for them but a triumphant acquittal; but all the time Sir John Redfyrne felt sure of his prey.

They were thus allowed the consolation of each other's society; their food was supplied from the governor's own table, but before them lay the blankness of despair, so far as this world was concerned.

For supposing they escaped the heavier accusation of "misprison of treason" hanging over both,—the elder for his voluntary share in the northern insurrection, the younger for his concealment of a secret involving the King's peace,—there was another weapon to which their foe might have immediate recourse.

This weapon was the Act of Supremacy.

Would they take the oath? If not the cruel fate assigned to traitors lay before them.

Cuthbert's own theories were not very defined on the point, but he would strive to follow such guides as Richard Whiting and Walter Trevannion.

But what was the object of Sir John Redfyrne in thus precipitating matters? It was simply that he wished to get *Cuthbert* into his power. He cared less for the elder prisoner, he might die or live, but were it once placed clearly before the youth that he might save his life by betraying the secret he was supposed to possess, there could be, to Sir John's mind, no doubt that he would give the clue, and all would be well. [138]

Then as it would no longer interfere with weightier interests, he would show his gratitude for such a trifling favour as the preservation of his own life; and should Cuthbert, as was likely in such a case, lack *other* friends, even provide decently for his future in some subordinate position.

But first of all the danger must become real, or the youth's obstinacy would never be subdued,—the jury *must* condemn.

It was the day of trial, and all the approaches to the court were crowded. We will not appear on

the scene in person, we have seen a very similar trial at Glastonbury; but we will just read a number of depositions, as they were written down in the county archives, in old books not generally accessible.

Laurence Tooler, known as Father Paul in religion, deposeth that he was one of the brethren at Furness Abbey, and being an apt scribe was employed by the Prior Ambrose as his secretary, copied lists for him of the leaders in the "Pilgrimage of Grace," their contributions, in money, men, and arms. Sent copies of the same by the hands of a sure messenger to Abbot Whiting, of Glastonbury; also, at later period, consigned sums of money by ship to the Bristol Channel and thence to Glastonbury: supposed it to be for safe keeping on behalf of the dispossessed brethren. Identifieth the elder prisoner as Prior Ambrose. Admitteth he was once chastised by the Prior for breach of his monastic vows. [139]

Jacques Le Fuyard, an English subject, son of an English mother and French father, speaketh both languages fluently: was employed by the English Government under Cromwell, to track the political refugees in Flanders and elsewhere; knew Prior Ambrose of Furness, at Antwerp; that he, the Prior, often corresponded with Reginald Pole, "the King's chief enemy across the seas;" that he was more than once with the Papal Nuncio, and often closeted with the Spanish Ambassador; understood that he had given up politics; lost sight of him at Brussels, knew him again in Sir Walter Trevannion; and recognized him, recently, when tarrying about the neighbourhood of the manor house at Becky Hall, near Bovey. [140]

Gregory Grigges, deposeth that he was groom to old Sir Arthur Trevannion; is very old now, nearly eighty years; knew the present Sir Walter as a boy, remembers his running away, and becoming a monk, as he heard; the old knight would have nought to say to him afterwards; the elder brother, Sir Roger, died of decline, and the old man longed for his only surviving son, sent abroad and spent much money in enquiries; at length Sir Walter returned. Doth not like Sir Walter so well as his father: hath been put in the stocks by him for having a very little drop too much. That is he present, the prisoner.

Nicholas Grabber deposeth that he was a schoolboy at Glastonbury Abbey, where they got plenty to fill their heads, but little to put into their stomachs; has felt it ever since in a tendency to boils and blains: the meat was so rotten it dropped from your fork as you held it, and the fish stank; hated the Abbot because he was, he thought, an enemy to the King. Watched him narrowly. One day the Abbot sent for the prisoner at the bar; he (Nicholas) would fain know why, suspecting treason, and crept after; heard the Abbot talk to prisoner about papers and a secret chamber, which was to be disclosed to someone who should present a ring which prisoner would recognize: prisoner always making up to my Lord Abbot. [141]

Questioned whether he had any motives for dislike to prisoner: said only that he hated favourites; once he fought with him and was thrashed; was once sent back as a truant to the Abbey, coupled between two hounds, but bore no malice for it, oh no!—only actuated by loyalty to the King; Sir John Redfyrne had shown him his duty. Here the magistrates told him they wanted to hear no more.

To sum up the story, the jury were of opinion that the identity of Sir Walter Trevannion with Prior Ambrose of Furness was clearly proved, that under that name he had been guilty of high treason, but they recommended him to mercy in consideration of his evident reformation in later years.

They found that there was not sufficient evidence to convict the younger prisoner of "misprison of treason."

Thereupon Sir John Redfyrne desired that the Oath of Supremacy be tendered to the younger.

The judges declared that the demand could not be refused, although they thought it vexatious, and evidently expecting that the young man would at once show his loyalty, were astonished by a blank refusal.

Thereupon Sir John Redfyrne observed they might recognize the true pupil of Richard Whiting. [142]

The judges besought the youth, who was only a little more than twenty years of age, to consider the consequences of his refusal.

He still remained obstinate, with the evident approval of the elder prisoner, his reputed father.

Thereupon sentence of death, after the usual fashion, was pronounced upon both prisoners: to be drawn upon hurdles to the cathedral yard, and there to be hanged, but not till they were dead, cut down alive, and dismembered.

The prisoners thanked God for calling them to die in what they called "so good a cause," and thanked the jury for the patience with which they had heard them, and the desire they had shown to save their lives, with a simplicity which brought tears to all eyes.

Sir John Redfyrne, on behalf of the Crown, asked and obtained a week's respite, such sentences being usually executed on the morrow.

The prisoners were removed; a dangerous tendency was visible amongst the mob, many of whom cried, "God bless them."

By desire of Sir John Redfyrne they were separated and placed in solitary confinement.



"THE POOR LAD GAVE HIM ONE INDIGNANT LOOK."

Page 143.

So far we have made extracts from the registers of Rougemont.

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What was Sir John's object in all this? why did he persist in securing the condemnation of Cuthbert? and then insist upon the delay of a week in its execution?

Because he trusted to the weakness of human nature, and thought that the fear of death would extract the secret he craved.

And if the fear of death did not extract it, he meant to obtain it by torture; he was provided with a warrant to that effect from the council.

Torture was not, even then, lawful in England, but could be applied by special warrant of the Privy Council, in cases where the safety of the commonwealth was concerned; and this was considered to be one, as the royal Blue-Beard himself was ravenously eager for such wholesale detection of his enemies, as would be attained by the discovery of the records of Furness transmitted to Glastonbury.

On the day following the trial and condemnation, Sir John Redfyrne visited Cuthbert in his cell.

The poor lad gave him one indignant look, then turned his head aside and would regard him no further.

"Cuthbert Trevannion, thou regardest me as thy foe, yet I am not; thou didst save my life from robbers, and I own it, and own that I must appear ungrateful beyond conception, yet I have one excuse, I love my young benefactor, but love my King and country better."

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No answer.

"Thou knowest the existence of a secret chamber at Glastonbury."

Still no reply.

"Reveal that secret, and I pledge myself to provide for thy future fortunes, to restore thee to liberty and honour, nay to gratify the most extravagant desires of thy young heart."

He paused in vain.

"Or, failing this, if thou wilt not be led by kindness and mercy, there remain the sharp arguments of thumb-screw and rack."

The answer came at length.

"Do thy worst, and God judge between me and thee."

Sir John departed.



FOOTNOTES

- [34] See Note K. The Black Assize.
[35] Hence the phrase "He shall rue it."



[145]

CHAPTER V. *PUT TO THE QUESTION.*



ow, hidden in the very foundations of the Castle of Rougemont, was an arched dungeon of considerable dimensions, which only the initiated knew.

You descended into it by a winding staircase, excavated in the very thickness of the wall, and entered, after a descent of thirty steps, on opening a huge door of stone, which shut again with a resonant clang, and struck horror into the heart.

It had no communication with other cells, neither had it any species of window; so that those who were within, when the door was shut, were cut off from all sight and sound of the external world.

Summer or winter, night or day, storm or calm, might reign above, all was alike down there.

At one end was a platform of wood raised about a foot from the stone floor; upon this stood an oaken table with writing materials, and behind it a grand mediæval chair with the insignia of justice, the sword and scales, carved thereon; and at the opposite end was an arched recess concealed by a curtain, which hid both the executioners and the implements of torture until they were needed, when some unhappy wretch had to be "put to the question."

[146]

But even in their most ruthless days, the dread ministers of English justice only used torture as a last resource, to wring guilty secrets from the criminal, when the welfare of the State appeared to sanction the cruelty—they never descended to the fearful refinements of the German dwellers on the Rhine in their robber castles, where fiendish ingenuity was displayed in pushing agony to its utmost limits without violating the sanctuary of life.^[36]

On the third day solitude and silence having failed of their effect, Cuthbert was brought down into this den.

At the table sat the governor of Rougemont, in his chair of state, and by his side Sir John Redfyrne; a physician, clothed in a long dark cloak, a clerk with pen and parchment, ready to take down the answers of the prisoner, were the only other persons present, at least in sight, when the two gaolers brought down the unfortunate youth.

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"Thy name?" said the governor.

"Cuthbert Trevannion."

"Hast thou always borne that name?"

"No, only a few years."

"What other hast thou borne?"

"Cuthbert, only."

"What then is thy real name?"

"I know not."

"Who was thy father? What was he called?"

"I was a foundling, and cannot tell."

"What is thy age?"

"I was found an infant in the wood of Avalon, on the 28th day of December, in the year 1525."

Sir John started at this announcement, and looked earnestly at the speaker.

"At whose charge wast thou brought up?"

"That of the Abbot of Glastonbury."

Sir John and the governor looked at each other as if this information corresponded with their expectations.

"Wast thou not sometimes called 'Hodge?'"

"After the yeoman who found me, and became my foster father."

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"How didst thou pass under the care of Sir Walter Trevannion?—men of rank do not usually give the honour of their name to obscure striplings."

"I was commended to him by my benefactor, the late Abbot."

"Thou wert, then, particularly dear to that trait—, I would say Abbot?" said the governor, who throughout showed a desire to spare the prisoner's feelings, and was evidently discharging a painful task from a sense of duty.^[37]

"I was dear to him," said Cuthbert, "but so were all his children."

"But he trusted not all as he trusted thee?"

"I am not a fair judge of that."

"He revealed his secrets to thee, I am told."

"He would hardly make a mere boy the depository of many secrets; I was hardly fourteen at his martyrdom."

The officials all looked at each other as the last word was pronounced, and the governor said mildly—

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"'Execution,' thou would'st say, but we will not dispute the subject,—dost thou remember the day when thou didst gain a silver arrow at an archery contest?"

"I gained more prizes than one."

"This was in the May of 1539, and Nicholas Grabber was thy competitor?"

"Yes, I remember it."

"Well, in that same night the Abbot, as we are informed, gave thee the honour of a private interview?"

"He often did."

"But on this occasion, had he not a special object?"

"He would not be likely otherwise to send for me—his time was valuable."

"Thou evadest the question."

"I do not comprehend it."

"What was the *special* object on this occasion?"

Cuthbert felt that the point was reached at last.

"I am not at liberty to disclose."

"That is the matter at issue between us, but we hope thou wilt not drive us to extremities, as we would fain spare thee, compassionating thy youth. In plain words, did he not disclose to thee the mystery of a secret chamber, where many documents of importance to the King be concealed, and much treasure of the Abbey hidden from the royal owner, to whom the nation hath given the property of the monasteries."

[150]

"That is the very question I must decline to answer. If I know anything it is not my secret, but one committed to me by the dead, under awful sanctions."

"A good citizen knows no higher sanction than the welfare of his country, and our religion bids us honour and obey the King."

"In all things lawful, but this is not lawful to me."

"I grieve over thee, poor youth," said the governor, "and over the measures I *must* take; but the orders of council are explicit, are they not, Sir John?"

"They are, there is no alternative."

"Gaoler, draw back the curtains."

The curtains separated in the middle, and were drawn back to the wall—the mystery of the arched recess was laid bare.

There stood two brawny men, beside a brazier of glowing coals, wherein were two pincers heated to a red heat; hard by was the rack, with its cords and pulleys, ready for working; manacles and chains hung on the wall; scourges and thumb-screws; there was the huge iron band, with a hinge in the middle and a padlock in front, which was placed around the bodies of wretches condemned to the stake; all the implements known to the English torture chamber, happily so seldom used, were there; *seldom*, we say, but comparatively *often* in this reign of terror.

[151]

This *coup d'oeil* was intended to frighten, there was no intention to bring the full resources of the chamber into very active use; the thumb-screw alone they thought would be sufficient for a young beginner.

"Thou seest thy fate—be wise in time. Believe me, my poor youth, thou wilt not be able to endure what is in store for thee if thou continuest in obstinacy; be wise, therefore, and yield with grace what thou canst not retain, and our best efforts shall be used for thy free pardon for all laid to thy charge, only remember we cannot allow a divided allegiance in this realm—it were death to us; thou must obey the King, or die the death; thou hast read the ancients:—

"*Cuncta prius tentanda, sed immedicabile vulnus
Ense recidendum est, ne pars sincera trahatur.*"^[38]

"My lord," said the poor lad, "I know I am weak, but I must do my best. You will do your duty, and I will try to bear, which is mine."

"Apply the thumb-screw."

[152]

Cuthbert was told to place his thumbs together; resistance would have been useless and unseemly, therefore he quietly complied, and the horrid little instrument of torture was made to take them both at once; the turning of a screw brought a sharp little bar across the bones which compressed them until it seemed to burn the flesh like fire, causing exquisite agony; the screw was secured by a lock, and a chain attached to it might, if there were need, be used to attach the prisoner to a staple in the wall, where he might be left until the agony broke his spirit.^[39]

Huge drops of sweat stood on the sufferer's brow.

"Thou feelest a portion of what is due to thee if thou confessest not."

"In te Domine speravi," breathed the poor prisoner.

Minute after minute passed by, during which the struggle between bodily pain and will continued.

At last, Sir John looked at the governor and whispered.

"Another turn!" said the latter, reluctantly.

Another turn was given to the screw, and the prisoner fainted, his sensitive frame could bear no more.

[153]

They poured cold water over him, but it was long before he showed signs of consciousness, and when he did so, the governor said to Sir John—

"It is useless, we can go no further to-day."

"But you will succeed *to-morrow*, the dread will be greater now he knows what pain is, and he *will* yield, I predict, when brought down once more; we shall not need a fresh application of the torture."

"God grant it, for it is a pitiful sight, and I would sooner stand on the field of battle; one feels a man there, and not a brute."

"Let the poor lad be taken to his cell and all kindness shewn him," added the governor.

So the pleasant party broke up.



FOOTNOTES

[36] Witness their Oubliettes, which the writer has seen, shaped like a bottle, the only opening the neck, wherein, when torture had done its worst and no more revelations were to be hoped of the criminal, he was dropped, to perish of his injuries in unseen agony, in cold, hunger, and filth. Witness, too, the recent discoveries at Baden Baden—the statue of the Virgin, which the victim was told to kiss, whereupon a concealed trap-door, on which he stood, fell, and dropped him upon wheels set with revolving knives. Such refinements appal the imagination, and constrain us to ask what manner of men invented such atrocities?

[37] Unless the reader can comprehend the intense way in which obedience and loyalty to the King, right or wrong, swayed the people of England in that day, he cannot comprehend the history of Bloody Harry, and why he was permitted to work his will. The anarchy of the preceding century, when the Wars of the Roses had drenched the country in blood, and helped to foster the sentiment, and to make the throne the central pillar of the edifice, the supposed bulwark of the nation.

[38] All things should first be tried, but an incurable wound
Must with the sword be cut out, lest the sound part be affected.

[39] In John Knox's house at Edinburgh the writer examined a similar implement, as also at



CHAPTER VI.
AN UNEXPECTED DISCLOSURE.



rt thou Sir John Redfyrne?" enquired a man, who by his dress appeared to be a parochial or parish priest, as that worthy knight left Rougemont.

"I am, what dost thou seek of me? I have little to do with cattle of thy breed."

"An aged woman," replied the priest, not noticing the taunt, "is dying in a suburb of the city, and cannot pass in peace till she hath seen thee."

"What does it matter to me whether the old crone dies in peace or not?"

"Verily thou art a hard-hearted man, but wilt thou look upon this signet?—she had confidence in its power to bring thee to her bed-side."

It was only his own crest upon a sapphire that he gazed upon, yet his heart gave a leap, and in spite of his self-command his blood flushed up, his face was crimson, and he evidently had to strive hard for mastery over himself.

"Sir priest," he said, "I am not well, and am subject to spasms of the heart, which will account for my seeming discomposure; lead me to her, I recognise the token." [155]

The priest led on, and Sir John followed. Traversing Fore Street they approached the West Gate, which opened upon the bridge over the Exe. But here the priest turned to the left down a steep descent, into the purlieu of St. Mary of the Steppes.^[40]

The district was crowded then, as now, by the habitations of the lower classes, and was probably even more unsavoury than it is at present, for there was no drainage save that effected by the showers, which flushed the gutters.

Such a shower had even now fallen when the priest entered a court between rickety houses, once of some pretensions, but now tottering in ruin; it was crowded with squalid children, stopping up the gutters as they carried down the filth and refuse, and sailing little boats, or making mud pies.

Amidst rags and wretchedness, the worthy guide led on; he was amidst his own flock; they were not a decent set, but they all respected him, and perhaps without his protection, the gay gentleman would not have gone on his way so unmolested.

"Where art thou taking me to? I knew not such dens existed," said the knight. [156]

"There are many worse; known perhaps only to the physician and the priest, now that ye have suppressed the sisterhoods; least of all to the constables, who dare not come hither save in troops; here the plague lies hidden in the winter, to burst out again each summer; here want, crime, disease, and vice fester together; here the fruit for the gallows is nourished; these be the orchards of the Father of Evil, where he grows of his own will many such apples as tempted Eve."

"And is *she* here?" He did not mean Eve.

"Even so."

"What brought her so low? she has long hidden from me."

"A guilty secret, perchance."

Sir John asked no more, and they entered the gateway of a house at the end of the court, which had once been a fair dwelling, but now the door hung by one hinge, and the windows were battered out. They entered the hall; tattered hangings drooped in fragments from the walls, beetles and spiders had their home amidst the rotten wainscoting, woodlice swarmed in the bannisters of the ancient staircase, the balustrade was partly broken away, the stairs were rotten.

"And is *she* here?" said Sir John again.

"Even so," was the reply; "tread carefully, the staircase will bear thee in places only." [157]

The ceiling, which had been moulded in patterns, had fallen away, and hideous joists and beams were disclosed as they ascended.

Then they heard a faint moan of pain, and a voice said, "Dying, dying, left all alone to die; Mother of Mercy, aid a sinful child of Eve."

"Peace, daughter, I bring him thou seekest."

The being whom he called "daughter" was an aged crone who had seen some seventy summers, and was now fast dying of decay; pains in all her joints, weakness in all her senses, toothless, wrinkled, blear-eyed, yet with the remains of a beauty long past, in the high outlines of her features.

Sir John gazed upon her.

"Art thou Madge of Luckland?" he said.

"Thou knowest me by the signet; it has more power to convince thee than this face; go, good Father Christopher, go," she said to the priest, "and when I have said that which must be said to this good knight, ha! ha! I will finish my shrift to thee."

"Shall I bid any of the neighbours come to thee when he is gone?"

"He will summon them; I would not be long alone in this haunted house; there be ghosts I tell thee; there be awful figures with faces that wither the eyeballs and blanch the hair, which troop about these halls of the forgotten dead; but it is daylight now, and I fear them not." [158]

"Madge," said the priest, "thou wilt soon be as one of those ghosts thyself: thy poor tabernacle of clay is falling fast into ruins like a child's house of cards, which a touch overturns; soon they will carry thee to the charnel house, and direly will thy poor soul burn in its purgatory, or haunt, if permitted, these scenes of forgotten crime, unless thou dost repent and make atonement."

"Father, I *will*; am I not on the point of doing so? go, leave me with this good knight: why, he was once my foster son."

"And has he left thee to *want*, like this? My son, God deal with thee as thou dost deal justly by her; she has little time yet wherein thou mayst make amends for the past to one, who, if she speaks truth, suckled thee at her breast."

The priest departed, and Sir John sank into a crazy chair by the couch of the old woman.

A faded coverlet was upon it, whereon was wrought the history of Cain and Abel; there were four posts supporting a canopy, but one post drooped, and the whole threatened to come down together.

"Speak, mother, why hast thou sent for me at last? or why didst thou not send before?"

"I would not have sent for thee now, but if I did not, a damning crime would stain thy soul and mine; *mine*, because I alone can reveal to thee its nature; *thine*, because thy sin led the way to it." [159]

"*My* sin, woman! gain is righteousness, loss is sin, I know no other description for either: I believe not as priestlings prate, nor didst thou once, although, like other unbelievers, we held our tongue for fear of Mother Church with her discipline of fire and faggot, for if we had said that we believed not in hell hereafter, she would have created one for us here."

"Enough, hadst thou seen what I have seen, thou wouldst know there is a God and a terrible one, and that the worst flames Churchmen kindle here for heretics are no more in comparison with those which await the unforgiven sinner, than painted flames compare with those which wither up the unbeliever or witch in Smithfield."

"I came not here to hear a sermon, Madge; what further crime hast thou to warn me against? I would not commit *useless* ones."

"Dost thou remember when thy brother's widow bare a poor babe, who never saw its father's face?"

"I do, as thou knowest, too well; it was a great disappointment to me."

"And while the mother slept in insensibility, thou didst bid me stifle the child, and say it was still-born, because thou wast as thy brother's heir in possession of the property?" [160]

"Why repeat this idle tale, it is all over and gone? Art thou alone? art thou sure there is none here?"

"Sure, yes, quite sure; none at least clothed in flesh and blood like ourselves, but how many unseen beings hover around us I know not."

Sir John could not help trembling, there was such a ghastly realism in her words, and the fast decaying light made him long to leave the place.

"Well, thou didst it for love of thy foster son, and thou hast been fool enough to confess it to this meddling priest?"

"Not yet, I waited to see thee first, and tell thee what I *really* did."

"*Really* did? didst thou not murder the babe?"

"Nay, I substituted a beggar's dead brat from a gipsy camp, hard by, for thy brother's heir, and showed thee its body, and thou didst blanch, but yet nerve thy coward soul to say 'well done;' meanwhile I hid the young heir, and when thou wert gone to court I restored the babe to the mother, bidding her flee the castle with it ere thou didst return."

"Can this be true? How wilt thou prove it now?"

"Listen; a month later, when the poor dame was well again, came a letter to bid us prepare for that return; I did not dare to let thee find the child alive, and bade the mother flee. It was the [161]

third day after Christmas, the Holy Innocents' day: to whose intercession she commended her babe."

"And she fled?"

"All alone she sought the sanctuary of S. Joseph at Glastonbury; there she purposed to remain, dreading thy power, until she could appeal to justice, for all in the castle, like me, were thy minions; she fled: a wild night of wind and snow followed, and she died on the road."

"With the child?" said Sir John.

"No, I learned all about *its* fate. The child was rescued by a yeoman named Hodge, and nurtured by the good Abbot of Glastonbury, and if the priest, Christopher, tells me truth, thou art about to compass his death now. Oh repent, Sir John, repent while there is yet time, for the sake of thy soul and mine; for I have sinfully concealed this secret, dreading thy anger, thine, my foster son, and I have hidden it from thee: yet my hands are pure from blood, although my guilty complicity exposed the mother to death in the snow, and the babe to the chances of the night; although I have aided thee to grasp an inheritance which is not thine, and which is dragging thee and me alike into hell: repent at once, and my poor soul may depart in peace; *save* the boy, thy nephew."

[162]

"Art thou sure none can overhear us? Art thou alone in this house?"

"Alone with the dead."

"And that thou hast confessed the truth to none?"

"Not as yet."

"And never shall. Die then the death thou didst spare the brat."

Hard by stood a ewer filled with water, and over it a towel; he dipped this towel in the water, and suddenly clapped it upon her mouth, then he thrust a pillow upon her face, towel and all, and threw himself upon it, keeping it down until the poor suffering body ceased to throb, when he removed the pillow, and composed the features as well as he could, smoothed the coverlet, and left the room.

It was growing dark.

A shudder passed over him all at once, as he descended the stairs.

At the foot of the stairs stood revealed to his sight—or to his guilty imagination—a misty form surmounted by a face which expressed such unutterable anguish, that even the iron nerves of the murderer threatened to give way.

He made a violent effort, composed himself, and rushed *through* the apparition; he gained the outer air, and felt a dead faint gain upon him, he sank upon the step, and knew nought till he was aroused by a voice.

[163]

"How is the old girl upstairs?"

"She passed away in a fit whilst I was with her."



FOOTNOTES

[40] As I write an ancient map of Exeter is before me confirming this description.



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CHAPTER VII. CASTLE REDFYRNE.

It is necessary, for the fuller elucidation of our veracious narrative, that the reader should here be made acquainted with the earlier history of the Redfyne family.

About twenty miles, or a little more, to the south-east of Glastonbury, over the Dorsetshire



border, and not far from Sturminster, stood, three centuries ago, an old and mouldering castle, built in the days of the Barons' wars.

It was surrounded by a wide moat, fed from the river Stour, which rolled its deep and sluggish flood in mazy windings through the ancient park, which, rich with hoary oak and mossy beech, surrounded the castle.

A part of the massive buildings had been adapted to the ideas of the sixteenth century, and fashioned so as to form a convenient dwelling for the family, while the Keep and other portions were left to decay. It formed a picturesque group, the modern dwelling, with its airy windows and open aspect, contrasting the venerable towers, which suggested dungeons, as deep as the walls were high; wherein the captives of past generations once wept, and "appealed from tyranny to God."

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Here, in the early days of "Bluff King Hal," dwelt the good knight Sir Geoffrey Redfyre, with his lady and their four children.

The eldest boy, Geoffrey, was the darling of his father's heart, frank and generous, full of chivalrous courage, affectionate, and gifted with the power of winning affection. The younger boy, John, differed greatly—he was morose and selfish in disposition, vindictive and passionate; his only good quality the courage which was hereditary in his family.

As a natural consequence, the father's preference for Geoffrey was almost too manifest, for it increased the secret hatred the younger brother, younger by a year only, bore to his elder, whom he continually crossed in a variety of ways—maiming his pet animals, leading him into scrapes and then betraying him, yet cunningly keeping his hand concealed when he was able.

They had of course many quarrels, but the elder was always as ready to forgive, as the younger to resent.

Of the sisters we shall not speak, further than to say that they were often peace-makers between their brothers, and that John was many a time forgiven at their intercession.

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It was on the whole a happy family, and had the parents lived, the faults of the younger son might, under their judicious training, have been corrected. But into this unfortunate household came a deadly visitor—the plague.

It was conveyed into the village by a bale of cloth, consigned to a tailor, from abroad—the tailor's family sickened, and all died; then those who out of Christian charity had attended them to render good offices in their last distress, sickened also, and infected their own households; from house to house the dreadful malady spread; the parish priest died, the physicians (leeches they called them) died; and, at last, the awful scourge reached the hall—for Sir Geoffrey could not keep away from his sick tenantry.

Death knocks with equal foot at the palaces of kings and the huts of the poor, the plague was no respecter of persons; the good and charitable knight carried the infection home, and ere three days had passed both he and his faithful wife were gone; she watched by him and nursed him till he died, and then falling sick at once, followed him to a better world.

Geoffrey and the two daughters were taken ill next; the boy recovered, the sisters died; the only member of the family who escaped altogether was John, owing perhaps to some physical peculiarity in his constitution, which enabled him to withstand the infection.

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Not far from the castle, down the stream, stood Luckland Mill; a father, mother, six children, and an aged grandam, all lived there; but death came, and all died. The water splashed and foamed down the mill-course, the merry wheel ran on, while there were eight corpses in that house which none dared to bury. But the difficulty was solved,—the mill having ground out its corn, ran on, and as there was no one to stop it, caught fire at last from friction of the machinery, and was burnt to the ground, so the dead were "cremated" not buried.

We said *eight* bodies, for one child, the eldest daughter, named Madge, escaped the fate of her family, being on a visit to some distant relations, when the plague broke out.^[41]

At length the pestilence abated, and the sorrow-stricken survivors, but a third of the former population, might estimate their losses, and gaze upon the vacant chairs in their dwellings, wishing often, in the desolation of their hearts, that they had been taken too.

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A distant relation became guardian to the two boys at the castle; both of whom were sent to Glastonbury for their education, where John was always in trouble, and Geoffrey in favour.

Richard Whiting was then one of the younger brethren, and one of the tutors of the boys, and it befel more than once that John fell under his just correction, and tasted the rod, an infliction he never forgave. It is needless to say that Geoffrey was a general favourite.

They left school in due time, and arrived at manhood. Geoffrey made one campaign in the French wars, which had a singular result: he was taken captive, and captivated the daughter of his captor; so that on the conclusion of peace, she returned with him to England as Lady Redfyre.

John remained at home to attend to the estate in his brother's absence—he did not care for the military life, being too idle; and he was fast sinking into the bachelor brother, who keeps the accounts, looks after the hounds, and makes himself useful in a hundred odd ways, but who feels his own position less comfortable as time moves on and a young family arises, not his own, superseding him.

But all the time, his darker disposition was only suppressed; it was his intention to be lord of the manor, if by any means (and he was not scrupulous as to what means) he might grasp his brother's inheritance; a younger brother's portion he despised or gambled away.

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"Sui profusus, alieni appietens,"^[42] as Sallust wrote of Catiline.

The occasion came; just before his wife's confinement, poor Geoffrey, to the grief of all who knew him, died after a brief illness. He came home from hunting, wet through, and confiding in the strength of his constitution, omitted, as he often had before, to change his garments; he caught a severe cold, pleurisy set in, and, for the want of such remedies as in the hands of modern science might have saved him, he died.

We are now coming to that portion of our narrative already revealed by Madge of Luckland, for that aged crone was indeed the survivor of the family at the mill.

After his brother's death, Sir John claimed the estate, as of right, and imagined himself the lawful lord of the manor, when he was informed that, as he had already dreaded, there were hopes of a direct heir.

For a brief time he wrestled with the devil; hard as he was he could not forget the pleading tone of his dying brother,—

"John, dear John, take care of Catharine, and should there be a boy, be a father to him for my sake; when we meet again in another world, thou shalt tell me thou hast discharged the trust: God deal with thee, as thou dealest with her."

[170]

When it became certain that the widow was near her confinement, Sir John had an interview with Madge of Luckland, over whom he had acquired an evil influence: the reader is aware how he used it, and what crime he urged her to commit. But unfortunately for his fell purpose, Madge, in her capacity of nurse, had conceived a strong affection for the sweet helpless lady, with her broken English, and pretty ways. In short, she was true to her better nature, and false to her patron.

After Sir John had gazed for one brief moment at the dead babe, whose identity he doubted not, he departed from the castle on urgent business; the deed was done, and he was glad to go, for he trembled while he repented not.

He was absent a whole month, during which he was busily engaged in pushing his fortune at court, where he had been previously presented: it was at this period he made the acquaintance of Thomas Cromwell, then Secretary to Wolsey.

At length the time arrived for his return for the first time as lord of the manor, and an avant courier arrived at Castle Redfyrne to announce his approaching arrival.

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It was then that Madge, fearful of the consequences, should she be unable to conceal the existence of the babe,—who was meanwhile nursed by a gipsy mother,—advised Catharine Redfyrne to fly to the shrine of S. Joseph at Glastonbury, assuring her that the good old Abbot would recollect her husband and protect his child.

It was arranged that she should leave the castle in the darkest hour, before the dawn of the winter's day; for the new servants were devoted to their lord's interests, and might not allow her to depart. Madge enquired whether the lady could ride, as she would undertake herself to procure a steed.

Catharine asserted that she was a good horse-woman, and had no fear of the journey; also that she knew the country, having been to Glastonbury with her lord. The weather was frosty, and there was no sign of any change for the worse; the weather prophets, as upon a later occasion, ^[43] gave no intimation of an approaching storm.

Before dawn on Holy Innocents' Day, Madge awoke the young widow; together they left the castle while the whole household was asleep. They crossed the star-lit park to the Luckland Mill, now rebuilt, where Madge had procured the horse. They found it awaiting them, and the gipsy was there, by appointment, with the babe. One other person alone was in the secret, the miller.

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They parted with many tears, and never met in this world again. Poor Madge, her life had been stained by sin; let this act of Christian charity plead her forgiveness.

On her way back to the castle, Madge was struck by the wondrous but ominous beauty of the dawn, first a streak of pale blue, which then seemed upheaved by sheets of crimson fire; the eye was almost dazzled by the brilliancy of the deepening blaze, as if the eastern heavens were in conflagration.

"A red sky at night is the shepherds' delight, but a red sky in the morning is the shepherds' warning," muttered Madge, fearing there would be bad weather.

It was one of those lovely winter days when the blue sky and fleecy clouds and the brilliant atmosphere are more delightful than in summer, but towards evening the wind set in steadily from the east, the heavens assumed a dull leaden hue, and just before sunset, down came the first flakes of snow.

Thicker flakes! thicker! thicker! the night darker; the snow deeper, each hour.

[173]

The reader knows the rest, if he has read the prologue to our tale. The horse must have refused to proceed, nor was he ever found, he must have perished in the snow; but the miller did not dare to make enquiries for fear of exciting suspicion. It was lucky that the same snow procured a brief respite for Madge, for Sir John could not get home for more than a week, and when he came was

met by the intelligence that the mother had fled, as it was supposed, in a fit of mental derangement, caused by grief over the loss of her infant; and that she had perished, as they thought, in the snow.

But how she had perished, and where, was never known to Sir John; Madge persuaded him that she had strayed into the river, but no body was ever found when the thaw, after some weeks of intense frost, permitted a search; the miller kept his secret, and Sir John was content to leave the matter in mystery, and to reap the benefit.

But he never afterwards liked the presence of Madge, his supposed confederate, and he sent her from the neighbourhood, so that he lost sight of her for twenty years.

How they met at last the reader has learned.

Sir John, hardened as he was, could not for a time shake off the remembrance of his brother's last words; often in sleep that brother seemed to stand by him. "I bade thee guard my poor wife and child, how hast thou kept thy trust?" He remembered the mournful way in which Geoffrey, when they were little children, had reproached him for the death of a pet which he had maliciously caused, and the boy and man were mingled in his dreams.

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Should he ever have to bear the reproach in another world!

He shook the thought off—parried it with the shield of unbelief.

How like the poor ostrich, who hides his head in the sand, and thinks, because it cannot see its pursuers, it is itself unseen!

But still he frequented Church, went regularly each Sunday to Mass, and each year to Confession; indeed it would have been dangerous to do otherwise, or to confess his unbelief, as he avowed to Madge on her death-bed.

By-and-bye Cromwell began to organize that terrible system of espionage, which filled the scaffolds with victims. Dorset was unrepresented in the prying brotherhood; he thought of his old friend, Sir John, in whom he had discovered a kindred spirit when both served Wolsey, and offered him the post. Sir John eagerly accepted the confidence, and began at once to exercise his office, to watch his neighbours, to entrap them in unguarded conversations, and so to denounce them if he found the opportunity, and all the time he was unsuspected, or even Cromwell could hardly have saved him from the just fury of his countrymen.

[175]

And in this capacity he had no small share in the tragedy at Glastonbury; he hated the Abbot as we have seen, and willingly employed all his craft in bringing his old tutor to the gibbet and quartering block, and when the victim suffered he was there, on the Tor Hill, and revelled in the ghastly butchery of the man who had once striven to check his opening vices.

When the fall of his patron, Cromwell, took place, Sir John was for the time in imminent danger, but he extricated himself by a master stroke: he attended in his place, as knight of the shire, and voted for cutting off his friend's head without a trial, by process of Bill of Attainder; thus by this skilful trimming of his sails he escaped the storm; but the idea was not original, Archbishop Cranmer did the same.^[44]

He had for a near neighbour Squire Grabber, and had often admired the evil qualities of young Nicholas, from whom, in the exercise of his vocation, he had gained many valuable pieces of information, which he had duly conveyed to Cromwell.

[176]

When the Martyrdom on the Tor Hill was accomplished, and the Abbey suppressed, Sir John proposed to his neighbour to let young Nick begin the business of life (as was then customary even amongst the sons of gentlefolk) as his page, not, be it understood, in any menial sense of the word.

The squire consented, and the reader knows the consequences, so far as we have yet had space to unfold them.



FOOTNOTES

[41] These details were gathered from some melancholy pages in an old parish register, which the writer once perused, when staying in the neighbourhood. Under this terrible visitation the proportion of deaths was sometimes far larger than that given in the text.

[42] Craving another's, wasteful of his own.

[43] The great snow storm of January, 1881, was entirely "unforecasted," if the writer remembers aright.

[44] The process of Bill of Attainder was invented by Cromwell himself, and he was, by a wondrous nemesis the first to fall by it. Cranmer voted on the second and third readings for the death of his friend—his presence is noted in the journal of the house, and the Bill was carried "nemine discrepante."



CHAPTER VIII. *LED FORTH TO DIE.*



he dusky shades of night fell upon the ancient Castle of Rougemont, the feudal pile of the proud Norman, and deepened the gloom of its dungeons; and in particular of that one, wherein poor Cuthbert was pining in silence and solitude.

For his spirit seemed broken; those three days of absolute silence, followed by the torture, the anticipation of further suffering in that dismal chamber underground, and of the shame of a traitor's death beyond; all these combined to crush his soul in the dust; poor youth, bred up by kind and loving hearts; spared hardships and sorrow for so many bright years, how had the scene changed before him!

And again, he could not help feeling some little doubt concerning the cause for which he bore all this suffering; his faith in it had been the transplanted faith of others; he knew that the majority of his countrymen held with the King, while they were yet staunch Catholics in every other point; papal supremacy had never been a matter of faith with the bulk of the English people, and might not the majority be right after all? in which case he was madly throwing away all the joys of his opening manhood, for a cause which had not the approbation of heaven.

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Against these thoughts fought the remembrance of the last Abbot of Glastonbury, and the present strong feeling of allegiance, which he felt to his protector, Sir Walter Trevannion; but there was a struggle, which he felt ashamed to acknowledge even to himself.

Sometimes the sounds of the revelry of the youth of the city, engaged in their sports, found their way in through the grated window, and mocked the poor heart-sick captive; he strove to find refuge in prayer, but prayer fled him, his mind wandered. "No, I cannot pray," he said, "the very saints forsake me now."

Who knows what might have been the consequence of those hours of pain and loneliness, had they been prolonged? but suddenly the door opened.

Cuthbert scarcely looked up, thinking it was but the gaoler bringing him food, when he heard a voice, a well-known one.

"My son, my dear son."

It was Father Ambrose, alias Sir Walter, and Cuthbert jumped up, and threw himself into his arms with a self-abandonment which shewed how far his feelings had been strained by their separation.

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"My father, my more than father," he cried.

"We are to be together till the end," said Sir Walter, after a few moments of silence, during which they had grasped each other's hands.

"To whom do we owe this mercy; to the governor? he seemed to feel for us."

"No, he could not have ventured to oppose Sir John Redfyrne, who was armed with the authority of the Privy Council."

Cuthbert flushed up at the sound of the hated name.

"*He* has no hand in this indulgence."

"Indeed he has, my dear son, whatever his motives may be; he may repent of his ingratitude."

Cuthbert shook his head.

"Let us not think of him; he comes between us and our God, if we would be forgiven we must needs forgive; God has forgiven us the ten thousand talents for His dear Son's sake, shall we not forgive the hundred pence?"

"My father, I am so glad, so glad you are here, my faith was failing me."

"In what?"

"In the justice of our cause; why do we stand almost alone, against the great majority of our countrymen?"

[180]

"Would'st thou have been with the majority or minority at the Flood? at Sodom? in guilty Jerusalem? Dear boy, majorities are nothing; indeed too often they but mark the broad way which leadeth to destruction; nor have they even the *majority* on their side, miserable as the support drawn from thence would be; for England stands alone amongst the Christian commonwealths in her present schism.^[45]

"Then, again, my dear boy, remember the words of your beloved benefactor, when he stood before his judges at Wells; and again in that hour when he parted from you with words of blessing, in the gatehouse chamber at Glastonbury; methinks it would pain his blessed spirit, even in Paradise, to hear that his adopted son, whom he loved so well, doubted."

The good father was using the very best means which could be used to keep his *protégé* firm in the path, which he believed the only road to heaven; argument might have failed to convince where faith was shaken, but the love of one who had died so nobly and patiently for the impugned tenet, carrying his mute appeal to the judgment seat on high, lit again the expiring embers of faith—"I will be true to him till death," he said; "as *he* died so will I die; and will stake soul and body on the creed which trained so noble a martyr, 'sit anima mea cum illo.'"

[181]

"Methinks," said the good Prior, "I see him looking down upon thee now; see through these thick walls, and this murky autumnal sky, to the heaven beyond where he sits waiting, near the gate, for his adopted son, whom he committed to my care! Well! when I see him, I shall say 'Behold father, here am I, and the lad whom thou gavest me.'"

Cuthbert wept upon the shoulder of the good Prior.

"He shall not be deceived in me; I will tread the path he trod."

"By God's grace, which alone can strengthen us weak ones; and what is the worst we have to bear—the gibbet and quartering block? Well, they cannot protract it more than half-an-hour; half-an-hour! why had it begun when I entered this cell, it had been over now, and we safe on the other side."

"Would it had."

"Yes, and then heaven had already been revealed to our enraptured sight, our eyes would have seen the King in His beauty and the land which is very far off."

"Where is that land, that glory land?"

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"Eye hath not seen, nor ear drunk in its sweet songs of joy; words cannot picture it, nor can the heart of man conceive its bliss, but it lies beyond the gibbet and quartering block, my son; let them do their worst, they know not what they do, and we will pray for them till the last, yes and for King Harry too; God turn his heart, and shew him his sin, and all will be well in dear old England again."

But the reader is doubtless eager to learn what had taken place to frustrate, as it would seem at first sight, the plans of Sir John Redfyne.

Perhaps they had not been *frustrated*, but changed.

That same evening he had informed the governor that he had received a messenger from court to inform him, that the secret chamber was already discovered, and that there was therefore no further occasion, either to put Cuthbert to the torture again, or delay the execution. "Let the criminals have the consolation of each other's society to-night, and die to-morrow," he added.

Much surprised, the governor pleaded hard for time to lay the whole case again before the Crown, and to implore mercy for the prisoners, whose execution he said "would shock all Devon."

But Sir John was armed with full authority from the Crown, and hinting to the governor, that the King would not be best pleased to hear of his backwardness in the royal cause, and his love for traitors, so frightened that worthy functionary on his own account, that no further opposition was made, and orders were given to erect the scaffold.

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Meanwhile every indulgence was given to the prisoners, whose fate many pitied—even in that stony-hearted gaol, the Castle of Rougemont. A priest was admitted to their cells, that very priest who had so nearly stumbled upon the secret of Cuthbert's birth, and early in the morning he provided all that was necessary for the celebration of Mass, whereat Father Ambrose, for the last time as he supposed, with tears of devotion, officiated; and the three received the Holy Communion together.

Fortified by this heavenly food, they scarcely noticed the heavy boom of the cathedral bell, which told the city and the country around that two souls were about to be forcibly divorced from their bodies, and sent to appear before the judgment seat on High.

Boom! boom! The deep solemn sound penetrated each court and alley of the ancient city, and struck awe to the hearts even of the most hardened; boom! boom! the swelling tones startled the boatmen on the Exe, awoke the echoes of the hills around the fair city of the west, nay reached the rich purple moorland, and startled the children who played amongst the heather or gathered whortle-berries.

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And beneath the two grand old towers in front of the great west door of the historical fane, was erected that disgrace to the civilization of our forefathers, the scaffold with its gibbet and quartering block, its hideous butchering apparatus, in the very cathedral yard.

What a multitude had now assembled! men, women, boys, girls; the noble and the simple, the burgher and the vagrant; there were many stalwart country men too from Dartmoor, each wearing a sprig of heather in his hat, that his companions might recognise him.

"*Here they come!*"

The bell booms out faster and faster, the multitude stretch their necks to gaze and catch the first glimpse of the sufferers. Oh, what a strange, morbid interest clings to those about to die; the very fact that that body framed by God as His noblest work, and sanctified by being limb for limb the same as the Incarnate Son took as His own, the very fact that that body is to be so ruthlessly desecrated, causes this awful excitement, this panting, breathless interest, in the poor victims.

Forward they come, between two lines of halberdiers; how calm and resigned they look as they approach the scaffold. The litany of the dying with its perpetual response—*Ora pro eis* (pray for them)—addressed in turn to each saint and angel of the calendar, is now audible. The multitude catch up the strain and join in the response; now it is *Miserere Domine*, now again *Ora pro eis*; but it is no longer one feeble voice, but the breath of a multitude which bears the sweet sad refrain to heaven. [185]

They are close to the fatal spot, and first the youth, then the old man ascends the steps, clad in white, for such was their choice, in testimony of their innocence of all crime before men. The fair attractive face of the younger sufferer, so sad, yet resigned, that it seems of itself a petition for pity, the reverend face of the senior, like to that of some holy patriarch or prophet, so soon too to be dabbled in blood and stuck up on rusty nails over the Guild hall in the High Street; truly this is piteous, and the gentler portion of the spectators can hardly forbear weeping as they still cry *Miserere* or *Ora pro eis*, while the *cannibals* who are there smack their lips at the dainty sight prepared for them.

They are on the scaffold, and the bell still booms as it shall boom until the victims swing between heaven and earth—a mockery of God and man. The priest of S. Mary Steppes has given his parting Benediction. The younger, to whom is given the privilege of dying first, has already meekly turned to the executioner—a brute with a masked face, clad in light leather, with two similarly dressed assistants, when— [186]

A tremendous shout—

“Dartmoor to the rescue!”

And the whole body of men with the sprigs of heather in their hats, clear all the incumbrances, carrying off their feet the few halberdiers at a rush, and are on the scaffold: they kick the executioners off their own boards, upset the governor and the sheriff, but do not hurt them, cut the prisoners’ bonds, pass them from hand to hand, and before anyone can prevent, they, the two, are lost to sight in the vast and sympathizing crowd.

Then the multitude spy Sir John Redfyne sitting upon a horse in the cathedral yard, ready to start to town when all is over; the story of his ingratitude is known, and they manifest a playful desire to duck him in the Exe; and it is only with the greatest difficulty that setting spurs to his steed, and riding over one unlucky old dame in his path, he escapes their pressing attentions, and rides away with the cry ringing in his ears, the unwelcome cry, “Dartmoor to the rescue!” “Saved, saved!”

FOOTNOTES

[45] The reader will perceive that there is something contradictory in these pious expressions; first he seems to think it dangerous to be with the majority, then he claims it as on his side.



CHAPTER IX.

BREATHING TIME.



hen our youthful hero, so suddenly rescued from a bloody death, regained the full consciousness, of which the shock seemed to have deprived him for a time, he felt like one in a dream, such a dream as enables a prisoner to escape from the slime and darkness of a subterranean dungeon, to the happiness and joy of the domestic hearth, or of boundless liberty in verdant woods, breezy groves, or sun-lit hill-tops. [187]

Was he in Paradise? The words he had often sung in choir came into his mind,—

“In loco pascuæ ibi me collocavit,
Et super aquam refectiois educavit me.” [46]

Had the gibbet and quartering block been endured and left behind, was he in the spirit while the mutilated and desecrated members of his mortal body rotted on the gates of Exeter?

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But as he regained fuller consciousness, he became aware of circumstances not resembling those which are commonly supposed to be the portion of the Blessed in Paradise—such as a comfortable down bed, richly embroidered curtains around him, Flemish tapestry on the walls of his chamber, and a bright autumnal sun pouring in between the window curtains.

He strove to rise, although he felt very weak; still curiosity overcame weakness, and he staggered, like one giddy, to the casement, and parting the curtains looked out.

It was early morn; a glorious bracing October morning,—such October mornings as they have in Devon,—and a scene of wondrous beauty lay before him, but all of this earth.

Immediately below lay a well-tended garden, with winding paths, terraces, flowers of varied hue, shrubs, and ornamental trees cut in strange fashions, and beyond lay a ruinous wall, through gaps in which he could see a deep hollow, which once had been a dyke or moat, in days when it was not safe to dwell beyond the shelter of such defences. But with all the bloody tyranny of the latter time it must be said that the strong hand of the government had given a sense of security, unknown before, from all violence save legalized wrong,^[47] and *that* no defence of moat or wall could avert.

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Beyond the garden the ground sloped down to the valley of the Exe; far away, on the left hand, lay the mighty ocean, in its deep repose, blue as the azure vault above it, the whole coast from the mouth of the Exe to Berry Head, beyond Torbay, was visible; with the line of ruddy cliffs, stretching out into headlands, and receding into bays: while, here and there, a rocky island remained, to show where a promontory had once extended ere the waters broke the connection with the mainland.

But straight across the lovely valley, rich in its autumnal livery of purple and gold, arose first the range of Halden, and glistening under the glorious sun and in the clear blue of heaven beyond, looking almost ethereal in the hues of distance, the rocks of Hey Tor and the cairn of Rippon Tor surmounted the nearer heights.

Beneath those mountains lay the happy home of the last six years; Hey Tor looked over Ashburton, and perhaps Isabel Grey was even now gazing at those same rocks. Oh, how the freed spirit laughed at distance: the sluggish body might be chained but the mind had flown across the valley of the Exe, over the ridge of Halden, and was there in the old familiar scenes hearing the sweet youthful voice, beholding the beloved features, wandering with the loved one around the enchanted borders of the moorland.

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The reader who is versed in the topography of Devon will see that the home in which Cuthbert has found refuge, is situated on that lovely ridge of the heath, which rises about three miles from the eastern bank of the estuary of the Exe, of which Woodbury Castle is the most prominent point.

But he will wonder how he came there.

Listen! a step approaches, the door opens, and a familiar form enters the room.

“What, Cuthbert at the window! God bless thee, my boy, thou art better then—, this *is* a sight for sore eyes.”

“Have I been ill, father?”

“Thy nurse has but now left the chamber to get her breakfast, and I came in to take her place, in case thou shouldst awake with recovered consciousness and wonder where thou art.”

“And where am I?”

“Not in Rougemont.”

“I see that, but where?”

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“Amongst true friends; this is the mansion of Sir Robert Tremayne, an old friend of our house, to whom we are much indebted.”

“But have I been dreaming? I thought we were led to the scaffold together, that I heard the cathedral bell, the death bell toll for us, and the litany for the dying yet sounds in my ears; then came a scene of tumult and fury, cries of “rescue,” and we seemed to be passed from hand to hand, until at last we passed through a gate or low door into some house on the cathedral yard.”

“It was no dream, my son, our period was indeed near its accomplishment, and, but for the efforts, heroic, but perhaps mistaken, we had been two days (did they number there by days) in Paradise; but it is plain God has work for thee to do on earth; for me I care not how soon I awake to a fairer scene than this; I had hoped the martyr’s death had been our purgatory, and that we had gained the shore.”

“But this scene is very fair,” said the youth, “bright sun, beautiful vale, lovely sea, grand moorland hills; loth should I be to leave it too soon, for this is God’s world too, is it not, father?”

“Thou art young, dear son.”

“Tell me all, have I been ill long?”

“This is the third day since the rescue.”

“How came it about?”

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"Public opinion made it *possible* for a few score of men to do the work of hundreds; the mob alone, if hostile, might have hindered, nay prevented our escape, but many who dared not assist actively, did so passively, and closing together covered our retreat, until we found temporary concealment in the house of a friend to the cause, who had a passage leading from his shop in High Street into the cathedral yard. But ere we had been there long, thou didst faint, and we had much ado to restore thee to life."

"How weak I must be!"

"Nay, my child, consider the torture chamber of which thy poor hands bear sufficient evidence, and the terrible strain of the approaching cruel death, of which we bore all the anticipation. Well, at midnight we smuggled thee through the west gate, in a litter, by the connivance of a sentinel, and so down stream to Topsham, dragging the boat with difficulty over the Countess's Weir; thereby we escaped the pursuers on the road, and favoured by the night, reached this secluded hall unobserved."

"And when shall we go to Glastonbury and complete our task?"

"Not at present, for they will be looking out for us there, I doubt not; we have a bitter enemy in Sir John Redfyrne; but when a month or so has passed away, we may venture, well disguised."

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"And shall we never dare to return home again?"

"Nay, not while Henry reigns; it would not be worth the risk; there is no sufficient object."

"And our poor brethren there?"

"They will, I trust, be undisturbed; before our trial I made a gift of the estate to Brother Cyril, late of Glastonbury, under his worldly name: after conviction our property would have become that of the state."

"Then we are very poor, father?"

"Do'st thou love me less?"

"Nay, thou shalt see how true thine adopted son will be, God helping him."

"I know it, dear boy, but it is not so bad as it appears at first sight, for foreseeing an evil day, I had forwarded considerable funds, for thy use and mine, to my old friend the Baron de Courcy, to whose care I purpose committing thee should we ever win our way to France, as now I trust we shall."

"And we shall be exiles?"

"'Omne solum forti patria,' said the heathen poet: how much more true to the Christian! And now, my son, thou must yet repose a while, and ere noon-tide I will bring our kind host and hostess to see thee; they lost their son, an only child, in the Pilgrimage of Grace, where he fought as a volunteer under Robert Aske. I knew the poor boy; they were strangely moved when thou didst arrive; the mother cried, 'He is so like our Robin.'"

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A few days of calm repose varied by walks, cautiously taken on the breezy moor behind the hall, soon restored the hues of health to Cuthbert's cheeks, and renewed his earlier vigour. Oh, how sweet the boundless freedom of that wilderness, how invigorating the scent of the pine groves, how bright the glimpses of sea down the valleys. Not far off, scarce two miles, was a large farm house on the road to Budleigh Salterton, where a family of the name of Raleigh lived; but their politics were hostile to those of Sir Robin Tremayne and Sir Walter Trevannion; they, the Raleighs, were men who worshipped the rising sun, and who a few years later were eager in the suppression of the Catholic Rebellion in Devon and Cornwall. In that house which our Cuthbert often saw from a distance, was born a bright star to adorn Elizabeth's Court but a few years later.^[48]

So nearly a month passed away, an interlude between two periods of excitement, and at length came All Hallows Eve, with its memory of the past, and a bright All Saints' Day, a day when the words of our sweet modern singer might be realized:—

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"Why blowest thou not thou wintry wind?
When every leaf is brown and sere,
And idly hangs, to thee resigned,
The fading foliage of the year."

A chapel was attached to the hall wherein Father Ambrose, for so we shall call him in this connection, celebrated the Holy Mysteries, and they thought of Richard Whiting, as amongst the great multitude which no man could number.

Their plans were now matured; they were to assume the disguise of a farmer and his son, travelling on agricultural business, to stop, one night only, at an inn on the borders of Somerset, and to reach Glastonbury the second day, then to find shelter with old Hodge, and rising at midnight to seek the ruins, and do their appointed work.

After this they planned to take horse for Lyme Regis, where they doubted not Cuthbert's reputed uncle, mentioned before in this story, would get them off to sea; of their reception in France, they were well assured.

A tried and trusted messenger was despatched to Glastonbury by Sir Robin, who knew the people and the country well; he brought back word that old Hodge and his wife were yet living and well, and that they were more than willing to take their own share of the risk, for it was death to shelter attached men; and that, so far as he could learn, Sir John Redfyrne was living in his own manor house—the reader knows how he had made it “his own”—and was expected daily to return to court.

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“Better wait till we are sure he has returned thither,” said Sir Robert.

“Nay, Redfyrne Hall is many miles from Glaston; there is little danger: besides we shall be well disguised; and we must remember every week makes the weather worse for crossing the Channel in an open boat.”

So the day came, a bright calm day within the octave of All Saints’, very mild and balmy for the season, the day for departure from their little Zoar, on their perilous errand.

They sat at breakfast for the last time. Do not let the word conjure up tea and coffee before the mind of the reader, it was a most substantial meal, composed of joints and pastry, washed down by ale and wine; but they ate little.

It was over, there was not much talk, the hearts of all were too full, and what there was ran in a subdued strain; the dear old lady was in tears, for Cuthbert had become a second Robin, and it was like losing her son again.

Before they parted, Sir Robert brought a sword from the armoury.

“It was my poor Robin’s; wear it, my son, for his sake, for thou art worthy of it.”

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Their disguises were at hand, and they assumed them and departed, after a warm farewell and many deep expressions of gratitude.

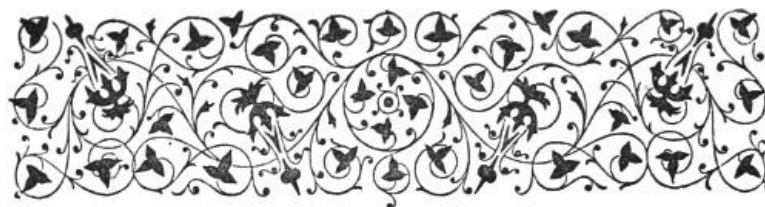
Cuthbert felt a little sad at first, but the invigorating air, and the restoration to life and action soon revived his spirits, and the love of adventure, never wanting in the young, shed its glamour over him, as they rode over Woodbury Common on their way to Glastonbury.

And thence from that breezy height, looking back, he caught his last view of Dartmoor.



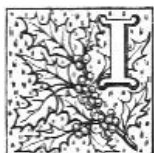
FOOTNOTES

- [46] “He shall feed me in a green pasture, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.”—*Psalm* xxiii. 2.
- [47] Witness, for instance, the case of Lord Dacre, of Hurstmonceux, executed for an offence which, a few generations earlier, would hardly have been considered an offence at all. Like Percy of Chevy Chase he had gone hunting in his neighbour’s grounds; a fray took place and he slew a gamekeeper. Henry would hear of no excuse, and the noble paid for the peasant’s blood on the scaffold at Tyburn, June 29th, 1541.
- [48] Sir Walter Raleigh, born six years later, in 1552.



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CHAPTER X. *THE SHADOWS DARKEN.*



In the library of Castle Redfyrne sat Sir John, the present lord of that ancient manor, at a writing table placed in the embrasure of a gothic window, whence he could look over the broad acres he had made his own.

In the shelves were ranged many printed books and curious manuscripts, in part the plunder of Glastonbury Abbey; and in truth never was typography clearer, or more beautiful than in the first century of its existence; nor on the other hand was calligraphy, as exemplified in ancient missals and breviaries, ever more a work of art than when about to be superseded by the printing press.

But Sir John was not thinking of these things, his evil heart was full of bitterness.

There is an old Spanish proverb,—“The man who has injured thee, will never forgive thee.” Sir John had injured his brother’s child, deeply, cruelly, and he could not forgive him.

He rose from the table and paced the room; his brow was knit; oft times he gnashed his teeth. So we are told that his namesake, king John, would roll on the floor and bite the straw which served in his royal palace as carpet, in his maniacal fits of passion. With his name, a double portion of his spirit had fallen upon the hapless Redfyrne of our tale. [199]

The whole of that scene at Exeter was before his mind as he strode to and fro, painted by the vivid pencil of a too faithful memory.

At length he rang a bell which stood on the table, and soon Nicholas appeared in the door way.

He was now a tall youth; his hair was brighter than ever,—that hair had betrayed him more than once: when he was young, playing truant, he had hidden in a field of long grass, the schoolmaster was abroad, and after him, and by chance, gazing over the field, saw a head, bright as a poppy, peep up and disappear; it was enough, he was caught; thanks to the lively hues with which nature had ornamented him.

And the sly expression of his features was not altered; that sharp nose which had once won him the nick-name “Pointer,” gave him as fox-like an expression as ever.

The tie between him and Sir John was one of evil, yet Sir John loved him as much as it was in his cold and selfish nature to love any one; he liked him for his very vices, in forming which he had taken no slight share; like those of whom the Apostle writes:— [200]

“Who knowing the judgment of God, that they who do such things are worthy of death, not only do them, but take pleasure in them that do them.”

Nicholas was now rather the companion than the page, and on very familiar terms with Sir John.

“Didst thou lie awake long last night, Nick?”

“I was somewhat restless, sir.”

“Didst thou hear aught unusual?”

“No,” said Nicholas, after pausing to reflect.

“Think again; any loud noise?”

“I cannot remember any.”

Sir John again paced up and down as if communing with himself.

“*Was* there aught unusual, sir?”

“Yes, I distinctly heard a door shut with a loud clang.”

“May have been the wind.”

“Nay, that would not have startled me; the fact is, the sound was not that of any door about this place; it shut with a clang as of a dungeon door falling into a framework of stone.”

“There is no such door, save in the old oubliettes below the towers; I wish we had Cuthbert in *one*, and his reverend father in another.” [201]

“No there *is* none; the fact startled me, and a strange thrill, which I cannot account for, went through me as I heard it.”

Sir John paused, and a visible tremor passed over him, which was strange in a man of his iron constitution.

“But I have not sent for you to talk about this; hast thou gleaned any tidings of Cuthbert at Glastonbury?”

“Yes; that a stranger called upon those old dolts, the foster father and mother of my friend Cuthbert; he came from the west, for his horse cast a shoe, and the smith remarked that the beast had been shod in Devon, from the make of his shoes. This happened in the hearing of a cunning fellow, Luke Sharp, who is in our pay, and he managed to entice the fellow to an ale house, and tried to make him drunk. Well, the messenger was, after all, a little too cute for that; but Luke told me that both from what the fellow did say, and from what he did not say, he was sure that he came from our old acquaintances; and I fancy they may both be expected to pay a visit to Glastonbury on particular business ere long.”

“Thou hatest this Cuthbert?”

“Ever since I have known him.”

“Because he once gave you a thrashing, hey, Nick?” [202]

“No; I am not ashamed of that, for I fought as long as I could stand or see; but I only wish this, that I could try chances again with him; with the sword, not the fist. I would sooner have him face to face with me, on the sward, with nothing but our shirts between sword point and breast, than see him on the scaffold again: I believe I could master him, the reverend brethren are poor masters of fence, and scant mercy should he get were he down.”

Sir John laughed merrily; the cheerful sentiment delighted him.

“Nick,” he said, “mayst thou have thy desire, and may I be there to see; I should laugh heartily

to see thee pink him; but I want thee to ride with me now; saddle our horses and be ready in ten minutes."

In a dismal dell or hollow glen, which had been worn from the side of a hill, in the course of ages by a streamlet, filled with brambles, nettles, and the slime of rotting vegetation, was a squalid hut, and therein dwelt an old blear-eyed, toothless hag, named Gammer Gatch.

By common repute she was a witch, and would long since have tasted of a lighted tar-barrel, and a few faggots to help, but for the protection extended to her by her landlord, Sir John. [203]

Years of persecution had made her a lonely misanthrope, believing absolutely in her communion with Satan, and her power for evil; poor wretch, whatever may have been her degree of Satanic inspiration she was guilty in intention; and when, after her temporary protector was gone, she was at last brought to trial, she gloried in her supposed alliance with Satan, and so made it easy for the judge and jury to send her with clear consciences to the stake.

Those who read the terrible literature which exists on this subject will be puzzled about many things, but will not doubt that several who suffered for impossible crimes, lacked but the *power*, not the *will* to have performed them.

It has often been noticed that men who have renounced their belief in Christianity, or even in a God, have become willing captives to the grossest forms of superstition, a truth not lacking examples in our own days; and thus it came to pass that Sir John, denying the existence of God, believed, instead, in Gammer Gatch; and thither he was bound now.

Leaving Nicholas on the brink of the glen in charge of the horses, he descended into the dell, and entered the hut which was avoided by all Christian people, save a few, who despite of their creed, came to consult the "wise woman" in divers difficulties. [204]

Lying, littered about, were human bones, a few grinning skulls, unclean reptiles, uncouth wax figures; the wall was blackened by cabalistic signs. The hut was built against the rocky side of the glen, and a ragged curtain concealed an aperture in the natural wall.

"Mother," said Sir John, "I have business to talk over; there are foes who hide from me, foes of mine, and of the king, whom I would fain crush; canst thou help me to discover their whereabouts?"

"The blackamoor may help us, if thou hast courage to face him."

Sir John winced;—"I would rather not see him if it can be done without."

"Couldst thou bear to hear his voice?"

"I could, methinks."

"Come, then, follow me, and we will do our best; thou shalt ask one question, and if he be in the mood he will answer."

She took up a torch of pine, and lit it at the fire. "Follow," she said, and drew aside the curtain; a dark passage seemed to lead into the very bowels of the earth.

It was one of those celebrated limestone caves of which so remarkable an example exists in the Cheddar valley; the water which oozed through the rifts had a strange petrifying power, and objects upon which it fell were in due time either incrustated with stone or actually petrified. [205]

From the roof descended long spars of stone in shape like icicles; fantastic resemblances of various objects met the gaze; here were shrouds and winding sheets, there delicate tracery like lace; here hung graceful curtains, and there were grotesque caricatures of animal life, but all in cold stone. The height of the passage varied; once Sir John had to follow his haggard guide on hands and knees, but onward they crawled or walked, deeper and deeper beneath the bowels of the earth, until they reached a dark cave, which seemed to be hung round with funereal trappings of black stone; in the centre was a sombre pool, into which heavy drops of water from above kept falling with a monotonous splash.^[49]

The hag renewed some half obliterated marks with chalk, which represented a circle inscribed in a pentagon, and motioned Sir John to stand beside her within its protection,—“Not a foot or hand outside,” she said earnestly; then she repeated some mystic words in an unknown tongue; a mephytic vapour arose, the pool boiled like a geyser, the cave appeared to tremble, and a deep voice said— [206]

"Why hast thou brought me up?"

"Ask thy question at once," whispered the witch.

"Where may I meet my foes?" said Sir John.

"In the Abbot's lodging, within the ruined Abbey, at the third midnight from hence."

All was still, the pool became quiet, the atmosphere cleared, and the hag seizing the hand of Sir John began to retrace her steps. To him the whole seemed like a dream.

But is it not possible that HE, Who sent an evil spirit into the mouths of the false prophets of Ahab, to lure him to his doom at Ramoth Gilead, and permitted the witch of Endor, not by any power of her own, to raise up the spirit of Samuel, that he might foretell to the unhappy Saul his coming fate; that HE allowed the instrumentality of this wretched victim of a terrible delusion, to

accomplish his end—that end which the progress of our tale will reveal as the direct consequence of this episode.

With difficulty Sir John dragged his failing limbs back to the hut, and for a time he and the hag sat by the fire, all in a tremor. She seemed as shaken as he: perhaps she, too, had been taken aback by the phenomenon, when simply preparing some jugglery.

At length Sir John rose, like one from stupor.

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“Mother, here is money for thee; keep the secret.”

“Or it would cost me my life; but, Sir John, beware of the Abbey at midnight, I fear *he* means thee harm.”

“Thou carest for me, then?”

“What would become of me wert thou gone?”

He shook his head and returned to Nicholas.

“Good heavens, how pale thou art, sir!”

“So wouldst thou be hadst thou been with us.”

“She ought to be burnt.”

“She is useful just now, and ministers to our designs.”

Not one word did Sir John speak all the ride homeward; perhaps he hesitated in his purpose, but at length his mind was made up.

They supped together, Nicholas waiting on his lord, but yet enjoying the privilege of supping at the same table.

After supper, as they discussed some hot sack, the patron said—

“Nicholas, I wish thee to go out on the western road which leads from Glastonbury to Exeter, and thou mayst pass the night at the ‘*Robin Hood*’; I have a strange impression our mutual friends will stop there to-morrow night. If thou meetest them stick to them like a leech, and follow them, thyself unseen, if possible, to Glastonbury; then join me in the Abbey, and we will await them there; it is their purpose, I am sure, to enter that secret chamber and destroy the papers, and I would fain seize them in the act, and so learn the great secret.”

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“There is much gold hidden there,” said Nicholas.

“There is, and it may be advisable for us to anticipate the work of the executioner on the spot, in which case”—

“I will answer for Cuthbert,” said Nicholas, even eagerly. “No one living knows the amount of gold and jewels; and we may deal with the papers as shall seem advisable; make our market of them, either with the parties compromised or with the government.”

They said no more, for up to this moment no idea of acting otherwise than the law would sanction had crossed the mind of Sir John: to minister to the vindictive feelings of the king, and to gratify the royal cupidity, thereby securing his own advancement, had been the original motives which had actuated him, but now—

He looked at Nicholas, but neither spoke again on the subject that night.

Sir John retired to rest a little before midnight; his page slept in the adjoining room. He was soon asleep, but with sleep came a strange dream,—his dead brother again stood by the bed side, and held an hour-glass, in which the sand was fast running out, but a few particles left. “What does it mean?” The dead one shook his head mournfully, and Sir John awoke—

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Awoke to hear an awful sound; he felt it coming before it came, something seemed moving through space; then came a sudden clang as when the iron door of an oubliette shuts for ever upon the captive of a living tomb.

“Nicholas! Nicholas!”

“What is the matter, sir?”

“Didst thou not hear?”

“Nay, I was awake, and all was still; thou wert dreaming, Sir John.”



FOOTNOTES

[49] The reader who has penetrated the Cheddar caves will recognize the description.



CHAPTER XI. AN ANCIENT INN.



month had passed away since the scaffold had lost its victims at Exeter, and although the agents of government had made every enquiry, searched every suspicious nook, and each house supposed to belong to malcontents, no trace of those who had been snatched from the hungry jaws of tyranny when about to crush them, had rewarded the zealous and obsequious spies.

Neither did the common people care to disguise their satisfaction, although it must be owned there were those whom we have already called "cannibals," who grieved that so goodly a show had been spoilt at the very crisis. The frequent executions, and sanguinary spectacles which this paternal government had provided, like the shows of the amphitheatre at an earlier age, had created a craving for the excitement of witnessing bloodshed amongst certain morbid spirits, to the destruction of all better feelings and human sympathies.

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A month, and our scene is changed.

Upon the hilly ground which separates the counties of Devon and Somerset, not many miles from Honiton, stood a lonely inn called the "Robin Hood;" the traveller will search in vain for it now, but there it stood in the days of which we write, on the main road, near the summit of a long ascent. Many plantations of fir and pine were thereabouts, and yielded that sweet scent, so favourable as we are told to the health of the consumptive, and in front of the rambling house the eye roamed down a rich valley, until, over the old tower of Colyton Church, appeared a glimpse of the blue sea, set in a frame of delicious purple and green, the green of woodland and the purple of heather.

In these days invalids would go to live in such a place, and tourists would linger there for days, drinking in its sweet pine-scented atmosphere, or gazing upon the dreamy scenery: but in *those* times men had but a faint appreciation of the beauties of nature, and the inn knew only such guests as tarried but a day, save when snowed in, or otherwise weather-bound.

It was a lovely evening during the week after All Saints' Day—for there are sometimes lovely days in November, when the last gleams of autumn seem to shine upon the scene, when the golden foliage looks richer than the duller tints of summer, and the leaves hail the rough blasts which are close at hand, dressed in their richest garb of gold and purple, ere they are blown away to die, like good vain people, who would fain dress in their best for the closing scene of all.

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The sun had gone down over the western ridge, in a flood of fiery light, and the full moon poured her silvery beams over the scene, when two riders came slowly up the long ascent, and drew bridle before the porch.

"Canst give us a room to ourselves, landlord, to-night—both to sup and sleep?"

"Thee must sit with thy neighbours and sup with them, but mayst have a bed room all to your two selves."

"Won't money do it?"

"There isn't time for Crooks the mason to build for you, if you laid the money down for bricks and mortar: you should give us a month's notice."

"Needs must then," said the elder; "take the horses, my son. Is the ostler at hand?"

"He will be here in a minute or two, if you are above looking to your own beasts."

"We should be poor farmers if we were," said the elder. "Come, John, my son, the stable is over this side, I see. What hour is your supper?"

"Curfew," said the Boniface, "and you will find good company: a priest, a lawyer, a leech, a youth who looks like a page, and my worthy self, who have filled that chair for twenty years, to carve for you."

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"Could not be better, the very idea appetizes me; come, John, in with the horses."

Soon father and son joined the motley company in the great common room of the inn, with its huge settles, its capacious hearth, and blazing fire; the priest sat in a corner of the room conning his book of hours: the leech (or doctor, as folk now call him,) talked to a rheumatic countryman who shook with his ailments: the lawyer discussed some recent statutes with a client who travelled with him to the approaching assize at Exeter: and the page—

Well, he was a good-looking stalwart fellow, who bore his burden of twenty years or so jauntily, —good-looking, but not prepossessing; he had that particularly sharp and bright appearance a hair of reddish hue often gives, and which was once esteemed an ornament, and sign of high blood,^[50] although silly people like to poke jokes at the wearer now-a-days. Moreover, there was

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a sly expression about his face which provoked mistrust; whether deservedly or not, the reader must judge by his deeds.

This page, then, when the farmer and son entered the room, started, then looked again, and an expression of surprise, not unmingled with satisfaction, crossed his flexible features.

Gradually the talk lost its technical character, and became general; once or twice it approached politics, but the great danger which then attended political or religious discussions, wherein one incautious word, as it had often done in fact, might cost a man his life, made men very shy of expressing their opinions. The bluff hearty way in which Englishmen of the Plantagenet period (in which time we include the houses of York and Lancaster) expressed their honest opinions, was gradually losing itself in a reserved and distrustful manner, which did not improve the national character, once so frank and open.

And moreover, the political system, inaugurated by Cromwell, had filled the country, as we have seen, with spies; so that men were chary of expressing their opinions before strangers. Still they discussed, with bated breath, the king's failing health: the question whether the Conservative party, under the Duke of Norfolk and Bishop Gardiner, with its Catholic sympathies, or the Reforming party, with the Archbishop at its head, would win the royal sympathy and hold the reins of power. It was not then a question which held a majority in parliament, but which party pleased the king.

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The lawyer here made a diversion.

"Has any one heard aught of the fugitives who escaped rope and quartering knife at Exeter?"

The red-haired page on hearing this gazed intently, with a very malicious smile, upon the face of the farmer's son.

"Why, no," said the leech, who was travelling from Exeter to Wells; "and yet they have made diligent search; but who can explore the wilds of Dartmoor, where they are doubtless hidden?"

"Has no one been hung for that affair?" inquired the merchant. "Hemp is going down in the market!"

"No one *as yet*," said the page, with a slight laugh, which sat unamiably on one so young.

"Well, then," said the lawyer, "some one will have to be."

Again the page looked at the young farmer, who returned a broad stare with the greatest apparent unconcern, and observed, in a broad Devonian dialect, that "Dartmoor was a cranky place to hide in."

The page looked puzzled.

Here "mine host" announced supper, and it soon smoked on the board: a sucking-pig stewed in its own gravy, a saddle of mutton, a chine of pork, a loin of beef, all well cooked and savoury; bread in plenty, but no vegetables; salt, but no pepper or mustard; wooden platters, rude abundance, but no luxury.

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"Give me the roast beef of old England," said our farmer, and stuck to the joint.

The supper over, for we will not pursue the desultory conversation which enlivened it, the guests betook themselves to their several bed-chambers, which lay immediately beneath the high slanting roof, the long garret being divided into chambers by partitions of board, each with its dormer window.

Two truckle beds, in one of those chambers, which was central in its position, accommodated the father and son, who were no sooner alone than they became once more our old friends Sir Walter Trevannion and Cuthbert, as the reader has doubtless long since surmised, on their way to Glastonbury to fulfil the dying wishes of the last Abbot, ere leaving England for ever, and travelling under assumed characters, for reasons needless to mention.

"Cuthbert," said his adopted parent, "we must follow different roads to-morrow for the sake of greater security; you must travel through Ilminster and Langport, I must take the southern road through Crewkerne and Ilchester; those who look out for two travellers, corresponding to the descriptions already advertized of our persons, will be less likely to recognize either."

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Cuthbert looked very sad at this.

"*Must we really separate, father?*" he said; "there is danger, and I would fain be nigh thee. I am young and vigorous, and might bear the brunt. Listen, I recognized an old Glastonbury boy, a former Abbey scholar, who was my especial enemy at school, and far worse than that, he guided the men who took the sainted Abbot,—'twas that red-haired page, his name is Nicholas Grabber, I think he knew and suspected me, although I tried hard to stare him out of countenance."

"All the more reason, my dear son, that we should separate, one at least may arrive safely, and each has now the secret. Our lives are as nothing in comparison with this duty; one day's riding will suffice, if we start about day-break, and at midnight we will meet in the Abbot's chamber; the moon will be full, and there will be none to disturb us in the roofless desecrated pile; we can destroy those papers, and then seek Lyme Regis, and your uncle's bark—you feel sure we may trust him?"

"Quite sure; at least he loves me for his brother's sake, my foster father, Giles Hodge."

"And we need not tell him any more than is necessary; it will be safer for him. And now let me ask once more about the secret chamber, to make quite sure I can master the door."

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"The rose, fourth in order from the door and the third from the ground."

The good father took out his tablets, and made a note thereof.

"Now, dear Cuthbert, our Complaine office, and then to rest. We must be waking early."

The sun rose brightly upon the old inn; it was a fresh, invigorating morning, with a keen frosty air, just such as would invite one to ride, walk, or run.

Cuthbert came out, his valise strapped on by a belt, and was ready to mount; his reputed father had already gone, for he had the longer journey, and Cuthbert was about to depart in turn.

He slipped a rose-noble into the hand of the ostler, whose face brightened as he received this unexpected donation, which was hardly a consistent or prudent one on Cuthbert's part, at least in his assumed character.

"Thee beest a gentleman, and dang'd if I don't tell thee all: I knows thee, I was in Exeter t'other day, when two folks were to have been strapped and cut up." [219]

"You will not betray me, then?"

"Not I; 'twor a mortal shame to think of cutting such a likely lad, like a pig to be stowed away in fitches; but I have a word more to say, thee hast an enemy here, or at least he *was* here."

"Indeed, who was he?"

"Red-haired chap—foxe^y like. Was you two talking much after you went to bed? if so, I hope you did not tell each other any secrets."

"Why? pray tell me."

"Because in next chamber slept red-haired chap—'foxe^y' I calls him,—and as I was going by to my bed at the end of the passage, I seed him through his door, which he had left ajar, with his ear as fast, as if he were glued to the partition, where I knowed there was a little hole."

Cuthbert looked serious as he said, "And were we talking just then?"

"Yes, I heard summut about Ilminster and Langport, and some other places; you were talking too loudly, and I don't doubt 'foxe^y' heard it all, too; beest thee going that way?"

"Yes, I must."

"Can't ye take another? He's gone that ere way before thee, I saw him start; he had a sword by his side, and may lurk in ambush for thee."

"No, no," thought Cuthbert, "it means *worse* than that; he knows about our meeting at midnight, and his plan will be to surprise both of us, and the secret: Sir John may be at Glastonbury, and he would go to him at once." [220]

"Good bye, and many thanks," he said, aloud, "he has more need to fear *me* than I *him*. I *must* catch him, he must never reach Glastonbury before me, it would be utter hopeless ruin. Good bye, keep our secret to yourself, and God bless you."

And setting spurs to his horse, he rode off at a brisk trot.



FOOTNOTES

[50] At another time, persons so favoured were unfortunately looked upon as special favourites of Satan, and suffered accordingly in the judicial holocausts for supposed witchcraft and sorcery.



CHAPTER XII.



uthbert rode at a brisk trot through the woods, sometimes breaking into a gallop; but he was too good a horseman to "take it all out of his steed" at starting, for he felt that the chase might last the entire day. The woods were beautiful in their calm decay, that November morning, but he had no heart to observe them, his whole soul was wrapped up in one consideration—should he overtake Nicholas and prevent his betraying the secret he had so meanly gained?

At any cost the spy must be hindered from reaching Glastonbury that night; if force were necessary, and to fight became the only alternative, the fight must be fought; they were both armed. The ostler had mentioned that Nicholas had a sword by his side, as became a smart young page; but then Cuthbert wore one also, concealed beneath his cloak, as more befitting his present disguise. It will be remembered as the parting gift of Sir Robert Tremayne.

Not only did the life of his patron, Sir Walter, to say nothing of his own, depend upon the non-arrival of Nicholas at Glastonbury, but perchance the lives of many adherents of the old faith, whose names were inscribed upon those documents, which Cuthbert knew were yet hidden in the chest which lay within the undiscovered muniment chamber of the Abbey.

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Nor can we pretend to deny that the persistent animosity, the deadly hatred, but above all the underhand way in which Nicholas had now twice penetrated into the secrets intrusted to his care, exasperated our hero to the utmost.

Filled with these thoughts, Cuthbert reached Ilminster, a small country town, where he arrived about ten in the morning; he could not obtain a change of steeds at the inn, so was forced to wait for his horse to bait.

He enquired whether any traveller had been before him on the road, and learned that a youth, dressed as a page, had preceded him by one entire hour.

So as yet he had not gained upon him.

The grey-headed ostler observed his uneasiness.

"Dost thou wish to catch that page?"

"I have most important business with him."

"Humph! I hope it is friendly, but that is not my affair; if thou canst make it worth my while, I will compound a draught for thy horse, which will make him go as if he had wings, instead of legs, for a few hours——"

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"And then?"

"Why, then, he will be very tired; but his work will be done, and if the beast rests for a day or two afterwards he will not suffer."

"A noble for thee, if thou canst get the draught."

The ostler went away a brief space, and returned with a mixture which he poured into a bucket with a little water; the steed drank it greedily.

"Now let him rest another half-hour, and he will be ready."

"Half-an-hour, now——"

"Thou hast but just arrived; get thine own breakfast, and thou needest not tarry again till thou catchest Master Redpate. He could not get a change of horses here either, although he tried hard; there was a hunt in the neighbourhood, and every steed was in the field; thou wilt hear of him before thou reachest Glastonbury."

Cuthbert was forced to make a merit of necessity and wait as patiently as he could.

"If thou canst not take it easy, take it as easy as thou canst," said this old philosopher of an ostler.

At the end of the half-hour he brought the horse to the door. Cuthbert mounted eagerly, gave the man his promised *douceur*, and was off.

"Let him go gently for a mile, then thou wilt need neither whip nor spur," cried the old man.

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Cuthbert obeyed; but soon found the horse eager to canter, then to gallop; joyfully he gave it its head, holding it up carefully in stony places: for did not life, and more than life, depend upon the poor beast?

Mile after mile flew by; and now Langport was in sight; it was the hour of noon.

Cuthbert inquired at the inn again; there was but one, frequented by wayfarers.

"Yes, a young page who seemed anxious to reach Glastonbury, had left but half-an-hour; he had taken a fresh steed, and left his own, much exhausted, behind."

Cuthbert delayed not a moment; his horse did not seem a wit inclined to tarry either.

But now he entered a district of bad roads, and progress was slow, for a fall would ruin everything; the comfort was that Nicholas must be equally delayed.

Hour after hour of sickening disappointment; every turn of the road, our hero looked for his young foe, but in vain; and now the sun, which sets soon after four in November, was sinking down to the horizon; the ground was becoming hard again with the frost: it had thawed in the

noon-tide.

At length, the distant Tor arose upon the horizon, a solitary hill arising like a beacon from the wide plain of Avalon, but still no Nicholas. [225]

Now he entered the precincts of the forest, which had once extended for miles around Glastonbury, that same forest introduced to our readers in the prologue to our tale, wherein the youthful Cuthbert was found in the snow by Giles Hodge.

Suddenly his eyes were attracted by an object still some distance in front of him, lying against the trunk of a huge beech tree.

It looked like a human figure.

Nearer, nearer; yes, it is a youth lying on the road, he is in the dress of a page, he has red hair; it is *Nicholas*.

Cuthbert leapt from his steed, and as he did so saw the solution of the thing: the red-haired page's horse had stumbled upon some sharp flints, and thrown his rider with great violence; and there he lay, as if dead, in the road, a low moaning alone testifying that life yet lingered.

"God has interposed in defence of the right," thought Cuthbert, with awe, not unmingled with pity in spite of his recent hostile intentions; for the sight of the suffering of his foe subdued his animosity.

The wounded youth muttered feebly, "Water! Water!"

There was a spring close by; Cuthbert brought clear sparkling water in a flask which he carried; the poor wretch drank eagerly, and then suddenly recognized Cuthbert. [226]

"What, Cuthbert! can it be thou! dost thou forgive me then? since I am dying, and can harm thee no more."

"I am trying to do so."

"Cuthbert! canst thou forgive one who sought thy life with such animosity, spied upon thee, obtained thy secrets, and was even now on his road to betray thee? if thou canst, God may forgive me too, for He will not be less merciful than man."

"Yes, I do forgive," said Cuthbert, touched by this appeal, "as I hope to be forgiven."

"Thou art better far than I: I should have passed by thee, too glad to get to Glastonbury first, and do the devil's work. Cuthbert, I am dying, I cannot move my legs or body, only my head, and can hardly breathe."

He spoke with short gasps.

"I was riding so fast—I came upon my hands—but pitched over again on my back—my spine came upon that sharp stone there—put there to punish me for my sins;—oh! for a priest—am I to die unhoucelled,—unanointed,—unabsolved?"

"God can forgive without sacraments when they cannot be had, I have heard the Abbot say so in old times." [227]

"Ah! *the Abbot*, had I but followed his holy precepts; but I betrayed him to his enemies and followed Sir John, and he has led me into all kinds of sin—debauchery, riot, uncleanness, as if he loved to corrupt me."

A change passed over the face of the dying youth.

"A strange numbness creeps over me,—only my head seems alive—my breathing is—so difficult—I choke—raise my head."

A painful struggle succeeded. Cuthbert had been taught the rudiments of surgery and he knew the truth; the spine was broken just below the neck, and he saw that suffocation would be the end, from inability to inflate the lungs, or to inhale the air.

"Pray! ask the saints to intercede for thee! call upon the Blessed Mother! nay upon the Incarnate Son Himself!" said Cuthbert after the teaching of his day.

"Sancte Nicolæ ora pro me—Cuthbert hasten to Glastonbury—Sir John—the secret chamber—midnight—beware—omnes sancti—orate pro me peccatore."

And so he died.

"I thank God his blood is not upon my head, that He Who has said 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' has Himself decided the question between us: poor Nicholas! yes, I can forgive thee freely, and the best proof of forgiveness is to pray for thy soul." [228]

He first laid the body decently on the turf, beneath the spreading beech, closed the eyes, composed the features, then spread the ill-fated youth's cloak over his corpse, and knelt down to pray.

When he arose, the setting sun was casting his rays on all that was mortal of Nicholas Grabber. Cuthbert re-mounted his steed, cast a lingering look behind, then rode on slowly, for he could give his horse rest now, towards Glastonbury.

He entered that old monastic town by moonlight, ere the curfew rang; he felt strangely moved by all that had happened, yet he could but be sensible of great relief that such a danger was averted, much as he now pitied his late foe.

He passed the butts where he had once contended with Nicholas for the silver arrow, and entered the town; every street and almost every house awakened a flood of boyish recollections; but he turned not aside, until he reached the outskirts on the opposite side of the place, where his old foster father and mother yet, as he knew, *lived*, in a new cottage on the site of the former one, destroyed by fire.

Yes, there stood the new house; built after the pattern of the old one, and Cuthbert tied up his horse and knocked at the door with beating heart. [229]

“Come in,” says a dear familiar voice; he enters, is recognized. Yes, they are both there; the old man stands amazed, but the poor old lady throws her arms around him crying out “My boy, my boy.”

During all these long years they had but once or twice heard of him, until the messenger, of whom we have spoken, reached them from Sir Robert Tremayne; they could not read, and if they could, it would have been dangerous for Cuthbert to have written to them; they knew nought of his recent dangers, of the trial at Exeter; let my readers then imagine how much Cuthbert had to tell.

And when hunger was appeased, he began his long story, and they listened with deep interest to the narrative of his recent captivity and marvellous escape; but when he told them of the fate of Nicholas, and how he lay dead in the woods, they seemed awe-struck.

They had not seen Sir John Redfyrne, and knew not if he was in the neighbourhood.

“The ways of God are beyond our thoughts,” said the old man, “but He is manifestly on thy side, my boy, so fear not, all will be well.”

Then some words he had often sung in choir, came into Cuthbert’s mind; I shall give them as he once sang them— [230]

“Nisi quia Dominus erat in nobis, dicat nunc Israel: nisi quia Dominus erat in nobis;
Cum exsurgerent homines in nos: forte vivos deglutissent nos.”^[51]

But it was drawing near midnight, and Cuthbert told them he had to meet Father Ambrose at that hour in the ruins of the Abbey.

“God preserve us,” said the old people together, “O mihi beate Martine,^[52] men do say they are haunted.”

“Though as many ghosts were there as stones in the ruined pile, thither must I go.”

“Thou wilt see us once more, dear boy?”

“If possible; I will knock at the door when our work is done—that is if permitted to tarry; but of one thing be assured, that while I live my heart will ever beat true to its first love—the love of my foster parents.”

They embraced in silence amidst tears. [231]

“The saints preserve him,” said the aged couple.

They did not retire to bed that night, it would have been a mere mockery of rest; they sat up and watched.



FOOTNOTES

[51] If the Lord Himself had not been on our side, now may Israel say: if the Lord Himself had not been on our side, when men rose up against us; &c. (*Psalm cxxiv.*)

[52] In those days this was a common invocation. S. Martin was a favourite saint in England: it shews the tendency of language to become the vehicle of lower ideas, that this invocation of S. Martin was corrupted into “O my eye and Betty Martin” in Protestant days.



CHAPTER XIII.
THE TRUST FULFILLED.



nce more at the midnight hour Cuthbert sought the Abbey precincts; the night was bright—it was almost as light as day, the moon was at the full.

But all the town was buried in sleep; not a watch dog barked—not a watchman stirred—alone, unobserved, Cuthbert walked along the streets.

The chief entrance into the Abbey was from S. Mary Magdalene Street, which lay on the west of the ruined pile; it led to the Chapel of S. Joseph, and through that chapel, eastward, one passed into the nave of the great church.

When Cuthbert approached, he saw the entrance yawning wide, like a cavern, for the gates had been sold for the value of the wood;^[53] and he entered into the desecrated chapel, which so many generations had revered as the very sanctuary of Avalon, the holy place, as men said, trodden of old, by the saintly feet of him of Arimathæa. [233]

On the right was the porter's cell, but where, alas, was the porter? he had been driven to beggary, and in accordance with the vagrant laws drawn up by Henry himself, had been stripped naked from the waist upward, tied to the end of a cart, and beaten with whips through the town, "till his body was bloody by reason of such whipping."^[54]

He had not dared to beg again so he simply starved, and made his moan to the God of Heaven, died and received a pauper's funeral, let us hope to be carried like a beggar of old, "by angels into Abraham's bosom."

His fate was perhaps milder than the fate of many of his brethren, who unable to find work, and unwilling to starve, had repeated their offence, had been brutally mutilated on the second occasion, and, on the third, hung, as felons and enemies of the commonwealth.

Cuthbert drank sadly of the holy well and plucked a sprig of the thorn, ere he entered the nave of the church. What a sight then met his view!

The defaced tomb stones, broken altars, empty niches, all stood out in brilliant relief as the chill moon looked down upon them, that November night; "Ichabod—the glory is departed" might well have been inscribed on that ruined fane. [234]

It was as large as most of our cathedrals, for the extreme length of the building, from S. Joseph's Chapel at the west, to the Ladye Chapel at the east, was no less than five hundred and eighty feet, and there were two deep transepts, on the east of each of which, were also two chapels.

The thronging multitudes, the incense laden air, the swelling chants, the imposing processions, the pealing anthem, all came to the remembrance of this solitary youth, as he knelt before the ruined altar, where as an acolyte he had so often knelt, and wept.

Rising, for it was near midnight, to fulfil his tryst, he traversed the south transept where the famous clock had once stood which told not only day and hour, but the changes of sun and moon, ^[55] and made for a door in the south aisle of the nave. Here he paused as his eye fell upon the epitaph to the memory of Richard Beere, the predecessor of the last Abbot of Glastonbury, who elected in the year 1493, had died in peace, in the thirty-first year of his rule, the year before the birth of Cuthbert; happy was he in the time of his life, happy too in his death, for he was taken from the evil to come; although there was no visible cloud in the horizon, to make him say with Louis Quinze, "*Après moi le déluge.*" Glastonbury Abbey had then attained the summit of its prosperity, being one of the richest and most renowned of all the abbeys of England. [235]

Cuthbert passed through the doorway in the south aisle, and entered the cloisters, which stood at the south side of the great church, forming a square of two hundred and twenty feet, surrounded by an arcade in which the poor monks had once been accustomed to take the air in winter, and to seek the shade in summer, while they held colloquy in their recreation hour.

Leaving the chapter house on the east, he turned the angle of the cloister, and passed along the front of the refectory on his road to the Abbot's lodgings, which lay to the south-west of the pile.

But here he paused, and recalled the past as he gazed around the cloisters: on the east lay the *chapter house*, which he had once regarded with such reverent awe, where had been the Lord Abbot's throne, so worthily filled by its last occupant; behind him the *refectory* occupied the whole south side of the square, where Cuthbert remembered seven long tables whereat the monks had taken their sober repasts, ^[56] while one of their number read from the pulpit the Holy Scriptures or some godly tome of the fathers: to the west lay the *fraternity* or apartments of the novices, and to the north was the great south front of the church. [236]

Over the cloisters was a gallery, from which had opened the *library*, wherein had been many valuable MSS., including one of Livy, which perhaps contained the lost decades: it had been sold to wrap up groceries; the *scriptorium*, where the ill-fated brethren had made copies of the Holy Scriptures and the Office books of the Church; the *common room*, wherein around the great hearth the brethren assembled in hours of leisure; the *wardrobe*, and the *treasury*.

All lay alike in sad ruin: all that *would* sell had been sold: the mere shell of the building remained.

Over these rooms, on what we may call the *second* floor, lay the *dormitories*, where each monk

had had his little cell containing a bed, a table, a crucifix and a drawer for papers and books. Hard by was the schoolroom, and the apartments of the choristers and other boys, who had lived in the house. [237]

While in the cloister, calling back the past to mind, he heard a step,—was it that of Father Ambrose? Cuthbert called in a subdued voice, but no answer was returned; he hurried up to the end of the cloister, his hand on his sword, but saw no one.

Well might the ruined desecrated pile suggest awe in this midnight hour.

“O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is haunted.”

Then he remembered that the unhappy Nicholas in his dying gasps had cried—

“Sir John; the secret chamber; midnight; beware!” and had died before he could offer the reparation of explanation.

And now he had reached the Abbot's former dwelling, a detached building, connected by a covered way with the cloisters. It stood west of the refectory and great hall; it had suffered less from violence than the rest of the building, being probably designed for use as a private dwelling.

Ascending the short flight of steps which led to the porch, he entered the chamber on the right, which had been the Abbot's especial retreat; it was in that room, with its old oak wainscoting and carved ceiling, that he had received the momentous communication which had changed the whole course of his then future life, and accepted the trust about to be fulfilled. [238]

And, as he waited, old familiar shapes seemed to gather around him, and for one instant, he thought he saw the Abbot seated in his chair, gazing benignantly upon him.

He strove to pray, as the best way of driving away imaginary visions, when he heard the clock of the town church begin to strike the midnight hour.

But before it had struck six times, a firm step was heard on the stairs; it mounted higher and higher, Cuthbert knew the tread and his heart beat lighter; another moment and Father Ambrose stood before him in the doorway.

“Father!”

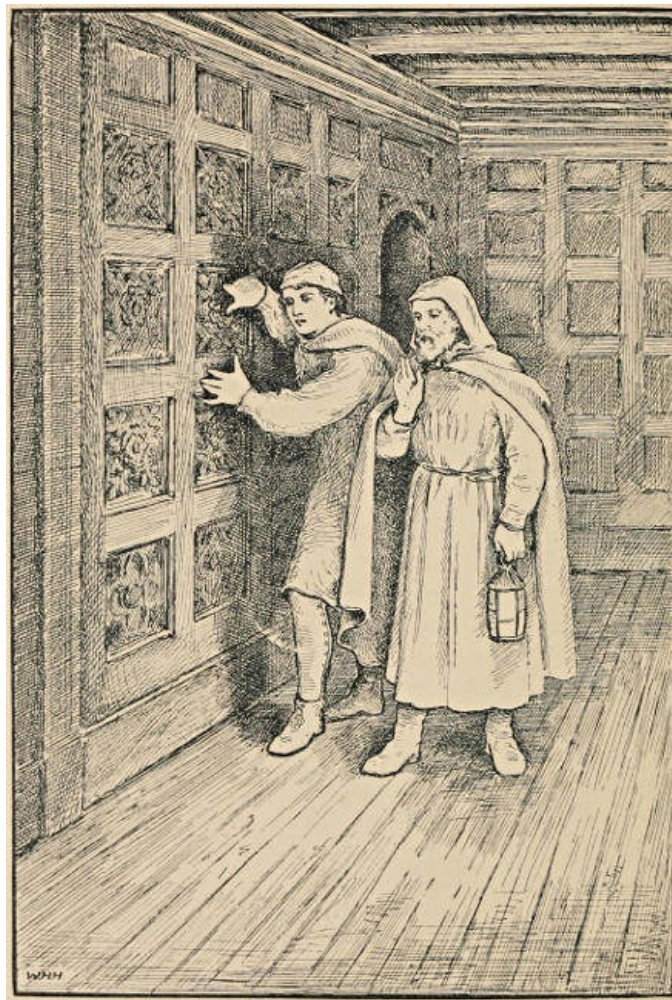
“Thou wert here first, then, Cuthbert my son, and hast met with no accident by the way.”

“How long hast thou been in the ruins, father?”

“But just arrived from the inn where I have left my horse,—why?”

“Because I heard a footfall.”

“Nay, it was fancy; we will soon do our errand and depart. Has thy journey been, like mine, uneventful?”



"HE PRESSED THE CENTRE OF THE BUD SHARPLY WITH HIS THUMB."

Page 239.

"Not uneventful, father; Nicholas Grabber, the red-haired page at the inn, is no more. He had played the spy over night, learnt all our arrangements, and even the fatal secret of the chamber: had he lived we had been lost." [239]

"Didst thou slay him, then?"

"Nay, it was the hand of God; and I am free from blood-guiltiness:" and Cuthbert told the whole story, which we need not say Sir Walter heard with intense interest.

"Poor lad! we will pray for his soul as he desired; Sir John has a heavy reckoning before him;—I wonder where *he* is now! But, my son, to our task; the night wears on."

Cuthbert well remembered the directions which the Abbot had given him; he had written them and conned them again and again during the intervening years. Amongst the cunning carving which yet ornamented the wainscotting of the ruined chamber, he felt for the rose which was fourth in order from the outer door, and third from the floor; he pressed the centre of the bud sharply with his thumb, and the old broken bookcase, which had been left as a fixture, not worth removing, but broken in mere wantonness, suddenly flew open in the manner of a door.

How near the enemy must have been to the secret, yet the door, which was the back of the bookcase, was ponderous, and the bolt only yielded to the spring, which was released by the pressure upon the carved rose many feet away. [240]

Thirty steps they descended, after fastening the upper door behind them, and below the very foundations, came upon the iron one. Cuthbert touched the spring and it slowly opened.

"We must fasten it carefully back," said the youth as they stood without, "by this bolt at the bottom, which falls into the pavement close to the adjacent wall; for did it swing to when we were within, we should never get out till the day of doom; it shuts with a spring, and can only be opened from without."

As he spoke he set the heavy door carefully back, as yet unsecured, against the wall; they watched it with curiosity; at first it appeared to stand still, then began slowly to move, increased speed in going, and shut with a loud resonant clang.

"So it was doubtless contrived in order to catch any unauthorized intruder upon the secrets of the Abbey, who had not observed the bolt and its purpose," said Father Ambrose. "Secure it carefully, my son."

Cuthbert did so, and they entered the vault; and now the youth drew the key, which he had kept all these long years, from the pocket in his vest; he inserted it in the lock, the rusty wards turned with difficulty, but with a little force yielded, and they raised the ponderous lid until it fell back and rested against the wall. [241]

There, as when the Abbot shewed them years before to Cuthbert, lay the missing treasures of the Abbey: the gemmed reliquaries, the golden and jewelled pyxes, the chalices of solid gold, the heaps of coined money, which a parliament, liberal in disposing of the property of others had given to the king, only he could not get them. All this enormous wealth had thus been saved from the tyrant's clutch; but it will be remembered that his disappointed avarice had aroused that animosity against the late Abbot, which was only satiated by the life-blood of the victim.

And beside it all, lay the yet more precious documents, rolls of parchments, bundles of letters, deeds of gift, and the violated charters of the Abbey.

"We must burn all the letters," said Father Ambrose; "such were the Abbot's last instructions."

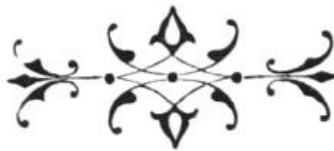
One by one they burnt them all by the flames of their lanthorn, until nought was left which could possibly serve as matter of accusation against any person.

"We may now depart, our duty done; we may borrow sufficient of this coined gold for our present needs, incurred in its preservation; the rest must be left until a sovereign, in communion with the Holy See, sits again upon the throne, when it will help to restore the Abbey, and refurnish it with sacred vessels; how long, O God, until this tyranny be overpast?" [242]

They closed the lid, locked it, and left the vault, shutting the iron door; glad were they to exchange its chilling grave-like atmosphere for the fresh air above.

They tarried not, but left the Abbey immediately; and at Cuthbert's request sought the shelter of his foster father's cottage, where they found the old couple awaiting them, and received the warmest welcome; the curtains were drawn, to hide the light from the neighbours, should any prying eyes be abroad in the darkness; fresh wood was heaped upon the fire, a jug of mulled sack was prepared, and so they drove the cold out of their bodies, and banished the remembrance of the icy vault.

And afterwards they sought their warm beds and slept soundly, under the thatched roof of the humble cot, grateful for the comfort which providence afforded them, and happy beyond description to feel that the difficult and dangerous task committed to them, was successfully accomplished.



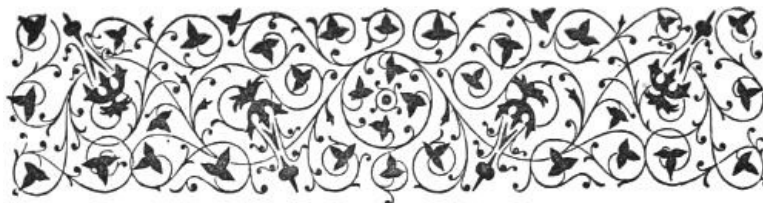
FOOTNOTES

[53] See Note L. Demolition of Abbeys.

[54] See Preface.

[55] It was purchased for Wells Cathedral where it may still be seen.

[56] People talk of bloated monks, and imagine them revelling in luxuries. The expression is as just, neither more nor less, as that of "a bloated aristocrat," used of a gentleman by a Socialist.



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CHAPTER XIV. *SUUM CUIQUE TRIBUITUR.*



Let us leave the snug cot and return to the desolate ruins of the Abbey.

Scarcely have the sounds of the footsteps of our two friends died away, when another step comes along the cloisters from the opposite direction, and after the pause of a moment it ascends the stair leading to the Abbot's chamber.

Hush! the new-comer is talking to himself, soliloquizing aloud.

"Methought I heard steps and voices, and saw from the opposite cloister the gleam of a light in this very chamber. Nicholas has played me false—the young hound; I shall have a rod in pickle for his back. He should have been here to-night, to share my watch; he sent word he was on their track, and that they were *en route* for Glastonbury Abbey; no doubt to visit the secret chamber, and he knew that I meant to await him here alone, where I have had but a cold time of it, and, I [244]

fear, a useless watch, for how can one person guard so large a place?

“Still the secret might be worth keeping to ourselves, for I am assured there is much gold, and if we could but surprise and slay them after they have betrayed their secret, we might enrich ourselves and no man the wiser, and then make our market of the parchments afterwards. ’Tis but an old man and a mere boy; Nicholas might grapple with the young one, and willingly would, for he hates him, while I disposed of the monk-knight, which would but cost me a thrust or two; and then if my page were sore pressed, I might lend him a moment’s assistance, although it would be rare sport to see him finish my precious nephew himself, and I think he *could*, for he must be the stronger, since he has had no confinement or torture to weaken his nerves or sap his health, and should be the better swordsman of the two. Ah! what is this?”

He was trembling with excitement, not unmingled with a sensation like fear, as he turned a dark lantern, and caused the hidden light to reveal the entrance, which Cuthbert had unwittingly left ajar, for the spring, rusty with damp, had failed to act.

Down the thirty steps; down to the iron door at the bottom, first closing the upper door.

“I shall have the secret all to myself, not even Nicholas shall know more than I choose to reveal; a man is his own best confidant, thanks to the saint, or may be the devil, who has helped me. Ha! ha!”

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Suddenly he started, and a chill of terror caused the cold sweat to stand on his brow; was that a peal of distant laughter mocking his words? Satanic laughter?

“I am becoming fanciful. Ah! here is the spring; no more mystery, the door opens, I will press it back against the wall; yes it is safe, it stands quite still.”

He enters the vault, and passes from mortal sight for ever.

Let us stand outside and watch that door.

It is certainly moving, almost imperceptibly; oh, how terrible that slight motion. It increases in speed, *vires acquirit eundo*; oh! will no one warn the guilty wretch within of his danger.

Clang! In that sound is the awful doom of one who is lost soul and body,—the warning portent is explained, its fore-boding fulfilled.

Again that low but awful peal of laughter breaks the echoes. Ah! who shall paint the agony of the few hopeless days of darkness, which remain to him in his icy tomb—the pangs of hunger and thirst, delirium, and madness?

We draw a veil over them, and bid Sir John Redfyrne a last farewell.

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Upon the following morning the sun rose brightly upon the earth; so soundly slept Sir Walter and his adopted son, that old Hodge had to knock once or twice ere he could arouse them.

“Look, Cuthbert,” cried Sir Walter; “the rising sun dispersing the darkness of the night, a harbinger of better days to us; dress quickly, commend thyself to God, and let us be stirring: for although we have heard nought of Sir John, it may be as well to put the sea between us and him, now our work is accomplished.”

They occupied adjacent couches in the same room, and both had slept, without once awaking, from the time they lay their heads on their pillows; a sense of delicious rest, of labour achieved, had been theirs.

And now after their thanksgivings to God, they came down to breakfast with hot spiced wine, before a warm fire; and although the reverence always accorded to rank in those days, made the old yeoman hesitate to set “cheek by jowl” with a knight and Prior rolled into one, yet Sir Walter soon put him at his ease, and the four made the last breakfast which they were ever to share together.

Cuthbert’s heart was too full for speech; he had cause to entertain the warmest feelings of affection for his kind foster-parents, and now he was leaving them perhaps for ever, for he could not hope to re-visit England, unless a total change took place in the government and its policy; and meanwhile the sands of life were running out for the aged couple.

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But the last farewells had to be said; the honest yeoman brought the two horses round to the back door; the few necessaries they had were packed in their saddle-bags, and bidding a longing lingering last farewell, they turned their backs upon Glastonbury, and took the road for Lyme Regis.

They rode leisurely, for they knew no need for special haste, and enjoyed the invigorating and bracing air; oft-times from some eminence they turned back, and looked over the plain of Avalon upon the lofty Tor, with mingled feelings; it was the land-mark of home, but it was the place where foul injustice had been wreaked upon one they had both loved.

Late in the evening they beheld the sea in the far distance, and soon after nightfall entered Lyme Regis, where Cuthbert sought his uncle, while he left Sir Walter at the inn.

Such a journey as they had accomplished would have been difficult in France without passports, or in any continental land until a much later day; but in England well-dressed and respectable travellers might travel unquestioned, in the absence of any cause to the contrary, and take up their quarters without exciting suspicion, even in the last days of bloody Harry.

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Cuthbert sought his "uncle," with whom it will be remembered he had spent the ten months after the martyrdom of the Abbot, and found him just returned from a fishing expedition. At first the old fisherman could not recognize the lad who had once won his affections in the young man who stood before him, but when he did so, the warmth of the reception was all that could be desired; he almost dragged Cuthbert to his "aunt," and no persuasion would induce them to let the youth return to spend the night at the inn with Sir Walter.

What a story had Cuthbert to tell them! "Uncle," "aunt," and two or three "cousins," stalwart young fishermen: they stood aghast with open mouths and erected ears at his narration of the scenes at Exeter, which were quite fresh to them, for news travelled very slowly in those days, and even otherwise they might not have recognized Cuthbert under the altered name.

And when he asked their help to convey him and his adopted father across sea, he was met by an enthusiastic reply, "Wind and tide both serve, why not to-morrow morning, my boy; loath are we to part with thee so soon, but thy safety is the first consideration."

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So the following morning Sir Walter and Cuthbert, both clad in fishers' garb, joined the fisherman and his stalwart sons on the beach. The largest boat, or rather sloop, was got under weigh, the wind blew directly off shore, and soon they saw the white cliffs of Dorset, and the red ones of Devon, which meet near Lyme Regis, receding on the right and left.

As they drew out to sea, and the whole coast line became visible, Hey Tor and the moorland hills loomed in the far distance on the left, and until they sank beneath the sea Cuthbert never took his eyes from them.

Now all was sea and sky for many hours, until the coasts of Normandy, about the mouth of the Seine, came into sight. And they ran the boat up the river to the nearest point to the great Abbey of Bec, founded by the famous Herlwin in 1034, and which had furnished two successive Archbishops to Canterbury in the persons of Lanfranc and Anselm.

The present Abbot had been a personal friend of Father Ambrose, and so soon as they had bidden a kind and grateful farewell to their English friends, the honest fishermen, who absolutely refused the offer of gold for their services, they directed their steps to the famous Abbey.

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After a journey of some hours, they arrived safely at Bec.

"Behold an Abbey, which God has yet preserved from the spoilers," said Father Ambrose, as he looked upon the glorious pile—grand as that they had lost—and then added with a sigh, "Alas, poor Glastonbury."

There they met unbounded hospitality, and Father Ambrose only waited to bestow his adopted son in the care of the Baron de Courcy, whose castle was hard by, ere he resumed that life he had never willingly abandoned.

The Baron de Courcy was a descendant of an old and famous Norman house, distinguished in the days of the Conquest, when Aymer de Courcy, refusing to share in the sports of England, retired to his Norman estate, although he had fought at Hastings, and enjoyed the favour of the Conqueror.

His good qualities, well known to those who have read of them in the "Andredsweald," a chronicle of the house of Michelham in Sussex,^[57] had not suffered in transmission through so many generations: and our Cuthbert found a warm reception in the Norman household.

And so they both gained a home, each after his own heart, and the recent trials seemed only to enhance the sweet sense of security they now enjoyed.

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"When the shore is gained, at last,
Who will count the billows past?"

But they had not been three months in their new homes, when tidings arrived from England of the death of their oppressor. Henry VIII. had passed to his last account on the early morn of the twenty-eighth of January, fifteen-hundred and forty-seven; passed from his earthly flatterers and parasites, who had treated him as if he were a demi-god, to the awful judgment bar whither he had sent before him by the hands of the executioner some seventy thousand of those subjects who had been committed by the King of kings to his care.

There, where prince and peasant, lord and slave, king and monk, are all equal, where there is no respect of persons, we leave him and close our tragical story.



FOOTNOTES

[57] The "Andredsweald," a tale of the Norman Conquest, by the same author.



Epilogue.



ere, when I first told this story to a generation of schoolboys, long since dispersed over the face of this busy world, I concluded my tale, and returned to my study, but I was followed thither by some young and eager story-devourers, who, like Oliver Twist, "asked for more."

"Please, sir, we want to know what became of the treasure?"

"Oh," said I, "I forgot to mention that in Queen Mary's reign, Cuthbert paid a visit to England in the train of the French Ambassador, Monsieur de Noailles, and found an opportunity of revealing the secret to the Queen. He was sent with some others to Glastonbury, and there they found the mouldering skeleton of Sir John Redfyrne, keeping watch over the chest."

"But how did they know who he was?"

"The name was engraved on his sword, 'John Redfyrne, Knight.'"

"Did Cuthbert know that it was his uncle?"

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"Not at the time, nor for years afterwards."

"I fancy," said a youngster, "Cuthbert would still have preferred the name '*Trevannion*' to '*Redfyrne*,' even if he had known."

"But what did they do with the treasure? Was the Abbey ever rebuilt?"

"No, for one of the conditions which the nobles, who held the Abbey lands, exacted when Mary restored the Papal Supremacy, was, that they should be left undisturbed in all their ill-gotten possessions: you may be sure that the gold was applied to such uses as the last Abbot himself would have approved."

"But were old Giles and his wife alive then? did they ever see Cuthbert again?" enquired a chubby little fellow.

"He yet lived, but the dear old dame had gone to her rest. Cuthbert's visit was the last gleam of joy in the good old yeoman's well-spent life: his foster son closed his eyes, and laid him to rest by the side of his beloved wife."

"And did Cuthbert ever get the lands of Redfyrne?"

"No, for he never claimed them, and they passed to the next of kin."

"But did Cuthbert have plenty of money?" cried a little fellow, anxiously.

"Yes, the King of France, Henry the Second, bestowed a valuable estate upon him, close by the Abbey of Bec, with the rank of Baron, in reward for his extraordinary valour, displayed when he led the forlorn hope at the taking of Metz, in 1552; which city remained a French fortress until the late Franco-German war."

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"And did he marry that Isabel Grey of Ashburton?"

"No, she married a fat and well-liking Devonshire squire."

"Poor Cuthbert; what a shame!"

"Oh, you need not pity him; few people marry their first love; he found ample consolation in Eveline de Courcy, daughter of the baron, had many bright-eyed sons and daughters, and lived happy, as the story-books say, 'ever afterwards.'"

"But how was it ever known who were his true parents: for it must have been found out, or we should never have had this tale," said an older boy.

"You remember the good old priest of S. Mary of the Steppes in Exeter?"

"Yes," cried several, "he was sent to fetch *that* Sir John Redfyrne to old Madge."

"Well, after the death of the poor old woman, he found a sealed packet in her chamber, directed to himself, with the words, 'To be opened in case of my sudden death,' which revealed the truth, but he dared not act upon it at once, in favour of an attainted person, and against a court favourite: he waited his time. Meanwhile, in the early years of Edward the Sixth, the Devonshire rebellion broke out, and suspected of being implicated therein, he fled across the seas, and eventually, after many years, became a monk in the Abbey of Bec. There he discovered the identity of Cuthbert, then resident at the castle of Courcy, hard by, with the youth who so narrowly escaped the scaffold at Exeter. Then he revealed the secret to Father Ambrose, and he to Cuthbert."

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"Then why did not Cuthbert claim his own?" said many at once.

“Because he had already attained all he desired in France, and the England of Elizabeth, much as it is lauded by many, had no attractions for him: besides there would have been the old question of the Supremacy to have fought out again; I am not in a position to say that his opinions had undergone any change on that point, and otherwise he could not have lived in peace in his native land.”

“But he was wrong in contending for the supremacy of the Pope, was he not?” said an incipient theologian.

“Undoubtedly; but as a modern historian, not usually credited with Catholic sympathies, says of the Carthusian martyrs who died for the same belief, ‘We will not regret their cause; there is no cause for which any man can more nobly suffer, than to witness that it is better for him to die than to speak words which, he does not mean?’”^[58]

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“What a wicked monster Henry the Eighth must have been!”

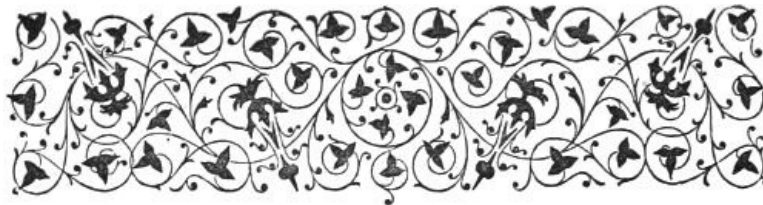
“Yet he had, perhaps, the majority of the nation with him; and doubtless his heart was hardened by continued prosperity and the flattery which he breathed as his vital air. I shall never forget the solemn thoughts which came upon me when I once stood over the plain stone which marks his grave at Windsor: the remembrance of his many victims, the devout Catharine, the stately Wolsey, the learned More, the pious Fisher, the faithful monks of the Charterhouse, the Protestant martyrs, the gallant Surrey, and a host of others. Then came the thought, he has long since met his victims at the judgment-seat, and he and they have been judged by One ‘too wise to err, too good to be unkind;’ let us leave him to that judgment, which also awaits us all. But hark, there is the Chapel bell.”

Exeunt omnes.



FOOTNOTES

[58] Froude, Vol. III., Cap. ix.



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NOTES.

Note A, P. 2.—ANTIQUITIES OF GLASTONBURY.

The town of Glastonbury is a place, whose historical traditions stretch back to a very remote antiquity. It was known to the early Britons as “Inis Avalon,” or the Isle of Apples, for that fruit was said to grow spontaneously on the rich soil. Thus Camden writes, or rather translates an ancient ode:—

“O Isle of Apples; truly fortunate,
Where unforced fruit, and willing comforts meet;
For there the fields require no rustic hand,
But Nature only cultivates the land:
The fertile plains with corn and herds are proud,
And golden apples smile in every wood.”

The cluster of hills was (as the name “Inis Avalon,” or “Insula Avalonia,” implies) once an island, surrounded by water from the inlet, we now call the Bristol Channel.

It was not conquered by the English or West Saxons, until the year 658, when Kenwalk [Cenwealh] of Wessex, defeated the Britons after a hard fight, and drove them across the Parret, but it was Christian long before it was English, for it is certain that it was a centre of Welsh Christianity from the earliest times.

Ancient legends relate that S. Philip the Apostle, anxious both to spread the knowledge of the Gospel, and to provide for the safety of his friend Joseph of Arimathea, exposed to danger from

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the hatred of the Jews, combined these ends by sending him to Britain with eleven brethren, and some add that S. Mary Magdalene accompanied him.

They were greatly tossed by the waves, and buffeted out of their course, so that they landed on the Isle of Avalon, where Arviragus, the king, received them kindly; and gave them permission to build a Church, which they did, dedicating it to the Blessed Virgin, a dedication afterwards forgotten, for it was finally dedicated to S. Joseph himself, and under the name "Vetusta Ecclesia," most carefully encased with stone and preserved by subsequent architects, until the great fire in 1184.

It is also recorded that the landing of the Saint and his companions took place at the northern side of Wirral Hill, at a place called in old maps, "The Sea Wall;" the exact spot was anciently identified by a hawthorn tree, which sprang from the staff S. Joseph struck into the ground when he landed. Many trees propagated by grafts from this wonderful tree still exist; they flower at Christmas in honour of the Nativity.

The legend adds, that S. Joseph brought with him a most priceless treasure, "The Holy Grail," the very chalice in which the Saviour administered the Sacrament of His Blood.

The Cup, the Cup itself, from which our Lord
Drank at the last sad Supper with His own;
This, from the Blessed Land of Aromat—
After the day of darkness, when the dead
Went wandering over Moriah—the good Saint,
Arimathæan Joseph, journeying brought
To Glastonbury, where the winter thorn
Blossoms at Christmas, mindful of our Lord.

TENNYSON.—*The Holy Grail.*

The original Chapel, built, according to tradition, by S. Joseph and his companions, stood at the west end of the great Abbey Church. It was 60 feet long by 20 broad, and, whatever we may think of the tradition, was doubtless one of the oldest churches in Britain; under its altar S. Joseph was said to lie buried. [259]

Furthermore we are informed that the Ambassador, sent by Pope Eleutherius in answer to the petition of King Lucius, landed here, and revived the faith, when it was becoming decayed; but the whole legend of King Lucius is rejected by modern historians.

Here also it is said that S. Patrick, after the conversion of Ireland, retired in his seventy-second year, and ruled as Abbot for thirty-nine years, dying in the year 472, in the one hundred and eleventh year of his age. He was buried in S. Joseph's Chapel.

Here also S. David, the patron Saint of Wales, is said to have ended his days; he wished to reconsecrate the Vetusta Ecclesia, or Chapel of S. Joseph; but our Lord appeared to him in a vision, and informed him that HĒ had consecrated it Himself.

Here King Arthur, the hero of a hundred fights, and a thousand myths, was said to be buried with his Queen Guinevra. His heroic deeds, in the defence of his country, against our pagan forefathers, have been sung by many Bards of old, but by none more sweetly than by our greatest living poet. Thus he describes the parting scene with the brave knight, Sir Bedivere, after the hero's last great battle with his treacherous nephew, Mordred, at Camlen in Cornwall:—

"But now farewell, I am going a long way,
With these thou seest, if indeed I go,
(For all my mind is clouded with a doubt,)
To the island valley of Avilion,
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly, but it lies
Deep meadowed, happy, fair with orchard lawns,
And bowery meadows, crowned with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound."

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But the hope was vain; he went to Avalon to die.

This story was sung by the Welsh Bards to King Henry II. on his journey to Ireland in 1177, and interested him so deeply, that he recommended a search for the remains, and that they should be (if found) exhumed and re-interred in the Church, as a more fitting resting place. This wish was carried out after that king's death by his nephew, Henry de Soliaco, then Abbot, in 1191, and in the spot indicated by the Bards, the remains were found both of Arthur and his queen. Geraldus Cambrensis, who was present, relates the scene, and says that a stone was found with a leaden cross bearing the inscription,—"*Hic pace sepultus rex Arthurus, in insula Avalonia,*"—and beneath it the remains of the hero king, which were of giant proportions, and of his queen, mingled in the same coffin. In the large skull were three wounds, and in the cavity occupied by the queen's remains a tress of fair yellow hair, which being touched fell to pieces. The remains were duly honoured by a black marble mausoleum in the Church.

When more than eighty years had passed away, the greatest of the Plantagenets, Edward the first, and his Queen Eleanor kept the festival of Easter at Glastonbury, and the tomb was opened for their inspection; when the king commanded the hallowed relics to be exposed before the high altar, for the veneration of the people, ere they were recommitted to their resting place; *there* to [261]

rest, until the tyrant—

“Cast away like a thing defiled
The remembrance of the just.”

We have dwelt upon these old legends, not without pleasure, as recorded chiefly by William of Malmesbury, on the authority of a “Charter of S. Patrick,” and an ancient British historian whose writings were then extant, but whose name he does not hand down to posterity.

But the Charter is pronounced by Archbishop Usher to be the forgery of a Saxon monk, and historians in general, consider the truth of the legends, hitherto recorded, as doubtful as those of the kings of Rome, or of the Trojan war.

Still, there can be little doubt in a candid mind, that these ancient myths enshrine many facts, that in the early British times, nay in the very infancy of Christianity, Glastonbury was a centre of light under its earlier name, “the Isle of Avalon,” and that the site of S. Joseph’s Chapel, or the “Vetusta Ecclesia,” is that of one of the oldest, or perhaps *the* oldest Christian Church in Britain.

We have already seen that the English Conquest had advanced as far as Glastonbury by the year 658. Sixty years afterwards, Ina, King of Wessex, after building the first Church in Wells, by the advice of Adhelm, Bishop of Sherborne, (in which diocese the new conquests were incorporated until the foundation of the See of Wells by Edward the Elder in 909,) rebuilt the monastery on the Isle of Avalon, which by that time, owing to the subsidence of the sea, had either ceased, or was fast ceasing to be an island; save, so far as it was encircled by the waters of the river Brue and its tributary streams, with the marshes they formed. So long as the English had remained heathen they had destroyed all the Churches and monasteries they found; now that they, the West Saxons, had become Christian they respected the Churches and monks, and thus they became great benefactors of Avalonia, or as the English called it, “Glæstingabyrig,” or “Glastonbury.”

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Ina died at Rome, whither he had gone, after resigning his crown, in all the “odour of sanctity.”

The monastery was burnt by the Danes in the following century, and restored by the great Saint Dunstan, as described in the author’s earlier tale, “Edwy the Fair, or the First Chronicle of Æscendune.” Here King Edgar died, and was buried; here, as recorded in a later tale of the writer, “Alfgar the Dane, or the Second Chronicle of Æscendune,” the murdered Edmund Ironside was solemnly interred.

The first Norman Bishop, was one Turstinus, or Tustain, and a testy Abbot was he; he had a dislike to the ancient Gregorian music, and bade his English monks sing Parisian tones; but they clung to their old melodies; they had obeyed their foreign tyrant in other things, but would not give up their Gregorians; so the Abbot called in Norman soldiers to coerce the unwilling songsters, and there was a terrible riot in the Church, for the Normans did not respect the sanctity of the place, and slew many monks therein, so that after the conflict ended many arrows were found sticking in the Crucifix over the high altar.

The plain Saxon edifice of Ina looked mean to men accustomed to the Norman abbeys, and therefore Tustain rebuilt the greater portion.

The well known fighting Bishop, Henry of Blois, brother of King Stephen, was appointed Abbot of Glastonbury in 1126, and Bishop of Winchester in 1134, retaining the earlier appointment also till his death in 1171. He rebuilt the monastery from the very foundations, (says an old chronicler) as well as a large palace for himself.

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But in the year 1184, on the 25th of May, a terrible fire destroyed the whole monastery, save the bell tower, and a chapel and chamber, built by Abbot Robert (A.D. 1172). Henry the Second, then king, immediately issued a charter, beginning with the words, “Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he reap,” and announced, that in order to lay up treasure in heaven, he and his heirs would restore and raise it to greater glory than before.

He built the Church of S. Mary, commonly called S. Joseph’s Chapel, on the site of the Vetusta Ecclesia, with “squared stones of the most perfect workmanship, profusely ornamented,” and it was consecrated by Reginald the Bishop, on S. Barnabas’ Day, 1186.

The great king only lived three more years, and after his death the further restoration went on but slowly, so that it was not until one hundred and nineteen years had passed away, that the great Abbey Church of S. Peter and S. Paul, which figures in our story, was completed and dedicated, in the year 1303, in the days of Abbot Fromont, and the reign of Edward the First.

The Abbey is said to have suffered grievously in the earthquake which shook the country in the third year of Edward the first, 1274.

The eight Abbots who succeeded in order, carried on the work of beautifying and enlarging until Richard Beere, 1493-1524, the last Abbot but one, finished by erecting the king’s lodgings for secular clergy.

Then when all was “as perfect as perfect could be,” so far as the outward structure, came the terrible fall our story records.

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"The old good wife's well hoarded nuts
Are round and round divided,
And many lads' and lasses' fates
Are there that night decided;
Some kindle quickly, side by side,
And burn together trimly,
Some start away with saucy pride
And jump out o'er the chimney."

Burning the nuts is a famous charm. They name the lad and lass to each particular nut, as they lay them on the fire, and accordingly as they burn quietly together, or start from beside one another, the course and issue of the courtship will be.—*Brand's Popular Antiquities*.

Note C, P. 11.—FETCHES.

These are the exact figures and resemblances of persons then living; often seen not only by their friends at a distance, but many times by themselves; of which there are several instances in Aubrey's Miscellanies. These apparitions are called "Fetches," and in Cumberland "Swarths;" they most commonly appear to distant friends and relations at the very instant preceding the death of a person whose figure they put on; but sometimes there is a greater interval between the appearance and death.—*Grose apud Brand*.

Note D, P. 25.—COUPLED BETWEEN TWO FOXHOUNDS.

"Sir Peter Carew, being a boy at about the date of the tale, and giving trouble at the High School at Exeter, was led home to his father's house at Ottery, coupled between two foxhounds."—*Hooker's Life of Sir Peter Carew*.

Note E, P. 31.—THE PARCHMENTS.

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The Abbot's connection with "The Pilgrimage of Grace" has never been proved, but it is scarcely unjust to assume, as is done in the text, his general sympathy with the movement. Froude says it was discovered that he and the Abbot of Reading had supplied the northern insurgents with money.

"Treason doth never prosper, for this reason
That if it prosper, none dare call it treason."

Thus, had the northern movement succeeded, it might generally be acknowledged to be as justifiable as the similar popular risings of 1642 and 1688; it failed, and the story has been written by the victors.

Note F, P. 38.—THE LAST CELEBRATION.

The account of this last celebration is taken from the touching and affecting narrative of Maurice Channey, a survivor of the Carthusian monks, who suffered in 1535, *mutatis mutandis*. Locality and names being changed, the story in the text is a narrative of facts. It will be found in the ninth chapter of Froude's Henry VIII.

Note G, P. 73.—DEATH OF ABBOTT WHITING.

For the purposes of the story the writer has taken some little liberties with the traditional account of the martyrdom, which here he supplies, beginning with the trial at Wells:—

"When he arrived at Wells, the old man was informed that there was an assembly of the gentry and nobility, and that he was summoned to it, on which he proceeded to take his seat among them, the habits of a long and honourable life clinging to him even after his imprisonment. Upon this the crier of the court called him to the bar to answer a charge of high treason. "What does it all mean?" he asked of his attendant, his memory and probably his sight and hearing having failed. His servant replied that they were only trying to alarm him into submission, and probably this was the opinion of most who attended the court, as well as the jurors. "As worshipful a jury," writes Lord Russell to Cromwell, "as was charged here these many years." And there was never seen in these parts so great an appearance as were at this present time, and never better willing to serve the king. He was soon condemned, though he appears not to have understood what had happened, and the next day, Nov. 15th, 1539, he was taken to Glastonbury in his horse-litter.

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"It was only when a priest came to receive his confession as he lay, that he comprehended the state of things; then he begged that he might be allowed to take leave of his monks before going to execution, and also to have a few hours to prepare for his death.

"But no delay was permitted, and the old man was thrust out of the litter on to a hurdle, upon which he was rudely dragged through the town to the top of the hill which overlooks the monastery, where he took his death very patiently, in the manner described in the text."—*Rev. J. H. Blunt's Reformation of the Church of England*, p. 349-350. (From original authorities.)

Note H, P. 78.—ENGLISH FARMERS.

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"My father was a yeoman and had no lands of his own, only he had a farm of three or four pounds by the year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled as much as kept half-a-dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find the king a harness with himself and his horse. I remember that I buckled on his harness when he went to Blackheath field. He kept me to school or else I had not been able to have preached before the king's majesty now. He married my sisters with five pounds or twenty nobles each, having brought them up in godliness and fear of God. He kept hospitality for his poor neighbours and some alms he gave to the poor, and all this he did of the said farm."—*Latimer's Sermons*, p. 101.

Note I, P. 93.—THE ABBEY CHURCH.

Add this sentence accidentally omitted from the text:—

"There, in that desecrated spot, reposed the ashes of the mighty dead; there, if tradition may be believed, rested the hero king Arthur, the defender of the land against the English invasion, the hero of a hundred fights, the subject of a thousand myths; *there* rested the holy bones of him who had afforded his Saviour the shelter of a tomb, but whose own resting place was thus defiled; there lay S. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland; there, S. David, the patron Saint of Wales; there, S. Dunstan, whose bones were said to have been brought hither, after the sack of Canterbury by the Danes in 1012.^[59] So highly had this spot been revered, that Kings, Queens, Archbishops and Bishops, had given large donations to the Abbey, that they might secure a resting place amongst the hallowed dead. Here lay the mournful historian, Gildas; here the venerated remains of the Venerable Bede; here lay King Edmund, the victim of the assassination at Pucklechurch; here King Edgar, the magnificent; hither, amidst a nation's tears, they bore the heroic Ironside to his rest—and now! 'twas enough to make an angel weep—and a mortal wonder whether the nation had ceased to reverence its ancient greatness; or indeed to believe in Him Who is the God to Whom all live, whether men call them dead or not; and Who has taught us to reverence the sleeping dust, wherein His Spirit once moved and energized."

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Note J, P. 117.—THE GUBBINGS.

The Gubbings were a kind of gipsy race who infested Dartmoor, and who were united in a confederation under one whom the people called the "King of the Gubbings." Old Fuller (p. 398) writes:—

"They are a peculiar of their own making, exempt from Bishop, Archdeacon, and all authority, either ecclesiastical or civil. They live in cotes (rather holes than houses) like swine, having all in common, multiplied, without marriage, into many hundreds. During our civil wars no soldiers were quartered *upon* them, for fear of being quartered *amongst* them. Their wealth consisteth in other men's goods; they live by stealing the sheep on the moors, and vain it is for any to search their houses, being a work beneath the pains of any sheriff, and above the power of any constable. Such is their fleetness, they will outrun many horses; vivaciousness, they outlive most men, living in ignorance of luxury, the extinguisher of life. They hold together like bees; offend *one*, and *all* will avenge his quarrel."

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Note K, P. 135.—THE BLACK ASSIZE.

"Among the memorable events of these times, in which innocent Catholics were everywhere made to suffer, is that which took place in the city and university of Oxford. One Rowland Jenks (a bookseller), was arraigned as a Catholic (for the publication of some unlicensed books against the changes in religion), found guilty, and being but one of the common people, was condemned to lose both his ears. But the judge had hardly delivered the sentence, when a deadly disease suddenly attacked the whole court; no other part of the city, and no persons, not in the court, were touched. The disease laid hold, in a moment, of all the judges, the high sheriff, and the twelve men of the jury. The jurymen died immediately, the judges, the lawyers, and the high sheriff died, some of them within a few hours, others of them within a few days, but all of them died. Not less than five hundred persons who caught the same disease at the same time and place, died soon after, in different places outside the city."—*Rushton's Continuation of Sanders*, Book iv., Cap ix.

Note L, P. 232.—DEMOLITION OF ABBEYS.

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The reader may wonder that men should have been found, so ready to plunder the house of God; so greedy, as the country people everywhere showed themselves, to share in the plunder of the Church.

The following extract from "Ellis' Original Letters," is much to the point, and will at least enlighten us as to their motives, which were of the earth, earthy:—

"I demanded of my father thirty years after the suppression, (that would be in the time of Elizabeth) which had bought part of the timber of the Church, and all the timber in the steeple, with the bell frame, with others his partners therein (in the which steeple hung eight or nine bells, whereof the least but one could not be bought at this day for twenty pounds, which bells I did see hang there myself, more than a year after the suppression), whether he thought well of the religious persons, and of the religion then used, and he told me 'yea,' for he said, 'I did see no

cause to the contrary.' 'Well,' said I then, 'how came it to pass, you were so ready to destroy and spoil the thing that you thought well of?' 'What *should* I do,' said he, 'might I not, as well as others, have some profit of the spoil of the abbey? for I did see all moved away, and therefore I did as others did.' Thus you may see, as well as they who thought well of the religion then used, as they which thought otherwise, could agree well enough, and too well, to spoil them. Such an evil is covetousness and mammon, and such is the providence of God to punish sinners in making themselves instruments to punish themselves and all their posterity, from generation to generation. For no doubt there have been millions that have repented the thing since, but all too late."

FOOTNOTES

- [59] The Canterbury folk denied this and said they had still got them; nay, in the days of King Henry VII. the Archbishop of Canterbury threatened to excommunicate those who venerated the "pretended relics" at Glastonbury.

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