VOICES FROM THE DUST

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“To-day, my Lord, I go back to my cows”

VOICES FROM THE DUST

Being Romances of Old London

and of

THAT

which Never Dies

The GOOD lives on eternally
Only the baser thing can die

BY
JEFFERY FARNOL

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
H. R. MILLAR

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TO

MY OLD FRIEND

HARRY PRESTON

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

WITH

AFFECTIONATE REGARDS

SUSSEX, 1932 JEFFERY FARNOL

CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

No. 1

THE LONDON STONE

I

Few are there of all the hurrying thousands passing daily who ever trouble to glance at this Stone of London Town in its dark and dusty corner, this relic of long-forgotten peoples and illimitable years, whose origin is lost in the dust of speeding centuries. Whence came it? What was it? Who shall say? The fetish, mayhap, of paleolithic man: a stone of sacrifice: a pagan altar? But we know it, lastly, as the measuring-stone for a Roman province.

To-day it lies, dim and grim, behind its rusting iron bars, waiting, as it has always done, for the end of Time,—history concrete for such as possess the eye of imagination, and which having no tongue may yet speak to such few as may hear.

As thus:

It is a day of early summer, and the genial sun sparkles on bright mail and crested helmet, it twinkles on broad spearhead and gleams upon spade and mattock where men labour upon a road that, piercing thicket, swamp, and dense-tangled forest, shall join this hard-won province of Britain with the glory of imperial Rome.

And these soldier-labourers, being also Romans, do not scamp the business, for see now!

They drive two parallel furrows the proposed width of the road: they scoop out the earth between, they pack and ram this excavation with fine earth,—and this is the *pavimentum*. Upon this they now lay small squared stones precisely arranged and mortared,—and this is the *statumen*. Upon this again they spread lime, chalk, and broken tiles pounded hard,—and this is the *nucleus*. Lastly and with extreme care they set large flat stones cut square or polygon-shaped,—and this is the *summa crusta*.

What wonder that such roads have been enduring marvels ever since?

Now, as these Roman legionaries bend to their travail or march upon their wards, come two men, young officers by their mien and look, for, though their bright armour is very plain, their helmets bear lofty crests.

"Barbarians, I tell thee, Metellus," cried the younger with a gesture of youthful scorn. "Yet must we go ever on watch and ward, day and night—Why? Why?"

"Thou'rt new to Britain, Honorius, but shalt see for thyself anon!" answered Metellus, smiling grimly. "When hast fronted the wild rush of their war-chariots, seen

their murderous scythe-blades dripping blood, 'twill suffice thee, Honorius, thou'lt know!"

"Nay, I've heard o' them, man."

"And shalt doubtless see, anon."

"A barbarian rabblement!" snorted the young Honorius.

"Yet Britons!" nodded his comrade, "and I ne'er saw Briton yet that loved not fight. Ay, barbarians are they . . . and yet——" Metellus glanced away to the distant, thick-wooded heights, and the dreamy eyes beneath his glittering helmet seemed suddenly at odds with his hawk-nose and grim mouth.

"Thou hast lived among them, Metellus, I hear."

"Three months among the Regni, to exchange hostages. I have their speech and ——" Metellus stiffened suddenly, his eye grew keen as from the camp away down the road a trumpet blared instant hoarse alarm.

"What is it?" cried Honorius, clapping hand to sword.

"Battle!" answered Metellus, and turned to order his company, where now, in place of spade and mattock, shield and pilum glittered and swayed. For, suddenly, from those wooded heights came a vague stir, a hum that swelled to clamour, to wild and fierce uproar: and forth of those gloomy woods leapt horses and chariots sweeping down with ever-increasing speed, hoofs thundering, and wheels rumbling —rattling wheels whose creaking hubs bore long, curved blades flashing evilly. So down roared these chariots of death, driven by men who laughed and shouted amain, brandishing spears, axes, or long bronze swords.

But upon the road all was silent where these veteran ranks of Rome, shoulder to shoulder, back to back, shields before and spears advanced, stood grim and silent to stem the wild fury of that thunderous onset.

A still and breathless moment, and then upon the road was raving pandemonium, dust and blood and death. For here are the chariots! Their drivers hurl javelins, they thrust with spear or smite with sword, they leap upon their horses' backs, they step upon the pole that they may strike and kill the better. The Roman front sways, totters, is riven asunder, and the blood-spattered chariots are through and away. And now, down upon these broken ranks the British horsemen charge. But a trumpet shrills, the men of Rome close up, stand firm, and British horse and rider go down before the levelled spears or recoil before this iron discipline. So stood the Romans, silent, grim, and orderly as before; only now outstretched upon the road were men who wailed dismally or lay very mute and still, with litter of chariots shattered or overturned, and dead or dying horses.

Then Metellus, knowing the attack was sped, wiped and sheathed his sword and

looked about for his young comrade Honorius, and presently espied him beneath a broken chariot, his youthful body hatefully mangled. Stooping, he touched his pallid cheek. The dying youth opened dimming eyes and sighed.

"Metellus, thou wert . . . right. These Britons are surely men. As for me . . . ah, well! . . . it is . . . for Rome. . . ."

Thus, then, they fought and laboured upon the road, these men of Rome, in heat and cold, wetting it with their sweat, splashing it with their blood, and dying now and then—but the road went on. For Rome's mighty fist, having grasped, held fast awhile: before invincible pilum, short sword, and rigid discipline the proud tribes, Regni, Silures, and Bibroci, gave back, slowly, sullenly, and vanished amid their impenetrable country of marsh and forest, beaten yet unconquered, and biding their time.

Thus, upon a summer's eve, young Bran, son of Cadwallan, King of the Regni, tightened the strings of his bronze war-helm and, leaning upon his sword, peered down through quivering leaves and above dense-tangled thickets to where in the vale below broad and white and straight as arrow ran the great new road.

"Plague seize 'em!" he growled fiercely. "They should be in sight ere now. What shall keep 'em, think ye?" And, from the denser wood behind, came a harsh yet jovial voice in answer, the voice of Tryggan, his foster-father, old in war and accounted wise in counsel:

"Patience, fosterling! They were ordered for Anderida, we know, and, being Romans, come they will."

"Romans—ha, curse them!" muttered young Bran, lifting his knotted fist. "And in especial do I curse Metellus the centurion!"

"Thy hate for him waxeth ever, Bran?"

"Hourly, since first he plagued my sight. Thrice have we met in battle, and yet he lives. And my cousin Fraya looks on him over-kindly—and he a Roman!"

"Why, he is a comely youngling, Bran."

"Yet a Roman! And therefore to be hated. So pray I the God o' the Grove, yea, the Spirit o' the running water, I meet him in fight this day! Think you my father shall be ready?"

"Yea, verily! Trust Cadwallan. Yonder he lies across the valley with all his powers, yet not so much as a blink of helm or spear! And moreover——Stay! What's there? Now watch, eyes all—hearken!"

Leaves a-flutter in the gentle wind, a bird carolling joyously against the blue, a stealthy rustling sound amid the underbrush hard by, where armed men crept . . . and then above all this, faint and far, a throb of rhythmic sound drawing nearer, louder,

until it grew to the rattle and thud of slung shield and spear, with the short, quick tramp of marching Roman infantry. Young Bran smiled fiercely and, tossing back his long fair hair, glanced down at the eager faces of his crouching followers and drew his sword.

"Be ready, men of the Regni!" he muttered. "This hour shall your thirsty swords drink deep. Where I go, follow and kill!"

"No mercy, then, princeling?" murmured grey-headed Tryggan.

"Mercy?" snarled Bran. "Ha, meseemeth you also look too kindly on these accursed Romans! Kill, I charge ye, kill all! Yet stay! Spare only Metellus, for he is mine; him will I give to the priests for our Sacred Fire. So—pass the word! And watch for my signal."

Far off upon the road there presently appeared a small company of soldiers, crested helmet and spearhead blinking redly in the sunset glow, a serried company, their files trim and orderly, their short, quick stride bringing them rapidly nearer, until these many hidden eyes might descry grim faces and sturdy limbs and one who marched before accoutred like his fellows, except that his helmet bore a loftier crest. Nearer they swung, rank on rank, veterans all by their showing—lean, sinewy fellows with eyes bright as their armour.

"Come!" roared Bran and leaped, long sword aloft—and up from bracken and sheltering thicket sprang his fierce company and followed hot-foot where he led.

From the road a trumpet sounded, shields flashed and spearheads glittered as the Romans wheeled to meet the charge.

Though surrounded and beset on all sides the Roman columns held fast; British long-swords whirled and fell, but the serried Roman spears swayed and thrust, and the short, two-edged swords bit deep, and thrice, for all their desperate courage, the Britons were flung back.

"Metellus!" roared Bran, raging amid the fray. "Ha, Metellus, I'm for you. Come!"

"So ho, Bran!" answered the hated voice of Metellus, rising loud and clear above the din. "Come, then, and taste again of Roman steel." But between them was a rocking close-locked press, and so they raged for each other in vain.

Then was an added tumult as down from the opposite steep charged Cadwallan with all his following. And presently, hemmed in thus at every point, the Roman ranks swayed, staggered, broke at last and were smitten and trampled into the bloody dust.

Breathless, half-blind with sweat, young Bran beheld a lofty crest that reeled and drooped beneath a hail of blows, and, roaring, he leapt and bestrode Metellus the

centurion as he fell.

"Off!" he gasped, beating back his fellows. "'Tis the accursed Metellus! Off, I say! He is mine!"

So the fierce British warriors drew sullenly away and stood gazing at conquered and conqueror in a dark and scowling ring.

Coming weakly to an elbow, Metellus peered up at Bran from beneath his battered helmet and, blowing blood from his lips, laughed faintly.

"What, Bran, dost live yet? Then here and now I die. . . . Strike, Briton!"

"Not so!" answered Bran, stooping to glare into that bloody face. "Dog of a Roman, my hate is all too large to slay thee gently so. Thine shall be a death less kindly."

Then was sudden shout, the ring of warriors parted, and so came Cadwallan the king, trampling and spurning the Roman dead beneath his gold-studded sandals.

"Well sped, my son!" he cried in his great booming voice. "A right noble fray, boy! What have ye there under foot? Why, by the Sacred Oak, 'tis the proud Metellus! How now, Oh noble Roman? What's the word, Sir Daintiness?"

"Death, Majesty!" answered Metellus, dabbing at the gash above his brow. "Death beyond all doubting."

"Death indeed since Roman you be."

"Ay, good my father!" nodded Bran. "But, noble sire, I crave as boon the manner of his dying."

"Why, verily, boy, so death it be. Yet, for thy deeds this day boon shouldst have, were it—even his life."

"Life?" cried Bran, spurning his foe with passionate foot. "Nay, father and king, he shall to the Stone of Sacrifice, the Sacred Fire shall lick him, sire, ay, devour him before my eyes."

"The Fire?" repeated Cadwallan, thumbing his great chin, and glancing askance at his fierce son. "The Fire, boy? 'Tis an evil death and . . . Well, so be it! Take up the prisoner."

"Ay, lift him, bear him tenderly!" cried young Bran. "Cut withies for a litter that he travel soft. Ha, dog of a Roman, I hate ye so perfectly I'll cherish ye with loving care lest Death snatch ye from me too soon!"

"Barbarian!" retorted Metellus faintly. "Oh Bran, I despise thee so vastly I had rather die than suffer thy fellowship!"

Julius Octavius Metellus, centurion of the Seventh, his hurts duly tended, full fed, close prisoned yet well cared for that he might prove hearty and strong to endure the full anguish of his dying, stood looking through the bars of his cell with eyes eager and expectant, yet saw no more than this: a green garth shady with trees, and in the midst an oak, mighty with age, whose gnarled branches shaded a stone something wider and longer than a man; a stone rough-hewn and blotched, here and there, with stains other than those of weather.

Philosophic in adversity and something of a poet, he composed verses of love and life and death, but, being also young, more especially of love and death; and so passed the long hours.

Daily he looked forth of his prison-bars, and always with the same wistful expectancy, only to behold the aged tree and grimly stone, particularly the stone, so that he came to know it very well, its every evil blotch—at which times his Muse led him deathwards.

At last, upon an evening when cow-bells tinkled drowsily from lush meads, he saw her. Tall and proud and gracious as he had dreamed her, radiant in young beauty from red-bronze hair to slim, buskined foot, her slender middle clasped by a jewelled girdle that clung about her loveliness as if it too had sense enough to love her. Against her rounded bosom she bore a sheaf of new-gathered flowers; coming to that stone beneath the oak she there disposed her flowers, hiding those ugly blotches 'neath their beauty and at this moment she turned and gazed up at the prisoner and, seeing the adoration of his eyes, she reached out her hand, her red lips parted in a tender smile—but even then came the distant note of a hunting-horn, the baying of hounds, and with a lingering, eloquent look she sped away, leaving that grimly stone a thing of beauty and in the prisoner's heart a song of joy.

This night came sturdy, jovial Tryggan, something stealthily, and, closing the massive door behind him, set broad back thereto and nodded. Said he:

"Metellus, thou'rt a Roman and therefore 'tis certain, something of a dog. Yet, being dog of war, I dare to think thee something also of a man, and so it is that one I love would not have thee die awhile, deeming thee fit for kinder things, mayhap."

"Oh man," said Metellus, rising to greet him, "Oh Tryggan, what's your meaning?"

"Our princess! The maid Fraya."

Now at this Metellus bowed his head, his eyes very bright.

"Fraya!" he whispered. "By all the great gods——"

"Stint thine oaths, Roman, and hearken! She deeming thee worthy sweeter thing than death—and such a death!—I needs must think the like——"

“Ah, generous Tryggan——”

“Nay, Roman, she plagues me, she plagues me unceasing; moreover she is . . . dear to me! So to-night when the moon tops the oak grove yonder, be waking! I command the guard this night—woe’s me.” So saying, Tryggan sighed, nodded, and was gone.

And now Metellus, philosophical no longer, paced his cell with impatient foot, dreaming breathlessly of what was to be, and each time he scanned the climbing moon the name “Fraya” was on his lip. Up, up, in serene, white majesty rose the full-orbed moon, yet slower surely than ever in all the memory of man; up and up in ever-brightening glory until it topped the oaks at last. The great door swung heavily open; a soft voice breathed:

“Metellus . . . Oh Julius!”

“Fraya—dear love!” he whispered, and then she was in his arms, trembling to the passion of his kisses.

“Haste! Oh, haste!” she panted. “Give me thy hand. Now—hush thee!” Thus sped they side by side, and never a sound until they were out beneath the moon, running hand in hand; so she guided him until, within a place of shadow, they came on Tryggan holding a tall white horse.

“Up, Roman!” he whispered fiercely. “Up and away! I see a light where none should be, so here’s danger for us all in tarrying. Away, Fraya!”

“Then will I go with thee, Julius,” she whispered.

“No!” quoth Tryggan. “’Twas not so agreed. Away, girl! Nay, little one, he but rides to his death; ay, so—and his death shall be thine——”

“Then shall it be sweetly welcome! Julius, take me, for——”

The stilly night was riven by a sudden wild shout and growing hubbub as the fugitive sprang to saddle.

“Oh!” cried Fraya. “Oh beloved Julius, leave me not to perish alone!”

“Never think it!” he answered, and stooping, caught and swung her up before him.

“Princess,” groaned Tryggan in despair, “thou’rt betrayed. The Roman rides to death, and thou——”

“Spur!” cried Fraya, as came a rush of feet, and, turning, Metellus had brief vision of Bran’s hated face, and then the great horse leapt, reared, and was away.

Fast they rode across an open mead, through rustling wood, by forest glades, plunging deep and ever deeper into the leafy wilderness; yet here, dark though it was, Fraya’s white hand directed their going. Even so needs must he stoop oft-times to kiss her eyes, her cheek, her silky hair, murmuring words of adoration and vows

of deathless love, until, what with the wonder of their young passion and the glamour of this midsummer night, they clean forgot their peril.

"Wilt love me always?" she pleaded. "Wilt honour me though I am a Briton?"

"To the end of my life, ay, and beyond!" he vowed. "Oh my Fraya, to the end of Time itself!"

"When didst love me first, Metellus?"

"When first I saw thee."

"'Twas when thou didst come in the matter of hostages," she murmured happily. "Oh, I mind it well—thy bright armour, thy dear, kind eyes! It seems long since."

"And yet, my Fraya, I do surely think I loved thee in my boyish dreams, long ere I came to Britain, long ere these bodily eyes beheld thy beauty and loveliness."

"Ah, marvellous strange!" she murmured. "'Twas even so I dreamed of thee, thy dear, dark head, these proud, gentle eyes, thy gait—all these were nothing strange to me."

"So, Fraya, dear, mine Heart, mayhap we have met and loved ere this . . . in some other world, some other age. Who knoweth—who shall say?"

"Hearken!" she cried suddenly, clasping him in the protecting passion of her arms. "Dost hear?"

"Nothing, my Heart."

"Ay, but I did! Ah—'tis there again!" she cried, as, faint with distance, rose the shrill clamour of a horn. "'Tis Bran!" she gasped. "'Tis Bran, I know his moot. Now ride amain. Oh Metellus, speed, for death surely follows hard!"

"Fear not, loved soul, they are yet afar."

"Nay, but Bran knoweth these woodlands, every glade and clearing. . . ."

And now, by reason of her terrors, Fraya misguided him, and going astray, they blundered amid mazy thickets and floundered into perilous slough and, or ever they won free, their pursuers were in full cry.

"Julius, beloved," she murmured, after some while of furious going, "they are close on us! I fear me 'tis the end. We have found again this great wonder of our love but to lose it awhile."

"Ha, they ride but three!" cried Metellus, glancing back. "Oh, for a sword! Yet if indeed I must lose thee, Beloved, willingly I'll die also. Yet would I smite Bran from life first!"

"Ah, Metellus, 'tis a deadly thing, this hate betwixt ye twain!"

"And most strange, my Fraya, for as I seemed born loving thee, so with life came hate for him."

“Yet hate is vain and empty thing, Metellus; ’tis waste of life.”

“’Tis death!” he answered twixt shut teeth. “To him or me.”

“To both!” she sighed. “To both, full oft, till Death at last shall lesson ye, and your hate be changed to love and amity. I see, I know! Life floweth ever like Time itself! . . . And now, ah, my Julius, kiss me farewell awhile, for here must we die . . . yet not for long, since Life is stronger than Death.”

“Why, how meanest thou, my Heart?”

“See! Yonder is chasm no horse may leap, so let us here await Death. Let us go out into the dark together until together we find Life again.”

But Metellus, rising in his stirrups, surveyed that dreadful gulf; then, clasping Fraya to his heart, he set his teeth and, with voice and hand and goading heel, urged the great white horse faster . . . faster yet . . . then, shouting suddenly, he plied hand and heel anew, lifting the mighty stallion with cunning wrist. . . . A rush of wind! A jarring shock! A wild scramble of desperate hoofs, and the brave horse, winning to level ground, gasped and fell. Half-dazed, Metellus staggered to his feet uttering a glad cry to see Fraya already upon her knees.

“Safe!” he gasped, lifting her in eager arms. “The Gods are with us, Beloved!”

But, speaking no word, she pointed, and, glancing thitherward, he saw Bran rein up his rearing steed upon the opposite brink of the chasm, saw him whirl up his long arm . . . and in that moment Fraya flung herself upon Metellus, clasped him in the shelter of her arms, with words of passionate love ending in an awful, sobbing groan; and looking down he saw her transfixed by the javelin, beheld his hands bedabbled with her innocent blood.

“Die, then, traitorous wanton!” roared Bran and, wheeling his horse, galloped away.

“Ah, Metellus,” she gasped, “Oh Julius! our time of love . . . is not . . . yet. Nay, grieve not, I . . . shall wait for thee . . . shall wait to . . . love thee again . . . at better time. But now . . . kiss me farewell awhile . . . a little . . . little . . . while——”

And so Metellus kissed her and, with her mouth on his, she died.

After some while he gathered bracken-fern and therewith made a bed, and very reverently laid her there, wetting her pale face with his tears.

“Thy bridal couch, Beloved!” he whispered. “And so . . . until we meet again . . . fare thee well!”

And thus he left her with the day-spring bright upon her young loveliness.

The circling years rolled, and, despite battle, raid, and deadly ambushment, the great road crept on.

And the proprætor Julius, Octavius Metellus, scarred veteran of the ceaseless wars, minor poet, great soldier, and famous engineer, grey-headed, haggard of face and sterner than of yore, stood in the midst of Augusta, the proud walled city, his officers grouped attentive about him, for he was busied upon many concerns and amongst them the laying out of divers new streets and fortifications.

"Here," said he, striking heel to ground, "here, as I reckon it, is the very heart of our city as she is and shall be. So here, sirs, will we set up a stone that shall be a notable mark for the measuring of our city to her walls and beyond. So many miles from this stone east or west, north or south, reaching on even unto the very gates of that Rome I shall ne'er see more. Here, then, shall stand yon stone to remain henceforth—ay, long after we are forgot. See to it, sirs, and——"

A trumpet brayed suddenly, armour rang, feet tramped and were still.

"Ah, what's here? You, Vitellius, go see. Nay, here comes one shall tell us."

A tall centurion strode up, grimed with battle and dusty from sandal to plume.

"Why, it is Spartacus of the Seventh, I think?"

"The same, sir, with prisoners new taken out o' the south."

"Let them approach."

So came they, a miserable company, battered, bloody, drooping in their bonds, reeling in their gait; one only of whom bore his head proudly aloft, a very tall man he, fair-haired, with fierce blue eyes, who, beholding the grey-headed, lean-faced proprætor, started and glared, his look aflame with sudden, passionate hate.

"Dog of a Roman!" he cried, uplifting chained fists. "I am Bran, King of the Regni, prisoner,—yet unconquered still, scorning Rome and all her works and hating thee, Metellus, in this my death-hour—hating thee in life present and to be! So, thus I spit on and defy thee, Roman dog!"

"Slayer of women!" said Metellus, his haggard brow unruffled, his voice serene. "Truly Death hath found thee. Strike me off his kingly head!"

"Here, sir?" enquired one.

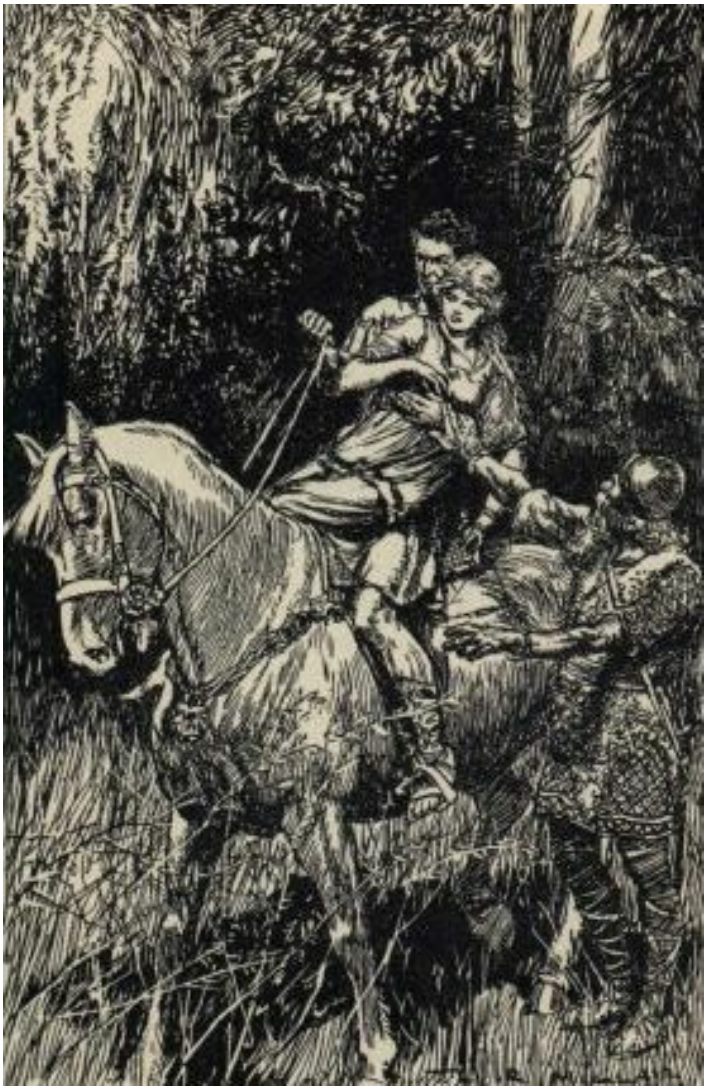
"Indeed! Our stone yonder shall serve, for I must see him die."

"Watch then, dog!" laughed Bran, turning towards the great stone that lay hard by, a stone something wider and longer than a man. "We Britons die as we live, unfearing. Well, Death taketh us all somewhen, Roman, me to-day, thee hereafter. But somewhere, at some time, we shall live again to hate and fight anew—and next time I'll watch thee die! So look to it thou Roman dog!"

Then Bran, unclasping from brawny throat his golden torque, cast it aside,

glanced up to heaven and round about, laughed defiantly, and falling on his knees before the stone, bowed his unconquered head to the stroke. . . .

And presently they set up the great stone, wet with the blood of the last British King, planting it deep, for the useful purposes of survey: a mark for unborn generations to wonder at, a mark that, broken and battered, stands to-day for each and all to see—the imperishable London Stone.



“The Roman rides to death”

No. 2

THE SANCTUARY—WESTMINSTER ABBEY

I

Since that pale, pious man—feeble king yet potent saint—called Edward the Confessor was laid in grave within his new great minster on Thorney Isle, the place has been deemed holy, a sanctuary for the hunted wretch, a place for prayer and the miraculous cure of ills, bodily and mental.

Had these grey walls the faculty of speech, what tales they might recount, what unrecorded stories of life and death, of joy and grief, what long-forgotten tragedies! Yet surely none more tremendous than that of those dim days when Saxon England fell.

The roar and tumult of Senlac's bloody slopes, those cries of victory and death, have long since passed away. The shame of slavery, the long years of bitter oppression have gone, thank God, and are forgotten. Proud Norman and hardy Saxon, uniting, have left descendants as proud, as courageous, yet greater than either, still marching in the van of the nations. To-day Saxon Harold is only a name, Norman William but a memory, yet how real were they, those virile ancestors of ours, and how very much alive upon that dim, far-distant October morning when: . . .

Young Godric of Brandon Holm leaned across the Saxon breastwork, that inner shield-wall and last defence manned by the chosen valour of England, where flew King Harold's golden banner, the begemmed Dragon Standard of Wessex.

A goodly man was this youthful thegn of Brandon, and very warlike in his gleaming helmet and ringed mail, as he stood shading fierce blue eyes from the early sun of this fateful morning to stare away across gentle, grassy slopes, over valley and misty swamp, to that opposite range of hills where, beneath waving gonfanon, pennon, and fluttering banderol, rank upon rank in three great companies, was marshalled the eager host of William, Duke of Normandy.

Long stood young Godric gazing on that dark array, heedless of the unceasing stir about him where, mustered beneath the standard, stood the lithesmen of London, while far to left and right, above the rampart of shields, mail glittered, broadsword and axe-head gleamed as these men of Saxon England, King Harold's own housecarls, his kin and chosen jarls and thegns, strengthened their defences and made them ready against the coming onset.

A great hand clapped down on Godric's mailed shoulder, and starting round he

beheld the smiling, ruddy face of Wiglaf Ericson, the mighty thegn of Bourne, a cheery giant, grey eyes twinkling beneath bright helm, long sword on thigh, and ponderous war-axe slung about his brawny neck.

"What, Godric!" quoth he. "D'ye peak, lad, d'ye pine?"

"Tush, man!" answered Godric, scowling. "Amid yon teeming thousands I seek me a pennon, the blue saltire of de Broc, my sworn and hated foe."

"They be all thy foes, lad."

"But, in especial, one!"

"Ha, dost mean Gilles de Broc, him thou dost name my rival and the cause o' thy sweet sister Githa's sighs?"

"Himself!"

"Then short rede to him this day, say I!" quoth the gigantic Wiglaf, his good-humoured visage darkening.

"Ay, verily!" nodded Godric fiercely. "Yonder he should ride 'neath the Pope-blessed banner of Duke William, being sib to him."

"See!" cried Wiglaf, pointing. "The robber-rogues muster well, down yonder; and yet for all their brave showing they be more o' monks than fighting-men,—shaven polls, d'ye see, and never a beard among 'em."

"What fools say thus, Wiglaf?"

"Grimbald. He and his spies are in but now from viewing their array."

"Then, sir, I say these same shavelings be stout knights all and lusty men-at-arms as we shall prove ere sundown. These be the pick and very flower of all Normandy, as I do know."

"Ay, sooth, thou wert at the Norman's court with our Harold ere we made him king. Ha, knights and men-at-arms, say you? Why, very well, say I,—for by the great rood at Thorney Minster, I'd liefer crack crown o' lusty knight than monkish mazzard, ay, would I! Here shall be goodly fight—ha?"

"Never doubt it!" answered Godric, scowling at the Normans' wide-flung battle-line. "And half our veteran levies beyond Humber! Verily Harold had been wiser to bide behind the walls of our London till England rallied to him. As 'tis, our force, the half of it, is but of rustics ill-armed, boors, serfs and the like——"

"Yet, being Saxons, lad, they should fight well and lustily."

"And these Norman thieves out-man us three to one!"

"Well, by the Bones, the more honour to us, then!" cried Wiglaf, his golden beard bristling. "As for me, I've old Brainbiter here shall even the odds somewhat!" and he patted his great, broad-bladed battle-axe. "Ay, by the Blood, he wrought right well at Stamford fight and shall this day be good for ten, a score, ay, half a

hundred o' the dogs, an the gentle saints prove kind. Howbeit, an Wiglaf die he shall take a full tale o' Normans for company."

"Well, as for me, Wiglaf, content I'll be with the life of single one——"

"Ha, by the Holy Nails! One, say ye? But a poor, scurvy one, lad?"

"But that one—mine enemy! To see him die 'neath mine axe! To feel him agonize upon my sword—ho, this shall suffice me!"

"Art a lusty hater, Godric, but to-day——"

"Hate?" cried the young jarl. "'Tis my life——"

"'Tis death, and the soul's destruction!" said a voice, and to them came a grey friar, a small, lean man who limped.

"Away, shaveling!" cried Godric savagely. "Preach not to me. Hence, I say!" The friar drew a pace nearer:

"My son," said he, gently, "needs must I preach to thee and all men the words of One that said 'Love thine enemy.' For by love only cometh salvation, and he that forgives his enemy findeth a friend."

"Off!" cried young Godric. "Prate no more. I tell thee hate is the very soul of me!"

"So shall thy soul be changed, my son. For thou, great lord, like the humble serf, art very son of God, and He shall chasten thee."

The gentle voice was lost in sudden shout swelling to a lusty Saxon cheer while sword, brown-bill, and broad axe flashed in welcome as up rode Harold the King with his brothers Gurth and Leofwine and, dismounting beneath the bejewelled banner, strode forward, a very comely, well-shaped man, light-treading despite weighty helm and bright-ringed hauberk.

"What, Godric—and thou, good Wiglaf! Greeting, noble lords!" quoth he, and gave a hand to each. But now were others, of high and low degree, eager to look upon their chosen king, to touch his hand and sue a word from him. So there beneath the banner Harold spake them, loud and clear:

"Ye men of mine, stout friends and comrades all, here stand we in arms this day for homes, for wives, and this, our land. Yonder crouch the Norman wolves to raven and destroy. Thus upon our swords doth rest the fate of all to us most dear. So, for the safety of our homes, the honour of our women, the glory of our race, let us smite, good comrades all, whiles life be ours. And now farewell, sirs. To your posts, and God defend us!"

And presently, as he stood, his quick, blue eyes glancing hither and yon, spake the mighty Gurth, and he sore troubled, for Gurth loved him beyond all men:

"Harold, good brother and king, the oath thou didst swear to Duke William upon

most holy relics doth grieve us—us that love thee, and, in especial, myself——"

"Nay, Gurth, here was trick most base and vile!"

"Yet, lord—'twas an oath, and the relics very holy. Wherefore now, lest such great sacrilege bode ill for thee this day, go hence and leave us, that swore no oath, to fight——"

"Not so, Gurth, my brother. Ne'er will I stand by whiles others fight and . . . Ha, there sound their clarions!" cried Harold, and out flashed his sword. "Now smite we all for God and our right!"

And so with hoarse blare of trumpets, with thunderous Norman shouts of "Dex aide" and Saxon roar of "Harold and Holy Rood," began this ever-memorable battle of Senlac that was to change the destiny of England and shake the very world.

All day long, from early morn to set of sun, the battle roared unceasing. Up and down, to and fro, surged this desperate conflict, until the trampled slope was churned to bloody mire thick-strewn with dead and wounded. Hour after hour headlong valour of attack was met by defence as unflinching and courageous until, before the battered shield-wall, the Norman dead lay piled, horse and man, in ghastly heaps.

Yet on came the invaders, nothing daunted, to smite and be smitten, launching their fiercest attacks where flew the Dragon banner, for here fought Harold the King with all his chosen, thegn and churl and serf with the bold citizens of London; here young Leofwine plied deadly spear, here smote the mighty Gurth, while, hard by, Wiglaf's terrible axe rose and fell; and here, too, fierce Godric thrust with tireless arm, seeking ever the hated face of his enemy. So here was blood and death and shock of crashing blows until the sun went down. But the Saxon rampart, grimly stained and direly battered, showed still unbroken above the ever-growing heaps of Norman dead.

"Splendour of God!" cried Duke William, as his shattered columns recoiled at last before the resistless sweep of Saxon sword, brown-bill, and shearing axe. "Stand, sirs, stand! Behind ye is the sea, dishonour and death: before ye is life and a marvellous rich booty. On, sirs, on!"

But, wearied with the long and desperate affray, breathless, shaken and awed by those ghastly piles of dead, his mighty following stood sullenly at bay. Then to him rode his half-brother Ode, the fighting Bishop of Bayeux and held him a while in counsel.

"Oho, archers—archers!" roared William, and galloping among their scattered ranks, he snatched the nearest bow and setting arrow on string, shot it high in air to drop within the Saxon barriers.

"Launch me your shafts so!" he commanded.

Now the gigantic Wiglaf, ghastly with slaughter, leaned upon the long shaft of Brainbiter, whose great, dimmed blade showed notches here and there, and panted:

"Aho, Godric, what shall mean this respite, think ye?"

"Some cursed Norman trick!" gasped young Godric, staring at the blood oozing slowly through his riven mail.

"God send our Saxon hotheads be not lured from their defences!" quoth Harold the King, glancing right and left along their battered line.

"Ha, by the pyx, I'm dry!" mourned Wiglaf.

And then . . . down upon them rained the deadly arrow-shower, and, as men reeled and died, up, up against them once more, fierce and relentless, thundered the attack.

And now at the shield-barrier was close and bitter fray; and now it was also that, amid the reeling press, Godric at last beheld his enemy's hated hawk-face, and cried aloud:

"Ho, Gilles—Gilles de Broc!" And Sir Gilles, seeing, would have turned aside, but his snorting war-horse bore him near, and thus fought they, sword to sword, till the raving battle tore them asunder; and when Godric, leaping upon the barrier, would have followed, Wiglaf's mighty hand plucked him back.

And ever down upon them, from the darkening sky, rained the deadly arrows, and one most fateful of all! For, uttering a hoarse gasp of agony, King Harold dropped his bloody sword and reeled back and back till Godric, staying him with out-flung arm, saw him pierced through brow and eye with a quivering arrow. So stood the King a while, groaning in his anguish; then, plucking forth the shaft, stretched out hands that groped piteously.

"A sword!" he gasped. "A sword——!"

But, even then, the wall of shields was riven at last, the battle roared upon them, and Harold the King was down.

And so came dusk, lit by the glimmer of clashing steel, dreadful with cries of pain and thunder of trampling hoofs where horsemen leapt the shattered barriers, crushing alike the living and the dead. Yet still, amid that din and wild confusion, the Saxons, thegn and churl and men of London, fought back to back around the banner of their dying king.

"Godric . . . ho, lad—art there?"

"Ay, but here's our end. Good-night to thee, bold Wiglaf. . . ."

"Verily, friend, here dieth . . . Saxon England. So . . . by the Blood . . . here dieth Saxon Wiglaf!"

So saying, the death-smitten giant whirled aloft his mighty axe and, roaring like a Berserk, leapt into the close-locked fray and was gone.

And now it was that bold Leofwine fell, and heroic Gurth, slaying, was slain.

Thus came night.

Now Godric, lying half-smothered beneath the dead, heard strange, small cries, and sudden, thin whimperings, for the roar of conflict had ceased at last. He beheld a flickering light, felt hands, strong yet kindly, lift him, and saw dimly a hawk-face, streaked with blood and sweat, beneath a dinted helmet.

"Ah . . . Gilles!" he gasped. "I yearned amain to slay thee, but . . . the fortune's thine. So now, here's my throat!"

"Nay, Godric, our fighting shall be done with henceforth, I pray."

"Thou'rt a cursed Norman——"

"And thou a valiant Saxon. So let there be amity betwixt us and all kindliness . . . for Githa's sweet sake."

"Thou'rt hated foe!"

"And would be trusty friend."

"So? Then . . . give me—death!"

"Take life."

"Ah, God of Battles," groaned Godric, "let me die a free man still!"

Then, with bloody head pillowed on his enemy's mailed breast, young Godric, thegn of Brandon Holm, closed his eyes.

II

The noble Minster of Thorney, that we call Westminster Abbey, was new in those days and famous for its great rood or cross. And hither daily at sunset came Githa, Lady of Brandon Holm, to kneel before this cross and supplicate the divine mercy on her England, her brother Godric, and one beside, whose name she never uttered.

"Let England stand secure, Oh, God; defend her from shame of conquest and Norman thrall; Oh God, let our England stand! Spare Thou my brother in the conflict and temper Thou his fierce soul. And now I pray Thee for—him, Oh God, for him that is our enemy, yet him I needs must love. Oh, be Thou merciful to him . . . let him not die."

Now, as she prayed thus passionately, rose a sudden wild uproar, the clamour of many voices, a rushing of feet that, coming rapidly nearer, filled this holy place with unseemly riot, fearful cries of men, the shrieks and wailing of women and children:

"Death! Death! The Normans!"

The Lady Githa rose up, tall, very pale yet very stately, and turned to meet these poor fugitives who fled hither for sanctuary from the terrors without; and many among them knew and hailed her piteously:

"'Tis the Lady of Brandon! Oh lady, save us! There is death in the city! Fire ——"

Now amid this rabblement she espied a squat, red-headed fellow, one of her own serfs, and him she beckoned with slender, imperious hand:

"What, then, Cnut?" she demanded clear and loud despite quivering lips. "What's here? Speak!"

"The Normans!" he cried. "The Normans be on us, Lady. . . . They kill and burn! There be villages aflame beyond bridge. Dead folk i' the streets! Women—ay, and children! Hell's loose!"

"Ay, 'tis the end of the world!" cried another voice. "'Tis death——"

A sudden shrill and dreadful screaming, a trampling of armed feet, a glitter of steel; the whimpering fugitives were hurled aside, and soldiers appeared, grim, mail-clad figures dusty with travel and fouled with recent slaughter, at sight of whom the Lady Githa shrank appalled, until being beneath the great Rood she paused there, pale, trembling, yet resolute. But now, at the sight of her rich attire and proud young beauty, there was a roar of hoarse cupidity. Brutal hands clutched her, evil faces leered upon her trembling loveliness, but even as her captors plucked at and strove with her, down upon them whanged the flat of a sword, and a shrill though commanding voice cried:

"Off, dogs—off! Here's meat for your betters!"

At the well-known voice the men leapt aside, and Githa beheld one whose thin lips curled in a slow smile as his narrow eyes drank in the lure of her revealing dishevelment.

"Aha! Dian!" he murmured. "Venus herself! As goddess I'll worship thee, and woman o' my delight. So—come to thy master!" And, thus murmuring, he seized her, swift and sudden, in clutch so shaming her womanhood that, forgetting pride, she screamed and, in her extremity, cried the name she had not spoken in her prayers:

"Gilles de Broc! Oh Gilles!"

And as if in answer to her prayer, there was the furious ring of horse-hoofs, the throng of fugitives and gaping soldiery was burst asunder, and into that holy sanctuary galloped a mailed knight, a slender man, hawk-faced, dark-eyed, fierce and quick with hot youth.

"Ha, Fitzurse!" he cried. "Thrice damned, accursed Fulk!" Even as he spoke, out flashed his sword and he was afoot. And there, before the shrine of Saxon kingly saint, the Norman long-swords flashed and smote and thrust, while Githa, gasping prayers, sank to her knees.

So mailed feet stamped and steel rang, till there came a shrill cry; and then Githa felt a powerful arm about her, and in her ears was a breathless, dearly-remembered voice:

"Lady Githa! Oh lady beloved! None shall harm thee . . . nought touch thee . . . fear no more. Thine am I to thy dear service. Thy will shall be my will ever. Come now. Come you home!"

So saying he raised her with a reverent gentleness, and, setting her upon his tall steed, went beside her through the silenced company, forth into the sunset.

"Ah, Messire Gilles," she sighed, "surely the merciful God sent thee!"

"Ay, truly!" he answered, glancing up to meet the tender gratitude of her long, blue eyes. "Though indeed at such dread time I deemed thou wouldst seek sanctuary."

"And . . . Harold the King——?"

"Alas, noble Godwinson lieth dead. Yet a right kingly dying."

"Then woe to my loved England! Now are we Saxons thrall to the Norman."

"Yet, lady . . . ah, Githa, yet is one Norman thrall to thee—here to-day in England as he was a year agone in Normandy."

"And . . . Godric, my brother, know you if he live?"

"Ay, truly, though sore stricken. He waits you now safe in Brandon Holm."

Thus he led her to where certain of his following waited, and with men-at-arms before them and behind he brought her safe through the turbulence and terror of London town.

Thus came they betimes to Brandon Holm, that goodly manor, above which now fluttered the blue saltire of de Broc, beholding which Githa sighed, though very gently.

"So now is Brandon and all else thine by right of conquest."

"Yet will I hold it but for thee, my Lady Githa. 'Twas for this I sued it of Duke William."

"Thou art then my master, Messire Gilles, by right of sword," she murmured, sighing again.

"Yea," he answered, sighing also, "yet master only to thy surer defence."

Side by side they rode across wide garth where, instead of yellow-haired churl and serf, were dark-eyed esquires and men-at-arms. Nevertheless, both within and

without the great house, all was quiet and orderly.

"Thou art truly a gentle conqueror, Messire Gilles!" said she, her sweet voice shaken by the very fervour of her gratitude; and because of this and the light within her eyes his cheek flushed and his sinewy hand fumbled with the bridle-rein.

Dismounting at the wide doorway, he lifted her to earth and led her within the great solar where stood her bower-women to welcome her. Pale-cheeked were they and wide of eye, yet all unharmed. So, having kissed them, as was her wont, she dismissed them with words of gentle comfort.

And now, being alone with Sir Gilles, she made him gracious reverence, saying:

"Welcome to thy manor of Brandon Holm, my lord."

Now at this he glanced from her to tapestried wall, to mighty roof-beams, to herb-strewn floor and, fidgeting with belt and sword-hilt, answered her a little wildly:

"Nay . . . nay, verily, by God's light, I—Ah, Githa, in Normandy a year agone I loved thee yet dared not to speak my love, for thou wert so proud and high, with mighty lords to woo thee. And now . . . to-day I . . . I cannot, for thou art—I——" He heard her laugh and, thinking she mocked, turned away; but then he heard her sob, beheld her eyes bright with tears and, being young, stood amazed.

"Sir Gilles," said she, "oh messire, to-day by cruel battle all that was mine is thine—yea, all save the very heart of me, for that . . . ah, Gilles, that was thine a year agone in Normandy."

Then she was upon his breast, and if his mailed arms hurt her a little, she but loved him the more.

"And now, loved lord," sighed she, striving in his embrace, "let us to Godric with this our new, great happiness. Come, mayhap joy so marvellous as ours shall lessen his grief and win him to quick health. Pray God it may be so!"

But when together they stood beside young Jarl Godric's bed he looked from one to the other with great fierce eyes that burned in the pallor of his face, while from bloodless lips came the harsh whisper:

"Ha, is it so, proud sister? Thy body our victor's spoil? Art then his booty . . . his serf, his leman thrall?"

"Not so, Godric, by God's light!" cried Sir Gilles solemnly. "Githa shall ever be my loved and honoured wife!" But Godric closed his eyes and, scowling, turned him to the wall.

Next morning, when they came to tend the sick man, his bed was empty; Godric, the unconquered Saxon thegn, with his wounds, his fierce heart and implacable soul, was gone.

And some while after, within the stately Minster of Thorney and beneath the

keen eyes of William the new-crowned King of England, Sir Gilles de Broc and the Lady Githa were wed.

And so, upon the wide demesnes of Brandon, at least, peace rested and a great happiness.

III

Years came and went, and beneath King William's heavy foot the soul of Saxon England writhed, defiant still, and still unconquered. Mighty castles, mightily built, scowled upon rebellion; yet the doughty Hereward and his valiant comrades maintained awhile desperate war in and around the swamps of Ely.

Nevertheless, with William's iron rule came laws, evil and good; out of chaos grew order; in town and city was peace, and with peace a growing plenty. The fires of many insurrections were quenched in blood, and in blood died brave Hereward at last, and, his heroic followers slain and scattered, King William and his hard-fighting barons took breath awhile.

Only in the wild wood Saxon steel yet flickered, Saxon bows still twanged, where roamed and fought wild companies of broken, landless men outlawed from hearth and home, to be chased and killed like wild beasts—wolves-heads all. And no man of all these desperate outlaws so powerful, so fierce and merciless as him they called "The Boar."

Now upon a fair June morning when birds carolled and wild flowers bloomed, Gilles de Broc, Earl Marshal of South Sex and lord of Brandon Keep, set forth with a small though veteran company of knights, esquires, and men-at-arms.

Beside the famous earl, on a goodly palfrey, rode his little son, bright-eyed and eager in his small helm and ring mail and very full of breathless question, for this was the first time he had travelled so far.

By the great forest road they went, at easy pace, intending that night to bide at Brockenhurst. Few travellers they met, for the times were still somewhat troublous, and within the forest nothing stirred save sullen charcoal-burners or the flitting antlers of timid deer.

It was afternoon when they came where the road led up between steepy banks crowned with brush. Of a sudden, out from these boskages to right and left, arrows whirred; horses, deep-smitten, reared and fell, men gasped and died, and all was wild confusion. Then forth of the green sprang men, wild and terrible, to slay and plunder; and Earl Gilles, pinned beneath his dead horse, opened swooning eyes to see his small son beside him, blue eyes wide in little, pale face, but sword grasped in

resolute hand.

"My lord," he cried, "oh, father, art hurt?"

"Nay, son, 'tis but my foot. Yet I cannot budge, so get thee down, boy! Down, I say, behind yon bush!"

"But, messire, dear, my father, I have a sword to fend thee——"

"Down, I say! For now must——" A horn shrilled from the bank above and, glancing up, they beheld a very tall, grim man in rusty mail who, pointing down at them with his sword, beckoned to divers of his wild fellows.

"Bring these to me!" he commanded, and vanished amid the thickets.

So, having disarmed and freed the Earl from his dead steed, they pinioned him with thongs and his little son also, who, seeing his proud father murmured not, himself endured as silently, though his blue eyes yearned after his little new sword.

By devious ways amid dense, tangled underwoods and beneath mighty forest trees, the prisoners were marched until, deep amid the wild, they reached a small clearing where burned a fire beside which sat the tall, grim man, bugle-horn about his neck, long-sword across mailed thighs.

"So, Norman thieves," quoth he, scowling at them beneath battered helmet, "slayers of Saxon women, murderers of Saxon children, Saxon am I and men do call me 'The Boar.' Well, boars have tusks to rend withal,—so will I rend ye twain—Norman wolf and cub! And first the cub, for short rede is good rede! Bring hither the cub, Wulfstan!" and slowly he drew his sword.

"Hold, sir Saxon!" said the Earl, his bold eye dauntless as ever, but brow haggard with sharp anxiety. "Rend me, an ye will, but this my son is young, a child innocent of war——"

"Good!" cried the outlaw. "Thus shall he die ere he learn. Bring me the Norman cub, Wulfstan!"

So they urged forward the little captive, who, looking into those merciless eyes, beholding the bright, sharp sword, quailed somewhat and bowed his head; but, seeing thus his own knightly mail, so bright and very new, he stood suddenly upright and stared into the fierce visage so near his own, flinching no more—only he breathed short and quick.

But now the Earl, shivering in his bonds, his lean hawk-face wet and agonized, spake in a voice that cracked strangely:

"Sir Outlaw, take my life, here and now, but set my son to ransom. Give him safe return to my castle of Brandon, and thy guerdon shall——"

"Ha—Brandon? Thy castle of Brandon? Then who art thou, Norman?"

"I am Gilles de Broc, Earl of Brandon, and——"

"Aha,—and this—this thy son will be son also of——?"

"Githa, my loved Countess."

Slowly, slowly the outlaw reached forth his great hands. He drew the child nearer, staring upon him in strange fashion; then lifting off the small helmet, he pushed back the close-fitting camail, discovering a silky shock of curling yellow hair.

"Boy," said he, sharply, "how art named?"

"Godric, messire."

Bowing grim head upon clenched fist, the outlaw stared at the fire awhile, then:

"Why art so named, boy?" he questioned, his face still averted.

"Sir Outlaw," answered young Godric, staring fearfully on that sharp sword, yet speaking boldly as he might, "it was in memory of mine Uncle Godric that was a valiant and noble Saxon."

Then this outlaw, whom men called "The Boar," rose up, his harsh face marvellously transfigured, his sword falling to lie all unheeded, and, looking at the Earl, above that small golden head, he spake in a voice as changed as his look:

"Ha, Gilles—Gilles de Broc, though Norman thou art, this thy son is true and proper Saxon. These bold blue eyes, that quail not at death, this yellow poll,—ha, by Holy Rood, thy boy is Saxon as I or . . . my sister Githa!"

The proud Earl uttered a choking cry; his eyes swam, though his voice was glad and joyous:

"Godric!" he cried. "Is it forsooth thou? Oh, brother, here is not death then . . .?"

"The lad is Saxon!" quoth Godric. "And Saxon slays not Saxon. But thou art Norman . . . yet lord to Saxon lady, and so——" He motioned to his wild men, and the Earl was freed of his bonds by quick and eager hands.

"Godric," said Gilles the Earl, reaching forth his hand, "there is a place of honour for thee in Brandon that hath waited thee these many years, with loving welcome from thy noble sister! And in this England of ours a man's work for thee to do. How say'st thou,—brother?"

"That I am outlaw with these my fellows—outlaws each and every."

"There shall be pardon for them!" cried the Earl, looking round upon the wild company. "Pardon full and free to one and all—pardon and bounty! And this swear I upon my knightly word, for King William, though Norman and mayhap something harsh, is a just man. So Godric, my brother, come thou back to hearth and home; our England needs the like of thee."

"Boy," said big Godric, setting a large finger beneath little Godric's chin that he might look down into those steadfast blue eyes, "thou small Saxon,—little kinsman

and namesake, how sayst thou?"

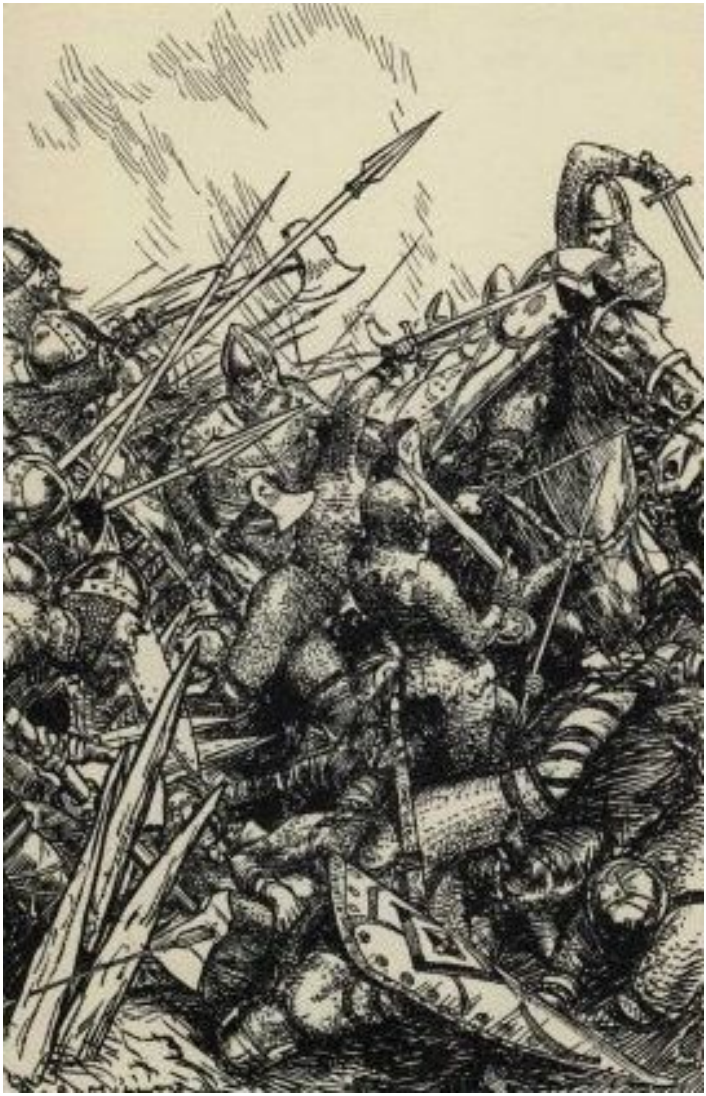
"Come, messire, for I've ever lacked of uncles," said the boy eagerly. "And now, Sir Uncle, an it please thee, I'll have my sword again."

Then Godric the Outlaw laughed and, catching the son within mighty arms, gave the father his hand.

"So be it!" he cried, fronting his eager followers. "Inlaws all are we henceforth! And yet, Gilles," said he as their hands clasped and wrung each other, "and yet—thou art a Norman!"

"Ay, brother," quoth the Earl, "Norman am I; yet there shall come a day, mayhap, in this fair England when there shall be neither Saxon nor Norman but a people greater, mightier,—who knows?"

"Ay, who knows?" said Godric, laying a gentle hand upon small Godric's golden crown. "And yet, my brother, 'spite all thy Norman blood,—here stands a Saxon!"



“Wiglaf’s mighty hand plucked him back”

No. 3

THE RIVER THAMES

From time immemorial our old River has run upon its course, singing among sedge and bending willow, lapping against bank and wall and pier, laughing and chuckling to itself in sunshine and shadow,—but singing ever its song of sighful death and life's joyous renewal, since ever Life was.

Small and insignificant beside other rivers of this planet, our Thames is yet greater than them all in experience of life and death. A silent road of age-old traffic, a crystal highway of pleasure, a defence against foes, it has helped the growth of mighty city and mightier empire.

Old Thames has watched the British village of Ligun Don or Lynne Dun wax to the proud walled city of Rome's Londinium Augusta; it has echoed the rhythmic clash of Cæsar's iron legions, the battle-roar of sturdy Norseman, Saxon, and fierce Dane; flood and fire and death in all shapes it has known while empires crashed to ruin, dynasties rose and fell, and the wondrous city grew and grew—mighty beyond the dreams of its long-forgotten founders.

Now where lives the Englishman, more especially the Londoner, who loves not his old River, the whole two hundred and twelve odd miles of it? For in it and on it and round about it his sturdy forefathers lived and loved, fought, suffered, and died; deep, deep within its silent bosom and in its banks to right and left lie their hallowed bones. Thus, in some sort, old Father Thames is indeed part of us, close linked and knit to our very destiny.

From its rise beyond Cheltenham to its wide outflow it is in itself a symbol of human life; pure at its source as the very Spirit of God, it laughs upon its young way between flowery banks, it grows sombre in the shade of village and town, becomes dark and foul in the great city's mighty shadow, but, flowing on darker, sadder, leaps at last to lose itself in the sweet, clean immensity of ocean. . . .

"And so is it, Gregory," quoth young Miles, gazing dreamful upon the murmurous water at his feet, "so is it I do love our Thames, for verily I do feel as I had known it in other days, dim days, Greg, ere London's Tower was, or London so great."

"Why, small wonder thou shouldst love it, lad, for, sithee now, 'twas yonder atwixt them two trees," answered old Gregory Hooe, the river-man, pointing with a hand gnarled and sinewy from the oar, "ay, atwixt them two trees as the old River brought 'ee to me, of a buxom summer's eve, three-an'-twenty year agone, thanks to the good Saint Cuthbert; for a rare blessing hast been to me, Miles, lad."

“On a summer’s eve the like o’ this?” enquired Miles, leaning his lithe, tall shapeliness upon the long oar he held.

“Ay, lad. ’Twas the old River gave ’ee to me, the saints bless it! Floated ’ee to me in small wicker ark; and a bonny atomy ye were, all lapped i’ fine linen and the jewel slung about the little neck o’ thee!”

“This,” murmured Miles, drawing from the breast of his leathern jerkin a gold medallion set with onyx stone curiously enwrought.

“Ay, lad,—the Pelican in Piety, crowned. The which be a strange symbol and rare, as do make me guess thou wast begot o’ noble blood. Belike some potent lord, a duke mayhap, went to the fathering o’ thee, Miles, or even . . .”

Miles laughed and, thrusting the medallion from sight, clapped a large hand gently upon the old man’s sturdy shoulder.

“Sire me not so, Gregory. Thyself hast fathered me so kindly well, none other would I so love were he the King’s Majesty——”

“Hast said it, lad!” cried old Gregory. “As thou’rt taller and stronger than most men, so is our lord King Edward, our Longshanks. Ay, and thou hast the same small droop o’ the left eyebrow, even as he, the same proud cock o’ chin——”

“Nay, now,” quoth Miles, black brows a-twitch, yet closing the old man’s lips with gentle finger and thumb, “peace, father Greg. No lust have I to Royal bastardy, not I. Thou’rt my father, sir—a boatman I, and therewithal content.”

“God love thee, Miles, now!” said old Gregory, smiling up at his comely young giant. “Love and father thee will I even as this goodly River hath fostered me. Ha, look, son, ’tis a noble stream, our Father Thames; ’tis bread to us, riches, our very life. And heartily do I love it since it gave me thee. So is it twice thy father, ay, and mother too, since verily it bore thee, three-and-twenty year agone. Wherefore God bless our Father Thames again, say I.”

“Amen!” quoth Miles, and, doffing his leather cap, bowed his comely head in smiling reverence to the murmurous, sun-kissed River.

“And now, Father Greg, yonder come Tom and Dickon with their lads to the evening ferogage. So, by thy leave, I’ll up stream to a pool that holdeth noble trout; a crafty fellow hath thrice escaped me.”

“So—good sport, lad. But what o’ supper?”

“’Tis ’i the shallop here,” and he laid his hand on a small boat, a craft somewhat battered with long-usage but painted a soft and tender blue: now blue is the colour of happiness and good fortune.

With a heave of mighty shoulder he launched the shallop, leapt nimbly aboard, and waved a sun-browned hand; then, shipping oars, pulled away up stream.

And as he rowed with long, powerful strokes his dark dreamful eyes gazed where, vague with distance and pink with sunset, rose the massy walls and embattled turrets of London's mighty Tower, and beyond this the lordly palaces, the spires and steeples of the famous city until a bend in the River hid them all.

And, after some while, he came where sighing willows leant to kiss the murmurous waters, and here he turned to make the shallop fast; but in this moment his keen eyes espied a shadow in the tide, and, knowing what this must be, with powerful thrust of oar he sent the light shallop leaping thitherward, and bending dexterously over heeling gunwale he grasped floating tresses . . . then his arm was fast about a woman's body, and winning ashore he laid her gently upon the grass.

An oval face, death pale, 'mid clinging braids of bronze-gold hair, a noble shape, yet all tender, youthful, rounded loveliness. Miles looked and looked and caught his breath for very wonder of her strange loveliness, while with reverent hands he ordered her draperies and, with water-wise skill, strove to woo her back to life.

Yet very still she lay and breathless all, as on the very brink of death; then, suddenly, even as he wrought despairing, her eyes opened on him, eyes that, meeting his, from look of dread grew wondrous tender and radiant with quick gladness. The shapely mouth curved in smile of joyous welcome, and from these pale and quivering lips came a voice sweetly low yet clear:

"Oh Metellus! Loved Julius! Forth of the shadows back to thee come I, since Love is mightier than Death! . . . Oh beloved Julius!" Then a hand was upon his brow, a hand slim and wet and cold. . . . And now, looking into these eyes of dark bewitchment, Miles himself grew sudden cold as death . . . grew warm again with eager life, yet full of great awe; then, trembling with a joy such as he had never known, he clasped her fast in sudden yearning arms.

"Fraya!" he whispered, "Oh Fraya, beloved! Now be glory to all the Gods!" But when he would have kissed her she stirred in his embrace and, uttering a small moan, looked up at him in cold amaze and spake, shivering and petulant:

"Oh alas! These cruel waters will not drown me! I am not dead, then?"

His powerful arms grew lax and, laying her upon the sward, he shivered violently, looked wildly up and around and clasped his head in shaking hands; then quoth he:

"Ah, woman . . . maiden . . . but now thou didst speak me strange words in another voice . . . thou didst look at me with other eyes——"

"Nay," said she, knitting black and prideful brows at him, "I spake not thee!"

"Then here was some enchantment!" whispered Miles, and crossed himself devoutly.

"Oh and alas!" she wailed, "and the River would not drown me."

"Nay, God and His saints forfend!" said Miles, shaking his head in deep perplexity. "Kind Father Thames shall ne'er slay such loveliness, I ween."

"Think ye so?" sighed she. "Then cast me in again to prove thy words; for Father Thames shall kill me an we do but give him time. Then shall I be quit of fear and grateful therefore. So, messire, toss me in again, I do command thee—forthright!" Miles stared, then smiled and shook his head; whereat she frowned again with look high and arrogant, albeit she shivered somewhat:

"How?" she demanded, with the prideful arrogance of lofty birth. "Wilt defy me?"

"Even so!" he answered, and reaching a large boat-cloak from his shallop wrapped it close about her despite feeble resistance.

"Ha . . . messire," she gasped. "Thou'rt presumptuous!"

"Yet no knight, lady!"

"Then who'rt thou to meddle—that darest give me life when I . . . do yearn for death? Who'rt thou to order my fate thus?"

"A water-man, lady, a man o' the River."

"Bold knave, so is thy presumption the greater!"

"Ay, so," nodded Miles; "but now thy so white teeth do begin a-chattering, thy tender body to quake and shiver. Wherefore incontinent I'll bear thee to thy home ——"

"Never, thou river-man; here will I hide and shiver me to death——"

"Then will I carry thee to my good father."

"Then will I cast me again i' the cold Thames!" quoth she, proudly resolute, despite chattering teeth and shaking limbs; wherefore Miles took himself by his smooth-shaven chin, viewing her defiant loveliness as one at loss. Then, stooping, he gathered her in his arms and strode in among the trees and underwoods that grew very thickly thereabouts.

"Ah, th-thou . . . w-water-man," she demanded, chattering, yet looking up at him with eyes no whit afraid, "th-thou large m-man o' the R-river, what wilt d-do now to m-me?"

"Comfort thee!" he answered; and so after some while brought her where, deep hid in mazy boskages, was a little cave that opened in a grassy, bush-girt steep within a leafy dell aglow with sunset.

Here, setting her down, he gathered sticks, dried leaf and fern, struck flint and steel and set a fire going that soon leapt and crackled so merrily that she smiled and reached slim shaking hands to its genial warmth.

"River-man, how art named?" she questioned suddenly.

"Miles, lady."

"Why, 'tis an apt name, for thou'rt mighty and long!" said she, and sat warming herself and looking up at him with a certain arrogant serenity so that his cheek flushed and he stooped to tend the fire.

"Soon," said he, very conscious of her half-disdainful scrutiny, "soon this small cave shall be warm and thou quite dry. In the meanwhile, if ye be an-hungered, lady ——"

"Nay," said she, recoiling. "Food for me hath lost all savour; cates the most delectable I do abhor! Oh, methinks I shall eat never again!"

"Then, by fair leave, I will, lady, for I have not supped!" And away he strode, but very quickly was back again, a goodly bundle under his arm.

"What hast thou there, Master Miles?" she questioned, something plaintively.

"Cold neat's tongue, lady, with cheese, a crusty loaf, and ale," he answered cheerily, setting forth these viands on the grass between them.

"Hast e'er a sup of wine for a poor clammed soul?"

"Alas, no, lady! Here in leather pottle is but ale."

"Ale?" quoth she, shuddering; "'tis rank drink, fit only for poor lusty knaves."

"And water-men, lady."

"So will I adventure me to taste o' thine ale, Master Miles."

"Nay—out on't; here is no cup, lady!"

"Then needs must thou learn me to drink from thy pottle!" she sighed. So, coming beside her on his knees, he steadied the leathern jack while she assuaged her thirst.

"Oh, 'tis a harsh and mannish drink!" said she, making a wry face. "Now eat, Sir River-man Miles, eat and heed not me!" and, bowing her lovely head, she gazed upon the jovial fire, shuddering cosily to its voluptuous warmth.

Now after Miles had eaten awhile he spake, keeping his gaze also upon the crackling fire:

"Thou art, I guess, a noble lady of lofty rank and proud degree."

"I am merest woeful poor maid and desolate."

"Poor maid, and why would ye die?"

"Die?" she murmured, glancing askance at the goodly viands on the grass beside her.

"Wherefore would ye drown?"

"Drown?" she repeated, her blue eyes still intent. "Drown. Ay me . . . yea, forsooth, 'twere better to drown than wed him I do hate. Better lie dead than in his

loathed arms!"

"Verily! Yet why wed one ye hate?"

"Because 'tis I am commanded thereto by—ah, 'tis the will of—my most harsh warden."

"Nay, but ye are of proud, courageous seeming. Defy him."

"Alack, he is such as none may e'er defy!"

"Then wherefore not fly his cruel governance and go free?"

"Free?" she cried, tossing shapely arms in a wild yearning gesture. "Oh, sweet heaven, that I might in very truth! Freedom have I never known, nor ever may—except, mayhap, in death!"

"Thou poor, sweet soul!" murmured Miles, and she, reading in his honest eyes the frank sincerity of his pity, bowed her stately head with a small sob. Then she said:

"So it was I sought to die. Yet am I nothing brave, for whiles I stood, shill-I, shall-I, upon the River's marge, my foot slipped, and in soused I. And being i' the water and it so cold I yearned to live, and swam amain until my robes dragged me down. And then as kindly Death came on me and I no more afeard, e'en then thy rude hand plucked me back to life and—dread o' the to-morrow."

"So now," quoth Miles, "now would I pluck thee from all fear and every sorrow an I might!" After this there was silence some while, she looking, wistful, on the fire again and he on her until at last she, sighing, spake:

"Sigh not for me, thou Miles o' the River. Eat, Sir Water-man, eat, nor grieve for poor woeful me."

"Nay," he answered, "mine hunger is of a sudden strangely fled."

"Why, then," said she, in soft, small voice, "wilt spare me one little bite?" Up started Miles and, upon a manchet of white bread, proffered her a slice of the neat's tongue; the which she, plaintive sighing, took and ate with small, nibbling bites yet lusty appetite.

"Eat thou also!" she commanded. And so, sitting friendly side by side, they shared the supper between them whiles evening crept down, a tender, fragrant, star-gemmed dusk with promise of a radiant moon.

"And," sighed Miles, their supper ended, "must thou soon to wedlock indeed? With one thou hatest?"

"Indeed! Alas!" sighed she.

"Now this," said he, frowning, "this, methinks, shall work thee shame—ay, and misery abiding!"

"This," she murmured, looking on him sadly, "this is wherefore I sought to die."

"But why not seek life, and perchance . . . happiness?"

“As how, good friend?” she questioned eagerly, leaning towards him. “Oh, prithee teach me!”

“Dost love . . . no man?”

“No man in all the world.”

“Why, then,” said Miles, staring hard at the fire, “if thou’rt truly in plight so woeful, wed a man thou dost neither hate nor . . . love . . . as yet.”

“What manner o’ man?” she questioned softly.

“A man o’ Thames—e’en I, lady.”

“But thou—thou lovest me not.”

“Hum!” quoth Miles.

“Nor I thee.”

“’Tis not expected . . . yet mayhap ’twould come—in time . . . who knoweth?”

“Ay, who knoweth!” she sighed, viewing the noble shape of him, dreamy eyed. “Ay, forsooth it might,” she nodded, “an thou couldst first learn to love me——”

“This I promise!” said Miles fervently.

“An wouldst be patient and tender as thou’rt strong?”

“This also I vow thee.”

“Then might I wed thee, Miles. And yet, alack, ’twere but a vain and idle dream! Thy wife or no, hide where we would, they’d snatch me from thy very arms——”

“Ha, not so, by God!” cried Miles, dark head up-flung, dark eyes fierce and bright ’neath scowling brows. “None should touch thee whiles I lived!”

“So should I be thy death!” she mourned.

“So would I die right cheerily in such just cause. Moreover, ay, by Holy Cross, I should not die alone!” Now as he scowled thus, face grim in the fire-glow, mighty fist aloft, she of a sudden rose to her knees, staring on him with a look of fearful wonderment.

“Miles!” she gasped, “Oh Miles . . .!”

“How; what is’t?”

“Now,” cried she, leaning near, “in thy face, thy mien, the very shape of thee, thou’rt like to him I most do fear! Ah, surely thou art nobly born?”

“In sooth,” he nodded, smiling, “borne was I of yon noble Thames and——”

“Hail, son of Thames and fair greeting!” said a deep rich voice. “Ye twain that were, and are, and shall be—greeting!” Into the fire-glow stepped a man; tall was he and very old, for his long hair and beard gleamed silvery white, yet the eye beneath drawn hood seemed bright with fiery youth. Thus stood he, looking down on them with aspect so stately and commanding, though kindly withal, that Miles stood up, cap in hand:

“Sir Ancient,” said he, “who art thou and what wouldst thou here?”

“Leolyn the Harper, I, tall youth, that some do name John the Rhymer, for, like the ancient River yonder, I sing to such as have ears to hear withal.”

“Ay, surely I’ve heard thee,” said the lady, dark brows knit haughtily, proud head aloft. “But now no mind have I to——”

“Truly thou hast heard me sing, lady, but with ears fast shut up like thy proud heart. Yet this night, peradventure, thou shalt hear and know the great truth whereof yon River singeth, my lady Duchess.”

“How—Duchess?” cried Miles in a voice like one sore smitten.

“Indeed, good youth, the Duchess Heloise she—late betrothed to Hugo, lord of Brandon Tower. Ay, yonder sitteth this most high, right noble lady, Duchess of Rouvère, Countess of Framlinghame, Lady of Remy Beckton, and divers many other towers, manors, and demesnes both here and beyond sea—herself, though sounding so many, yet one and indivisible—and moreover ward unto our potent liege lord King Edward the First, whom God preserve!”

“The King’s ward!” gasped Miles.

“Yea—yea!” cried Heloise passionately. “All this am I, and all this would I flee, e’en were it to a fisherman’s mean hut or . . . a River-man’s strong arms!”

“Ah, lady, lady!” stammered Miles, shaking his despondent head. “Here in troth . . . here were bitter folly!”

“Oh,—thou!” cried Heloise, turning fiercely upon the Harper. “Out on thee for knavish, idle chatterbox! Alas, alas, Miles, a prisoner I, throned solitary upon Pomp’s dismal, very peak, a fettered victim to a mighty King’s vile polity, to be given into whatsoe’er man’s arms he will! Ah, Death were sweeter! . . . Oh Miles! . . . Ah, thou meddling Rhymer, I would have told him—after!” Now looking into the yearning passion of her eyes, beholding the surge and tumult of her bosom and all her eager, vital youth, Leolyn smiled and from his cloak took a small harp:

“Proud lady,” said he gently, “most sweet maiden, methinks great Love with tender wing hath touched thy cold heart, so are thine ears open at last. List now and I will sing ye the song old Thames hath sung since ever he ran, which is a song of the three Great Mysteries that are yet matters very simple to such as have ears. Hearken now, sweet children both, and be ye comforted and bold for Life and Love.”

Then Leolyn, standing over against them beyond the fire, unslung his harp, struck divers running chords, and sang in a voice soft and deep and wonder-sweet:

"Pomp and rank, estate and power,
These may pass within the hour,
Fade and languish as a flower
And wither in a day.
But Life and Love and Time, these be
Eternal all—the Deathless Three,
The veritable Trinity,
These ne'er shall pass away.
What though this fleshly body die?
The deathless Soul shall upward fly
Back—where the Fount of Life doth lie
Lost in immensity.
Thus if cold Death a while benight us,
True Love shall like good angel light us
Back into Life—and reunite us
Through all eternity.
For Life, like mighty river flowing,
Ever coming, ever going,
Like God and Time is past our knowing—
The great and Deathless Three."

Now while they yet sat thralled by such sweet singing, Leolyn drew from his scrip a handful of dried herbs and cast them upon the fire:

"Behold!" said he. "Look, children, and know!"

Even as he spoke, up rose a column of vapour that rolled about them, thick and dense and of a marvellous sweet savour,—a smoke that wreathed awhile and thinned away.

Then of a sudden the Duchess Heloise uttered a sweet, glad cry and reached forth eager arms to him that gazed on her with eyes of adoration, a slim man of a noble bearing, sheathed in the glittering battle harness of Imperial Rome.

"Metellus! Oh Julius!" she cried.

"Fraya . . . beloved . . . at last!" he answered; and so they kissed; but lo—the arms about her now were dight in ringed mail, a young hawk-face smiled down on her 'neath gleaming helmet:

"Gilles!" she murmured. "Dear my lord!"

"Githa!" said he. "Sweet my wife!" and kissed her; and then again was wondrous change: a great fellow in triple chain mail, a tender-smiling, mighty man with ruddy hair:

"Oh Gyles!" she whispered.

"My loved Melissa!" he smiled, kissing her; and so again was transformation. . . .

“Ah, . . . thou!” she sighed. “My man o’ the dear River! Take me . . . hold me, Miles!”

“God knoweth that will I!” quoth Miles, and caught her fast and kissed her amain until at last she chid him, saying:

“Nay, now, mine Heart,—no more, with yon Rhymer to see us!” So, unwilling, Miles released her, and then she clung to him again with a despairing cry, for behold, Leolyn the Rhymer was gone, but there, his mail gleaming in the firelight, his fierce eyes brighter yet, stood Hugo, lord of Brandon Tower, and divers of his foresters behind.

But now the young Duchess turned and fronted this fierce lord, with head erect and eyes unquailing, like the great lady she was.

“Well, messire?” she demanded haughtily. “What meaneth this so mannerless intrusion?”

Lord Hugo fell back a step:

“How?” he gasped. “How then, lady—thou that art accounted so cold . . . so disdainful of wedlock with thy peer canst yet prove overly kind to yon base fellow? Ha—now black shame on thee!”

“Peace, my lord!” cried Heloise proudly. “In true love is nor shame nor any fear ——”

“Love?” cried the Earl, clapping hand to the dagger at his girdle. “Love? And for such a poor knave, forsooth—such mean flesh as yon fellow?”

“E’en so, my lord; ’tis ‘yon fellow’ I’ll wed—him or none!”

“Wed . . . wed, sayst thou?” cried Lord Hugo, in stammering amaze. “To . . . wed him! Art mad, Heloise? What of our lord the King? Darest thou gainsay his will, defy his mandate? And for such paltry rogue! Ha, wilt defy the mighty Edward? Wilt stoop to wive such——?”

“Now, ’bate thy ill tongue, blatant man!” cried she. “Get thee to the King and say Heloise of Framlinghame hath chosen the man shall ’spouse her, else maid will she die. To the King go! Speed ye hence!”

“That will I forthright, proud lady! Yet first,” cried he, beckoning to his foresters, “seize me yon rogue!”

Back leapt Miles and, snatching up a knotted branch, swung it in his mighty grasp and therewith smote down the foremost of his assailants. Yet they were many and he but one, so they beat him to earth at last; they bound and dragged him battered and torn to Lord Hugo’s feet.

“Lewd dog, base serf, thou shalt die!”

“So must . . . we all . . . one day, lord!” panted Miles, his yearning gaze on

Heloise's pallid loveliness. "Yet no serf am I, but freeman born . . . and do avow me . . . innocent of wrong to . . . any——"

"Enough! A rope to his neck, Jeannot!"

"Not so!" cried Heloise, interposing. "Sir Hugo, unworthy knight and loathed lord, the wrong he did was saving me from Thames wherein I sought to die rather than wed a man so abhorred as thyself! Now, loose him, I command! Loose him—I charge ye all in King Edward's name, he that is peerless knight and King most just ——"

"Hang him, Jeannot!" cried the Earl. "And thus, my proud, wanton lady, a maid indeed thou shalt die——"

But in that instant, swift and lithe as panther, she leapt upon him, had snatched the dagger from his girdle, yet ere she could strike, a ringing voice cried her name, and in the fire-glow stood a man very tall, lean, and stalwart, and with left eyebrow somewhat drooping.

Lord Hugo and his foresters, every man, crouched instantly upon their knees; even the proud young Duchess knelt, for despite homely garments, this man with his eagle glance and face stern and worn with ceaseless conflict and passionate effort looked what he was—the greatest of the Plantagenets. Only Miles stood, erect in his bonds, the death-noose about his naked throat; so for a long moment the King gazed on him and he upon the King, eye to eye. Then King Edward beckoned, and into the dell stepped Leolyn the Rhymer, to whom the King said wearily:

"See now, my John o' Jingles, see how ill these lordlings serve me, ever mindful o' their proud Norman blood, with a hearty curse on't! Petty tyrants all, and notably —this felon."

"Felon, sire?" quoth the Earl, flinching. "Nay, dread Majesty, thou knowest thy most loyal subject, Hugo of Brandon——"

"A rogue felon, John, that to his own ignoble purpose would commit murder upon this our subject."

"Nay, my liege lord," cried Hugo. "According to custom and feudal code, I, as overlord, would but do justice on——"

"Ha, fool and knave, have I 'stablished courts of law but to be flouted by such as thyself? The feudal code is dead! Here in our realm is neither Norman nor Saxon henceforth, but only Englishmen. Have we not so proclaimed?"

"Yea, Majesty, but——"

"Ha, this 'but' makes thee rebel. Thy black tyranny armed a brave and noble lady's hand against thee! . . . Shall we hang him? How sayst thou, Heloise?"

"Nay, sire, spare his life, so he, living, marry not me!"

The King's wide, grim lips twitched; but looking whither she looked and seeing Miles viewing her with adoration, forgetful of majesty, bonds, and aught else under heaven, the King frowned.

"Ha!" quoth he, "ye love-sick doaters, is Edward of England then of none account? God's life! . . . Thou, Hugo, for the sake of this noble lady I grant thee life a while. Hie thee to thy tower of Brandon and there prison thyself during our good pleasure and pray God and His saints teach thee to be as merciful, as just, and as English as is thy King. Now be dumb! Hence—away!"

So Hugo, lord of Brandon, arose, made his obeisance, and hasted away with his company and never a word. . . .

"And this is he, is't, my John, my Jingling Jack?" said the King, coming where stood Miles in his tatters, mighty arms and shoulders gleaming. "Ha, for a maid thou hast a ready eye to manhood, Heloise! 'Tis a good, lusty youth, 'tis verily a man to ——" The King's hand pounced on the jewel that shone upon Miles's wide breast; he stared on it wide-eyed and, snapping the chain whereon it hung, turned it to the firelight.

"John," said he at last in a strangled voice. "Ah, John, didst know of this?"

"Lord, I knew."

"And . . . art sure, John—sure?"

"Ay, lord, sure."

Then, swiftly, the King turned and, coming to Miles, tossed the noose from his throat and, clapping mighty hand on mighty shoulder, turned where stood Heloise.

"My lady Duchess, lovest thou this man o' Thames?"

"Oh, sire, with all my poor heart!"

"Wouldst forsooth mate with him, this lad o' boats?"

"Ay, verily, my lord."

"And thou, Sir Boatman, darest thou wed this proud-spirited lady? Art bold to undertake this most unruly maid?"

"With all my heart, sire."

"Bravely said! But since she is a woman, young and so fair o' body, nobly born, of lofty estate, and therewith, as I say, vastly stout-willed and indomitable, and thou but mere man, needs must I fit thee, in some sense, to cope with this so puissant dame that, 'spite her present meek seeming, hath the reckless valour to defy the purpose of England's Edward. How art thou named?"

"Miles, good my liege."

"'Tis well," said the King, drawing sword. "'Tis a good English name! To thy knees!"

Then, hands still prisoned, Miles knelt and King Edward rapped him with sword on bowed head and shoulder, saying:

"Now do I name thee Sir Miles Broom and make thee Lord Warden of our noble Thames. Rise up, my lord. To-morrow at noon come to me in the Tower. As for thee, my most defiant ward, sweet lady of Meekness,—thus am I rid of thee! Sever now thy lord's bonds, loose thy master's hands . . . unless thou art afraid o' them—aha! So fare ye well! Come, John, go with me, for much I need thy counsel."

Now when they were alone she stood looking on him and he gazing speechless upon her.

"Oh, wonderful!" he murmured at last. "Beloved, loose my hands."

"Dost love me, then—Man o' Thames?"

"Ah, God knoweth it! Prithee loose my hands."

"And wilt love me ever . . . Sir Miles?"

"With my every breath . . . to the end of all things. Sweet, mine Heart, loose my hands."

"Wilt be . . . patient with me and very, very tender, my lord?"

"Ah, this thou knowest. I pray thee now, loose . . ." And Heloise loosed them.

The moon stood high, making a pale glory of the murmurous waters, when at last the shallop crept forth of the shadows.

"Oh Miles . . . now do I thank God for thee!"

"Him and our kindly Thames, beloved."

"That would not drown me, dear Miles!"

"That brought thee into my arms, Heloise . . . nay, unto the very heart and soul of me."

"Ah . . . lovely River, dear, gentle Thames!" she sighed, and catching up a glistering handful of water, she kissed it. And surely the ancient River in all its length of days never bore twain with hopes more high or love more deep, as the little blue shallop moved dreamy on its gentle tide.

Now blue is the colour of Happiness.

“The King’s hand pounced on the jewel”

No. 4

LONDON BRIDGE

I

In the year of God 994 the citizens of London town made them a bridge hard beside Botolph's Wharf, a bridge of oak, stoutly fashioned, that served them very well until down came the wild Danes and partially destroyed it fourteen years later. However, the sturdy citizens tinkered and patched the ruin and made it do for another eighty years or so, when came storm and flood to sweep it away. Thereupon William the Red, who, it would seem, was not quite so evil as historians clerical and his bitter opponents aver, rebuilt it stronger than ever; but a great fire in the year 1136 destroyed it utterly. Again the indomitable men of London restored it, only to have it yet again destroyed. Then in the year 1176 arose a certain bright, ingenious soul hight Peter of Colechurch, who builded it of enduring stone, a mighty structure with nineteen arches, and there it stood, through succeeding centuries.

The first building erected on it was the Church of St. Thomas, and after this, houses great and small, embattled gates, drawbridges, and scowling fortifications. Thus it became a great highway for trade, a mighty defence against foes, and the most wondrous bridge in all the world. Men lived and loved and died on it; children were born on it; duels were fought, tournaments were held, and battles raged on it; armies homing from foreign conquest marched across it in triumph.

Day in and day out, from early morn till curfew, it rang with the tread of countless feet, the creak of cart and market-wain, the lowing of dusty herds and bleat of scurrying sheep.

Now because the Bridge was a place of such traffic, King Edward the First (that human Hammer of the Scots) here set up the heads of rebels and traitors for a terrible warning to all and sundry, which good old custom succeeding kings followed only too readily. Thus the embattled gates bristled with poles whence grinned festering eyeless things that once had laughed and sung,—heads of men old and youthful, heads so many and so constantly replenished that the busy citizen or weary traveller, familiarized with such dreadful sights, hardly deigned them a glance. Wherefore, upon this summer's morn, of all the great throng that came and went upon the Bridge, there were but two that stayed their course and, turning aside from the press, paused to look up at this grisly array. One of these twain was a woman, something tall, her shapely body wrapped in a long, hooded mantle of fine blue

camlet, who, having seen, shivered and hasted away; the other who thus paused was a man, small, hump-backed and ill-favoured, his face pallid ’neath tattered hood, and whose eyes, red with the salt of many tears, were upturned to a certain head so fresh and new that sun and rain had as yet wrought no change, nor sharp claw and beak of carrion bird marked it—the head of a man in the prime of his age, black-haired, with eyelids a-droop and thick brows drawn in a ghastly frown.

Long time stood the dwarf, gazing up at this awful thing, blinking red eyes, mopping and mowing in silent hideous fashion, his powerful hairy hands writhing one in the other for very grief.

“Loved lord,” he muttered, his small piteous eyes blinking ever upward. “Saints keep thee! Fare thee well awhile, noble master!” And so, with a snuffling sob, he turned and crept away amid the jostling, careless throng, mighty shoulders bowed, long arms a-dangle. Now as he shambled onward all unheeding, a long arm reached forth of the crowd, a strong hand checked and swung him about, a cheery voice hailed:

“What, Grigg, thou merry rogue! I’d ken the misshapen bulk o’ thee amid a thousand. How now?”

The Hunchback glanced up, and beholding the swart, grey-eyed, sun-burned visage ’neath battered head-piece, the lean, aquiline features framed in rusty link-mail, “Lord!” he gasped, and would have plumped to knees but that the strong hand upheld him.

“Nay, good Grigg, say now—how doth my lordly brother? Back come I from the wars, poor in all save woundy knocks and buffets, very fain to make my peace with him. Stay! what means that phiz fantastical o’ thine! Dost laugh or weep, man? Dost blubber forsooth—thou? Saints, man, what’s thy dole?”

“Death, Messire Jocelyn, fire and sword!”

“Why, then, what o’ my lord Gilles, my brother?”

“Come!” whispered the Hunchback, and hairy finger beckoning, he shambled on until before them scowled the massy gateway, its grim battlements a-bristle with those rotting heads.

“Yonder!” quoth Grigg, pointing.

“God’s death!” murmured Sir Jocelyn, and stood glaring up at the head, so fresh and new, that seemed to frown down on him in angry scorn. “Whose work is this?” he demanded at last, in a husky whisper, his eyes still intent.

“Lord, I know not. ’Twas a night some week since, at Brandon-Shene. We were beset, the Manor fired about us, the most of us slain, and my lord Gilles taken.”

"Ay, and by whom?"

"Lord, I cannot tell; but the face of him that led the attack I saw by light o' the flames and shall know it again."

"So . . . they burned the Manor! And what o' Brandon Tower? Know'st thou this?"

"Not I, messire."

"Then to Brandon Tower we march forthright!"

"Nay, lord, a broken man I, a fool out o' place, a thing o' rags to starve and die."

"Not so, Grigg! Let others die. Be thou one with me to live and—avenge!"

"Ha, vengeance?" cried the Hunchback, his lumpy, comical features hideous with sudden blood-lust. "Oho, a sweet word! To avenge! Lord, do but show me how! Ah, do but show me!"

"Why, thou'rt a mighty mannikin, so get thee an axe. We'll find work for it and this my sword anon, mayhap. So get thee axe or club, for yonder's a thing doth cry aloud for vengeance! Alas, Gilles! . . . See, Grigg, he scowleth very life-like,—ay, e'en in death as he scowled on me in life! Yet was he my brother and I would fain ha' made my peace with him! So now, Gilles, my lordly brother, hear me swear to avenge thy cruel death whiles I live. To this I dedicate my sword——"

"And I an axe—oho, an axe!" croaked Grigg, cutting a caper in wild, uncouth fashion. "Ha, lord, promise me but bloody vengeance and I'll follow thee through the very flames of hell."

"Ah, children of God," said a voice behind them, "talk not of hell or vengeance, since these be evils both!"

Back shrunk Grigg and round spun Sir Jocelyn and stared into the face of a Gray Friar, a lank man and tall, whose gentle eyes shone in the pallor of his lean face.

"Ha, Friar," quoth Jocelyn, knitting black brows, "wilt creep and hearken?"

"Dear my son," said the Friar in a voice serene and gentle as his look, "be not angered that I heard thee, for I am one heareth much of sorrow and evil, and betimes some little good, praise God! Father and brother am I to all that will, so do folk call me Brother John o' the Bridge, since on the Bridge do I live and work—i' the Church of St. Thomas yonder."

"What heard ye, Friar?" quoth Sir Jocelyn, blue eyes threatening.

"I heard thee promise blood for blood—alas, in this poor world where so much bloodshed is! I heard thee swear vengeance, death for death, sin for sin,—by reason of yon woeful thing," and Brother John lifted his gentle, pitiful gaze to the new head

above them.

"Knew ye of him, Friar?"

"Indeed, my son,—he was a very haughty lord, of wild and tameless passions ——"

"Friar, he was my brother! Moreover, he is dead!"

"So is he with God, my son, and unto God leave vengeance."

"Nay," cried Sir Jocelyn fiercely, "rather will I yield myself God's instrument of vengeance. So meddle not, Friar! Come thou, Grigg—ha, why grovel there on thy marrow-bones, fool?"

"Lord," answered the Hunchback, looking up at the tall Friar with eyes very reverent, "'tis Brother John,—a most holy man that doeth great works among the poor folk . . . a man all unfearing. . . . Moreover, but for him I had perished——"

"Tush, mannikin! If thou'rt for vengeance, up and follow me,—up I say, or——" But as Jocelyn spake there was a sudden uproar on the Bridge, screams and shouts with a wild scurry of movement, and a great bull appeared, his tawny hide dark with sweat and spattered with foam; for a moment he stood, fierce eyes rolling, tail lashing, then, swaying mighty head, he uttered a deep bellow and turned where in dusty corner a woman crouched, her shapeliness draped in long blue mantle, her wide gaze on the approaching monster; suddenly she cried aloud and sank upon her knees. . . . And then, his old, grey gown kilted above brawny limbs, Friar John leapt and, hurling himself upon the bull's mighty, lowered head, seized those cruel horns—wrenched, twisted, and, for a moment, checked the maddened creature; then Sir Jocelyn was beside him, had gripped also those wide-branching horns. So with sinewy bodies tensed and feet firm planted the grey-clad Friar and mailed Knight together strove amain, gasping, sweating, quivering in stupendous effort, until men came running with goads and ropes and, tethering the bellowing animal, dragged it away. Then Sir Jocelyn, panting, looked upon panting Brother John, viewing him with kindling eye, his shapely mouth up-curving in a sudden, boyish smile:

"*Par dé!*" he exclaimed, "but thou'rt valiant man and lusty, Sir Friar!"

"Sir Knight, I was not always a Friar," answered Brother John, smiling also. "And, but for thee, yon poor beast had doubtless been my death—aha, see yonder!" Glancing whither the Friar's long arm pointed, Jocelyn saw Grigg bestriding the swooning woman and close beset by four sturdy fellows; even as he looked, the mighty dwarf's stout oak cudgel smote down one of the four. Shouting joyously, thither leapt Sir Jocelyn and with him Brother John,—seeing which, the three fellows yet upon their legs made instant use of them and fled amain, whereat the ferocious Hunchback fell to heavily belabouring the fallen man until Brother John's iron grasp

and gentle voice arrested him.

"Softly, my son! Smite not the soul from his evil carcass, suffer him to live, that peradventure he repent him and grow honest."

Meantime Sir Jocelyn, seeing the cloaked and hooded woman yet a-swoon, stooped and lifted her from the dust.

"Brother John," said he, "prithee what o' this?"

"Follow me!" answered the Friar, and went on before, through the stream of hurrying wayfarers, many of whom cried out right gladly:

"Ha, 'tis Friar John! Cometh holy Friar John! Room for Brother John o' the Bridge!" And some there were who sank upon their knees as he passed, or bowed reverent heads to his gentle benediction.

Now as Sir Jocelyn wended after the tall Friar, thinking not at all of the woman in his arms, his mind busied, rather, on dark schemes of vengeance, he chanced to glance down at his burden and thus espied a shimmering tress of red-gold hair, and instantly became conscious that the form he clasped was delectably soft and rounded; wherefore his pace grew slower and he stooped to peer under the deep, shadowy hood. . . . And then Sir Jocelyn halted. . . . Low-arching brows, eyelashes long and dark 'gainst pallor of curving cheek, vivid lips, smooth and dimpled chin,—an oval face whose beauty, whose proud yet tender loveliness, stirred dim memories, vague youthful dreams of beauty sensed yet all unrealized till now, a face of witchery oft dreamily visioned in sunny drowsings, oftener in glamorous moonlight, yet never seen until now amid the stir and bustle of great London's famous Bridge.

So stood Jocelyn down-gazing upon this beauteous face and heedless of aught beside, whelmed by the loveliness so often dreamed and now made manifest in this unknown woman. . . . And suddenly his breath caught, for these dark lashes quivered, lifted, and he beheld eyes darkly blue that gazed up at him in swift and joyous recognition, the red lips parted in tender smile: a soft voice murmured:

"Ah, Julius. . . . Oh Metellus, beloved. . . ."

On the Bridge all about them life stirred tumultuous, a ceaseless bustle, the never-ending tramp of hurrying feet, while Jocelyn gazed down, wistful and questioning, lost in a profound wonder—until upon his shoulder came a hand vital and compelling, and Brother John spoke:

"My son, why tarry ye?"

So Jocelyn, starting, glanced up and around like one new waking and followed whither the Friar led—to a house, a cool, shadowy chamber, where two gentle-faced women took the swooning maid from his unwilling arms.

Then Brother John brought him into his Church of St. Thomas, small and dim

and silent, and thence to his own little bare room, where upon rough oaken table he set forth such viands as he had,—smoked fish, cheese, bread and herbs. Here, having spoken a brief grace, he brake bread, and seated side by side they ate together, the Knight and Friar, very companionly, while Grigg munched heartily, crouched on a stool in adjacent corner. . . . Their meal done, Friar John folded his lean hands, looking earnestly upon Sir Jocelyn, and spake gentle-voiced; but with his first word Sir Jocelyn was afoot, had drawn mail-coif and fitted thereon heavy bascinet, all in a moment, whereat the Friar sighed:

"Art so hot for thy hateful vengeance, my son?"

"Even so, good brother!" nodded Jocelyn. "There is that above the gate yonder, staring blind upon the day, doth cry aloud for . . . Yet no more o' this, since verily I would not grieve thee, good Brother John."

"Ten long years," sighed the Friar, "ten long years and more have I dwelt here on the Bridge, and thus have seen suffering of many and divers sorts, yet I do tell thee, my son, there is no pang doth bite so deep as remorse. . . . And there is no vengeance but, soon or late, shall bring remorse; for vengeance belongeth to God. Ah, dear my son, hear ye now the words of that gentle Christ—He that bids all men forgive, nay, love their enemies . . . for though Hate be a passion wonder strong, yet Love is stronger."

"Ha, sire!" cried Jocelyn, buckling on his ponderous sword, "such holy teaching sorts not wi' this rough world or such a mere human as I."

"Nay," said the Friar, patient and gentle ever, "'spite all thy fierce humanity thou'rt very child of God, and unto God must thou answer hereafter——"

"So be it!" quoth Jocelyn, frowning. "Come, Grigg!"

"Son, shall the slaying of this enemy restore thy brother's life?——"

"Enough, Sir Friar!" said Jocelyn impatiently. "Thou art a holy man vowed to God's service; go then thy holy way and suffer me to go——"

"Stay!" cried Brother John, powerful hand upraised, voice harsh and compelling. "I bore sword once, and, like thee, suffering grievous wrong, hunted down and slew mine enemy. God forgive me! For—ah, my son, bitter remorse hath been my bedfellow ever since. Sir Knight, brother man, dear my son—be warned! The blood I shed so long since crieth against me day and night, staineth my soul even now. . . . I have prayed, I have worked and striven, but stained am I yet, and so must be until by years of love and service I have atoned and God of His mercy shall lift me hence and cleanse my soul at last. So, my son, in thy youthful passion, sin not as I, but rather live to noble purpose—love thou and serve thy fellow-man. . . ."

"Sir . . . sir . . ." stammered Jocelyn, for Brother John's pale face was wet with

tears, his tall, strong body shaken with great and bitter sorrow; therefore, and suddenly, Jocelyn grasped his outstretched, pleading hand, gripped it fast and for a moment, striving for speech, was dumb. Then: "Noble sir," quoth he, bowing mailed head, "an God indeed be just, thy sin is forgiven thee long and long since. . . . As for me, good brother and most holy Friar, I . . . I must do even that I must. And so . . . fare thee well!"

Then away strode Jocelyn, with ring and clash of arms, through the small dim church out into the dusty stir of noonday glare, his mind so distract that he was well-nigh across the Bridge ere he was aware that Grigg shambled at his heels, snuffling beneath tattered hood.

"So, mannikin,—what's amiss now?"

"Ah, lord, 'tis good Brother John—a very friar o' friars he, a godly man, a holy saint, fearing no man high or low, comforting all men such as be poor and friendless . . . little, ailing children, ay, and women forlorn . . . none so base, so vile o' soul or body, but he shall serve 'em,—oh, a saint! Somewhen I'll beg me monkish cowl and be his slave——" Even as he spake thus, Brother John's voice halted them and Brother John himself came striding, flushed with haste and something out of breath.

"Good my son," said he, drawing Sir Jocelyn aside; "there is one I would fain place within thy knightly care and charge, a maiden, solitary and something fearful, that journeys to the high and blessed sanctuary of Holy Thorn upon the Forest Road beyond Shere. Know you it?"

"Noble Brother, very well. . . . A maid, sayest thou?"

"Wilt thou protect this lady so far, my son?"

"A lady, good Brother?"

"Even she thou dost wot of; she that was beset by rogues; she thou didst——" Sir Jocelyn, staying for no more, turned about forthwith. Quoth he:

"Brother John, I accept the charge."

"Why, then, Sir Knight and son, 'twould seem she hath some dread . . . some fear of peril on the way."

"Howbeit," answered Jocelyn blithely, "with God's aid I'll bring her safe to Holy Thorn, for the which I pledge thee my knightly word. Know'st thou aught o' the lady—her name, condition, rank . . .?" But, being by now back amid the throng, Friar John plied his long legs so well that Jocelyn's questions went unanswered.

So back came they to the church, and there, bidding Sir Jocelyn wait, the Friar strode off, beckoning Grigg to follow. Being alone thus, Sir Jocelyn took occasion to kneel and say an ave or so until, hearing footsteps, he glanced up and stared to see Grigg, bright-eyed and eager, his squat, misshapen body sheathed in glistening mail,

and in knotted fist a ponderous axe.

"As armour 'tis something behind the fashion," said the Friar as Grigg hasted away; "but it hath been well tried ere now. And so, good friend, come, for the lady is minded to reach Holy Thorn ere sunset."

"Nay, good Brother, as I mind, to Holy Thorn is a fair day's march," began Jocelyn; but, smiling, Friar John clapped hand on shoulder and brought him where the lady sat her eager, fretting steed with an easy grace.

"Messire," said she, viewing him with eyes of quick adjudgement, "our kind Brother John telleth thou'rt so courteous to see me in safety to Holy Thorn."

"'Twill honour me, lady."

"Then, sire, I pray thee let's away, for I would be there soon—oh, soon!"

"Why, very well," said Jocelyn, bowing; "but where now is Grigg?"

"Here, lord!" answered the dwarf cheerily and appeared forthwith, leading two noble horses ready caparisoned.

"*Par dé!*" murmured Jocelyn, surveying the powerful animals right joyously. "We should reach Holy Thorn long ere sundown with such noble beasts——"

"Ah, mount, Sir Knight, mount, I do beseech, for the way is long and perilous, I fear."

So Jocelyn swung lightly to saddle, settled feet in stirrups, took the reins, and stooped to the Friar, hand outstretched:

"Noble sir, good Brother John, fare thee well!"

"God prosper thee, my son!" answered the Friar, grasping hands. "God bring ye safe all, and grant if that we meet again"—here he stood on toes the better to whisper—"that this thy hand be clean and innocent of thy enemy's blood."

Now presently as they rode, Jocelyn, glancing back, saw Brother John of the Bridge gazing after them wistfully with his so bright and gentle eyes.

II

"And thy name, Sir Knight?"

"Jocelyn, lady."

They were out upon the great Forest Road, riding side by side along that noble highway built long since by the iron men of Rome.

"Jocelyn!" she repeated, viewing him with her frank, level gaze. "And what beside?"

"Other name have I none," he answered, knitting his black brows; "a poor, broken, landless man-at-arms, I, lately out o' France."

"And I," said she, after some little while, "I am . . . Rohese."

"And what beside, lady?"

"Nay," she answered, with flash of bright eyes, "a poor lorn maid I, so prithee let this serve."

"Do poor lorn maids wear golden latchets to their broidered shoon, lady?"

"This one doth," she answered, "e'en as some poor, broken, landless men-at-arms go dight in golden spurs."

"So 'twould seem have we eyes both, noble lady, thinks I."

"Oh, gentle sir, now bless God for thy so profound wit, thy so dazzling intelligence!" sighed she. But seeing her eyes so bright and mirthful:

"Hum!" quoth Jocelyn.

"Art of the country hereabouts, Sir Poor Man-at-arms?" she questioned, reining her horse to a gentle amble.

"Nay, of Southsex, I . . . and thou?"

"Knowest thou good Brother John of the Bridge well?"

"Scarce well enough, lady, for he is, meseemeth, a rare notable man-like friar."

"Ah, verily!" she answered, her eyes suddenly tender. "A man in sooth, being slave to the meanest and brother to all that be distressed. And yet was he, upon a time, noble knight and lord."

"It was so I judged him!" nodded Jocelyn. "Know you him well, lady?"

"Indeed, all my days, and surely there is none like good, valiant Brother John. . . ."

So thus, while Grigg jogged behind them, dreaming of blood and cherishing his goodly axe, rode they together through that golden afternoon, heedless of time, of danger, or of the silent, shadowy forest that stretched away right and left, mile on mile of whispering green, being indeed truly conscious only of each other; and now at last Jocelyn spake of that which had vexed him so persistently:

"Rohese . . . lady . . . is there ever a man very dear to thee . . . by name, Julius Metellus?"

"No man in all the world!" she answered, meeting his look, her frank and gentle eyes something amazed.

"And yet thou didst name me so."

"I named thee so—I?" she exclaimed, her wonder growing. "And name thee name so outlandish! Messire Jocelyn, dost surely dream!"

"Ay, belike I do!" said he, pondering, and so held his peace, his gaze pensive and abstracted. Wherefore she viewed him more at leisure, the stalwart, shapely form of him that bore his battered harness so lightly, the high, proud look of his lean

hawk face, his kindly mouth and dreaming eyes; and presently she frowned as in troubled perplexity:

"Surely—surely," said she suddenly, "we ne'er saw each other till this day . . . and yet . . ."

"Ay—there's the wonder on't," he nodded; "'and yet'!"

"And—the name I named thee?"

"Julius Metellus. It was as I bore thee across London's Bridge——"

"Ay, the bull frighted me."

"Also divers beastly rogues beset thee——"

"Ah, Sir Piers' men! I had forgot!" she exclaimed, glancing around in sudden terror.

"Rohese, who and what is thy fear?"

"A man!" she answered, urging her horse to faster gait.

"A man—so? and no more?"

"Himself is peril all sufficing!"

"And reason for thy sudden so passionate haste?"

"Yea, indeed!"

"Wherefore I begin to hate him since I love not haste, in especial now. So pray thee abate thy speed and tell me o' this two-legged peril."

"Sir Piers de Brockenridge, he an evil man of passions base—and merciless, oh, merciless—who, since I'll not wed with him, hath vowed to . . . shame me to his will . . . ah, Jocelyn!"

"Verily, Rohese, such gentle knight were better dead! Hast no father to thy defence nor brother?"

"My father is dead, Jocelyn, long since; and my brother—ah, my brother would see me wed Sir Piers!"

"And thou wert upon the Bridge defenceless and alone, Rohese."

"Yet four men-at-arms had I to my defence, Jocelyn; but these were of my brother Roger's following, and——"

"So do I thank the rogues for their base treachery since I now am——" He stopped as, faint and far, rose the cheery notes of a horn. "Nay, now," saith Jocelyn, smiling at her fearful looks, "comfort thee, Rohese, yon was but some hunting party, mayhap;" but his eyes were bright and keenly alert as deftly, and almost furtively, he addressed his shield, from whose dinted surface the device had been battered long since.

"Oh," she sighed, "methinks the peril I feared is upon us—so, Jocelyn, let us hide, I pray thee—come!"

So, spurring their powerful steeds, they took the steepy hill before them at a gallop, but, reaching the summit, checked all; and Rohese, leaning nearer, laid a slim, trembling hand on Jocelyn's mailed knee:

"Now, sweet Jesu, aid us!" she whispered, "yonder rideth Piers de Brockenridge!" And she pointed where, on the road below them, three mounted men approached, the foremost in bright and splendid armour and surcoat.

"Why, then," said Jocelyn, scanning the oncoming three joyously, "it is very well! Ho, Grigg!"

"Here, lord!" cried the brawny Hunchback, pressing eagerly forward. "Shall I prove this my goodly axe now?"

"Ay, doubtless. Yet, and mark me, Grigg! Bide ye here a while, the axe i' thy right hand, my lady's bridle i' thy left—so wait ye till I be upon them—then spur thou through them, smiting amain—is't understood, ha?"

"Yea, lord. And oh, 'tis a noble axe, this!"

Then Jocelyn turned and looked on Rohese, and she, looking on him, reached forth her hand; so for the moment they gazed on each other. . . .

"Ha, Rohese?" he murmured, for now her pale cheeks were aglow, her lashes drooping.

"God shield thee, Jocelyn!" she sighed. "Without thy friendship, desolate all am I henceforth, so God of His mercy spare it unto me." So Jocelyn kissed that tremulous hand and rode slowly down the hill, a smile on his lips, even while his keen, grey eyes surveyed the approaching three,—lusty men all, armed very well, but riding at ease and all unhelmed, for the day was hot. Jocelyn's smile broadened. Thus rode he at leisured pace, nearer and nearer, until the foremost of the three, a full-faced, black-eyed man, raised mailed hand beckoning imperiously,—but in that same instant out flashed Jocelyn's sword, in went his spurs and, steel-clad head bowed above dinted shield, down hill he thundered upon the astonished three or ever any guessed his intent.

Sir Piers contrived to couch his lance, but Jocelyn swung his horse deftly out of line and, as steel lance-point whanged harmless from his shield, rose in his stirrups, long sword down smiting, and Sir Piers' whinnying steed lurched, staggered, and fell crashing; then Jocelyn was upon the other two with stabbing point and biting edge, and for some while there was desperate work,—horses reared, men shouted, busy steel glimmered and clashed—then was a clattering rush of hoofs . . . Grigg's axe glittered, swung by mighty arm—and the road was clear.

"Come—spur!" cried Jocelyn hoarsely. "There be hoof-strokes down wind yonder!"

And now rode they at speed, a stretching gallop up hill and down, the white road before them, a rolling dust-cloud behind, and to right and left the green dusk of the forest,—on now, with loose rein and goading heel, until the Hunchback uttered a sudden cry of dismay, and Rohese, glancing round, saw how Sir Jocelyn rode, his head drooping, hand pressed to side—a hand red with the blood that oozed through riven mail.

"Thou'rt hurt!" she cried.

"A small matter!" he answered breathlessly. "Spur—spur! Ride, I say!"

"Dost bleed amain!" said she, checking speed.

"Ha, maiden, on—I bid thee on!" he said, frowning at her; whereat she frowned on him. Quoth she:

"No man shall command me, beau sire, in especial one that is a-faint."

"How, wouldst have me plead?" he retorted. "Then, lady, I entreat . . . save thyself! On, I beseech. . . . I must have thee safe to Holy Thorn; my word is pledged . . . ride and be safe."

"And what of thee?"

"I shall . . . be very well!"

"Indeed, for I think thou'lt be dead, so now will I see and tend thy hurt."

"Ha, perversity!" he cried.

"Oh, folly!" she retorted. "To scowl and thine eyes a-swoon, thy very life ebbing from thee! Come!" and she caught the reins from his loosened hold.

"Ride on!" he gasped. "Grigg shall with thee . . . ride and . . . be safe!"

"Rather will I be dead!" she answered. "But now, lest thou perish before my eyes, poor soul, I'll stay thy bleeding!"

Thus saying, she turned her horse from the road and, still grasping Jocelyn's bridle-rein, led him in among the trees, through underbrush and, stooping 'neath leafy branches, on through mazy boskages until they reached a small clearing full of a soft and greeny twilight. Here, slipping lightly to earth, she came to Jocelyn, both hands reached up to him:

"Lean upon me!" she commanded. Then Jocelyn laughed, gasped, and, swaying weakly in the saddle, looked down on her with wild bright eyes.

"Oh, love . . ." said he in strange voice, grasping at his horse's mane with failing hands. "Ha, now glory to the Eternal Gods, 'twas but a dream, for thou'rt beauteous with life, strong for love. . . . Oh Fraya . . . wife . . ." and with the word, Sir Jocelyn sank swooning into those tender, clasping arms.

Saith Jocelyn, coming to his elbow and staring about a luxurious, arras-hung chamber:

"Now, in St. Benedict's name—where am I?"

"At my little Manor of Ashdene, i' the forest," murmured a soft voice, and Rohese bent over his couch. "Thy head to the pillow, messire——'

"But how came I here, and when, lady?"

"By means of thy man Grigg, horses, and myself—three days since. Thy head on pillow, messire—ay, so!"

"Three days?" exclaimed Jocelyn, sitting bolt upright.

"Hast been sick and fevered of thy wound; but 'tis mending——"

"Ay, I am very well," said he, glancing eager-eyed at her lovely, down-bent face, "so am I heartily grateful to thee, Rohese——"

"So mayst soon go back to—thy wife, Sir Jocelyn."

"Wife?" cried he, staring. "Wife, quotha? No wife have I, lady——"

"To thy so loved Fraya, Sir Jocelyn."

"Ha,—what mystery is here, now?"

"This is for thee to expound, messire."

"Rohese, I—lady, pray turn and show me thine eyes,—look on me, Rohese!"

"Sire," she answered, never stirring, "I've no desire to look on thee! Shouldst be with thy wife, thy Fraya——" Out from the bed shot a long sinewy arm and grasped a fold of her purfled gown:

"Rohese," said he, drawing her near, "plague not a sick man thus,—oh, shame on thee! Sit thou beside me!"

"Art overly strong for a sick man!" said she, viewing him 'twixt smile and frown.

"Sit! Here on the bed beside me!" The Lady Rohese sat perforce. "Now what is this talk of wife and—what not?"

"'Tis but that, swooning i' the forest—even as I clasped thee—thou must needs cry in a voice of love on Fraya, thy wife . . . so prithee loose my robe!"

"How—I? I spake such folly?"

"And in a voice of love infinite tender . . . so loose my robe, I pray."

"Then here was madness, some damned spell o' witchcraft! For wife have I none, and this I do swear on my knightly faith. Dost believe me, Rohese, dost believe me?" Now sitting thus upon the bed she looked down into his honest, grey eyes, reading there truth and so much beside, that she glanced away, quick-breathing. Quoth she, gently:

"Oh, verily I do believe thee. . . . But . . . of this Fraya . . . didst love her . . . on a time——?"

"Never! Rohese, I vow to thee, never in my life knew I any so named."

"And yet . . . didst speak such name, Jocelyn, and——"

A horn's shrill summons startled the sleepy echoes and, rising swiftly, Rohese peered forth of the small, deep-mullioned window; then coming to Jocelyn she smoothed his pillow, and for a moment her cool fingers touched his brow.

"Rest thee now," she murmured. "I will back to thee anon."

Now as Jocelyn lay there drowsily, full of a deep content, and watched the evening shadows deepen, a door creaked stealthily, the arras lifted, and Grigg came creeping, bowed and furtive, finger on lip:

"Ha, lord . . . lord!" he whispered, little eyes fierce 'twixt blinking, narrowed lids. "Bestir, for he is here,—oho, he that burned thy goodly Manor of Brandon-Shene, he that slew my lord Gilles thy brother, is below . . . and in's cups! I might ha' smitten him dead wi' mine axe, yet left him to thee—the first stroke thine,—ha——"

"Bring my gear!" saith Jocelyn, and, rising from bed, strode to and fro to try his strength; then, with Grigg's deft aid, clothed and armed him.

"Where is my Lady Rohese?"

"Forth with her women on household matters."

"Art sure, Grigg, art sure 'tis he?"

"Ay, my head on't, master!"

"And drunk?"

"Nay—but drinking."

"Is he alone?"

"Nay, there is one with him, he shall be mine. So come, lord, let us be sudden and slay both——"

"Stay!" said Jocelyn, belting on sword and dagger. "First must I ha' proof assured."

"How, lord, how? My life on't, 'tis he——"

"Hearkee, Grigg! Go thou to him in all humility, be fearful, crawl, cringe, yet name him murderer, beg money of him, vow thyself secret an he pay thee enough. Canst play such part?"

"Ay, lord—watch now!" Down winding stair Grigg led the way, and presently, to a narrow door that stood ajar upon a small chamber whence came loud voices and laughter; round this door edged the Hunchback and crept into the room with a cringing shamble, and the laughing voices were suddenly hushed:

"Right puissant lord," whined Grigg, "look on me kindly——"

"Hey, thou misbegotten thing, what now?" cried one.

"Dread lord, I be all thou didst leave wi' life at Brandon Shene. I only 'scaped

thy steel and flame."

"Accursed goblin, who'rt thou?"

"I was fool to Lord Gilles de Brandon—him ye slew——"

"Who dareth say this, dog?"

"I, dread lord, for I be a fool. 'Twas thou and thy men burned Brandon and betrayed my lord to death, so am I out o' place and masterless. Thus, dread sire, though I know thee murderer, give me but alms and this tongue waggeth not——"

"Say'st thou?" laughed a jovial voice. "Wouldst have an alms, money? Why, then, hither, thou sorry, misshapen knave—approach! Here is gold, yet first—ha, Rolf, strike—thy dagger, man—this dog must not howl!" . . . Came a sudden noise of furious strife; then, thrusting wide the door, Jocelyn leapt and saw two men grappling the mighty dwarf.

"To me, murderer!" cried Jocelyn, and dropping sword whipped forth dagger. Then desperate arms clutched him, steel flashed to steel, but Jocelyn's mail served him well, while his foe, clad for the chase, wore none. Thus, despite his wound, Jocelyn prevailed and, with cunning wrestling-hold, bore his opponent down; but now, even as he freed his dagger-hand to smite, a voice cried his name and Rohese was clinging to his upraised arm.

"Woman!" cried Jocelyn, harsh and fierce, "this is he slew my brother——"

"Jocelyn," she gasped, his vengeful hand clasped fast to her tender bosom, "this man is brother to me! So, Jocelyn, for his sake, for thine and my sake, show mercy! Oh, foul not this dear hand with his blood! Ah, Jocelyn, thou man that I love, stain not thy soul with murder . . . set not such barrier betwixt us! Jocelyn, in God's holy name—forbear!"

Jocelyn's dagger fell clattering, and he rose; then, freeing him of Rohese's trembling hold, he turned, beckoned to Grigg, who crouched above his motionless adversary, and stumbled away—out into the evening glow. And presently to him came Grigg bearing his own axe and Jocelyn's sword.

"Master!" quoth he, wondering. "Master, yon murderous lord yet lives, so beseech thee let us back and end him!"—and he thrust the sword into Jocelyn's lax hold.

"Nay," muttered Jocelyn, his eyes abased, "vengeance is—not for me!" And his sword fell and lay gleaming.

"Alas, thou'rt direly sick!" moaned Grigg. "So now will I go smite him dead with mine axe——"

"Ha—thou dog, not so!" cried Jocelyn, in sudden fury. "Hurt him not, I charge thee!"

"Oho, forsworn . . . forsworn!" cried Grigg, and, hurling aside his axe, leapt about and scuttered away. Then, staring up at the darkening sky, Jocelyn set off, haphazard, following a leafy track that led he cared not whither. He went, head adroop, with lagging step, for his wound irked him; thus after some while coming beside a bubbling rill, he sank thereby and sat crouched, head on hands, staring drearily at the gloomy, murmurous streamlet, heedless of time, until upon these hurrying waters came a glow, a waxing brightness, a rippling glory, and glancing up he saw the moon rising very large and bright. . . . Wearily at last Sir Jocelyn got afoot and, turning to be gone, beheld Rohese standing in the splendour of the moon; and then, or ever he knew, she was kneeling before him, had clasped him in her arms, was speaking him in a voice of passionate entreaty:

"Jocelyn, thou strong, sweet soul,—I loved thee for thy valour, yet more—ah, much more—do I love thee for the valiance of thy mercy! So now, my lord Jocelyn . . . beloved . . . take me . . . suffer me to love and serve thee ever. . . ."

Then Sir Jocelyn, kneeling also, clasped her to mailed breast.

"Rohese!" said he, and kissed her. . . . And now sat they awhile beside this noisy brook, viewing each other by light of the moon.

"But . . . I am a landless man . . . very poor . . ."

"So am not I," she murmured, nestling within his arm. "And what is mine is thine, henceforth, since thine am I for ever. . . . Come," sighed she, at last, "I have horses yonder."

"Ay, but whither, Rohese?"

"Whither but to kind Brother John? He shall rejoice to see us."

"And truly," said Jocelyn, rising, "he is a wise man and shall counsel me——"

"Nay, he is a holy friar and shall wed us—an thou wilt, my Jocelyn. . . ."

IV

Being among other matters wise in medicine, Brother John, new come from struggle with sickness and death, stood upon the silent Bridge, his pensive gaze upon the lightening east, for day was breaking; thus folding sinewy hands, he prayed for blessing on this coming day, as was ever his wont. Scarce had he ended when there was a knocking on the mighty gate of the Bridge; so thither came he and, having questioned, he opened the wicket, stepped through, and glanced from Sir Jocelyn to Rohese with eyes of eager question, beholding which so wistful look Rohese smiled and spake. . . .

"Brother John, his hands be all unstained, guiltless . . ."

"Sir Knight," quoth the Friar, when she had done. "Oh my son, so hast thou ennobled thy manhood and glorified God! Come now, my children, and I will make of ye twain one."

Their horses stabled, they entered the little church, and there at the high altar, the day-spring brightening about them, Friar John wed them. Now as they came forth into the dawn, one rapped at the gate with hoarse outcry. Quoth Jocelyn, turning thither:

"Yon is Grigg." Even as they opened the gate in tumbled the Hunchback, wild of eye but axe in hand:

"Ha—lord!" he cried, pointing back, "Piers—Piers of Brockenridge rideth amain . . . with men-at-arms! Fly, lord, fly!"

"Nay," said Brother John, clapping to the wicket, "'twere vain! The gates must open, it is the hour. Come ye with me." So he brought them into his own small chamber and pointed to a narrow winding stair in a dim corner. "Up, children!" said he. "I will speak this fierce lord . . . also I shall pray."

And after some while there was a great clamour at the gate, shouts and clash of arms, until the sleepy wardens came to open. So, in rode Sir Piers at the head of his men, calling loudly for Brother John, who came forth, serene and gentle as ever:

"What is't, my son?" he questioned.

"Rohese, Friar, the Lady Rohese that is fled shamefully with a rogue in rusty mail,—saw ye them?"

"Indeed, my son, I married them but now."

"Ha—married! Then, by God, he dies!"

"Yea, verily, Sir Knight,—but when God willeth."

"Know ye where they lurk, Friar?"

Brother John beckoned with gaunt finger; wherefore, having posted divers of his men either end of the Bridge, Sir Piers, dismounting, followed the Friar into his little chamber. Here the Knight loosed off his heavy helmet, setting it upon a great oak chest that chanced to hand.

"And now, Friar," quoth he, clashing to and fro in his armour, "where lie these fugitives?"

"What wouldst thou, Sir Piers?"

"Wed my Lady Rohese——"

"But she is wedded wife, my son."

"So will I make her widow and wife again within the hour. There needeth but one blast on my bugle-horn and——" Sir Piers laughed suddenly, and pointed where at the foot of the turret steps lay Rohese's blue camlet cloak; but even as he

raised horn to lip, Brother John reached forth sinewy hands. . . .

Little by little the great Bridge awoke and grew busy with its daily traffic,—a cheery noise of voices and trampling feet, a blythe, ever-growing hubbub—until the busy stream of life was flowing to and fro and all was stir and bustle.

. . . In answer to Brother John's summons, Sir Jocelyn and his lady, with Grigg shambling after, descended to behold the Friar, his hands outstretched to bless them.

"Your way lieth open, my children," said he gently. "Go forth to your new life, wherein God give ye joy and abiding peace, I pray. And now—fare well!"

So, having clasped those kindly hands right heartily and spoken something of their love and gratitude, forth went they together into the glad sunshine and cheery bustle of the Bridge.

Then opening the great coffer, Brother John lifted thence a clashing, sprawling thing, and, bearing it to a window that opened above the river, whispered a prayer and hove thence the dead body of Sir Piers to plunge down deep and deep into the rushing waters below.

. . . Now raising haggard face to the radiant heaven and lifting gaunt arms aloft, Brother John groaned and fell upon his knees:

"Father!" he whispered. "Oh God of Mercy—Thou knowest . . ."

“Friar and mailed Knight together strove”

No. 5

THE WHITE TOWER

I

The Tower of London, hoary with years, grim with tragedy, serene with the profound knowledge that only Age and Death may bring, stands to-day, mighty as ever, its twenty-five-foot walls deep-rooted in the city's heart, imperishable as London's very self.

It has known this marvellous city glad with the clamour of a thousand joy-bells, loud with desperate battle, silent with disease and death, and swept by miles of roaring flame.

Within its dark bosom it has smothered the desolate cry of hopeless prisoners, the thin wailing of tortured flesh; it has echoed the dull shock of the headsman's shearing axe; within its length of days man's life is but a moment; the ceaseless, rolling tide of years has battered it in vain.

So to-day King William's mighty keep stands a monument of old, bad days,—of actions good (a few) and actions evil (a many), of cruel suffering and noble heroism. Grim, stately, and aloof it broods above this wondrous city that, by the valiant striving and patient courage of its long-forgotten children, has endured and shall endure so long as we prove worthy such glorious heritage.

But of all the suffering endured and deaths died within the massy walls of our White Tower, no death of them all (according to tradition) bore in its aftermath results so tremendous and enduring as the agony of a certain fair, young and most heroic woman when:

London town was hundreds of years younger and smaller, huddled in the protecting shadow of its impregnable citadel that soared aloft in all its rugged grandeur, undecorated as yet by the ubiquitous Sir Christopher Wren, for it was the year of God 1215 of a fair May morning.

A blithe morning indeed, glad with flowers and the joyous piping of birds, though poor England, battle-torn, groaned under a merciless tyranny and trembled beneath the interdict of Rome; and Gyles, squatting beneath a tree, indited a song to Spring.

He sat within a leafy dell where a small brook tinkled pleasantly; hard by his tall horse Bran cropped the tender grass; all about him from tree and thicket birds carolled in ecstatic chorus. Thus Gyles, his muse inspired, wrote apace, mail-coif and hood of leather back-tossed upon wide shoulders, ruddy head bowed above

the tablets on mailed knee; a tall, great fellow, yet, despite bulk and length of limb, very quick of eye, very light and instant of gesture.

And presently, grey eyes scanning what he had just writ, he fell a-singing in a voice deep and clear and tuneful:

> "The birds their pretty notes do sing
> All for to greet the buxom Spring,
> Tirra-lirra making,
> Jovial echoes waking,
> Downy nests forsaking
> On flutt'ring, dewy wing.
>
> So I, that seek not empty fame
> Ne lowly maid, ne prideful dame,
> My joy shall——"

He stopped in the middle of a note as, from beyond a dense thicket, rose a woman's shrill scream. Gyles laid by his tablets and, rising, took up his sword; but ere he might draw it a woman appeared, who, bursting through the leafy tangles, fled to him, swift as startled deer, and fell beside him upon her knees. Young was she and nobly shaped, with hair very long and black as night, for her wimple and couvre-chef were gone; and with flesh smooth and white, for her dress was torn; and in her dark, wide eyes he read desperate fear.

"Oh, messire," she gasped, speaking in the courtly Norman-French, "aid—aid me! . . ."

"'Gainst what?" enquired Gyles, using the Saxon-English.

"From shame . . . black shame!" she panted, now speaking the English also. "Oh, man—save me!"

Gyles thumbed his smooth-shaven chin and glanced round about the little sunny dell. Quoth he:

"I see nought shameful here, maid."

"'Twill come!" she whispered fearfully. "Ah—sweet Mother of Mercy! See yonder!" Leaves, rustling, parted and one stepped into the dingle,—a shapely man, something broad in the cheek, dark-eyed, dark-haired, his hunting tire rich though plain, a man of proud and arrogant bearing, whose smouldering gaze dwelt upon the maid's rich and vivid beauty.

"Fellow," said Gyles, drawing sword, "turn you back!"

The man never so much as glanced towards him, but, with gaze ever upon the lady's shrinking loveliness, advanced with leisured stride, and when he spoke it was with the tone and gesture of one used to instant and slavish obedience.

"Knave, begone!" said he, and, coming in reach of the trembling girl, stretched forth hand to grasp her,—in which moment, with the broad of his blade, Gyles smote him to his knees; at this was gasping cry, and, looking on the maid, Gyles saw her staring aghast with sudden horror.

"Ah, God of Mercy!" she whispered. "Oh—death——" then cowered suddenly as the fallen man, dazed by the blow, got him afoot, fumbling at sword-hilt; but even as he drew Gyles's long blade struck the weapon from his grasp, and Gyles's left hand was at his throat; but, striving not, the man glared and spoke:

"Fool! I am the King!"

"Liar!" quoth Gyles, and, tripping his heels, set a dusty mail-clad foot upon him. "Now," said he, "wilt rid us o' the plague thou art, or——" and he set sword-point to throat; but with a supple bound the maid was up and had caught his arm in passionate hands.

"No!" she panted. "He . . . he is the King in very sooth!" Gyles eyed the speaker doubtfully, the man beneath his heel dubiously. However, he removed his foot.

"Saints and angels!" he murmured. "Can such Kings be? . . . Rise, Majesty, and of thy Royal courtesy leave us to the gentler beasts o' the field and tender fowls o' the grove; right potent sir—remove!"

And John the King, he whom men had once named "Lackland," obeyed, speaking no word; but out from his hot, wide eyes Death glared upon them as, turning in slow, leisured fashion, he walked across the little dingle and was gone.

"Ay de me!" sighed Gyles, sheathing his sword. "So then, thither goeth God's Anointed and England's King!"

"Didst not know him, man, didst not know him?"

"Not I, lady, not I—nor seek to."

"He meaneth cruel death to thee!"

"Tu-whoo! quo' the owl,—a wise bird, lady."

"Oh, man, yonder goeth thy death!"

"Why, so it go and come not, lady, 'tis well!"

"Nay, he'll be back anon with others to watch thee die,—slowly, ah—slowly!"

"Lady, now verily I marvel thou shouldst company with such Kings!"

"Oh!" cried she, with passionate stamping of foot. "And I marvel thou canst be prating o' folly so fool-like, and death so imminent! Death for thee . . . and for me. Ah, kind saints forfend! Thy horse, man, quick—to horse. I'll show where we may be secure. Oh, haste!" So, taking up his tablets, Gyles got to saddle, lifted the maid before him and, turning whither she pointed, galloped away. Presently, by her

direction, he turned in amid the trees, riding ever deeper into the greenwood.

And now, since they must go slowly amid these leafy ways, she questioned and he answered thus:

SHE. Dost know me, man?

HE. Ay—for thing o' beauty.

SHE (glancing askance at his comely, sun-burnt visage). Hast seen me ere this day? At court in England or France?

HE. In my dreams. I've visioned thee in all beauteous things, the black and white of thee in shadowy night and beam o' tender moon. Thine eyes o' blue——

SHE. Ha, man, they be brown.

HE. Of brown, in sun-kissed pool and bracken-fern——

SHE. But my name, my state, condition—knowest thou these?

HE. Beauty hath none other name or estate than beauty.

SHE. I am Melissa. Knowest thou me now?

HE. No better than I did.

SHE (frowning). What manner of man art thou that knowest not my name or thy King by sight? Who art thou?

HE. A simple country soul that loveth country things, and therewith a creature o' rare fancy, a writer of songs, a very dreamful sprite.

SHE. Yet solid as an oak.

HE. Whose fancy soareth on a sunbeam.

SHE. But whose feet trample on a King. And canst write, forsooth!

HE. I was bred a monk.

SHE. Yet art a knight?

HE. Of small estate and therewithal content.

SHE. Shall little aye content thee, big man? What is thy name?

HE. Gyles Brandholm, lady.

SHE. Why, 'tis a name I've heard o' late.

HE. Therefore I marvel.

SHE. 'Tis a name I've heard contemned by one Sir Godfrey de Broke.

HE. Then I marvel not; he is my kinsman!

SHE. He speaks thee great among the villainage of Sussex, a consorter with poor rogues, masterless men, and such, given to play of quarter-staff, wrestling, and the like unknightly ploys.

HE. And 'twixt whiles I make songs and sing 'em.

SHE. Then shall thy next song be of my sweet sib Matilda, for of all fair women is she woman most fair. Oh, she is all gold and tender white, and no man may see but

needs must love.

He. I'm no lover o' fair ladies, lady.

She (in lofty scorn). Nay, thou'rt a poor soul, cold and sluggard hearted for all thy fiery hair!

He. Yet when I love my love shall be brown-eyed with hair o' midnight, for verily ——

Gyles stopped and caught his breath as from beyond a flowery thicket stole the sweet chords of a lute touched by skilled fingers, and therewith a woman's voice, very rich and clear, singing these words:

> "Time shall not for the loveliest rose
> His cruel work delay.
> Cull then the flower whiles yet it blows,
> 'Twill languish in a day."

Now peering through the leaves, Gyles beheld a small garden with a lily-pool and, beside this, a lady young and slender, whose radiant beauty seemed to make the very place more fair; while couched before her on the velvet sward, viewing her golden loveliness with eyes of adoration, was a young knight very bravely clad, his flowing perfumed locks glossy from the comb.

"Is she not beauty's very perfection?" whispered the Lady Melissa.

"Verily!" murmured Gyles. "So might have seemed the Trojan's golden Helen."

"And singeth a pretty song!" sighed Melissa; "and the words so sweetly sad!"

"Ay," nodded Gyles, "woeful with youth, lady, for I was very young."

"Thou?" she questioned, wondering.

"Lady, I wrote 'em—being over young, as I say."

But now the beauteous singer, falling mute, glanced up and around with look of sudden fear, while her companion leapt up, hand on sword:

"Who comes?" he demanded.

"None worse than I, noble coz!" answered Gyles, and, riding forth of the thicket, swung the Lady Melissa gently to earth, while Sir Godfrey scowled.

"Ha, Gyles," quoth he ungraciously, "why ride ye hither and in arms?"

"Sir," answered Gyles, lightly dismounting, "I hear the times be something unquiet."

"Well, better thy ill-fashioned mail than rustical smock! But why art thou not with thy swine and kine and dunghilly ploughmen fellows?"

"Why, coz," answered Gyles serenely, "in this good mail, that was mine honoured sire's, I had a thought to ride and pay homage to the King at court. Well, him I've seen, so my Lady Melissa doth affirm, wherefore incontinent back go I, sir.

"Back to my horses, sheep and lowing kine,
Back to my cheery herds of grunting swine,
Back to the lusty village-folk of mine,
Since country things and country ploys
Are, have been, and shall be, my joys.
And as for Kings, methinks for me
My swine were better companee."

And so, fair ladies and most noble lord and cousin, God den t'ye."

"Nay, Sir Countryman, hold!" cried the Lady Melissa, catching his bridle-rein. "Sweet my sib and loved Matilda and you, Sir Godfrey, know that this same Sir Simplicity and maker o' verses hath, within the hour, trod upon our liege lord the King."

"Trod . . . trod on the King?" stammered Sir Godfrey in horrified amaze, while Matilda, letting fall her lute, rose swiftly, white hands clasped, lovely cheek alternate red and ghastly pale.

"The King!" she whispered. "Here again! Ah, God of Mercy . . .! Oh, would my father were in England!"

"Nay, fear nought, mine Heart!" cried Sir Godfrey. "Even our lawless King shall not dare touch the daughter of proud FitzWalter! Moreover, am I not here——" The brave words ended in a gasp of pain as, his shoulder transfixed by sudden arrow, Sir Godfrey reeled splashing into the lily-pool and lay there floundering helplessly; a second arrow whirred harmlessly from Gyles's triple mail of proof, and then he was afoot, sword in hand, for the little garden was a-throng with men. He saw the beautiful Matilda snatched up in savage arms, heard her despairing cries choked to sudden silence, and then he was smiting with terrible edge and deadly point; men gasped and stumbled and fell . . . a brief, desperate battle, for, beset on all sides, Gyles was battered to his knees, his sword torn from his fainting grasp and, lying half a-swoon on the trampled grass, he looked up into a face that glared down on him, a face somewhat broad in the cheek, dark-haired, dark-eyed, whose lips curled in a dreadful smile.

"Enough!" said the King. "Slay him not yet. He shall die for our pleasure. What o' the black-haired witch?"

"Sire, she fled like a deer and is away."

The King burst forth into a passion of oaths, French and English:

"She must be taken. Look to it, Gontran, look to it! There must none live to tell o' this! So—bring yon sturdy red-poll along, good knaves!"

Thus in a while the little garden showed deserted all, only on the trampled ling

were smears of blood and a broken lute.

II

Gyles opened dim eyes to see a man bending over him—a great hairy fellow whose ruddy face was framed in golden beard and a thatch of yellow hair.

"Hey, Robkyn?" he murmured drowsily, "my lusty Rob. . . . I've seen nought o' thee since we wrestled about two years agone at Lewes Fair. Well met, lad!"

"Nay, lord," answered Rob, dismally, "'tis ill met in very troth!"

"How so, Rob? Why . . . ha, where am I?"

"Here, master, i' the Tower,—with a curse on't!"

"The Tower o' London. . . . Ay, I mind me now, I smote the King and am jailed for't. But thou, Rob man, what dost thou here?"

"Lord, I am thy gaoler!"

"Thou, Robkyn, a gaoler? Thou that lovedst ever the sweet greenwood, the gentle Downcountry, and such-like cleanly things—thou a gaoler?"

"Master, I . . . I killed a man, and to 'scape prison and worse, turned gaoler."

"So, then," quoth Gyles, glancing round the grim stone walls about him, "here lie I, pent and doomed, methinks. Yet might my present case be worse, for here is no black dungeon,—here is air and light, God be thanked."

"Alack, good my lord," groaned Rob, "'tis why I do grieve for thee sadly, since these be comforts to thy future ill, winning thee to health that thou mayst better . . . endure . . . endure——"

"What, death, Robkyn?"

"Worse, lord,—the torment."

"So," quoth Gyles, blenching somewhat as he glanced down at his shapely limbs, "my lord the King will torture me? Prithee, how knowest this, Rob?"

"Lord," answered Robin, hanging his yellow head, "I . . . I am . . . chief tormentor."

Now at this Gyles fell back upon his pillow, staring at the speaker with eyes of horror and amaze; then of a sudden he laughed:

"Why, Robin, thou didst ever love small children, ay, and dogs, and these loved thee again! Thou hadst a way very marvellous with wild birds, and didst teach me to know each by his note! Thou wert mighty strong, yet so kindly gentle that——"

"Lord . . . lord . . .!" gasped Robin and fled forth of the cell, his many keys jangling harshly.

Now passed two weeks, and Gyles, recovered of his hurts, stood at the narrow

barred window, looking down upon the mighty fortress, and hearkening to the city's never-ending hum, when the door of his cell was thrown open and soldiers tramped in upon him; and having set gyves upon his wrists, they led him out and away. Across the sunny courtyard they marched him to the great White Tower that was at once citadel, palace, and prison, and so down narrow winding stairs, down and ever down 'twixt damp and slimy walls that gleamed in the torch-glare, past grim small doorways whence rang the muffled clank of fetters, faint groans, and dismal wailings, and then at last, deep under ground, to a great vaulted dungeon dim-lit by flaming cressets whose uncertain beams glinted upon the many tools and devilish engines contrived for the twisting and wrenching of quivering flesh. And here, redder for the light of a glowing brazier, was grim Robin, in apron and gauntlets of leather, with his two assistants.

And now they stripped the helpless victim, clamping him fast in a great chair; but seeing Robin's haggard look and how his strong hands trembled, Gyles contrived to smile on him, though wanly.

"Courage, man," quoth he, "and in memory o' better days, let me die ere the anguish grow too sharp."

"Lord . . . lord," whispered Robin, gasping, "watch me . . . watch, and do ever as I bid ye. But, an all fail, thou shalt die swiftly . . . swiftly, lord, because . . . I love thee. . . ."

"Master Robin," cried one of his assistants. "Ho, Master Robin, cometh the King's Majesty!" An echo of leisured feet upon stone stair, and the King entered with his slow, deliberate stride. Gems flashed in cap and girdle, they glittered upon his restless hands; but his face was dark, his brows knit in anxious gloom of thought. Behind him walked Peter Mauluc, his confidant and boon companion. Slowly, the King approached his captive and stood awhile viewing him with appraising eyes while his fingers plucked and plucked at the parchment scroll they held.

"A sturdy fellow, Peter," he nodded, "very lusty with life. Torment him tenderly, Robin, man, and he shall last us until nightfall, and beyond. Be cunning, Master Robin."

"Aha, trust me, Sire!" growled Robin.

"And first—the boot," said the King. "I see 'tis ready there. And his left leg, Master Robin, 'twas his left foot profaned me! And after the wedges be driven, try molten pitch. Thus now—begin." So saying, the King seated himself on a cushioned seat over against the chair of torment; then, as suddenly aware of the parchment scroll, he raved suddenly, smiting it with passionate fist: "Ha! God's curse on these Scots,—they harry our Northern Marches! Aha, Peter, man, would I had all

Scottish necks in a single noose! . . . So ho, there, Robin, why tarry ye? To it, knave, to it!" At sign from Robin his assistants dragged forward the iron boot, that ghastly engine of excruciating torture, into which they thrust their victim's naked foot and leg. Now came Robin with mallet and six wedges, the first of which he set between unyielding iron and tender flesh; then took he the mallet, and Robin's eyes glared wildly, his face ran with sweat as he raised the mallet.

"Now . . . groan!" he muttered, and smote. Then, writhing in his shackles, Gyles groaned amain while the mallet drave the wedge with blow on blow; and thus, with slow, deliberate strokes, five wedges were driven home; but now as he set the sixth and last, Robin's eyes seemed wilder than ever and his face gleamed wetly.

"Now," he whispered, gasping, "howl!" The blow fell, and the victim, leaping in the chair, roared so dreadfully that the King dropped his parchment and leaned forward to peer, while Peter Mauluc clapped his hands and whistled.

"The rogue giveth tongue!" murmured the King, smiling. "Now, Robin, the pitch, and see it bubbleth——" But as he spake there was the tread of hasty feet upon the stair, a clash of arms, and the Lord Constable entered with divers knights.

"Ha, de Greinville," cried the King, rising. "What now, man, what——?"

"Treason, my liege lord, treason most damnable! The citizens make uproar 'gainst us."

"Tush, my lord; out upon 'em with dog-whips!"

"Nay, Majesty, here's worse yet. FitzWalter is new landed from France and marcheth amain on London with all his powers. The men of Kent are up, and de Courcy with his Sussex levies——"

"Thunder of God!" roared John, and snatching up the parchment, tore and rent it with teeth and hands. "Do they bait me, then? Ha, dare they so! . . ." Here he fell into one of those wild paroxysms of fury that were the heritage of his wild blood, and then—was as suddenly the cold, clear-headed man of action.

"Man your walls, de Greinville! De Bracy, marshal our array, advance our banner, and cry 'King John and England.' To arms, my lords!" And so was gone like a whirlwind, his knights clattering after him.

"Now thanks be to good St. Guthlac!" gasped Robin, smearing wet face with mighty arm. "I feared 'twould come to the boiling pitch——"

"But . . . but these wedges, Robin?"

"Ha, lord, tormenting is rare, delicate art! Ho, lads, Hob and Thomkyn, off wi' these accursed irons!" So, while the assistants freed the prisoner from the chair of torture, Robin loosed him from the direful boot, and Gyles stood up, sound and whole, swaying a little, and full of amazed and breathless question:

"But the wedges, Rob, the wedges . . .?"

"Clap into thy gear, lord, and speedily!" cried Robin. "What, lads, fetch hither my lord's mail. So, now arm ye, good master, arm ye and haste, for there is one would fain ha' speech wi' thee, and the time is short."

So Gyles dressed and armed him, buckled on sword, tossed money to Hob and Thomkyn, those grimly wights, and followed whither Robin led. Up winding stone stairs, and ever up until his head spun, up and up until his legs ached, up and up until he must needs pause for breath, while Robin, pausing also, dashed sweat from him and muttered alternate prayers and curses.

"On, lord," he panted; "'tis a race 'gainst Death! Up, lord!" So on they went again until Robin halted at last, opened a small unexpected door, and beckoned Gyles to enter.

. . . She lay on a narrow bed, and all about her the shining glory of her hair, but in her sad, great eyes the creeping shadow of Death.

"Lady!" murmured Gyles, falling upon his knees. "Oh, my Lady Matilda!"

"Good friend," she whispered, "thou'rt kin to—him I do love. Give to him this ring, saying . . . though I die . . . yet is Death my kind friend, and . . . 'tis only this poor body perisheth, for my soul and . . . my love, these do live on, . . . waiting . . . waiting for him. And to my noble father . . . this neck-chain, and say . . . this Death the King . . . meteth out to me, . . . though sharp, is welcome, since Death . . . purgeth all stains; and I . . . am a FitzWalter. . . . And now, for thyself . . . Messire, the Lady Melissa waiteth thee . . . in the city. 'Twas she and I . . . and the good Robin . . . contrived. . . . Oh friend, reach me thy hand. The world darkens on me; yet I go . . . all unfearing . . . to my . . . merciful. . . ." She sighed deeply, and with that shuddering breath her pure soul winged its flight up and away from the sinful gloom of that grim old tower back to the radiant heaven whence it came.

And, after some while of whispered prayer, Gyles arose and, folding those pale slim hands upon the motionless bosom, stole forth where Robin waited him.

"Wert in time, lord?"

"Ay!" nodded Gyles.

"Then come, master, lace thy camail close. Moreover, I've a vizored helm shall hide thy visage. Come!"

So down and down again, along dim passages in the massy walls, across small gloomy chambers, through the echoing chapel, where from beneath the high altar Robin whipped a great helm, the which Gyles did on. And so to the thronged courtyard where King John's foreign mercenaries marshalled them; through this riot and confusion Robin brought him to where in care of Hob and Thomkyn stood Bran,

that fleet horse, saddled and bridled. Then, clapping on mailed jack and steel head-piece, Robin got to horse also and seized Bran's rein.

"Lord," quoth he, glancing up at the scowling keep, "so here's farewell to the tormenting art! And now sit ye and speak not."

Like one in a dream Gyles rode whither he was led, across inner and outer bailey, 'neath the gloomy arch of the Garden Tower, over thunderous drawbridge, and they were in the streets of London town, whence rose a mighty stir with sullen distant uproar and the rolling throb of drums. And presently he found himself among mounted men-at-arms, and, still like one in a dream, rode on with them through the city's angry hubbub. Very soon London was behind them, and nought to see save hedges, trees, and rolling meadowlands. Then he was aware of one who rode beside him, a slender knight and youthful in fine link-mail, rich surcoat, and vizored casque.

"Noble sir," said Gyles, "one told me I should see the lady Melissa, yet I espy her not, and fain——"

"Gentle messire, where be your eyes?" answered the young knight; and though the sweet voice rang hollow in the steel, he knew it and leaned suddenly near.

"Now by Heaven's Grace!" he exclaimed.

"Ah, Sir Rustical Simplicity," she answered, throwing up her vizor, "now could I laugh at thee were not my heart breaking for Matilda, my sweet saint. Saw you her indeed—at the last?"

"Verily," he answered, "her white soul soared to heaven whiles I held her hand."

"So now," cried the Lady Melissa, lifting tearful eyes to the cloudless sky, "now do I pray God and the holy saints she hath not died vainly. I pray this so cruel murder shall end black tyranny."

"Amen!" quoth Gyles reverently.

"Thus it is I ride in arms. Wilt think me unmaidenly, Sir Gyles?"

"Thou brave and noble lady," he answered; "some day, mayhap, I shall write songs to thy sweet womanhood and my worshipful love of thee."

"Love?" she murmured, between laughter and tears. "Oh, love forsooth? So soon? Thy love, messire, is marvellous swift,—like an arrow, like lightning!"

"Ay, truly," he answered gravely, "though more enduring. Also I've dreamed o' thee in the Tower these weeks, and so do know I loved thee at the first blink o' thy dark loveliness, Melissa,—thy midnight hair, thy honest, beautiful eyes. Oh, fain am I to kiss them——"

"Heart o' me!" she gasped, and down clanged her vizor.

. . . The sun was sinking what time they reached the wild stretch of Blackheath and saw before them the long slope of Shooters Hill dense with a rolling storm of

dust, a murky cloud pierced ever and anon by the flash and glitter of steel.

"Glory of angels!" cried Melissa, urging her steed to a faster gait, "yonder rideth my noble uncle, Robert FitzWalter!"

And thus upon Blackheath's desolation they met the great Earl's dusty, sweating array; and presently unto them rode FitzWalter himself, haggard-eyed 'neath lifted vizor, and beside him young Godfrey de Broke.

"Melissa," said the Earl, "my lady . . . sweet maid, what o' my child . . . my loved daughter—is't true? Godfrey found me in France . . . with the news. I came at speed. Am I . . . ha, God . . . too late? I read it in thy look! Now God's curse on this John, lewd ravisher! May he languish and rot from this hour! From this hour my sword goeth naked for his life! Is my loved child indeed dead?"

"Even so, uncle and lord. This noble knight, Sir Gyles Brandholm, was with her at . . . the end. He hath messages. Hear him."

So whiles the Earl and his fellow-barons and knights sat their stamping horses, a fierce and dark-faced ring, Gyles spake the dying lady's words, giving to FitzWalter the neck-chain and to Sir Godfrey the ring. And from that stern company went up a groan, a hoarse murmur that spoke of bitter wrongs to be bitterly avenged. Only Sir Godfrey, looking on the ring, uttered then no word, but of a sudden unlaced and let fall his helmet, and unbuckling sword, tossed it from him and looked up to heaven and round about wild-eyed.

"Fare ye well, my lords!" he cried. "Here is no place for me. Prayer is mightier than the sword, and Holy Church than embattled armies. Fare ye well, messires; be it yours to fight, and mine—to pray unceasing . . . to avenge . . . to watch a base King die!" So saying, he spurred his rearing horse and galloped away across the wild heath while all eyes watched until he was lost in the gathering dusk.

III

And thus came war, bitter and remorseless, and no leader more able than the King; but his army was of foreign mercenaries for the most part, while behind FitzWalter and his barons charged the sturdy sons of England; and thus it was that after many desperate affrays came Runnymede and the signing of Magna Carta, that mighty corner-stone of England's liberty—whereby we to-day (and all unthinking) reap the glorious aftermath of the blood and agony that went to its winning.

But scarce was the ink dry than John the Perfidious was in arms again, and battle followed battle with varying success . . . until a windy October evening found the royal forces pushing for Lynn through a burned waste of cruelly ravaged country,

while in tireless pursuit marched Earl FitzWalter, grim and relentless; and with him rode de Vere, Roger Bigod, William Fortibus, and divers other sturdy barons and knights; and there also was Gyles.

Presently, red in the sunset lay the sea; and from their van a knight came galloping:

"Ho, my lords," he cried joyously, "the tide riseth, the fords will be a-flood. John must stand and fight!" At this Earl FitzWalter lifted his heavy head, his haggard eyes gleamed:

"Now by Holy Cross!" he cried, drawing sword, "'tis even so. On, sirs! Death to the bloody tyrant! Death to Black John!"

Spurs struck deep at the summons, the weary horses leapt forward, and a thousand lances swept feutered to the charge while evening darkened to night.

Far in the vanward, astride his mighty horse Bran, rode Sir Gyles of Brandholm, and hard beside him spurred grim Robin.

"Lord," cried he, "we ride alone. Shall we not stay for our van?"

"Ay, back with ye, Rob, and bid 'em follow my pennon."

"Master, what be your intent?"

"Seest thou, Rob, yonder flaunts the royal banner, and with it John. Well, can I but come up with him unknown i' the dusk—a shrewd thrust ere any are aware, and England is rid of her curse."

"Verily!" cried Robin, levelling lance. "Ha, 'twere marvellous well; let's do't!"

"Nay, Robkyn, I ride alone!"

"Lord and master, I taught thee notable good tricks o' wrestle, I saved thy shanks i' the Tower by wedges o' wax, so where ye ride there rideth Rob."

Thus neck and neck they rode while night came down. Soon they were up with the King's rear-guard, were past, were mingled among the shadowy, straggling columns, were past creaking tumbril and baggage-waggon, pressing ever nearer that fluttering patch of shadow that was the standard of royal John.

And then their horse-hoofs splashed in water growing deep and deeper; from before rose hoarse shouts of warning, from behind, where the baggage-guard floundered, cries of wild dismay.

"It groweth perilous, lord!" quoth Robin. "Soon us must swim for't. Will the King go on, think ye?"

"He must, Rob, he must. 'Tis too late to form array, and he knoweth Death rides behind."

And now their powerful horses were staggering, were swimming, and from the darkness, before and behind, rose fearful cries, dreadful splashings, and bubbling

screams.

"Art there, lord?"

"Here, Robkyn! Ha, methinks my Bran touched bottom. Ay, there again; brave lad, he hath the ford! Hither, Robin, it shallows!"

So, amid the half-drowned rabblement of King John's scattered army, they won to shore; and all about them dim shapes that gasped and cursed in divers tongues, yet all very sincerely. But the King's banner was gone and, with nought to guide, they spurred on and through the broken army, riding with loosened reins until before them lights gleamed.

Thus came they, among the first, to Swineshead Abbey, where the good monks made them welcome to fire and board.

At the high table, with Abbot and tall Sub-Prior, sat the King quaffing goblets of wine and roaring in loud jollity as was his way when Fortune served him ill; and his knights, heartened by his merriment, laughed and cheered likewise. And if the grave Abbot sat mute, there was the tall Sub-Prior ever at Majesty's beck.

Now presently, from joyous profanity, the King got him to tales of love and fair ladies, and though the Abbot shrank and hid face in hood, hard by the King stood the tall Sub-Prior.

Then the King rose up and called a toast whiles all stood hushed to honour it.

"To the loveliest these arms e'er clasped—Matilda the Fair!" The King lifted the goblet high, but even then the cup was snatched and, turning unsteadily, King John beheld the tall Sub-Prior upon his knee, proffering a chalice of gold richly begemmed.

"Pardon, Sire!" he murmured. "But for toast so fair here is a like fair, rare wine of Hyppocras."

"Ha, sayst thou?" quoth the King. "Then—drink first, right reverend shaveling, and quaff deep!"

So the Sub-Prior drank and, yet upon his knees, gave King John the cup.

"Matilda!" he cried, and drained it. Thereon was laughter and riot till the King stumbled to bed, at last. But in the night it was whispered that King John was direly sick. Came morning, with the King raving in agony, yet vowing he must on. Wherefore, because he could not mount horse, they set him in a litter; and ever as they went, from that close-curtained litter came deep sighs and moans and hoarse gabble of fevered prayer. And close upon this litter, among the royal body-guard, rode the tall Sub-Prior, who swayed and nodded and clung so desperately to saddle that many laughed at this tender Churchman who could not ride.

They reached Newark at last, and there the King was put to bed; and dire word

came that he was dying and raving for a priest. So to him went the tall Sub-Prior, who, putting all without, barred the chamber door and, coming to the great bed, clutched the post and stood there, looking down on fallen Majesty.

"Ah . . . reverend father!" groaned the King, "shrive me . . . aneal me, for my bowels consume, and . . . Death glares. . . Shrive me, holy father; loose me of . . . my sin . . ."

"John, thrice accursed! . . . Murderer of innocence! Ravisher and tormentor! There is no pardon for thee!"

"Treason!" gasped the King. "Father, I die . . . mercy!"

"Accursed of God . . . and man," panted the Sub-Prior, throwing back his cowl, "as in sin ye lived . . . in sin shall ye die! . . . Know ye this face, . . . accursed man? I was . . . Godfrey de Broke . . . betrothed to . . . Matilda. Think . . . think on her white innocence . . . blasted by thy brutish lust . . . and die . . ."

"Treachery!" gasped the King, "ha, the golden chalice! . . . Poison! . . . Oh, death!"

"Ay, Majesty . . . thou'rt poisoned."

"Mercy!" whispered the King, lifting a feeble hand in supplication. "Mercy!"

"Perish in thy sin . . . so shall hell be . . . foul o' thee!" And presently, with a sudden, dire convulsion, King John wailed and died.

Then sinking beside the bed, young Godfrey covered his twitching face with hands that clutched in agony:

"Oh God!" he groaned. "Matilda . . . beloved. . . . I follow thee . . . reach me thy dear hands . . . lift me up . . . to heaven . . . and . . . thee." And thereafter the Sub-Prior was suddenly very still.

IV

"Ay de me!" sighed Gyles, reining up his great steed Bran within a sunny glade. "She is forsooth a lady so proud, Rob, of estate so lofty, of such wide demesnes, seest thou! A Countess in England, again in Brittany, in Mortain a Duchess, and, by the Rood,—of the blood royal!"

"And yet, master," answered placid Robin, "a mere woman."

"Ah, verily! Yet shall such a woman stoop to such a man as I that abhor pomp, despise the pageantry o' state, and yearn for my rick-yards, the lowing o' cows in sunny mead, and plain, lusty country folk,—being myself such a simple, homely fellow——"

"That no man may put on 's back!" added Robin.

"Nay, wrestling be out o' favour with your folk of high degree, Rob."

"Well, that writeth good pretty songs, then!"

"Faith, my Robkyn, had I but known her of lineage so proud, of possessions so direly vast, I had been mum, nor dared speak my love. Well, bide ye here, man. Should she prove kind, I'll give thee a rouse on my hunting horn."

"So then, lord, will I spur for Brandholm and set every church bell a-clang for pure gladness. And now may St. Cuthbert prosper thee."

Thus Gyles presently sat him 'neath that tree where ran the cheery water-brook; hard by, his tall war-horse Bran cropped the tender grass, and Gyles, ruddy head bowed above tablets on knee, wrote a song of love triumphant (though sighing oft) and oft raising head to look expectant in the one direction.

And suddenly, from a direction quite opposite, came Melissa stepping like a young goddess, for tall was she and proud, also her feet made no noise; yet soon his quick eyes espied her, and, rising, he stood viewing her dark beauty with eyes of wistful question.

"What write you there, Sir Rusticity?" she demanded.

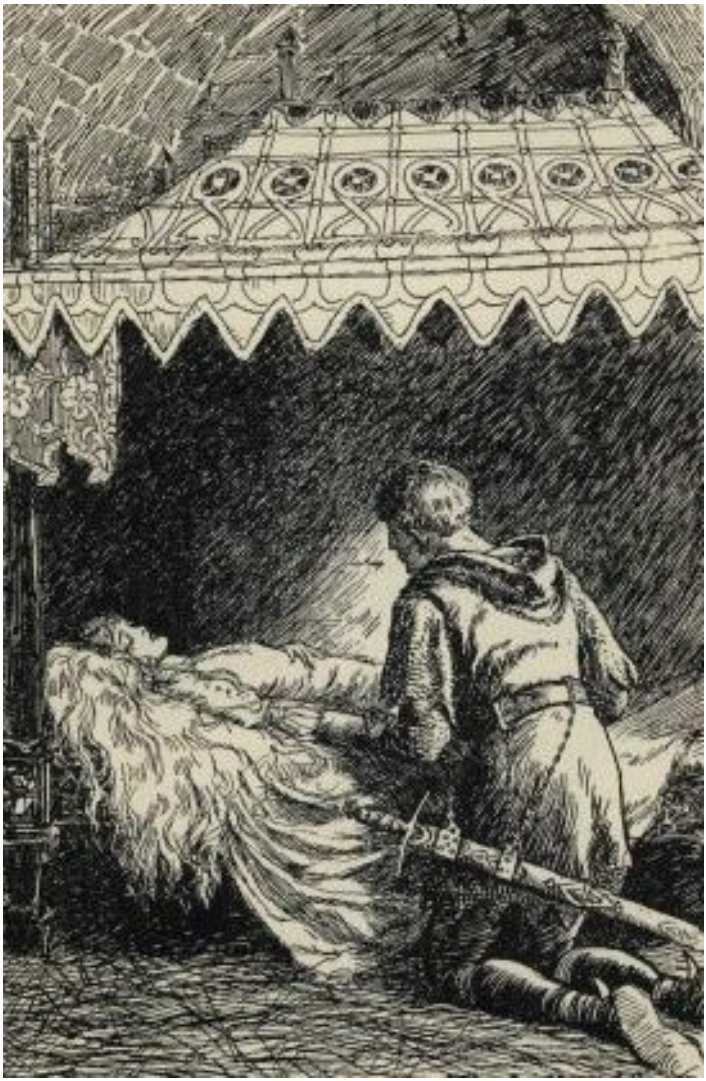
"Sooth, lady," he answered, "I know not if it be merest folly or sweetest truth, nor can I know except thou discover me thy mind, as thus: Wilt thou, whose blood is royal, to the gay courts of kings, sorting with thy proud kind, wilt thou away to the pomp and worshipful homage of mighty lords or to the country go . . . the sweet greenwood, the gentle downs, with none to worship thee save one, an humble knight of small estate, hight—Gyles?"

"Ah, Sir Simpleton," she sighed, tender-smiling, "needeth this an answer, indeed?"

"Yea, in very sooth!"

"Why, then, Gyles, did I not, with the aid of that sweet dying saint, bring thee forth of the mighty Tower? So art thou mine—and I thine—and each the other's. Wherefore, Sir Gyles, pray you . . . take me, now."

So Gyles took her, lifting her high against his heart; and, having kissed her a while, sat beneath the tree with her upon his knees, and thus, her loving arms about him, he read to her his song of love triumphant.



“‘Good friend,’ she whispered, ‘thou’rt kin to him’”

No. 6

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S

I

A TALL, slim man sat upon a wall,—long legs a-dangle, his lean, comically woeful face down-bent beneath cockscombed hood,—plucking with skilled fingers at the lute upon his knee sweet minor chords and soft rippling notes sad as the look in his dark eyes.

"Rahere!" said a soft voice from the terrace above. "Oh Rahere, hast no greeting for me?"

The lute gave forth a sudden harsh discord, and Rahere, King Henry's famous jester, glanced up at the lovely young face stooping above him:

"Malise!" he whispered.

Joyously eager she seemed and very young, more child than woman, for all her glory of rich and stately apparel.

Then Rahere the Fool nodded, his wide mouth up-curling in twisted smile, and stepped to earth.

"Hail, Luna!" he cried, with an absurd capering bow, "Sweet Dian, Cynthia, Queen o' starry heaven, veil me thy splendour, submerge, begone,—thou'rt risen upon the world too soon——"

"Begone?" she repeated. "Oh Rahere, what meanst thou?"

"Away!" he cried, striking divers chords and postures together. "Hence, avaunt, off, dispatch, trip, and so be quit o' folly, noble lady!"

"Nay, mock me not, Rahere!" she pleaded, reaching out a small, jewelled hand to him. "I have scarce had word with thee since thy return from holy Rome. . . . And I have waited, watched for thee, and now—now thou wouldst seem strange to me, and I find thee mopish as owl——"

"Faith, sweet soul, an owl were merrier, for here perch I plaguing my fool wits in foolish matter of a song o' folly, a rare jape, a thing o' waggery shall tickle grave Majesty and convulse a court o' lesser fools——"

"Rahere, say now—art not glad to see me?"

"Oh child, beyond expression!"

"Ah, name me not child!" she cried, flushing. "I am seventeen—a woman grown and——"

"Splendour o' heaven, here is ripe maturity! Here standeth woman apt and fit to

wedlock! Heigho! so wags the world!"

"Wedlock!" she whispered, bending nearer. "Hast heard then, Rahere, hast heard——"

"Lady, I have ears."

"Rahere, I—I am sore affrighted——"

"Child, thou'rt but seventeen!"

"The King would wed me to one I——"

"And so Amen!" cried Rahere, with a twang of strings. "Heaven's blessings on ye twain!"

"How?" she gasped, shrinking suddenly as from a blow. "Canst speak such a blessing—thou, Rahere, thou? Oh, but thou'rt changed,—art changed indeed since thy pilgrimage to Rome!"

"Why, 'tis a world o' change, lady. And when man doth range 'tis none so strange if heart should change——"

"I thought 'twas not in thee to change!" she murmured in gentle reproach. "Ah, Rahere, dear friend, years agone, and I very small and lonely—a child of none account, with none to heed or care for me,—at such time God sent thee to my comfort, thou wert my kind playfellow, the gentle companion of my solitude, and time but made thee dearer. Alas, to-day, by the death of my kin, I am a woman . . . a lady at court . . . of wide lands, they say, and right hatefully rich. So there be many great lords would fain wed me! So am I a-dread and would fain be very poor again. . . . Dear Rahere, do thou take me. . . . Oh, pray run away with me, for I am still thy little friend, Malise, and thou—thou art——"

"A very fool!" he cried hoarsely. "Mark this my cockscomb."

"I ever thought thee most wise, Rahere, a scholar——"

"Yet am I the King's poor jester."

"And his most sage counsellor and friend, Rahere. And 'tis known thou'rt of gentle blood! And none can sing or touch harp as thou! And 'spite thy cockscomb hast a proud, high valiance of look."

"Sleights, child! These be but arts o' my foolish trade."

"Moreover, Rahere, I do love thee!"

"Nay, thou'rt seventeen and a countess, whiles I am forty-odd and a beggarly fool."

"Oh, loved beggar!" she sighed. "Hast forgot the night thou didst fare away on thy pilgrimage? The night we spake farewell—my hands in thine, my kisses on thy tear-wet cheek, Rahere! Hast forgot that hour—'twas but three little years since ——"

"Ohé!" cried he, with a graceful pirouette; and strumming his lyre, sang:

> "Three little, little years! quo' she,
> 'Tis but three years—heigho!
> Yet in this bustling world, quo' he,
> Three years may prove eternity.
> Sing nonny, nonny no!
> For oh, alas, when love's forgot,
> Then, out upon it, love is not."

"Ah, Rahere," she questioned in a weeping voice, "didst then never truly love me?"

"Ay, mightily—with love right fatherly," he answered, frowning at the lute that sighed and whispered to his restless fingers; "thou wert but a babe, Malise, new to life, three years agone, but to-day——"

"Three weary years!" she sighed. "But all this while thy dear memory sang within my heart, for 'twas thou—'twas thou, Rahere, first taught me to love all good and noble things: the stars in heaven, the names of flowers, how to know each bird by his pretty pipe, to touch the harp to music, to read—oh, much didst thou teach me, yet most of all—to love thee."

"Now praised be God!" said he, lifting a saturnine face to the evening sky. "Thy faith in me, thy pure and childish love maketh this sorry world, for me, a better place, lifts me high 'bove my baser self, making of Rahere the Fool a man thrice blessed. Thou wert but a timid child then, to-day thou'rt a noble woman, Malise, to use thy womanhood to noble purpose, to . . . wed right nobly, perchance to . . . mother noble children, teaching them to live in honour, loving their God and this our England ——"

"And thou, Rahere,—and thou——?" she cried, and stooping swiftly, caught him by his escalloped cape and so held him to peer into his sombre eyes.

"I thank the saints, Malise, for thy much youthfulness, since the young may soon forget sorrow. . . . Peradventure in some other world and age, life shall prove kinder and I come at last by my heart's desire, an I be worthy. Meanwhile I have man's work to do . . . and my dreams. And so fare thee well, child! . . . Go now,—go and take God with thee, thou'rt in His holy keeping henceforth, so am I content—almost . . ."

Then loosing those small, clinging hands he kissed them . . . heard her sob . . . heard the sad rustle of her silken draperies, and turning, beheld King Henry watching him from a leafy alley hard by.

Now as the King frowned, so frowned Rahere and strummed a merry lilting

measure.

"Ha, Fool," cried King Henry angrily, striding forward. "'Twas the lady Malise left thee but now."

"Peevish coz, not so," answered Rahere, fingers tripping merrily. "Yonder went mere sundry miles of good English lands, divers townships, bailiwicks, with mills, markets, manors, and castles."

"Hast done my will, Rahere, am I obeyed?"

"Ay, Majesty, I have but now trod and trampled upon a flower——"

"Tush, man! Hast killed this puling maid's idle love for thee?"

"It bleeds, lord, it bleeds—'twill haply die anon. And I am but a poor Fool, thou a king mighty and esteemed wise, and she—no more than a young and tender maid!"

"Yet of a stubborn mind, and would thwart my purpose for this arrant fool's-head o' thine! And here's the passing wonder on't!"

"Yet again, Hal, here's no wonder at all, good gossip, for when she was small, a lonely maid of none account to thee, dread lord, or any lesser man, this same fool's-head schemed comfort to her childish woes, these fool's-hands wiped her tears, these arms cradled her, this shoulder was her throne. 'Neath this my cap o' folly, sir, she saw only Rahere the man. The eyes o' childhood look deep, Harry Beauclerc, a child's instinct is truer than the cloudy reasoning o' the sagest philosopher or kingliest bookworm. 'Twas so she saw the man and loved thy Fool, Lord King, with passion sweet and pure as God's good sunlight."

"Go to!" quoth Majesty, frowning. "Thou'rt but my Fool, a thing for idle laughter, no more—whiles the Lady Malise is to-day a lady of so great possessions she is become right potent to our state, and may be a factor good or bad to our future governance and the well-being of our England. So Rahere—man, I do summon the knightly blood o' thee to make oath thou'lt speak the Lady Malise no more until she be safe wed. Come, swear me this upon the cross of my dagger here!"

"Aha, lord King," laughed Rahere grimly, "'tis politic monarch that, spurning thy man o' folly, calleth thus on Rahere his knightly honour! Oho, 'tis crafty monarch, Hal, this Henry of ours! And so, dread lord, here upon thy dagger-hilt I swear thee this oath. . . . Thus, 'tis done! And now, Sire, I crave a boon o' thee——"

"Ha, must I pay thee for thy knightly faith, Rahere?"

"Nay, Sire, for my folly."

"Well, what would ye?"

"Land, my liege; land hard by this thy good city o' London; land crave I in St.

Bartholomew's blessed name; land whereon to build a spital and little church for the poor and sick; land sufficient unto this and no more,—in a word, land."

"A church, a hospital—thou?"

"E'en I, lord King."

"How, wouldst dare make mock of holy things, Rahere? Thou'rt a man o' folly and something sinful ways."

"Ay, God forgive me! Yet a man, ay, e'en such as I, may repent. And in Italy, upon my pilgrimage, I fell direly sick, so needs must I remember the afflicted poor; and since St. Bartholomew cured me, unto this good saint shall my hospital be built."

"But thou art my minstrel, and famous; thou art Rahere the Fool; I made thee so, and——"

"True, Hal, true—yet first God made me man. So henceforth my folly ends, God's man I'll live."

"Nay," quoth King Henry, frowning; "what then of my merry wag, my roguish jester,—what?"

"Alas, Sire, he died but now; in proof whereof—behold!" and letting fall his famous lute whose magic strings had been the joy of so many, its merry lilts and tender melodies waking in turn laughter and tears, Rahere crushed it to twanging ruin beneath his heel. Then while the King stared in angry amaze, Rahere tossed cockscombed hood back upon his broad shoulders and threw wide his arms:

"Lo, here stand I," quoth he, "no more your Majesty's gilded Fool but a poor, mean fellow out o' place unless thou grant my boon."

"Shalt quit our court forthright, curst Fool!"

"And thus," sighed Rahere, "being quit o' folly, is thy Wisdom wiser."

"Ha, thou ingrate dog!" quoth Majesty.

"Great and noble King!" murmured Rahere, with a profound obeisance. King Henry scowled and, turning his back, took a turn upon the terrace, while Rahere stood gazing wistful upon the shady gardens below. Said he:

"Oh King, whoso giveth to the poor, giveth unto God, so to thy known wisdom and godliness, most Christian King, add you charity."

"Good faith, Rahere," gibed Majesty, "from Fool art growing churchman before my eyes; and all churchmen be lusty beggars——"

"Then, Sire, here upon my marrow-bones beg I," said Rahere, suddenly kneeling. "Land, my liege, as gift to God for the poor. St. Bartholomew in my vision named Smithfield,—the blessed saint appearing unto me in my sickness as I have told thee did, as I have already recounted, choose, pronounce, and name——"

"Enough—enough!" cried the King in quick petulance; "I'll grant thee land

sufficient to thy purpose and no more,—that part of Smithfield called The Elms."

"Sire, 'tis where the gibbets stand——"

"Sir Beggar, I cede ye the gibbets also."

"Lord, the place thereabout is a marsh."

"Why, then, drain it."

"Lord, I have been ever a prodigal, thus a poor man I, and this shall cost much money."

"Then beg it, Rahere."

"Verily that will I, Sire——"

"But not of me nor at my court,—stranger art thou to us henceforth."

"Verily, Majesty, since Fool am I no longer. Wherefore, my good lord, I humbly take my——" He paused as from the leafy alley below came a sudden distressful outcry, and, glancing thither, he beheld Malise, her slim youthful loveliness writhing desperate in the clutch of a man's arms, her young eyes wide with fear and horror of shame. Rahere crouched to spring, but the hand of Majesty stayed him; and in this moment also, Malise, slipping her captor's hold, fled and was gone.

"Peace!" said the King.

"How, Sire, will Henry of England watch Purity shamed?"

"Say rather Innocence wooed to honourable marriage."

"Ha—marriage?" gasped Rahere, trembling. "Little white-souled Malise—to yon lewd dog——"

"Nay, rogue, to Count Ranulf, lord of the Northern Marches and Lord Seneschal of Northam."

"Ay," nodded Rahere, "I know him,—a vile lord, old in corruption, of life most vile. Ah, my good Sire, bethink you of this, I pray, and spare this pretty innocent ——"

"Enough, man, curb thy venomous tongue! . . . And 'tis a mighty lord that holdeth in his gripe all the powers o' the North,—so powerful he might bring war upon our realm——"

"Well, Sire, and have we not swords here i' the South country?"

"Tush, Fool! My policy soareth 'bove base folly of war. . . . Better one maid weep a while than English blood flow and English homes burn."

"Ay, ay, lord, a notable phrase! But . . . this child Malise——"

"Shall wed the Count Ranulf within the week."

"So God forgive thee, Harry of England!" Thus spake Rahere, and then, even as he turned from the King's cold fury, to them came Count Ranulf the Lord Marcher himself, a tall, lean man with red, ravenous mouth and hungry eyes.

“Welcome, good my lord!” said the King as Ranulf made his obeisance. “How speeds thy wooing?—Stay, Rahere, do reverence unto thy betters; salute my lord Count.”

“Gracious lord,” said Rahere, bowing, “a mighty to-do is there on thine account,—Dan Cupid pouts, sweet Venus and her rosy lights-o’-love weep and bemoan thy fall, wise Majesty nods and winks, but the flies, small imps o’ lechery, cry buzz, buzz, out, alas, our master goes a-marrying! Good faith, Sir Count, the very dogs might howl for thee.”

Count Ranulf blinked and stared:

“Good my liege,” quoth he. “I pray what meaneth thy Fool?”

“’Tis a chirping madman and none of mine!” answered Henry, stroking his bearded chin and viewing Rahere with musing eyes. “He groweth pious.”

“Pious, your Majesty?” cried the Count. “Rahere—pious!” And he laughed amain.

“Yet true is it, Sir Ranulf,—this Rahere quitteth fool’s-cap and motley for monkish cowl and gloomy cell, turning from life of wanton joys to an austere chastity. He would flee our court and be holy. Yet ere he go, friend Ranulf, he shall make for thee a song of marriage,—sing now, Rahere, for this most gentle lord.”

“Noble Count,” sighed Rahere, louting low, “sweet, gentle lord, thou gentle, of gentles most gentle, the dogs, as I say, might howl for thee in sympathy, but as for myself, I being no other than I am and that our noble Henry’s right humble servant, hearing obey. Thus then—with dainty ditty something witty, quaint and pretty, I’ll e’en fit ye,—so heark and mark:

‘Alack, to wed! To Love’s soft pinions clip!
To shackle sweet Desire that free should trip!
To drag along the leaden marriage clog!
To be a husband, spouse, a sorry dog!
Let other dogs give tongue
Whiles doleful bells be rung.
To Happy Freedom sound the passing bell,
Since, fettered thus, to Joy is long farewell.
Ding dong! All’s wrong—
—But, an ye seek a luscious dame
Apt to sly Cupid’s tender game,
Rahere, an ye shall fee him well,
Might of such rare young beauty tell.
But, faith, my song
Groweth o’er long,
And so—ding dong
Farewell!’”

Thus sang Rahere, then turned about and, kicking aside his broken lute, strode away down the leafy alley; but after some while paused to lean against a shady tree and look back with eyes expectant. And presently indeed Count Ranulf came hurrying.

“Rahere,” quoth he, tapping the jewelled purse at his girdle, “I’m for thee . . . thy song . . . what o’ this beauty? Name thy price and speak, man, speak!”

“Oho, sir,” said Rahere, leering evilly, “what then o’ thy wife that is to be?”

“*A fico!* ’Tis a peevish child, good Folly, so now——”

“Yet fair, they say, good lord.”

“So-so!” nodded Count Ranulf impatiently. “Her green innocence and timorous fears may prove delectable awhile, but——”

“Awhile, gentle Count? A day? A week? A month? And then? Go to, I perceive thy need is for something of complexion more luscious—aha? I could show thee a creature of warmer blood, of rich, orient beauty—oho! A damsel o’ degree, ripe and loving—yet mum!”

“Say ye so, Rahere, say ye so in sooth? Ha, ’tis known thou’rt wise in beauty . . . an eye—judgement! Who is she? What? Where? Good faith—speak, man, speak! An she prove thy words I’ll guerdon thee well, ay, and passing well,—speak!”

So then, with evil looks and words fittingly salacious, Rahere whispered awhile, until the Count’s eyes glistened, his lean face twitched, and his nether lip showed wet ’neath fretting teeth.

"To-night! Without the walls . . . where the road trendeth towards Smithfield. . . ."

II

An orbed moon peeping stealthily from creeping cloud lit a vague, wide heath dense with tangled briar and rank grass . . . small stilly pools glittered . . . dank sedge rustled, tall rushes stirred above whispering ooze; the furtive moon, rising higher, showed this wild desolation crossed by a broadish track that led up to a grassy knoll topped by divers weather-beaten gibbets whence dangled shapes, stark and grim against the lightening sky, shapes that swung, creaking faintly in the shuddering night wind.

"Saints defend us! What dire place is this?"

"Faith, Sir Count, 'tis a place dedicate to the good St. Bartholomew. Here one day shall stand his church and noble hospital,—but to-night 'tis verily a place o' death."

"Death? . . . How, then—ha, Fool, what mean ye?"

"Death!" answered Rahere, tossing off his cloak, "death, lord Ranulf, for thee or me as God and His saints elect." And speaking, he drew the sword he bore.

"So . . . madman," cried the Count, scowling "Curst Fool, what's here——?"

"None—save thou and I, men of equal birth, yon poor gibbeted rogues equal in death—and God that watcheth always. So, my lord, an ever thou didst fight—fight now—fall on, for one of us shall die."

"Base rogue . . . treacherous dog!" cried Ranulf and, drawing sword, leapt in furious onset.

And so, what time London slept secure behind her massy walls and young Malise sobbed and murmured within her dreams, they fought together, these twain, in that place of desolation, a desperate conflict, foot to foot and eye to eye . . . deadly steel glimmered and rang. . . .

And, after some while, Rahere, panting, looked down on what lay at his feet, and tossing his sword into the quag, stooped, gathered the limp burden in mighty arms, and, coming to that dark, quaking ooze, hove the dead therein.

"Good rest to thee, Ranulf!" said he, nodding down at it. "Upon thy bones shall rise a noble monument hereafter." Then turned he towards the great city whose mighty walls rose silvery beneath the moon, and reaching forth long arms:

"Malise!" he whispered. "Sweet soul . . . thus art thou saved to better purpose, I pray. Life's garden lieth open to thee now . . . happiness . . . honour, thanks be unto

God and His holy saints,—in especial the good St. Bartholomew. . . . And so farewell to thee—Malise!"

Thus spake Rahere and presently wandered back across that desolation, head a-droop like a man very weary. Such was the passing of Ranulf, Lord Seneschal of Northam, vanishing from life none knew how or whither, and, though great in life, yet, being dead and human, was presently forgotten.

But as time passed, Rahere the Jester, though banished from court, grew more famous day by day, labouring in the marsh mid ooze and mud to drain the land and build thereon his hospital. Solitary he worked, in heat and cold, rain and shine, yet so joyously that some folk named him "madman" and some proclaimed him "saint." And every day, as his fame spread, came people more and more to watch him at his cruel labours,—some to laugh and jeer, some to pity and encourage, some very few to proffer timid aid, but all wondering at this madman, this Fool turned saint.

And so a year passed.

III

Half-naked, knee-deep in mud, Rahere laboured upon a certain noon, surrounded by a clamorous multitude, poor lowly folk and gentle, serf, franklyn, and knight, women who stared and chattered, ladies on horseback who looked and laughed.

Now suddenly, forth of the crowd, strode a great fellow in battered half-armour, who, fronting Rahere, jeered at him in the voice of a bull:

"What, thou worm, wilt burrow in the mud for thy pleasure? Ho, thou lobbus little-wit, an thou so love this stinking mud, wallowing therein like a beastly hog, let us see an thou will lap and eat it—come!"

But, leaning upon his mattock, Rahere looked his mocker in the eyes:

"Ah, brother," said he kindly, "tell me thy name."

"Nick o' the Ford they call me; and what then, thou mud-worm?"

"This, Nick,—one day shalt be my man and serve God. And as for this good mud, scorn it not, since all flesh—ay, thou and I are but mud animate. So now hearken, brother Nick—and ye good people each and every, and I will incontinent make and sing ye a Song of Mud."

So saying, Rahere laid by mattock and, taking a small harp from a leather bag, struck thereon with his matchless skill a loud, sweet chord; then, while the crowd stood awed and mute, he sang in a wondrous voice, very rich and clear, This Song of Mud:

"All ye that be of woman born
Dare not this homely mud to scorn,
For of good mud God made us all,
King and proud noble, serf and thrall.

Out of the dust the great God formed us,
Breathed upon this dust and warmed us,
Dust that, when our life be o'er,
Returneth back to dust once more.

But of this dust God made a shrine
For man his soul, that part divine.
Thus though formed of the mud we be,
Yet instinct all of God are we.

So, Brethren of the Mud, give ear!
In life, in death—be quit of fear,
Since being o' God, when life is o'er,
Back unto God go we once more."

For a space all stood mute; wherefore lifting his work-stained hand, Rahere spake them, loud and clear:

"Children of God's love, here am I upon a work of God—lo, each swing of spade or mattock is to God's glory and the future comfort of ye His children, one and all. Here on this waste, where men have died in shame, shall stand a church and goodly hospital to the comfort of the poor, the sorrowful, and afflicted, a place of mercy for all! So, my brethren, ye children of God, who will aid me in this work? I ask not money but the labour of your hands; dig and delve you with me, bring to me stones, bricks few or many, give to this good work aught ye will. Brothers and sisters,—who now will aid, who glorify God by the sweat o' their bodies,—labouring only when ye may, bringing to the work only what ye can,—which of ye will be first?"

Then Nick o' the Ford, this mighty man, roared lustily, and tossing off sword-belt and mail-jack, seized mattock and fell to labouring furiously, while divers others came running to join him with bare hands since tools they lacked, and the air rang with eager shouts, cheers, and joyous hubbub.

"Rahere!" cried a well-loved voice; now parting the throng about him, Rahere beheld a splendid cavalcade, and riding foremost—two. But he saw only the lovely flushed face and small, eager hands reached out to him.

"Malise!" said he, catching his breath. "Sweet lady, I . . . I may not touch thee . . . my hands . . . so miry."

"Ah, Rahere," she cried, "great man and right noble gentleman, fain would I kiss them. How sayst thou, Giles, my husband?" and she turned to him beside her, a young, comely man, his hawk-face lit by quick bright eyes.

"In troth, messire," he answered, "being loved friend to my Malise so art thou friend of mine, and so will I have thy hand, noble Rahere, mud or no."

"Why, verily," said Rahere, clasping hands. "I heard . . . I heard tell of your marriage . . . so I pray God bless ye to each other and unto this England."

Now the Lady Malise, glancing from her young husband's handsome face to Rahere's worn features, his sad, wise eyes and wistful mouth, sighed and spake with head averted:

"We be come, loved Rahere, to grant thee our aid . . . money . . . to thy noble work . . . whatso thou wilt——"

"Bricks!" cried Rahere, cutting an antic. "Stones, timber, craftsmen . . . and may the good St. Bartholomew bless ye! But ha, see where my workers gape,—and I must to them, and so . . . fare ye well! Ho, Nick, my brawny Nicholas, stay by me and shalt be my master o' works! And so, good friends—with a will, let's to 't again!"

So, in fullness of time, upon that evil swamp, rose St. Bartholomew's hospital and church, a noble work indeed, set within fair gardens where laboured devoted brethren, skilled in herbs and medicines, waging ceaseless war against sickness and death. Which hospital, beneath Prior Rahere's able manage, grew ever more a blessing, as witness King Henry's notable charter, in especial this:

> Wit ye, that I have granted and by my charter confirmed to the Church of Bartholomew and to Rahere the Prior, and to the poor of the hospital of the same church, that they be free from all earthly servitude, power, and subjection. As any church in all England is free, so shall this be free, and with all lands acquired or so to be. I will maintain and defend it as free as my crown against all men. I also deliver Prior Rahere from all charges and claims whatsoever, and let none presume to usurp any dominion in the place.
>
> Done at Westminster, A.D. 1133, in the
> 33rd year of our reign.

So Rahere from famous Jester became more famous Prior, the brother and comforter to all distressed either of mind or body, spending his laborious days in constant service for man, woman, and child. And thus rolled the years until, upon a certain evening; said he:

"Nicholas, my good and trusted brother, thou knowest mine eyes do fail o' late, pray now read me this letter."

So tall Nicholas, the Sub-Prior, bowed grey head to the parchment and read:

> *To* RAHERE, Prior.
>
> Holy Father and most dear friend, my noble husband is dead, my children wed and scattered and I a solitary soul. So come I unto thee, seeking that comfort sure and unfailing thou wert wont to accord unto thy little, solitary
>
> MALISE.

"Malise!" murmured Prior Rahere, bowing white head upon work-worn hands, and sat thus so long that Nicholas in anxious love set a sturdy arm about the old man's thin shoulders. Yet when he looked up Rahere's haggard face was bright and joyous.

"Good brother Nicholas," said he, "loved Nick, two-and-forty weary years agone . . . she was dear . . . very dear to me. . . . To-day I'm old, out-worn and nigh to my rest, thank God . . . yet hath He suffered that I see her once more ere kind Death soothe me. Truly our God is very merciful, Nicholas. Go now, let them bring lights, and when this lady be come, lead her hither."

But when at last she came, old Rahere was sleeping in his great chair, and waking to the touch of lips upon his withered hand, beheld her kneeling at his feet, a woman grey-haired yet comely, though with sorrowful eyes.

"Daughter!" said he.

"Father!" she whispered. "Alone was I as a child—and thou didst comfort me; alone am I now——"

"Nay, child," he answered, "for God is with thee."

"Rahere," she sighed, "to what end are we born?"

"To work, child. To the service of our fellows. To grow wise by suffering. To die that we may know the fuller living. . . . And mayhap in death our dreams shall come true. . . . But God hath blessed thee with fair daughters and with sons. . . . As for me, I've had my dream, I've worked and am content—almost."

"I pray—what was thy dream, Rahere, wilt tell me this?"

"Thyself, Malise; all thy days I've loved thee and made that love a goad, a spur to achievement. And lo, here where was noisome marsh standeth our hospital,—out of corruption good hath blossomed, a good that shall endure, I pray,—but without thee, Malise, Rahere the Fool had not dared a thing so seeming impossible."

"Ah, Rahere," she murmured, bowing her stately head, "if in death our dreams come true, then . . . perchance . . . in some other world . . . thou and I . . ."

"Why . . . 'tis a God of boundless mercy, and Death, Malise, Death methinks is beckoning . . ."

And in a while they parted, to meet no more in this life, for that night Rahere the Prior died.

They buried him in the church his indomitable will had brought into being and his own brave, strong hands had helped to build. And there stands his tomb to-day for reverent, grateful eyes to see, in the north chancel of this church, which, though altered since his day, yet stands to the glory of God, like his hospital of St. Bartholomew that was, and is, and shall be a blessing to suffering humanity by reason of Rahere that was King Henry's Jester.

“. . . held him to peer into his sombre eyes”

No. 7

SMITHFIELD

I

Within our London are many plots of ground each of which, to the thoughtful wayfarer, is especially sacred by reason of some bright, courageous act of self-sacrifice, heroic suffering, or noble dying, wrought or endured by great-hearted man or high-souled woman who, out-facing murderous steel or unfearing amid the cruel flame, gave their lives in the cause of our national freedom.

Thus, who of any imagination may stand in busy Smithfield but shall hear in fancy the dread crackle of martyr fires, the groans of anguished flesh, and behold again Mayor Walworth's dastard stroke and see poor Wat the tiler writhe to death on the swords of those courtly sycophants who between them flattered their vain young king to his miserable doom?

And how vastly different their Smithfield to this of ours! First a desolate marsh, then a grim place for the execution of malefactors, then a broad, level meadow pleasantly set with groves of lofty elms, beneath whose shade gurgling brooks sparkled,—a smooth, grassy mead fit for the joyous May revels and homely sport of the sturdy London folk; an arena for the showing of noble horses, for archery, for tilt and tournament; a place of vigorous merry living and ghastly dying.

And of the very many who perished there, none are better remembered than poor Wat the tiler of Dartford, who dared front Court and Kingly Majesty for the freeing of England's most wretched, long-suffering, down-trodden commonalty.

Now in those days of such prideful pomp and magnificence for the favoured few and such cruel wrong and shameful injustice for the miserable many,—upon a bright summer morning the sun, just apeep, showed the broad spread of Smithfield deserted all, save for Richard, Knight of Brandondene, who sat his horse behind a grove of trees and looked where, vague in the pearly haze of dawn, rose the mighty walls and towers of London. Nearer at hand, amid bowery gardens, stood Rahere the Jester's noble hospital and church of St. Bartholomew, while here and there amid shady trees peeped the thatched roof of cottage or goodly farmsteading. Very thoughtful sat Sir Richard astride his tall horse, a sinister figure in his heavy, dusty armour; but his head was bare and his grave face, framed in long, curling black hair, was lit by eyes joyously eager, and his firm-lipped mouth showed kindly.

Roused at length by a sound near by, he glanced round and beheld a man astride

a shaggy pony, a stalwart, hairy fellow in garments of leather.

"How now, Wat?" he questioned.

"Ill enow, lord!" rumbled the hairy fellow. "Two inns! Both shut! And we a-famishing!"

"Why, 'tis full early, yet thou shalt eat ere we reach London yonder, so be patient, Wat."

"So—be yon London, lord? What, all on it? My head, but a woundy gurt place it be, sure-ly! Eh, Sir Richard, Dartford be nowt to yon!"

"Ay, 'tis a mighty city, Wat."

"So it be, master, sure-ly! Nobbut gie me Dartford, it be a fearsome place, yon! And the King now, do ee rackon t' King shall suffer us word wi' un, sir?"

"Certes, man—why else are we come so far?"

"My bones!" quoth Wat dismally. "I'll ha' no guts to face no King on an empty paunch, lord; 'tis a swig o' nappy ale and a full belly I'll be needing."

"Shalt have both, lad."

"Well and good, master! But when us do be come afore the King on 's throne and all, 'tis your lordship shall up and speak to 'e. Wilt speak him all our woes and sorrows and how hardly us poor country folk do be used—and not forgetting this cursed Poll-tax, eh, Sir Richard?"

"I shall speak him my best, Wat; and thou also, his my hope, canst plead for thy fellows better than I."

"Ay, belike, in Dartford, but not in yon gurt city."

"Now heart up, man!" quoth Sir Richard, clapping his companion's brawny shoulder. "And yonder is an ale-house with door agape." So thither rode they, and having stabled their animals, stepped down into a small, gloomy chamber, half-cellar, half-kitchen, where an unkempt fellow, having stretched prodigiously and yawned profoundly, served them with such edibles as he had, and casting himself on a dingy pallet in an adjacent corner, immediately fell a-snoring.

"Body o' me!" growled Wat, staring, "if these be London manners, gie me the South Country, say Kent, say Dartford. And as for this ale—good lack, Sir Richard, London beant no place for a man o' Kent."

His meal done, Sir Richard came to the snoring innkeeper and stirred him to wakefulness with his sheathed sword.

"Fellow," he demanded, "when do they ope the city gates?"

"Now," yawned the man. "They'll be opening now——"

"So, then take thy money,—and, Wat, do thou bring the horses." But as he spoke, there rose the faint yet cheery music of a horn, whereat the innkeeper,

pouching his coin, hastened to the door, blinking.

"Yonder cometh the King's Majesty!" quoth he, pointing. "To-day he goeth a-hunting along by——" Sir Richard clanked up the dingy steps out into the sunshine and, getting to horse, rode across Smithfield level with Wat trotting at his heels. Thus presently they beheld a cavalcade very glorious to sight—sleek horses pranced in their trappings of gold and silver, jewels glittered, plumes nodded, bridle-chains jingled, with the gay sound of voices and laughter.

Foremost of all came three horsemen, one a scarred veteran, one a fair-faced youth, and one a grim-visaged, cold-eyed man.

Sir Richard, reining up his horse, watched this advancing pageantry anxiously, while Wat, beholding such unimagined splendour, gaped and was dumb.

"Now, Wat, do thou as I!" said Sir Richard suddenly, and, riding forward, dismounted in the path of all this advancing splendour.

"My liege lord!" said he, and, setting one knee to earth, looked anxiously into that fair, boyish face.

"How, then?" cried young King Richard, checking his spirited horse. "What grimly wight art thou that stays us—and armed thus?"

"Dread lord, Richard of Brandondene I, a knight of Kent, hither come to voice the woes of thy poor, loyal subjects, these country folk that work harder than beasts o' the field, to sue thy clemency in the matter of thy new Poll-tax and humbly pray ——"

"Ha, Sudbury—Sudbury!" cried the King petulantly. "Sudbury, my lord Archbishop, here be others to plague us anent thy Poll-tax. Come thou and speak them!"

Forth of that glittering cavalcade rode a comely man, richly habited, mild of eye, soft-voiced. Quoth he:

"Sire, I do proclaim this a tax politic, a tax needful to your Majesty's happy governance, and therefore a good tax——"

"There be folk shall starve of it!" cried Wat hoarsely. The Archbishop bowed a meek head:

"Alas!" he sighed. "Yet since this tax is for our liege lord's good, and he God's own Anointed, starve they may—yet pay they must."

"How sayst thou, Knolleys?" questioned the King of the scarred veteran.

"Lord, these base dogs be for ever whining. They should be whipped!"

"So! And, Wentworth, what say you?"

"This, Sire," answered the grim-faced man: "that an a whip serve not, there be branding-irons, the noose, the boweller's block! And your Majesty is let and stayed

_____”

“Ay, by Mary!” cried the young King in sudden anger. “Away, Sir Knight of Kent! Here is no time to irk us with thy pleas. Begone, sir! Ho there, huntsmen, sound!” So, with tramp and jingle and cheery notes of horn, with gay babble of talk and laughter, the noble company rode on, while Sir Richard stared gloomily earthwards and Wat scowled in grievous dismay.

“So, lord,” he growled, “here is an end to our fond hopes! Our labours be all vain! Whips, d’ye see! Branding-irons! The gibbet and boweller’s block! It be the old tale. Never no freedom for we o’ the shires! Never no justice for we poor country folk.”

“Courage, Wat! Good fellow, the end is not yet. Since all do yearn for freedom, so shall freedom surely come, soon or late.”

“And what now, lord?”

“Thou back to thy tiling, Wat, and I to my crops.”

“Ay so!” sighed Wat the tiler. “But mebbe I’ll come back somewhen, ay, and with all Kent at my tail—mebbe!”

II

A girl, struggling against brutally evil hands, screamed: “Father . . . father, help me!”

A heavy tramp of speeding feet, a hoarse roar:

“Ha, foul dog! Loose my maid!”

The man in King’s livery, turning from the breathless captive, beheld a swart, hairy fellow grasping a hammer in a brawny fist, and whipped forth his dagger; but the hammer smote first; the dagger spun and clattered, a man fell.

“Up, thou dog!” roared the hairy fellow, brandishing his hammer. “Up and crave pardon. Cry mercy o’ my lass!”

The man in King’s livery never stirred; the fellow with the hammer spurned him with savage foot—and then stood utterly still, glaring down at the blood that fouled the hearth-stone; and now a woman’s terrified voice wailed:

“Oh Wat, out alas, thou hast killed him, and he the King’s bailiff! Ah, Wat, my man, God aid us now!”

“The foul rogue hath but his deserts, wife. He would ha’ brutalized our child!” quoth Wat, stooping to peer at the dead man.

“Ay, but—a King’s bailiff, Wat! I’ the King’s livery! ’Twill be death, oh, ’twill be cruel death to all on us!”

"My bones!" quoth Wat, ruffling his shock of hair and looking down on his handiwork with eyes of dismay, "'tis ill for me he should be the King's officer. . . ."

But now came neighbours: they filled the low, dim room; they peered in through the small lattice; they jostled each other in the narrow street, while the air throbbed with the hushed murmur of awed voices.

"It be Wat. . . . Wat the tiler hath slain the King's tax-gatherer!" The word sped from lip to lip until all Dartford was in wild and growing ferment. Gradually awe and fear gave place to joyous exultation, a fierce triumph; hats were tossed in air, lean arms flourished, scythe and pitchfork gleamed. Then there was a clatter of hoofs, the crowd made way, cheering, and Sir Richard Brandondene, tossing his bridle-rein to ready hands, dismounted and entered the cottage.

"Good folk, how now?" he enquired.

"Death, Sir Richard!" answered Wat, pointing to the dead man. "And the King's bailiff, do 'ee see? Lord, he would ha' shamed my lass Mal here, so I rapped him wi' my tiling-hammer, whereof he presently died. But a paltry rap, lord, yet the rogue be dead of it—and he a King's liveried bailiff!"

"Now, God save thee, Wat, here's a black business!"

"Forsooth, lord. He be the King's officer, and I—I be poor Wat the tiler——"

"And yet," cried a loud, clear voice from the doorway, "thou, Wat, being man and formed in God's image, art as much a child of God as any other man, be he bailiff, proud lord, ay, or any potent king in Christendy!"

Now at the sound of this hearty voice all made room, and into the narrow chamber strode a stalwart, rosy-faced, comely man clad something like a wandering friar, though his weather-stained, cowled frock was girt about him by a broad leathern belt carrying a long knife, and his brawny legs went busked in dusty boots of rough-tanned hide.

"How then, Wat, man," said he, kneeling beside the dead body, "is't murder?"

"Nay, Master John; his steel was in 's fist," answered Wat, pointing to the dagger upon the hearth.

"Why, then, thanks to God, here was no murder and——But what now, man?"

"Nowt, Master John, only hard beside thee doth stand Sir Richard Brandondene o' the Weald! Sir Richard, this do be good John Ball as be friend to all poor distressful souls."

"And thou also, messire," said John Ball, rising and viewing Sir Richard eye to eye. "Thou'rt a man kindly to thy poorer neighbours 'spite thy proud lordship, so do I greet thee well, Sir Knight, and pray God's blessings on thee."

"And thou," quoth Sir Richard, "art John Ball, this runaway monk that goeth

about preaching up rebellion?"

"Sire, I am he that, though bred a cloistered monk, go up and down preaching Salvation to all men—but a salvation that, by Christ's blessing, may come but through man himself."

Now the people in the street without, hearing John Ball's familiar voice, began to cheer and cry his name:

"Ho, John . . . good John Ball, come forth and let's hear, come forth and preach to we!" And so, having prayed over the dead man, John Ball went out and, lifting long arms, spake the townsfolk in his pleasant ringing voice:

"Ye children of God, one and all, ye men of England that should be free, how long will ye slave in bonds? How long will ye endure? Oh, my brothers, God gave ye life for a blessing, not for curse. God made this jocund land of England, but your masters make the laws whereby ye must slave in hardship whiles they go at their ease. And who be they, these your masters? Men no better and ofttimes worse than yourselves. Ha, but, say you, we be but poor folk born to serfdom and cruel bondage, and these our masters be potent lords, the good land, and we on it, theirs by right o' birth or kingly charter. Ay, but, say I, God gave Israel a King in anger,—and God never made a lord, His handiwork was Man,—and ho, brethren—

> 'When Adam delved and Eve span,
> Who was then the gentleman?'"

Thus spake John Ball, and scarce had done when up went a roar of wild acclaim:

"Ho for John Ball! Hey for our John! Let us to London . . . to the King and demand our rights! Let us to London! Lead us, Wat! Be thou our Captain, Wat the tiler! Lead us to London!"

And so it befell upon a day of June, in the year of grace 1381, that forth of their town marched the men of Dartford, led by Wat the tiler, and with them, newly rescued from Maidstone prison, John Ball; a motley company armed with bows and bills, with rusty swords, staves, and scythes; bold-eyed fellows, blithe of heart despite the weary miles before them, eager one and all to supplicate (though in something determined fashion) their young King's clemency upon their woeful plight, and repeal of the hated Poll-tax.

And day by day, with every weary mile, men as determined joined them until through the rolling dust of their march ten thousand voices roared in jubilant chorus:

> "When Adam delved and Eve span,
> Who was then the gentleman?"

III

London was astir, the air full of a vague yet ominous hum that rose and fell, never ceasing, with distant shouts and snatches of wild singing; for Wat the tiler with his men of Kent had been joined by Jack Straw's thousands from Essex and Norfolk. The powers of life and death had, for the while, changed hands.

Thus young King Richard, turning his back upon the troubled faces of his counsellors, stared from the narrow casement with eyes quick and anxious:

"An hundred thousand of these 'shoeless ribalds,' eh, sirs?"

"Scarcely so many, Sire," answered hardy old Sir Robert Knolleys.

"More, your Majesty, with submission to Sir Robert," quoth Walworth the Mayor, his grim face something haggard.

"And the base rogues ha' destroyed Southwark, I hear——"

"Nay, not Southwark, Sire," said Master Nicholas Bramber. "They have burnt down no more than our worthy Mayor's stews at Bankside; and fire be a cleansing element."

"Fire, say you?" cried the King, pointing out of window. "See yonder smoke! They be firing the city e'en now. Where shall it be, think ye, sirs? You, Walworth, what do they burn yonder?"

"That will be beyond Strand, Majesty,—your uncle John o' Lancaster's palace in the Savoy."

"Which nothing grieveth me!" cried the King pettishly, a scowl on his youthful face. "For mine uncle of Lancaster loveth me not, nor I him. Ha, what's here?" he exclaimed, turning swiftly, for beyond the door of this narrow chamber was the ring of armour with a hubbub of dismayed voices, and an usher appeared, pale and breathless:

"Your Majesty and my lords," he gasped, "a messenger is here saith these lawless folk ha' stormed into your Majesty's Tower and there slain my lord of Sudbury, your Majesty's Archbishop and Chancellor, and divers others with him."

"So? Have they killed Sudbury?" said the King, leaning in the window-recess. "Why, 'twas he framed this accursed Poll-tax! Moreover, he hated these base dogs e'en as I, but fool-like he proclaimed as much, so is he dead! Now if this shall content the rogues, my Chancellor hath died to excellent purpose, for we can make a new Archbishop, but——" The high, querulous voice faltered, stopped, and the King turned to peer from the window again; for that vague hoarse clamour was drawing rapidly nearer, wilder,—an increasing, hideous uproar—through narrow streets and into the sunny square men came marching, an innumerable host; ragged

arms tossed heavenwards, steel glittering; the hoarse roar was intelligible now:

> 'When Adam delved and Eve span,
> Who was then the gentleman?'

Oho, the King! Ho, forth to us, King Richard! We be thy loyal liegemen—so forth and speak wi' we, lord King. Forth to us or us'll in to 'ee! Ho, King Richard!"

Back from the window shrank the young King and faced his counsellors, tremulous hands outflung:

"Well, sirs, you hear, you hear!" he cried. "What must I do?"

"Do, Sire?" cried Knolleys, clashing in his armour; "summon your following, and at them with lance and sword. Yon vile rabblement shall never abide a charge of chivalry."

"Nay, my liege," cried Mayor Walworth, griping nervously at the dagger in his girdle; "we can muster scarce eight thousand. Moreover, half the men o' London be with them, and they an hundred thousand and more——"

"And, being Englishmen, not easily cowed!" added Master Nicholas Bramber.

"Then, o' blessed Mary's name, how shall I act?" cried the King, glancing into the haggard faces about him, while the uproar without grew ever the more ominous. "Ha!—you there! You, Sir Richard Brandondene," cried he, darting a slim finger. "You know something o' these rogues. What is your counsel?"

"Ride forth to them, Majesty," answered Sir Richard, stepping forward. "Go amongst them with a scant following and all unarmed."

"How? Trust myself to yon ravening pack and they reeking with slaughter?"

"Even so, Sire. For these be Englishmen indeed, each and every, and thy leal subjects at heart. Trust to their faith, therefore, and faithful shall they prove."

"'Tis a wild course, Sir Knight, and right desperate!"

"'Tis a desperate occasion, Sire. And these be men of England!"

"Why, an I venture me to them thou shalt go beside me, Sir Richard."

"That will I gladly, Sire," answered Sir Richard, loosing his sword and setting it by. "And the sooner the better."

"Hast marvellous great faith in these vile, traitorous dogs, sir!"

"They be English dogs, Sire."

"Come, then, come, o' Mary's name! Ha! What now, Walworth?"

"An thou'rt for so adventuring thyself, Royal Sir," said the Mayor, "bid these rebels wait thee without the city, at Mile End fields, say."

"So be it!" cried the King. "Let proclamation be made forthwith."

So presently trumpets blew, the wild clamour subsided, and heralds proclaimed

the fact; whereat up rolled a mighty shout, blithe cheer on cheer, as that vast and dusty concourse turned about and marched triumphantly towards the appointed tryst.

And after some while his Majesty King Richard the Second rode forth attended by no more than sixty of his gentlemen, intending for Mile End; but, reaching Smithfield, they found their way barred by the men of Kent in great array, who hailed the King with lusty shout; and forth of their ranks spurred Wat, hand upraised in friendly greeting.

"King," cried he, reining up his horse suddenly, "dost see all those goodly men?"

"I see them."

"They be sworn to do my bidding."

"And what seek ye, sir?"

"No more slavery!" cried Wat, riding nearer. "Freedom for us and our children for ever."

"It shall be granted!" answered the King.

"Moreover," said Wat, "we demand freedom from the Poll-tax, and also we demand open markets."

"These also will I grant."

Now here was an angry murmuring among the King's train, more especially from John Standish, a young esquire, who scowled upon bold Wat and clapped hand to jewelled dagger.

"Ha—thou!" cried Wat, pointing. "Ho, Sir Popinjay, fumble not thy steel! Dost see our King pluck at weapon or me flourish sword? So give me thy dagger."

"Not I!" cried Standish angrily. "'Tis not for such base thing as thou!"

"Give it!" said the King, frowning. "Give it him, I say!"

"Aha!" chuckled Wat, tossing the dagger behind him. "Now thy sword, lest it play tricks—thy sword!"

"Never!" cried Standish contemptuously. "'Tis not for vile mechanic's wear ——"

"Give it him!" said the King.

"Obey!" cried Wat. "Or by my troth I'll none eat till I have thy head!"

"Rogue!" cried Walworth, beckoning those about him and urging his horse against Wat. "How dare such as thou so act before the King?"

"Hey, now," cried the Tiler, glaring round on those who now encompassed him, "what have I said? How doth it concern ye all?" Now, seeing the Tiler surrounded and thus hidden from his men, Walworth pressed yet nearer:

"Out!" cried he. "Doth it become such stinking rogue as thou to so misname thy

betters?" and speaking, he whipped a short sword from beneath his cloak and drave it into unsuspecting Wat's hairy throat.

Death-smitten by this stealthy, murderous blow, Wat fell to earth, gasping, and as he writhed there, beating the ground in his agony, other swords flashed above him; but then Sir Richard was among them, striving to protect the fallen man.

"Off, sirs!" cried he, wheeling his powerful horse right and left. "Is this your knightly honour——?" As he spoke, down upon his unarmed head smote the flat of a sword, and but for Master Nicholas Bramber's friendly arm he would have rolled from his saddle.

Meanwhile those bright swords were busy, for down sprang young John Standish, with divers other noble gentlemen, to stab and hack until that which lay upon the spattered grass sprawled a ghastly thing, very silent and still.

And so died Wat the tiler.

But now his fellows, seeing him dead, raised a sudden clamour of wild dismay:

"They ha' killed our Wat! We're betrayed! The Captain's dead! Ha, bows and bills—let us on and slay them all!"

But in this dire moment King Richard spurred forward and in among their disordered ranks, his pleading hands outstretched to them.

"Ah, gentlemen!" he cried. "Oh, men of England, seek ye a captain; then here am I! Take me for your captain, be ye my men henceforth."

And now these poor country fellows became no more than a very rabble ready to fly at each other's throats, for some cheered and shouted for the King's Majesty and some roared for his blood. But the young King rode among them, calm and valorous, promising them his abiding love and friendship, with pardon full and free for all, pardons writ on fair parchment, charters, new laws, all that they demanded and more. Thus he boldly kept them in play until was distant glitter of arms and thundering hoofs where spurred Sir Robert Knolleys, Sir Robert de Namur, Sir Perducas d'Albreth, and many other gallant knights, with eight thousand horsemen armed from head to foot; and mightily wroth were they when not permitted to trample down these presumptuous rogues in their ragged homespun and leathern jerkins.

However, these wicked men of the shires were to pay dearly enough later on; for (though his Majesty kept fifty odd clerks writing out pardons all night long) within the year a thousand and more rotting carcasses were defiling the countryside; axe and rope were kept busy a while, and John Ball's comely head was set to rot on a pole above London Bridge and thence preach the cruel folly of living before his time.

As for Sir Richard, awaked from his swoon, he found himself in the grip of fierce

hands, staring dumbly into the King's youthful, scowling visage, the petulant, kingly voice loud in his ears:

". . . As for thee, Richard of Brandondene, traitor unto ourselves and thy knightly heritage, banished art thou henceforth. Adventure thee not to our Court or thy head shall be stricken off! And now, gentle sirs, let us go deal with the rebel rogues at Mile End."

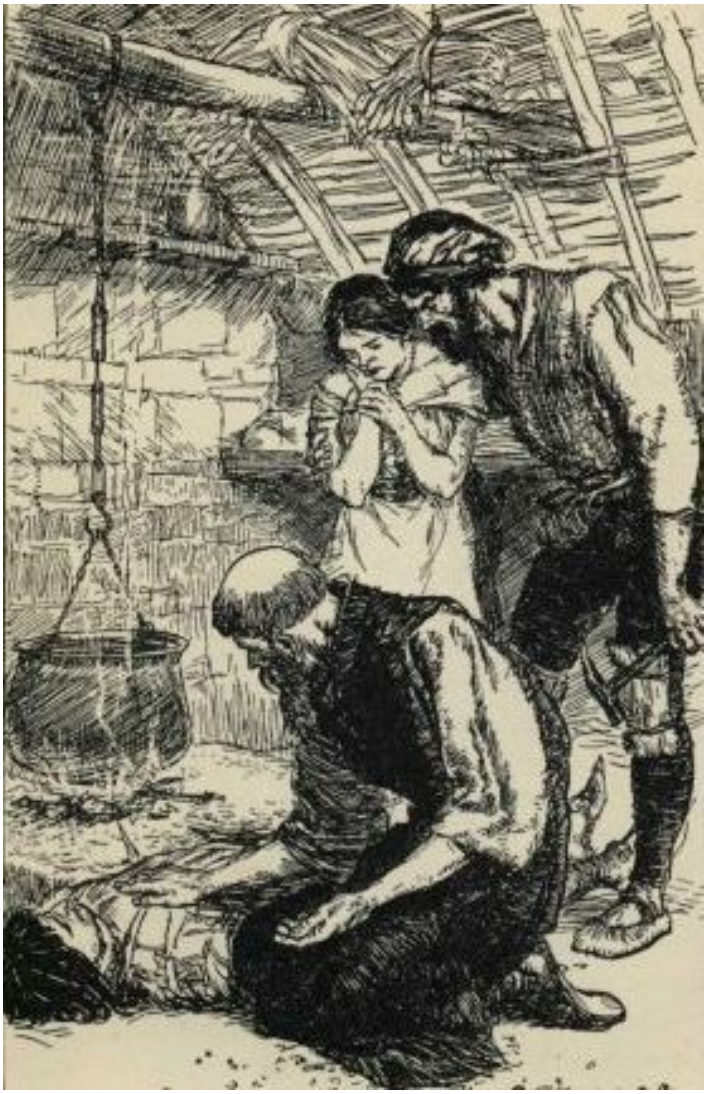
So with hoarse blare of trumpets, with ring and clash of arms, King Richard and his army clattered away, leaving one who crouched, half-swooning, upon his knees.

Raising his head at last, Sir Richard found himself alone. Only his good horse Swallow cropped at the trampled grass hard by, while beyond him, hideously asprawl, lay the very dead body of Wat the tiler.

Getting to his feet, Sir Richard went thither and, looking down upon that poor, still thing, made a cross in the air above it. Quoth he:

"Farewell to thee, brave Wat! Thy sturdy soul liveth for ever, as I think, so shall thy memory endure, mayhap, and men have thee in mind when I and such as I shall be forgotten quite. Alas, Freedom's hour is not yet, but—some day! So fare thee well, and a good rest to thee, brave Wat!"

Then, climbing heavily to the saddle, Sir Richard rode away southwards.



“‘How then, Wat, man, is’t murder?’”

No. 8

TOTHILL (TUTTLE) FIELDS

I

In the days when "bluff King Hal" filled the throne so completely as to leave very little room for his various unhappy consorts; when fine gentlemen went in doublet and hose wonderfully pinked, padded, and slashed, and great ladies tottered in gowns and farthingales cut long and dangerously low,—there was scarce a man, from bluff, rosy king to humble, hard-worked peasant, from noble lady to timid serving-wench, who did not believe whole-heartedly in spells, magic, the evil eye, demons, necromancers, and witches—especially witches. For witches indeed they entertained a joyous dread, a fearful awe, yet whom they searched brutally for witch or devil marks, tormented with needles, and frequently haled shrieking to the water or fire, thereby purging the poor wretches of the demons believed to possess them, and thus saving their souls, but very effectually drowning or burning the miserable creatures into the bargain, which of course mattered to nobody but the poor wizard or witch in question.

So positive and universal became this belief, even among scholars and churchmen, with very few bright exceptions, that a place was set aside for the proper ending of these wizards (a few) and witches (a great many), and this a wide stretch of marshy green within sight of Westminster Abbey, called by the vulgar Tuttle Fields. Here amid searing flame many a poor soul screamed and died in torment that their souls might escape damnation.

At such time it was, then, that young Tomalyn Brooke, his square, boyishly smooth chin buried in snowy, starched ruff, feathered bonnet cocked on frowning brow, scowled through the open lattice at the resplendent young gentleman who had just galloped into the busy inn-yard; a slim young gentleman this, in garments of the very latest mode, his long riding-boots beautifully cut, embroidered, and adorned with jingling silver spurs, upon his shoulders a short velvet cloak, at his hip a long Spanish rapier of the newest fashion, his dark-eyed, lean face shaded by a flat plumed cap such as King Henry himself affected these days.

"What, Peter—man—Peter Antrobus, quit thy wine-pot," growled Sir Tomalyn, "quit thy bibbing and come tell me what thing is yonder." At this arose a third young gentleman remarkable for long, slender legs, new-sprouting beard, and nothing else, who, yawning, crossed to the lattice, peered out, twisted his youthful beard, shook

his very ordinary head, and sighed:

"Out—a pox, Tomalyn! Methought 'twas this witch we wait sight on, and 'tis no more than my Lord Brandon."

"Ay, marry! And how think ye of him?"

"That he goeth vastly fine since King Hal took him in favour——"

"Fine, quotha!" snorted Sir Tomalyn. "Yon poppet! I tell thee 'tis an evil dream, a very walking nightmare,—an ill medley o' Spanish don and prinking Frenchman—pah! 'Tis a thing offensive to the sight of honest English eyes."

"Nay—stint, Tom, stint!" cried Master Antrobus, forgetting his beard. "'Tis even so our bluff King Harry goeth clad o' late, and moreover——"

"The King," retorted Sir Tomalyn, turning from the window, "is the King, but this apish mountebank doth affront my sight."

"Good lack, Tom, beshrew me, but young Brandon is well enough. What a plague, man, is he not thy neighbour in Sussex, ay, and kinsman to boot?"

"He is so, and this is aggravation!"

"But wherefore dost so dispraise and hate this lord?"

"Marry, sir, for breathing! For his curst, black-avised dog's-head. For his high, languid, piminy airs! I tell thee, Peter, at the first occasion I'll shiver his Spanish bodkin and gut him with my good English fox, here!" And Sir Tomalyn tapped the steel pommel of his ponderous sword.

"Hist!" exclaimed Master Antrobus. "By my beard, he's coming hither,—he and Christopher Barton o' the King's guard."

"Why, so much the better!"

"But you're not for having at him here, Tom?"

"I'll warrant you, an chance prove kind."

"Then let us back to table, circumspectly seated at our wine—so!"

A sound of merry voices on the stair without, a ring of spurred heels, and into the spacious chamber came my Lord Brandon on the arm of a gallant in the scarlet and golden roses of the King's new guard. Meeting the blue glare of Sir Tomalyn's eyes, my lord smiled and, bowing with an exaggerated courtesy, sat down with his companion in an adjacent corner.

"Yon country-seeming gentleman scowls on us, I think," murmured Captain Barton hopefully.

"On me, Kit, on me!" sighed my lord, stretching indolent legs. "'Tis mine accursed cousin, our land in the country marches together,—and he scowleth on me, Kit, because 'tis so his nature as 'tis a dog's to snarl. And we hate by instinct; he yearns for my blood, and I do dwell upon the pure joy of pinking him with my good

Toledo here."

"And where's the reason for thy hatred, Julian?"

"Oh, my Christopher, 'tis a winged hate soaring 'bove vulgar reason. Perchance 'tis that I mislike his golden curls, his Saxon eyes, his speech, his port, his voice, himself, one or all o' these."

"'S heart, 'tis very catalogue o' hate, Julian, and should suffice for duellos as many. Now should it ever come to naked steel, I'm for thee, thine to serve as second active or passive."

"And so, my gratitude, Kit."

Here to them came Jenkyn, the landlord, with wine, the which he set them with many becks and bows. Quoth he:

"Noble sirs, they'll be presently along to Newgate wi' the young witch, Helen Applegarth, back from judgement. I see 'em takin' her to trial, and a rare comely lass she do be, ay—a proper, handsome piece, in troth, sirs."

"Jenkyn, will they burn her, think ye?" enquired my lord.

"For sure, noble sir. I'm told she be kin to Bess Sawyer, the witch of Edmonton, as was put to the fire last year,—I see her burn, sirs, and Lord, but a rare racket o' screaming and crying she made on't. So this young lass, being her kin, d'ye see, is safe to burn likewise."

"God aid the poor soul!" murmured his lordship.

"Why so says I, noble sir. Yet how may God save her till the devil be drove out of her body by the purging fire? Why, nohow, says the Church, and so say I."

"Folly!" cried Julian, dark eyes glowing. "Besotted ignorance! These tales o' spells and witchcraft be no more than idle fancies bred o' splenetic fears and doting mischiefs. The day is past for such cruel folly——"

"Ha, Peter, man," quoth Sir Tomalyn loudly, "as we were saying,—he that in witches and spells accursed believeth not is heretical dog gainsaying Holy Writ, and sinning thus 'gainst the Light is therefore everlastingly damned, for——"

"Nay, Tom, pox on't," quavered Master Antrobus, clawing at his beard, "we said no such——"

"And," continued Sir Tomalyn sonorously, "being creature so damned is certes no right company for honest gentlemen, inasmuch as——"

"And, Christopher, my good Kit," quoth my lord in accents high and clear, "any man believing in witches to-day, I do proclaim notorious ass and most egregious fool, a bloody-minded blockhead that should be whipped for a raving madman or hanged out o' the way, thus I——"

"Gentlemen . . . oh, my lord . . . ah, good my masters . . ." cried Jenkyn, for Sir

Tomalyn was afoot, scowling, hand on sword, while my lord had risen, smiling. Quoth Sir Tomalyn:

"My lord o' Brandon, here as I think is reason good for some small further debate 'twixt you and me?"

"Certes, sir," answered my lord, tossing off his modish cloak, "'tis beyond question! My good Jenkyn, begone—hence and let none dare interrupt us. . . . Now, Sir Tomalyn, at your service."

"Vastly obliged, my lord," quoth Sir Tomalyn, drawing his heavy sword, "for now shall this my good fox rive thee in sunder."

"Not so, Sir Tomalyn, for ere that so out-o'-fashion, ancient, old-world, and most cumbrous steel o' thine may turn, my bilboa shall certainly be through thy midriff," and out flickered my lord's long, narrow rapier.

But hardly had these so different blades clashed together when from the street below arose sudden hubbub, fierce shouts, hideous outcries, and the rhythmic beat of drums:

"Witch . . . witch! To the water with her! Nay—the fire! . . . Drown her! Burn her! See an she can swim! Try an she won't burn! . . . Ha, cursed witch!"

The slithering sword blades were stilled . . . serene dark eyes questioned eyes of blue:

"Sir Tomalyn, by your leave . . . I crave sight o' this poor soul."

"As you will, my lord . . . I'd fain see this damned witch." So together, side by side and sword in hand, came they to the open lattice and leaned forth, shoulder to shoulder. And presently they espied her among that howling press, walking between her guards, young and of a lovely stateliness . . . a face pallid as death, whose strange beauty was framed in tawny hair. . . . On she came, stumbling pitifully ever and anon, yet with bright head up-borne, and thus, chancing to look upward, she saw the two faces out-thrust from the casement above, and for a moment her eyes, wide with horror and dark with the agony of coming awful death, gazed wistfully into Sir Tomalyn's blue eyes and the dark, eager eyes of my Lord Julian; and then, amid the rattling drums and obscene raving of the fierce mob, she was past. . . . Sir Tomalyn's heavy sword fell, clattering:

"God's death!" he gasped. "That such noble beauty should to the fire . . .!"

"Oh, bestial ignorance!" cried Julian. "To burn a thing so sweet and lovely!" Now, even as they stared after her, a missile from the crowd struck that tawny head and she was down . . . in the dust . . . among those cruel, trampling feet. . . . Sir Tomalyn cried a great oath and, catching up his sword, leapt for the door; my lord, speaking not, swung forth of the lattice and dropped lightly to the cobbled yard

below; then, sword in fist, he ran shouting, whereat the crowd gave back, scattering before his brandished steel,—so leapt he and, kneeling, lifted that tawny head from the dust while her guards, taking him for one in authority, stood agape. But now came their officer, fierce and loud-voiced:

"What's here?" he demanded, clutching Julian's shoulder. "Who dareth meddle wi' my prisoner? Who——?"

"Peace, fellow!" retorted Julian, and stooped to wipe blood from that pale, strangely beautiful face as Sir Tomalyn burst mightily through the reeling press.

"Ha! done!" cried the officer, threatening Julian with his sword. "Loose my prisoner or——"

"Back, fellow!" quoth Julian arrogantly. "I am the Earl of Brandon——"

"And I," roared Sir Tomalyn, twisting the astonished officer aside, "I am a Justice o' the Peace and Quorum!" and plumping on knee he also set an arm about the swooning girl.

"Sir Tomalyn," said my lord, "I am here to protect her from this vile rabblement!"

"Forsooth," nodded Sir Tomalyn, tightening his clasp, "so here come I to protect her from your lordship."

Thus for a moment the two glared upon each other above the inanimate form they held, all heedless of surging crowd and growing tumult, until the outraged officer advanced upon them, roaring to his men:

"Seize me the witch! On with her to Newgate—an she walk not, drag her—ha, the witch . . .!"

Now in this moment she opened her eyes and, seeing the two faces bowed so near, cried in a passion of supplication:

"Oh, save—save me from the fire! Do not suffer me to burn! No witch am I, good gentlemen, indeed—indeed! Ah, do not suffer they burn me. . . ."

"Never think it!" cried Sir Tomalyn hoarsely. "I'll be thy defence or die with thee!"

"Spoke like a bombastical fool!" quoth my lord, rising. "For, Sir Addlepate, how shall thy death avail her?"

"So now," cried Sir Tomalyn, scowling on my lord, as he lifted the trembling maid to her feet, "now will I to prison, lady, along with thee."

"And I," said my Lord Julian, turning on his heel, "I'll to the King."

A large, comely, full-faced man sat in the shade of a tree, twiddling a pen in sinewy fingers, tap-tapping with large velvet-clad foot upon the rich carpet spread to his comfort, and rolling his small blue-grey eyes like one in dire agony.

So Julian Lord Brandon found Harry the King and, setting knee to earth, awaited Majesty's notice.

And after pen had twiddled, foot tapped, and kingly eyes rolled thus a while, Majesty became aware of him; the little eyes fixed him with glittering stare; the small mouth pouted above the quick jut of great, fleshy chin; and King Henry spoke in his bluffest voice:

"What, Brandon . . . how then, Julian—by Heaven, lord, any other than thou had angered us,—ay, marry! For my muse halts, limpeth in fashion damnable! The word have I most apt, the metre trippeth truly,—but the rhyme, the thrice accursed rhyme——"

"Noble Harry, I crave thy grace!" cried Julian in quavering eagerness. "Dread Sire, I do beseech thy kingly pity on one doomed foully to most cruel death——"

"Ha,—foully, say ye, sir? Is not Harry England's lord and arbiter of life and death? Foully doomed, ha?"

"Most foully, though not by your Majesty's will."

"Yet hath my Majesty signed the warrant, since none of our subjects die save by our kingly authority."

"Then, Sire, 'twas signed by reason of false testimony."

"What is the crime, and who convicted?"

"Witchcraft, Sire, and——"

"God's Passion!" cried King Hal at his bluffest. "Wilt beard and bait me, wilt dare thus outrage our strict privacy i' the matter of an accursed witch, a foul hag—and our thoughts uplift in contemplation o' the infinities? Wilt dare plague us with such paltry matter, and I i' the birth-pangs o' concept poetical? Ha, Julian, were not Harry a king o' rigorous justice and rare patience, a man potent yet tender, a friend o' faith abiding,—by God's Death, I had banished thee for this!"

"Sire, 'tis because I know thee all this that I am so vastly daring. Thus, noble Harry, relying on thy justice and mercy, trusting to the might of thy friendship, I sue thy clemency on this young maid, one who——"

"What,—is she young, is she fair? Very flower o' love,—ha, Julian?"

"Your Majesty, she is all this and more, for in her eyes sit Truth and a sweet Innocency——"

"Yet is she indeed a witch condemned, Julian,—to writhe in flame—'stead o' thine arms, thou naughty rogue,—to die painfully——"

"Never, Sire, whiles Harry ruleth England!"

"Hum!" quoth Majesty, puffing full cheeks.

"Such sweetness, Sire, should live to make the world fairer——"

"And thyself a lover, eh? *Par amours*, eh, Julian, eh? So ho, then, to it, lad,—snatch her from the flame and use her to better purpose——"

"Ah, gracious Majesty, noble King!" cried Julian, springing lightly afoot. "Beseech thee now, thy mandate, the writ to her freedom."

"Nay, nay," chuckled Henry, giving his hand to Julian's kiss of gratitude, "shalt have nor writ, nor mandate from us,—shalt use thy mother-wit, man. Win her forth o' prison as best ye may, carry her safe out o' London, and bluff Hal, thy friend, shall clap thee heartily on shoulder and pardon thy witch every crime saving ingratitude to thee."

"But, my lord, alas, she is to die on the morrow, early——"

"Then must thou be speedy, friend Julian, thy wit sharp! So—off, haste, begone and leave me to my muse, intractable jade——" Suddenly upon the air was a jingle of bells that rang a small, soft chime. . . . "Ha, by Venus!" cried the King. "Yonder should be Will Somers, my merry wag! Ho, Will, my joyous rogue, art there forsooth?"

Out from an adjacent bush popped a head surmounted by a cockscomb, a bony hand with crooked finger beckoning: at the which mute summons Majesty rose with surprising nimbleness and hastened thither to set brawny arm about his jester's shoulders and question him in eager whispers.

Now as Julian stood, somewhat at a loss, he chanced to see a torn letter that lay beside the King's desk and, stooping to replace it, his quick eye caught these words:

> . . . so quit awhile thy nest, white bird, entrust the treasure thou art, to honest Will, and know this for the humble prayer of thy Hal, and yet too sweet soul
>
> by command of Henry Rex.

Julian glanced from this to the King's broad back and, folding this torn letter with swift, sure fingers, thrust it into his bosom and went upon his speedy way.

III

Before the small, grim prison of the Newgate a crowd of riotous folk jostled clamorous for sight of the accursed witch! But with arrogant voice and gesture, Julian urged his powerful horse among them, and, reaching the iron-studded doors deep-set in frowning masonry, hammered thereon with dagger-hilt until a narrow

grille was opened and a harsh voice demanded his business.

"Open!" cried my lord haughtily. "In the King's name!"

Straightway bolts creaked, chains rattled, and, the doors swinging wide, my lord rode through and dismounted in the small, grim yard where presently came a turnkey, something unsteady in his gait, who blinked drearily, hiccoughed, and spoke thick-voiced:

"Y'r pleasure, m' noble master?"

"The Chief Warden, on the King's business. And be speedy, fellow."

Along a narrow, flagged passage, up stone stair, when, to my lord's amaze, his noble ears were saluted by the sound of bibulous voices upraised in a roaring ditty.

"What unseemly riot is yon?" he demanded, frowning and disdainful.

"'Tis merest drinking-snatch, fair sir," answered the turnkey, leering. "Cap'n Flack, it be, and 's officers along of another. . . . They burns the witch to-morrow, good master, and 'tis a poor heart as never rejoiceth." Saying which, he opened the door and ushered Julian into a small, dim, airless chamber, where, at a table wet with the slopping of much wine, sat four men very drunk, singing joyously, and loudest, cheeriest, and drunkest of all—Sir Tomalyn Brooke.

At my lord's sudden intrusion they fell silent, all four, staring in goggling, vinous surprise, though Sir Tomalyn, lolling across the table, viewed my lord with eyes quick and surprisingly keen.

"Ho, Sol," cried one in half-armour, pointing unsteadily at the leering turnkey, "what's here?"

"Cap'n Flack, 'tis a messenger from the King."

"God bless His Majesty!" cried the Captain, stumbling to his feet. "Good gentleman, how may I serve ye?"

"By delivering into my care Helen Applegarth, falsely accused of witchcraft."

Now at this Sir Tomalyn got afoot, frowning fiercer than ever, but stumbling not at all.

"Hey—hey, sir?" stammered the Captain. "Nay, i' faith . . . good lack . . . 'tis a witch proven . . . must burn . . . and now—hey . . . by what authority——?"

"This!" answered Julian, and thrust before the Captain's staring eyes a strip of fair paper whereon were these words very boldly writ in King Henry's familiar script:

by command of Henry Rex.

IV

They had halted in the forest as night came, and here, beside a rill that made soft

noises in the gloom, had kindled a fire. Upon a bed of fern ’neath a shady tree lay Helen, her late terrors all forgot, her strangely beautiful face serene in blessed slumber. Julian’s velvet cloak formed her pillow, Tomalyn’s long mantle was folded about her young shapeliness. Hard by three horses cropped the tender grass in snorting content, while over against each other at the fire sat young lord and youthful knight profoundly speechless; at last:

“She hath been marvellous silent!” said Sir Tomalyn softly, glancing towards a certain shady tree.

“A notable good quality in any woman!” answered Julian, glancing also towards that same tree.

“Nay, my lord, such silence goeth beyond nature,—all these miles and never a word!”

“Yet she spake her thanks right passionately.”

“And so grew dumb.”

“Her spirit yet swooneth with dread o’ the fire, mayhap, or she is by nature timid.”

“Nay, she is not timid, I judge.”

“Then perchance she is daunted by thy vast bulk, sir.”

“Ha,—bulk, my lord?”

“Ay, or thy goggling, love-sick sheep’s eyes, Sir Tom——”

“Stint, my lord,—damned cousin, abate! Yourself hath done naught save stare the poor soul out o’ countenance, leer, sigh, moan, mutter, and shake that calf’s head o’ thine! ’S death, sir, how much farther will ye dog us? How much longer must we endure the plague o’ you?”

“I . . . dog thee?” quoth Julian contemptuously. “By my faith, Sir Tomalyn, having in mind thy so passionate belief in witchcraft and detestation o’ witches, I marvel shouldst force thy most unwanted company upon us—except it be thou’rt basely lured by the beauty o’ this sweet creature thou didst name ‘witch.’”

“Tush, man!” cried Sir Tomalyn hotly. “’Twas but a sleight to draw thee into quarrel. Did I not haste to share her prison whiles thou, forsooth, tripped kingwards to plead the aid o’ Majesty?”

“Ay,” nodded Julian. “Kings may prove useful, now and then!”

“So, whiles thou fawnedst on Majesty in right crawling, courtly fashion, I, in fashion more honest and downright, besotted her guards with wine and should ha’ won her free but for thy accursed meddling!”

“Whereby, Sir Fool, she goeth free and shall be safe, hereafter!”

“Yet by no reason o’ thy lordly wit or valour, but the King’s mere warrant.”

"Verily, Sir Knight, and 'tis warrant of such wide potence I might thereby have ye clapped by the heels in any town 'twixt here and the coast."

"Oho!" exclaimed Sir Tomalyn, glaring. "So would ye have this young maid alone to thy base will, most noble lord and right accursed cousin! So—do I smoke ye, your roguish, wanton purpose——"

"Purpose?" repeated my lord, chin out-thrust. "Prithee, most virtuous clod, crass knight, and most detested sir, be more explicit."

"Well—hated lord, as thus—perpend! Yonder lieth a thing o' rare beauty, defenceless in her innocence, and here sit you, a right courtly springald o' liquorish appetite—but and wherefore, here sit I her sure defence 'gainst thee, base lord."

"For this despite to mine honour, Sir Tomalyn, will I have thy oafish blood hereafter!"

"And I thy beastly life, Lord Julian, and no time, methinks, more apt than now."

"So be it!" answered Julian, coming lightly afoot. "Yet remove we, sir, lest by hap we awake our sleeper."

So side by side they followed the chattering brook till they reached a little clearing bright with the moon; here they doffed pourpoint and doublet, bared their swords, and, casting aside belts and scabbards, saluted each other and fell to.

Twice Tomalyn's broad blade had whirled and smitten empty air, thrice Julian's narrow steel had darted vainly, when there was a rustle of flying draperies and Helen was between them, slim hand outspread upon the breast of each; and, holding them off so, she looked from one to other with wide, reproachful eyes.

"Ah, no!" sighed she in voice wondrous sweet and gentle. "Ye that are my so generous and valiant friends, ye that together dared stoop to aid a witch accursed and save this poor body from the cruel fire, ah, pray ye, harm not these my good and only friends."

Sir Tomalyn glowered earthwards, my lord gazed from these gentle, accusing eyes to the moon's pale serenity, and they were both silent; wherefore she spoke again, soft yet commanding:

"Now give unto me your swords!" Wondering and still mute they obeyed, and she, falling on her knees between them, held up the glittering steel towards the deep immensity of starry heaven. "Behold, dear my friends and valiant gentlemen, thus do I offer your swords to God, to be drawn only in His service henceforth. So take them back and with them a new strength and ever-growing kindliness." Then giving each his sword she watched him sheath it, and each very conscious of her earnest scrutiny. "Will ye now swear me friendship for each other?" she pleaded.

"Not so," answered Julian, frowning on Tomalyn. "It were to swear thing

impossible, for this our dislove is of long standing."

"Verily!" nodded Tomalyn, scowling on Julian. "'Twas born in us and shall end but with life,—and mayhap not even then, for——"

"Say ye so?" cried a harsh voice, and forth into the moonlight strode Henry the King armed and clad for hunting, and behind him his gentlemen and verderers. "Your hate shall outlast life, say ye? Foes are ye, sirs?"

"Indeed, Sire!" answered Julian, falling upon his knee.

"And have thus hated each other long?"

"Heartily, your Majesty!" answered Sir Tomalyn, baring his golden head.

"Why, then, sirs, one of ye shall rejoice anon, for one of ye twain dieth this night."

"Dread lord," said Julian, blenching, "I pray you . . . for what crime?"

"Sir King," demanded Tomalyn, folding his long arms, "speak us your so royal reason."

"For that ye did—out o' King Henry's prison,—steal away King Harry's prisoner,—this so proud gentlewoman and ice-cold lady!" quoth Majesty, gesturing towards the maid Helen, who stood so utterly still, staring great-eyed upon the King.

"Gentlewoman?" gasped Sir Tomalyn. "She was accounted poor witch . . . she was to burn——"

"Ha, truly!" quoth Henry, his full face reddening angrily. "Forsooth, this so squeamish gentlewoman would ha' dared the flame, doomed her peerless body's loveliness to destruction, rather than endure a royal kindness,—so vile, so monstrous, so deadly a thing is Virtue—plague on't!"

"Ah, your Majesty," said she breathlessly, "Royal Henry, wouldst have suffered me to burn indeed?"

"Ah, Helen," murmured the King, "thou poor, sweet victim o' thy dragon-like virtue,—couldst thou have suffered thyself so to die?" Now at this the Lady Helen bowed her head, hiding lovely face in trembling hands:

"Nay, my lord," she answered, "ask me not, for . . . I was direly afraid! Had I but seen the dreadful fire. . . . Oh, had I but seen it . . .!"

"Enough, child!" sighed the King. "Harry is bluff, they say, a something masterful sovereign, mayhap, yet he—more kindly than thy proud virtue and merciless chastity—would ha' spared thee such death. . . . But now," and here he turned to frown from Julian yet upon his knees, to Tomalyn standing bare of head but defiant, "ye enemies, so full o' deathless hate, one of ye shall die, but which—yourselves shall decide—speak!"

"Sire," said Julian. "Your Majesty," quoth Tomalyn, both in a breath.

"My lord of Brandon, speak thou first."

"Then, Sire, since 'twas I—stole thy signature and thereby freed this lady, it were more just that I pay the penalty the rather than this so simple, guileless Sir Tomalyn that had no share in——"

"No share? 'Tis a lie, your Majesty!" cried Sir Tomalyn wrathfully. "For 'twas I fuddled thy rascally guards! 'Twas I should ha' freed my lady—spite o' them and thee! 'Twas I named thee base tyrant, lord King,—ay, so I do now—to thy beard, bluff Hal! So, an my neighbour Julian be guilty, I hold myself the more so."

"Forsooth," nodded Henry, small eyes snapping, "now I perceive ye do hate each other so perfectly ye would each die for the other,—so shall ye live. Yet punished shall ye be, ay—and surely! . . . I will, this very night, see ye wedded to a witch accursed! Wed her this very hour, ye shall——"

"Noble Sire!" cried Julian, grasping Majesty's hand. "Oh, generous Harry—which of us wilt punish with joy so infinite—which?"

"Nay," answered the King, turning his broad back, "this must ye settle among yourselves. Within the hour come ye, all three, to my hunting lodge hard by West Dene yonder, and fail not! Ho, there,—let my huntsmen sound a rally! Gentlemen, away—our sport is done."

And so, to the cheery notes of the hunting-horns, off strode bluff King Hal, his gentlemen and verderers attendant.

V

They were seated once more about the fire that blazed cheerily, also the rising moon poured her tender radiance all about them; but though they could thus see each other very well, they were silent all, the Lady Helen gazing sad-eyed upon the dancing flame while these two kinsmen, when not glowering on each other, gazed on her. Quoth Sir Tomalyn at last:

"Helen, dear lady, wherefore so dolorous?"

"Oh Sir Tomalyn," she sighed, "have I not reason sufficing? To be thus, and so suddenly, wed! And all unwooed! No single word of love!"

"My lady," murmured Julian, "now might I speak my love for thee till break o' day but for this peevish Tomalyn, his plaguy company."

"And I," retorted Tomalyn instantly, "I'd woo thee roundly, sweet mistress, but for this lord's pestilent presence."

"Alas!" she murmured, glancing bright-eyed from one comely face to the other, "I would ye twain were but one, or I myself twain for your dear sakes . . . how, ah

how may I make choice betwixt such as ye? Noble and valiant are ye both, and each hath perilled life for sake of one ye thought poor maid and dread witch. Oh, dear my friends, how may I choose?"

"Nay," answered Tomalyn, "as I see it the matter is purely simple—choose me, sweet Helen, and make an end."

"And how sayest thou, Julian?"

"Beseech thee, lady, choose me rather and make a beginning."

"Of what, my lord?"

"Of life, Helen." Here she sighed, shaking lovely head; and they were silent again until, yet sighing, quoth she:

"Sirs, I have proved ye both gentle and equally valiant,—but which I must wed, yourselves must teach me, as thus: He that here and now doeth the noblest and most selfless act—him will I best love . . . and he shall this night be lord of me and master." Now here once again was silence, Sir Tomalyn scowling fiercely on his kinsman, and Julian gazing wistful on the fire.

Then up rose Sir Tomalyn, and tossing wide his mighty arms spake quick and eager:

"Lo, Helen, here stand I to love and honour thee above all women!" Then sinking before her on his knees, "Sweet mistress," said he, "come to my heart, and in thy name I will free all such as be anyways in bondage to me . . . the half of my possessions will I likewise bestow on needy folk that they shall bless thy name . . . moreover, I will endow a goodly spital to thy dear honour so shalt be held in memory ever kindly. How sayest thou?"

"That there spake our generous Tomalyn!" she murmured. "And thou, my Lord Julian?"

Slowly Julian lifted his head and turned from the Lady Helen to kneel humbly before his astonished cousin, speaking him with a grave humility very strange:

"Cousin Tomalyn, because thou didst venture thy life for this sweet Helen that we love so greatly, now, for her sake, I crave of thee forgiveness for all past ills and unkindnesses from me to you-wards. I pray thee let the feud betwixt us die and be forgot, and in its stead be amity and fellowship henceforth. For, Tomalyn, I do so love her that, even though she choose and wed thee, yet will I love thee truly all my days for her sweet sake. So, kinsman,—here's my hand."

Sir Tomalyn stared a moment, mute and still with wonder, then clasping this proffered hand, wrung it heartily; and in this moment Helen was kneeling between them.

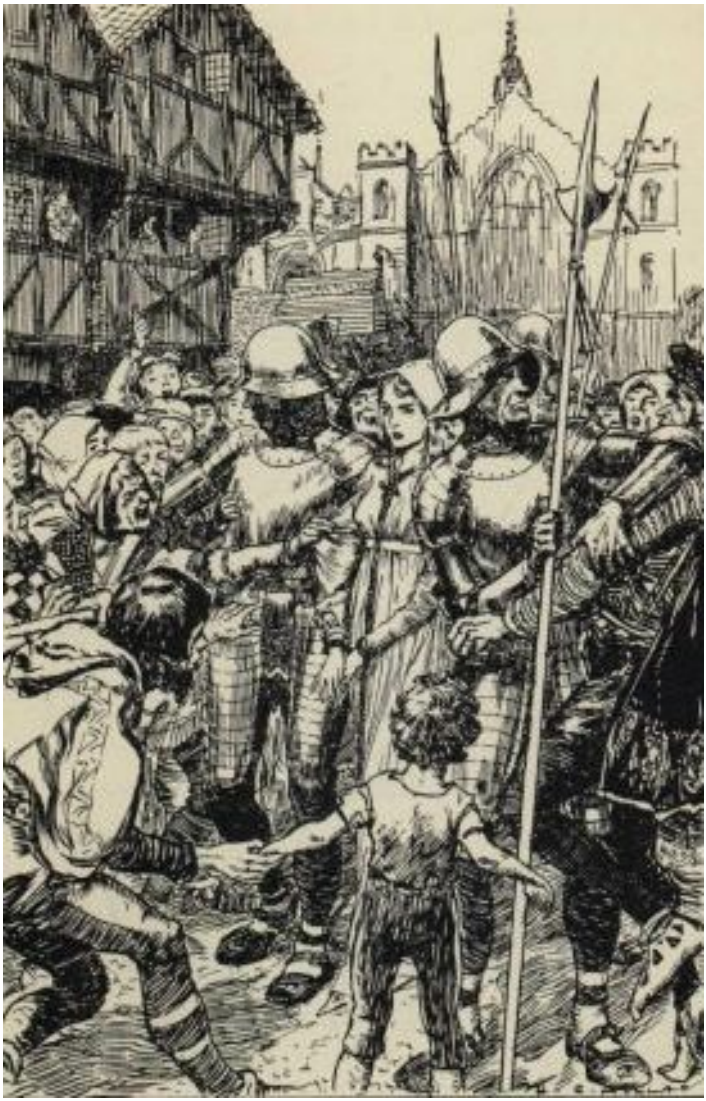
"Oh Tomalyn," she sighed, "Tomalyn that would give so much for Love's sake,

yet look on thy new friend Julian who, trampling down past hate and pride and forgetful of self giveth thus for Love all that he by nature is, and who, willing thus to lose all doth win me . . . an he will have it so. How sayest thou, Tomalyn? Let now speak thy valiant heart." For a moment Sir Tomalyn scowled fierce and grim, then, sighing gustily, rose up from his knees:

"Thou hast said, my lady!" he answered. "Let us to the King." And turning, he strode into the shadows where stood their horses.

"Beloved," murmured Julian, his arms fast about her. "I am all amazed . . . for . . . yonder goeth valiant and right noble gentleman."

"Ay truly," sighed she, swaying to his embrace, "but here is mine . . . close upon my heart . . . oh Julian!"



“. . . espied her among that howling press”

No. 9

WHITEFRIARS

I

In that far day when Edward Longshanks granted land beside the River to the Carmelites or White Friars, founded by Sir Richard Gray in the year of our Lord 1241, the good brethren reared them a noble church and monastery. They laid out fair orchards and gardens where flowers bloomed and vegetables grew, so that from the River, that great, silent highway, in season and out, it was a place whose beauty filled the eye. It also possessed all the privileges of Sanctuary.

But in the fullness of time came Henry the Eighth, that bluff potentate who, having reft it from the friars' tender care in his very bluffest manner, bestowed it upon Dr. Butts, his physician.

So houses came, growing ever denser into narrow streets, into crooked courts and unlovely alleys, which with years degenerated into a slum so vile that in the reign of King James the First (called "the Wise") it was become a very pest-spot and sink of iniquity; for King James was so wise indeed that in 1608 he confirmed White Friars as a sanctuary by special charter.

So this particular neighbourhood was made the asylum of thieves and worse rascals, flying from arrest; the haunt of cut-throat bully and swaggering bravo; an infamous place where Murder rioted and Vice stalked unashamed, and where one might purchase every iniquity under the sun, from assassination down,—and all at remarkably low rates.

Now here at the corner of Water Lane and Hanging-sword Alley stood a tavern. Low-browed it was and furtive-looking, for its small windows, deep-sunk in massy walls beneath the scowl of toppling gable, seemed to leer darkly askance on all and sundry with never an honest twinkle anywhere. In a small room of this ale-house, seated at a rough table in a dingy corner, two men faced each other, the one blue-eyed, reddish of hair, and somewhat young, the other grizzled, darkly keen of eye, and somewhat old. Both were bronzed, both were scarred, and both wore high, spurred boots and buff-coats frayed and stained by long and hard usage, and each of them was gazing with a certain wistful sadness at the hat on the table before them, a sorry-looking object, its wide brim and weather-beaten crown pierced by more than one hole, its feather a broken, faded wisp.

"'Tis a curst, villainous old hat, my Peter-Pierre!" sighed the younger man.

"*Par Dex*—yes, my friend, Deek, there is but one worse—*voilà*!" and reaching his own from where it lay, the speaker set it beside the other.

"Ay, faith, and there they are, Pierre! The veriest woebegone brace o' hats for gentlemen in all London town, and too vastly eloquent of our broken fortunes——"

"Then why not amend 'em good, my master?" said a voice, hoarse-whispering, and from a small, softly-opened door in dingy corner crept a little man hatted to eyes and cloaked to chin.

"*Mordieu!*" exclaimed Pierre, clapping hand to dagger-hilt. "*Voilà—le petit homme noir!* He follow us, mon Richard."

"Ay so!" nodded Richard, fronting the intruder. "You've dogged us from beyond Fleet, rascal,—and why?"

"Sir, 'twas that methought I knew your worship."

"Say'st thou? Then who am I, fellow—pronounce."

"Thou'rt Sir Richard de Brooke, and shalt not ha' forgot me, sir, I'll wager, nor the days o' thy so vain, tempestuous wooing o' the Lady Duchess Joanna." As he spoke, the little man loosed his cloak, doffed hat and bowed.

"Body o' me!" exclaimed Sir Richard, "Thou'rt Benet Lightfoot, madam's chamberlain. How doth Her Grace these days?"

"'Tis fierce, termagant lady!" quoth Benet fiercely. "She had me whipped, sir, driven forth o' mine office, and for no reason."

"Hum!" quoth Sir Richard. "None, say'st thou?"

"Why, then, for reason small, sir—e'en as upon a day she had her lacqueys cast thee from her presence, Sir Richard,—thy noble self that, on a time had saved her from fang of hound, she had thee driven forth very shameously."

"She did, Benet man, for that I'd compelled of her a kiss, and she so peerless proud, God wot! But this was years agone,—how now, what wouldst o' me and this my good comrade the Vidame of La Tour Courcelles?"

"Sir Richard, your fortunes be at low ebb."

"Ay faith, my Benet—remark this hat! Lookee this solitary James is all that standeth 'twixt us and destitution," and between the two woebegone hats he placed a single gold Jacobus.

"Why, then, sir, by your leave, I shall teach you how to pouch goodly fee and therewithal how you may something tame this so haughty, proud lady."

"Speak, my Benet, our ears attend."

"Then, Sir Richard, here anon shall come three bravos hired by roguish lord to wicked purpose,—*videlicet*, sir,—by sudden, brutish force to seize upon and bear this same lady unto him at his house yonder by the River."

"What man—the Duchess Joanne?"

"Herself, sir."

"And this villain lord, his name?"

"Sir, he is your kinsman, Lord Brandon."

"Aha! We hated and clouted each other as lads, I mind. And his hireling bravos shall come hither, eh, Benet."

"Sir, without fail. Thus, sirs, should you in their guise contrive the matter, this your hated kinsman shall see you well, and, moreover, you shall be nobly avenged on this proud lady her past scorns and unkindnesses."

"Faith, and that will I. And these bravos now——?"

"Be three, sir, and chiefest Captain Bludso, a swashing braggart of bloody repute. You may know him by his roaring oaths, his scarlet cloak, and hat wi' sky-blue feather——"

"Good,—these same shall be mine! And how then?"

"Sir, being thus equipped, I shall bring you to your lordly kinsman for your earnest money and to be further instruct. And now, Sir Richard, by your leave I'll out to watch for them."

"Away then, my Benet. As for these bullies, these roaring boys, these swashbuckling, hell-fire toss-pots, we'll out-roar and out-swash 'em, I'll warrant me! Meanwhile the noble Vidame and I will adventure us on such supper as this ill-favoured dog-hole may afford. . . . So ho, there—house ho!"

Thus shouted Master Richard, hammering on the battered table with his sword-hilt, until to them presently a maid came hasting, a poor, trembling creature in shrinking expectancy of blows, yet who, despite tear-red eyes, had once been fair enough.

"Prithee bring us supper, wench," quoth Richard kindly; "aught that may be ready, and ale. Nay, blench not, lass, here's none shall harm thee. Why, what a poor, terrified soul it is——" for the girl had uttered a faint scream and cowered as, from the narrow alley without, came sounds of sudden riot, a fierce, bull-like roaring, the shrieks of women, the shrill, painful cry of a man, followed by a wild rush and scurry of flying feet.

"Aha!" quoth Richard, glancing towards the small casement. "Hither, meseemeth, come our rake-helly roarers, Peter, man—true-bred Alsatian bravos that shall perchance——"

The door was flung violently open, and a man appeared, a man very tall and broad, whose blue-plumed beaver seemed to brush the lintel and whose fine, gold-braided scarlet cloak swept the doorway, right and left; a very masterful man who

stamped spurred heels, bellowed a full-throated curse, and glared from smiling Richard to his grave companion in scowling hostility.

"Oho, wench!" he roared, head back-thrown, foot advanced, and hand on sword-hilt. "What errant dogs d'ye kennel here, aha?"

"Sir . . . Sir Captain," quavered the girl, shrinking fearfully, "I . . . I . . . they be strangers, sir——"

"Nay, Captain, sweet chuck," quoth Richard, getting up to bow, "fright not the damsel, roar not lest she swoon. As for our humble selves, we are together, or each and severally, at your service, as first—my good friend Monsieur the Vidame de la Tour Courcelles, and lastly myself, Richard de Brooke."

The Vidame, always courteous, rose and bowed with his usual stately dignity, whereupon the Captain twirled his moustachios fiercely, hawked terrifically, spat ferociously and, beckoning his three scowling companions, turned away.

"Ha, wench," he roared, louder than ever, "a pox—a plague on all strangers! To me . . . to me, I say! Follow and bring us sack. A lusty pottle o' sack to Captain Bludso and his friends i' the Long Chamber yonder. Bustle!"

"Anon . . . anon, Captain!" answered the trembling girl.

"Why, then, be instant!" shouted the Captain, his fury waxing as he met Richard's bland gaze and the Vidame's unwinking stare. "Jump, wench,—dispatch, lest I brand ye!" So saying, Captain Bludso stamped across the dingy room jingling his spurs, with his three equally ferocious companions, whom the shivering girl made incontinent to follow.

"My good maid," said Richard, grasping a fold of her poor gown, "who then is yon braying jackass?"

"Nay . . . oh, sir," she answered in a desperate-pleading whisper, "God's love, suffer me to go. 'Tis Captain Jack Bludso, a terrible man, sir. Ah, suffer me to go lest they beat me again."

So Richard loosed her and turned to the Vidame, who was gazing pensive at their two shabby hats.

"Our fortunes shall never mend, my Peter-Pierre, until we go better gauded and equipped. How thinkest thou?"

"That the exchange is not the robbery—no!" answered the Vidame, gently.

"Aha, Peter, art there then? And a brave blue feather, Pierre—a goodly scarlet cloak! And how for thyself?"

"*Fort bien*, my Deek, there was of these gentle roarers one in a cloak of a blue and a hat cocked with an ouch—of a seemliness, oh, yes."

"Then, comrade, let's to it!" Even as they rose, from the adjoining chamber

came a harsh roar, a shrill wail, and the maid ran in upon them, wiping blood from her pale, pretty face.

"Thou poor little soul!" quoth Richard, clapping an arm about her and dabbing gently at the weeping girl's hurt with a corner of the soldier's scarf he wore. "There, never weep, lass. Here, take this to thy comfort!" and into her work-roughened palm he thrust the gold James.

"Oh, sir! Oh, good master . . ." she gasped, staring on the gold through her tears, "'tis a year's wage! Ah, sir, here's mistake . . ."

"Not so, 'tis our solace for thee—eh, Peter?"

"My faith, but yes, Deek, of a verity."

"So, my lass, get out o' this——"

"Oh, may the good God bless ye, noble gentles!" cried the girl, clasping the gold to her heaving breast. "With this I have enough. I'll away, I'll away back to the blessed, sweet country. God be kind t'ye, noble sirs!" And so she was gone.

Then Richard clapped on his woebegone hat, twisted tattered cloak about left forearm, and drew his sword while the Vidame did likewise; so they viewed one another keen-eyed, smiled, nodded, and, striding across the floor, Richard kicked wide the door of the neighbouring room and burst upon the astounded company.

Captain Bludso, standing wide-legged upon the hearth, turned with a gasping oath; but in that moment Richard lunged, and transfixing the blue-feathered beaver upon unerring sword-point whisked it deftly from the astonished Captain's head.

For a moment there was a stupefied silence, wherein Richard drew the hat from his blade and donned it in place of his own. Then the Captain roared in purple-faced ferocity, and his companions leapt to their feet.

"Hell's flames!" bellowed the Captain, hand gripping at sword-hilt. "Ha, 'sblood! Now will I spit thee, split thee, cut thee into little gobbets to feed vile curs withal! Now will I rive——"

"Tush!" shouted Richard in louder retort. "Howl not, dog! Bite an' ye can. Nay, first, that cloak!"

A flicker of darting steel, and the scarlet cloak, severed at the clasp, slipped from the Captain's broad shoulders to the floor; whereat, in the very act of roaring, he gasped and leapt nimbly aside from his aggressor's twinkling point.

"Ha, now!" cried he. "Now by all the fiends most foul I——" But here Richard, lowering his point, made a left volte and smote him in the face with his old hat.

"Thou beastly rogue!" he said. "Peace, windbag, thy bellowing roars do nothing affect us. Abate, fool, abate and draw. Out steel and I'll see if thy loathly blood be red or white. Come, out sword and clap to 't, my bully!"

With bare-toothed snarl Captain Bludso jumped back, whipped out sword, and sprang in again with savage thrust; but steel met steel and for a moment there was the stamp and jingle of spurred boots, the clink and slither of quick-whirling blades while the Vidame stood serenely by, dignified yet watchful. Then the Captain's heavy rapier fell clattering, and he stood groaning, his sword-arm skewered from wrist to elbow.

"*Sa-ha!* And there it is, thou thing o' straw!" nodded Richard and whipped forth his steel. The Captain howled and, reeling to adjacent settle, sank there, nursing his wounded limb and whimpering.

"And now, messieurs," said the Vidame, bowing to the Captain's three companions, "you perceive me at your service the most humbly,—one or all, if you please. How, sirs? Please! Not one?"

"Poor stuff, Peter man, poor stuff these famous bullies, these roaring boys of Alsatia!" laughed Richard contemptuously.

"*Hélas*, but yes, Deek," sighed the Vidame plaintively. "But with the liver of the chicken, *par Dex*! So, now, you, sir, in the corner, I trouble for your 'at . . . your manteau, an't please you—ah, so! Now, the exchange being not the robbery, you accept mine. *Voilà!*"

"And now, my jolly dogs, my merry toss-pots," cried Richard, dropping his war-worn cloak and catching up the scarlet, "the question is—Ha, 'ware yonder, comrade!" But even as he spoke, the Vidame's long blade flashed, and the pistol so stealthily drawn was instantly dropped, and next moment gleamed in the Vidame's sinewy hand.

"*Eh bien*, my Deek, 'ow now?" he enquired, "for you perceive unless we keel them all they shall raise the town on us——"

"And, faith," nodded Richard, "to kill 'em should be a notable good act; yet, being in England, methinks we were wiser to dispose of 'em something less bloodily. But how, Peter, how?"

"*Regarde* then, *mon ami, par là—la cave*!" and the Vidame gestured with the pistol towards an adjacent corner.

"Eh, the cellar? O' my soul, 'tis the place most apt. Up wi' the trap there, my roaring lambs, my bullies tender,—up, I say—so! Now down with ye, good hell-fire boys, down under—trip!"

"Ha, what a pox?" groaned Captain Jack, blenching at his own blood. "Must I die i' the cellarage, then?"

"Ay, faith—like t'other rats. Come, jump!"

"Oh, alas, I am a dying man!"

"Tush! I but winged ye when I might ha' been through thy midriff, thy roguish gizzard, thy most detestable inwards. So yelp for joy of my so great clemency and get down to thy fellows—down!"

Groaning loudly but cursing softly, Captain Bludso climbed laboriously through the trap and, from the gloom and security of the cellar below, fell instantly to his customary roaring oaths with passionate threats of dire revenge; whereupon Richard let fall the trap and, having bolted it secure, sheathed sword, folded the scarlet cloak about him, and, slipping a hand within the Vidame's ready arm, quoth he:

"Methinks, Peter, we were as well out o' this vile dog-hole." So forth went they together accordingly; but scarce had they come into that foul thoroughfare called Water Lane when Richard whistled softly and halted. "Peter," he whispered. "Oho, Pierre, here in the pocket o' this same goodly cloak is fat, comfortable purse; wherefore, comrade mine, I'll hazard guess we shall presently sup in a place more suited to our gentility than this rascally Alsatia." Then on they strode again very blithely and at faster pace.

But presently there met them one in the livery of an upper servant who, picking his way mincingly across the dirty street, tapped Richard familiarly on his broad shoulder.

"Aha, sirrah, and what's for you?" demanded Richard, his blue eyes smouldering.

"You'll be Captain Jack Bludso o' the Friars—eh, eh?"

"Well, d'ye say so, now?"

"Ay, marry do I!" nodded the fellow, with a knowing look and companionable leer. "I know it by your blue feather and——"

"Oho, good knave, and what then?"

"My master waits ye."

"Faith, and doth he so? And to what purpose, brave chuck?"

"I' the matter of a wench, or some my lady. But mum!" quoth the fellow, laying finger against nose and winking.

"Why, such pretty business would seem to flourish hereabout."

But now to them came Benet Lightfoot who, ginger on lip, beckoned them to follow the liveried servant.

Very soon they reached White Friars stairs, where their conductor hailed a waterman, and, stepping into a wherry, they glided away down stream.

They stopped at last beside a private landing-stage giving upon a walled garden where stood a small house. Hither their conductor brought them and, after some delay, ushered them into a fair, tapestried chamber where, at a carven table, sat three

very exquisite gentlemen, perfumed and begemmed, one of whom, even more resplendent than his fellows, wore jewelled pendants in his ears as the delicate fashion then was.

"My lord," said the servant, bowing humbly towards the ear-rings, "Captain Bludso."

"Fool—begone!" said his lordship, gesturing him away with white, languid hand, whereat with yet another obeisance the fellow withdrew; but scarce had the door closed when Richard bowed and, drawing the blue-feathered beaver low on his brows, strode forward and, arms akimbo, stared from one lounging gentleman to the other.

"Greeting, my masters all!" quoth he in deep throaty tones. "In what matter o' villainy shall we serve ye? And which o' ye—who? Pronounce, sirs!"

The gentleman of the ear-rings blinked his close-set eyes, his thin nostrils quivered, while his companions, forgetting their languor, sat up in their chairs.

"'Od's my life, Brandon," quoth one, "this dunghilly cock croweth loud!"

"Ay, my lord," cried the other, "'tis an insolent rogue!"

"So—so!" murmured Lord Brandon, viewing Richard with contemptuous yet searching gaze, "If his deeds match his looks 'tis very well. Hearkee, sirrah," he continued, gesturing at Richard with one slim finger. "A certain gentleman hath named you as desperate rogue, bold to serve, of approved courage, and therewithal discreet. How say you?"

"Amen, sir!" answered Richard with a wide-armed flourish, "I and my brave comrade here stand the fair flower o' White Friars Sanctuary, arrant rake-helly, bawcock boys, unmatched in all Alsatia, notable dealers in iniquity, that shall, at prices various, slit ye purse or weasand, fetch ye neighbour's ox or ass, maid-servant, wife, or grand-dam, and, being duly fee'd,—poof, 'tis all forgot, in deep oblivion buried. For——"

"Stint your babble, knave, and heark to me——"

"At a price, my master, at a reasonable price our ears attend ye, or——"

"Be silent, rogue! The sum I offer is fifty guineas and——"

"But base fifty?" cried Richard, with a thundering oath. "Ha, this for myself shall scarce suffice! Yet what of this my noble comrade,—ha?"

"To the devil with your comrade——"

"'Sblood and death!" cried Richard, with a gesture so fiercely sudden that his hearers blenched instinctively. "Then to the foul fiend wi' your proffered pittance! We be purveyors of iniquity but to your persons of condition, we truck not wi' paltry sinners, we!"

"Ha, damnation, fool!" cried his lordship, leaping from his chair. "D'ye know who I am?"

"'Sbones, sir—nor care! But no ditch-crawling corner-creepers we,—bullies o' condition rather, and bravos o' circumstance. Ha, comrade, the door; we'll march to worthier employ, to sinners more opulent, to——"

But here my lord laughed and held up an arresting finger.

"How then," he enquired, "have ye degrees o' villainy?"

"Ay, marry and forsooth have we, my master," answered Richard, halting. "There be villainy such as ours, the which is acto-passive, and, *per contra*, villainy such as thine, the which is passo-active."

"Why, then, thou acto-passive villain," laughed his lordship, sitting down again. "I do agree thy terms, to each of ye fifty guineas, but——"

"And the half down, master!"

"So be it!" said my lord, tossing a heavy purse on the table. "There be thy fifty guineas,—count and make sure."

"Not so!" answered Richard, pouching the money. "'Twixt roguish villain and villainous rogue trust shall rule. So now, sir, what secret roguery wouldst purchase of us?"

Then, leaning back in his great elbow-chair, Lord Brandon stared into the eyes that stared back at him:

"This," said he, frowning, "and heed me well . . ."

II

The youthful Duchess Joanna lay upon her shapely back, somnolent amid the flowery ling, watching with slumberous dark eyes the comely, middle-aged lady near by, who sat plying her busy needle with plump, pretty hand.

"Thou'rt a small, lovely soul, sweet Aunt," sighed the Duchess at last. "The years ha' proven kind to thee. I marvel thou didst never marry."

The elder lady sighed, frowned slightly, and shook her head in gentle reproof:

"Fie, Joanna!" she murmured in voice as sweet as her look. "Thy posture is unseemly . . . indecorous!"

"Nay, loved Aunt, unseemly is as unseemly doth. And oh Aunt Mabille, I do yearn for a very man!"

"Gracious heavens of mercy!" exclaimed the Lady Mabille with a very small shriek. "A man? Child, I blush, I——"

"Nay, precious Aunt and lady, so do I blush for thee—thy naughty thinking! For

I wish a man merely that such man might out-man another man that is man I do abhor, since this man, though gentleman, is no man but fiend rather, in man's shape! In fine, Aunt, I'd have a man who might cross and thwart, out-fight, maim, mend, ay, or end this cruel, proud, and hatefully evil two-legged thing that names itself Hugo Lord Brandon."

"Ah!" sighed the Lady Mabille, shuddering, "name not this wicked monster, this merciless duellist. He killed poor Lord Saxonthorp scarce a month since."

"And there were others, Aunt. There will be others, also. He fights but to kill."

"And by reason o' thee, my Joanna."

"Oh!" cried the Duchess, sitting up to clench white fists, "he is a very pest! He hath made my name a byword!"

"He hankereth for thy beauty, child, thy wealth. He sweareth none other shall possess thee——"

"Nay, Aunt, I'll die first!"

"Meantime others die because o' thee, Joanna, and will die at his cruel hand, I fear, unless thou seek the King's protection——"

"The King!" cried Joanna, with passionate gesture. "King James doth favour the beastly fellow."

"Thou wouldst not—marry him, child?"

"Nay, rather would I turn dairy-maid! Oh, is there no man in all London to master him?"

"Alas, Joanna, divers valiant gentlemen have so attempted and now be dead!"

"So hath he made o' me a deadly thing. So do I hate him, and so now do I swear——"

"Nay, child, swear not."

"Yea, Aunt, swear I will that—could I but find a man so bold, so skilled in arms to rid me o' this wicked lord, to such man would I yield myself in wedlock . . . were he not too ill-favoured. Yea, Aunt, such a man should be lord of me and mine, his arms should be my harbourage, his children would I——"

The words ended in a fearful gasp as forth of the adjacent hedge stepped a tall man, his masked face lit by eyes vividly blue and shaded by a goodly beaver brave with a sky-blue feather, his stalwart figure shrouded in a scarlet cloak.

"Lady," said he, uncovering coppery curls in full-armed bow, "so be it! Thy very man am I!"

Now here the elder lady screamed and instantly swooned. The younger did neither, but, leaping nimbly afoot, surveyed the intruder with a look of proud disdain.

"What do you here?" she demanded, fronting him all undismayed. "What do you

i' the strict privacy of this my garden?"

"Admire the beauties o' Nature, madam, with an awful reverence," he answered, with a bow more lowly than before.

"How . . . ah, what mean you?"

"A foot, lady. An ankle slim. A notably buxom leg, a——"

"Thou—thou spying rogue!" she cried, and, proudly arrogant lady though she was, her dark eyes quailed beneath his look, and her cheeks flushed rosily. "Ha, thou detested Peeping Thomas!" cried she.

"Nay, not Thomas," he answered gently, his shapely lips up-curving beneath his mask. "Richard am I hight, and here also is my good friend and esteemed comrade, Peter; both humbly at your ladyship's will."

"Have done!" she cried imperiously. "Begone, I'll none o' thee!"

"Yet, lady, indeed," he answered, "an my fortune hold, thou shall have all o' me, according to thine oath."

"Oath, fellow?"

"Oath, sweet lady,—to wed him that shall rid thee of this right bloodthirsty lord, —to make his arms thy harbourage, and his children——"

"Enough!" she commanded, stamping her slim foot passionately; and then her aunt, rousing from her swoon, fell a-wailing:

"Oh, child! Alas, Joanna! Now kind heaven preserve us in this dread hour!" Here she gasped and flushed to see before her a personable, grizzle-headed gentleman who bowed in stately fashion and murmured courtly phrases albeit in somewhat quaint English.

"Madam," said Richard, bowing also, "I take joy to present my honoured friend and companion in arms, Monsieur the Vidame de la Tour Courcelles. As for myself, sweet lady," he continued, turning back to smile down on Joanna, "as for myself ——"

"Ay, what, what o' thyself?" she demanded, viewing him with growing intensity beneath wrinkling brows. "Who art thou?"

"Merely Richard, lady."

"And what beside?"

"Thy very man o' service," he answered, but, seeing how she stared on him, he pulled down his hat-brim and smiled beneath his half-mask.

"I knew a Richard long ago," said she, musingly. "I was scarce fifteen years old, and he, methinks, would be twenty, as I guess. . . . And this youth saved me from savage dog and was bit in arm and leg. He was my playfellow."

"Happy imp!" quoth Richard.

"And his name, like thine, was Richard."

"The name groweth common, lady."

"Well, sir, and why are you here?"

"On matter nearly concerning your future good."

"Sir, ha' done with these riddles and speak me plain—what would you?"

"Obey thee, lady. So now, wilt go with me upon thine own two pretty feet or must I carry thee?"

The proud young Duchess leapt back, yet even so his long arms were about her. Once she screamed, but then her passionate outcries were muffled in the scarlet cloak and she was whirled aloft and borne away. The breathless Lady Mabille was used much the same, though the Vidame's sinewy arms were something less masterful and his courtly periods deeply sympathetic; thus whereas the proud, passionate niece only ceased struggling by reason of the embrace that tightened almost painfully about her tenderness, the aunt strove not at all, because, perhaps, of the reverent look, the kindly tone, and gentle eyes of the stately personage who bore her along with such surpassing ease.

"Vile man!" panted the Duchess, submitting of necessity. "Whither do you take me?"

"Thou beautiful thing," he answered in caressing voice, "where no harm shall touch thee. Here is the coach. Wilt mount unaided or shall I——" Joanna mounted forthwith, and the Lady Mabille, as submissively, after. Now as Richard stood to close the door Joanna snatched at his mask, but laughing he caught her hand and kissed it; then, swinging to saddle, he gave word to the coachman, and the ponderous vehicle lumbered heavily away with Richard and the Vidame riding at either wheel.

And so with evening they came to White Friars, to an inn hard beside the River.

"Sweet ladies," said Richard opening the coach door, "will ye be pleased to walk or shall we——?" They walked—across the narrow, miry way, through a loud-voiced, chattering rabble, up a winding stair, and into a wide and goodly chamber where at a small table set for dainty meal sat my Lord Brandon, more magnificent than ever. Beholding Joanna, he rose hastily and stepped forward in eager, smiling welcome. Beholding her aunt, he halted in frowning perplexity.

"Fool!" he exclaimed, turning on Richard in sudden fury. "What crass mistake is this?"

"'Sbones, my master," answered Richard in his bravo fashion, but removing his half-mask, "we bring ye this Duchess according to our bond, and herewith, for peace and quiet sake, her so respected lady aunt. And how then?"

"Why, then, take her hence, crass rogue, or 'stead o' thy promised fee I'll have ye soundly drubbed——"

But here the Duchess Joanna interposed:

"My Lord Brandon," said she, yet heeding him no whit since her wide gaze was on Richard's whimsical visage, "know you this man?"

"Not I, madam, not I—save that he is a hired bully and very rogue."

"And his name?"

"Captain Bludso he calls himself, and is the most notorious desperate cut-throat in Alsatia by account."

"Oh, shame!" cried she; and it was ever upon Richard she looked. "So vile a thing! And yet—ah, poor fool that I was,—and yet I trusted thee! I deemed thee a man honourable and valiant. Thy look waked forgotten dreams. Methought to see in thee——"

"Thy 'very man,' lady!" he murmured. "Thy man o' service, Joanne——"

"Joanne?" she repeated in a voice suddenly hushed. "Oh, 'twas so the little Richard named me years agone!"

But now my lord, haughty and impatient, stepped between.

"Enough, fellow; go hence!" said he, and waving Richard away contemptuously, he bowed to his lovely captive who never so much as glanced towards him.

"And thus, adored lady," said he, bending near, "mine thou art at last, and mine thou shalt be—ay, spite all thy pride,—mine this night by force or gentleness. Choose thou the way on't——" And he made to set his arm about her; but then Richard stretched forth his open hand suddenly, and planting it in Lord Brandon's astonished face thrust him reeling to the wall.

"My lord," said he in voice altered as his mien, "to-night kind Fortune hath thwarted thy black villainy by means of a blue-feathered hat and cloak of scarlet. Thus we'll away with 'em—so! Now as for me, sir,—nay, prithee temper thy lordly rage one moment,—I, being no bravo but gently born as thyself, have made promise to mend or end thy so evil living for the good o' the world. Come, sir, you wear sword and dagger, I see. Well?"

"Ha, thou base, presumptuous dog!" exclaimed Lord Brandon in a passionate, soft voice, drawing a small silver whistle from his breast. "I fight but with my peers, so begone! I have trusty servants below, and it needeth but a single blast on this ——"

"*Holà*,—the window, *regarde*!" cried the Vidame suddenly, and in such a fearful voice that every startled eye glanced thitherward; in which breathless instant the whistle was twitched deftly from Lord Brandon's lax fingers.

"Pardon, milord!" murmured the Vidame bravely and, bowing in his stately fashion, tossed the whistle into a distant corner.

Then steel flashed, and, speaking no more, my lord stepped towards Richard, sword in right hand, dagger in left.

Stamp and shuffle of quick feet, gleam and glitter of sword and dagger, clash and clink as they met in thrust and parry. The Duchess, leaning against the panelled wall, watched, scarce breathing, rosy lips apart, while her Aunt Mabille, shivering in adjacent corner, wailed softly until somehow her pretty hand came into the Vidame's sinewy fist to find there such comfort that she wailed no more.

But the fighting grew fiercer, closer, and so deadly that even the Duchess, shivering, bowed her head at last and, hearkening to those tireless, trampling feet, that ceaseless clash of murderous steel, whispered prayers until there came a sudden quiet and, glancing up, she saw Lord Brandon, his back against the wall, his eyes wild—and Richard's sword-point at his throat.

"Ah!" she cried instinctively. "Slay him not!"

Obediently Richard lowered his point and turned as to recover his opponent's fallen sword. Then Lord Brandon leapt; his dagger gleamed; the steel, though half-parried, went deep enough, for Richard gasped and sank stiffly to his knees. But in that instant, as his lordship made to thrust again, above Richard's drooping head a long blade darted, and, dropping his dagger, Lord Brandon fell and lay utterly still.

"Oh dear Mercy o' Heaven!" wailed the Lady Mabille. "Ah . . . is he . . . hast thou——?"

"Oh, but perfectly, *chère* Madame," answered the Vidame, wiping his blade on Lord Brandon's motionless person. "*Hélas*, it was necessary that I keel the so passionate gentleman. But pray how of my Deek?"

"He is dying . . . dying, I fear!" answered Joanna on her knees beside him. "Come, help me, sir—for, ah—if he die indeed——"

"Never . . . think it!" murmured Richard, looking up with swooning eyes to the lovely, woeful face bent over him. "Ah, Joanne, back . . . back to life come I . . . through ages o' dark . . . back . . . to thee, Joanne . . ."

III

"And so," said Joanne, seated beside her invalid's daybed, "thou'rt truly Richard, Richard? Richard Jocelyn de Brooke art thou, Richard, for despite the change of years and thy scarred face I do know thee by thy dog-bite. I espied the mark whiles thou didst lie a-fevered."

"Mark, lady?" questioned Master Richard, his eyes vivid in his pallid face. "I' my arm or thigh, prithee? . . . Oh, faith, but thou'rt lovelier flushing so, and thine eyes a-droop so maidenly! Ay me, thou'rt grown a beauteous thing, Joanne, and infinitely desirable, save for thy so vast riches and possessions—with a curse on 'em!"

"Ah, verily, Richard," sighed she, smoothing his pillow needlessly, "I am shackled by my riches—with another curse on them. Heigho!"

"And I," he murmured bitterly, "am a soldier o' fortune, the which meaneth o' no fortune i' the world save a tumble-down manor house in Sussex."

"Thou hast fought right valiantly 'gainst the cruel Spaniards in the Low Countries, the good Vidame telleth me."

"Ay, we campaigned with Frankie Vere, he and I . . . and were beggars all, and all was well. But here in England I'm well-nigh a beggar yet, alas!"

"Like him—thy good friend Peter de la Tour——"

"Nay, in France a man o' wealth is he and great estate. Where is old Peter, where tarries my Pierre?"

"Canst totter as far as yon window, thou poor thing?"

"Ha, madam, never doubt it," he cried cheerily, and leaping from the daybed reeled and would have fallen but for her ready arms.

"'S life!" he gasped in self-contemning dismay. "Here's a curst to-do!"

"Yea, Richard," she answered, smiling into his troubled eyes. "Oh, thou'rt very . . . sweetly weak!"

"Sweetly, quotha? Now wherefore 'sweetly,' madam?"

"But for me, Richard, e'en now thou wouldst have fallen."

"Faith, 'tis very like," he sighed, "so prithee hold me fast."

"Indeed that I will, Richard. Needs must I by reason of mine oath."

"Oath, child?"

"To wed but him, no matter his condition, who should prove himself a very man i' the matter of Lord Brandon, supposing——"

"Nay, 'twas a wild oath and foolish——"

"Supposing my very man were not too ill-favoured."

"'Twas an oath whereto no man of honour would hold thee."

"I vowed such a man should be lord of me and mine, that his dear arms should be my harbourage——"

"And here," said Richard, looking down at her through sudden tears of bodily weakness, "here am I in thine, Joanne!"

"Hush!" she murmured, drawing him down upon the roomy window-seat. "Hearken now to thy so wise, so good and sensible comrade, Peter,—thou foolish,

prideful Dick!”

. . . Borne up to them from the sunny garden on air sweet with flowery fragrance, came the Vidame’s murmurous voice:

“Ah, miladi so beloved, it is now I implore thee tread lightly, for ’neath thy so pretty feet is the heart of poor Pierre de la Tour Courcelles.”

“Now prithee, dear Richard, what o’ thy heart?”

“It thumpeth yet, sweet maid, and in fashion something lonely—as it needs must. But as for friend Peter, he is a man o’ wealth, of rank, and——”

“And lastly, Richard, in regard to my very man, I . . . I swore . . . his children should. . . . Oh, stoop . . . stoop thy so proud head!”

“Ah, Joanne . . . Joanne . . .” he sighed.

“And look yonder, Richard—peep!”

Now looking into the garden whither she bade, Richard beheld the Vidame, in fashion most reverent and infinitely stately, clasp my Lady Mabille in his long arms and, in manner whose fervour was nowise marred by such dignified stateliness, kiss her rosy lips.

“Richard!” murmured Joanna, folding soft arms about his neck, “thou and I were boy and girl together, and yet, meseemeth, before then . . . at some time . . . somewhere . . . we have often kissed and——”

“At some time . . . somewhere . . .” he repeated softly, “lost in the mist of years, thou wert mine own, and I . . . ah, my loved Joanne!”

Then, holding her fast, Richard kissed her—without any dignity or stateliness whatever.

“Whisked it deftly from the astonished Captain’s head”

No. 10

THE BANQUETING HALL AT WHITEHALL

I

For three hundred bustling years and more the Banqueting Hall, designed by Inigo Jones in 1619, has looked forth with its row of austere windows upon a world of ever-changing men and things, manners, and customs. Whitehall Palace and Holbein's noble gate, these have vanished utterly and are out of mind long since. London, the world, and Life itself are altered in marvellous fashion and are altering for the better every day, a slow yet sure ascent on and up towards the Light.

But amid this universal change, the Banqueting Hall remains the same, its seven austere windows looking serenely upon the bowler and trilby hat of the busy Londoner of to-day as it did upon the euphuistic, lisping courtiers of the first Stuart in cloak, ruff, and feathered bonnet, the be-ribanded lovelocks of laughing, silken Cavalier, the flowing periwigs and scented perukes of Georgian beaux, and the high-waisted coats of bewhiskered Regency bucks and dandies.

It has echoed back the tumult of riotous conflict, the roar of party mobs, the click and clink of deadly rapier and small-sword; but, in all its length of days, never such echo and never such scene as upon a certain bitterly cold, snowy morning in January when a gentleman took a walk.

He was dressed richly though sombrely in black velvet, this gentleman; he also wore two under-vests to prevent all possibility of his shivering in the frosty air, lest such natural tremors should be mistaken for quaking of another sort.

Though he was pale and something haggard of face, his look was serene, he carried his head aloft and walked with quick, resolute, almost sprightly, step, calling to the pikemen marching beside him right and left to mend their pace by reason of the shrewd air. Once only his step lagged as he pointed out to one who went beside him a certain tree hard by the entrance to Spring Gardens, a tree that years ago had been planted by "brother Henry."

Having crossed the snowy park, the soldiers halted to re-order their formation, since before them was a great concourse, a vast throng of people, a hushed yet eager-swaying multitude hither come to see how a king might die.

Now, during this momentary bustle, with supple movement of shapely young body, a woman slipped beneath a pikeman's arm and sank kneeling before the King, —a handsome creature despite her wild looks and deadly pallor.

"Lady," said the King, "child—what would you?"

"Your . . . blessing, Sire!" she panted.

"Who art thou, child?"

"Your Majesty, I am Cecily Brand."

So, reaching forth his hand, King Charles named and blessed her; but then she clasped that hand, kissing and wetting it with her tears.

"Nay," said he, raising her, "grieve not for me, Mistress Cecily. I go now to strive for a heavenly crown."

Then, hand in hand, speaking her comfortingly, he brought her between those grim ranks of armoured soldiery to the Palace of Whitehall and the great Banqueting House (much the same then as now, except for the black-draped scaffold before it and the faces that thronged window and roof). Here the King paused.

"Fare ye well, Mistress Cecily, dear child. Take you this in memory of me!" So saying, he put something into her nerveless fingers, uncovered his head, and ascending the wooden steps to the Long Gallery was gone. Then, looking at what he had given her, Cecily saw it was a gold-handled pen-knife.

And now ensued a dreadful time of waiting, a time of suspense and nerve-racking expectancy; horses snorted and stamped impatiently with a jingle of bridle-chains and accoutrements, armour clanked, and above it all, rising and falling yet never ceasing, sounded the dull, hoarse murmur of the anxious, waiting crowd; while all eyes were turned where stood the block, grim and black amid the clean, yellow straw.

The sudden roll and rattle of a drum, and the multitude grew as suddenly still; for out upon the scaffold had stepped a tall, ghastly figure cloaked from neck to heels, hideously masked from chin to hair, and bearing the axe of death, whose broad blade gleamed. Cecily shivered and closed her eyes. Again the drum rolled, the tall headsman tossed his cloak to his masked assistant and stood, his bare arms folded on his wide chest. Now upon his right forearm, livid against the tanned skin, was a jagged triangular scar that drew and held Cecily's shrinking gaze. But from the watching concourse went up a groaning murmur; and then again Cecily beheld the King, haggard yet serene of eye, heard him speak by name to the aged Bishop Juxon, beside him, in a voice even and untroubled. With him also were divers officers and gentlemen, to whom he now addressed himself:

. . . "For, sirs, it seems I shall be very little heard by anyone else——" But as he spoke thus, seeing one touch the axe, he broke off in the middle of a sentence ——"Hurt not the axe, sir," he cried, "*that* may hurt me!"

And in a while, having made an end of this his last public discourse, he turned to

the officer beside him.

"Colonel Hacker," said he, "take care they do not put me to pain, and moreover, sir, this an it please you——" But here another gentleman coming near the axe, he cried again: "Take heed of the axe!" And now, turning to the executioner, said he:

"I shall say but very short prayers and . . . when I thrust out my hands——" Then, looking upon the Bishop, "I have a good cause," said he, "and a gracious God on my side."

"Ay, Sire," answered the old Bishop in tremulous tones. "There is but one stage more, turbulent and troublesome, but it shall carry you from earth to heaven, and there you shall find great store of cordial joy and comfort."

"Indeed," answered the King, glancing up to the leaden sky, "I go from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can be . . . no disturbance in the world." And now, putting on a silken night-cap, he turned again to the executioner:

"Is my hair well?" he enquired.

The executioner nodded his grim head; then, taking off his cloak, his Majesty gave the George with its broad blue ribbon to Bishop Juxon, saying:

"Remember!" Then he drew off his doublet, but donned his cloak again because of the extreme cold, and so came to stand above the block, staring down at it wide-eyed:

"You must see it set fast!" said he, anxiously.

"Sir, it is fast!" answered the executioner, speaking in a voice that was strange and unnaturally hoarse; and once again, as he reached for the axe, Cecily's horrified gaze was held by that jagged, triangular scar.

"Why, then," said the King, "when I put out my hands—so . . . then . . .!" After this, he whispered to himself awhile, his hands and eyes uplifted, and suddenly kneeling down laid his neck upon the block, but, as the headsman tucked his long hair more securely beneath the cap, the King, thinking him about to strike, started and said:

"Wait! Stay for the sign!"

"Yes, sir," answered the headsman, "I will."

And after a little pause the King stretched forth his hands . . .

Cecily saw the great axe flash upward, saw again that livid scar, and covered her face, but to her swooning senses came the muffled thud of shearing steel,—and from that great concourse, in that awful moment, went forth a gasping, universal groan.

Once again Cecily's eyes beheld that scarred arm and clutching fist, frightfully bedabbled, whence dangled a head pallid in death, haggard no longer but ineffably

serene.

"Behold the head of a traitor!" cried the headsman in his strangely hoarse voice.

And in that moment Cecily sighed, sobbed, and sank back upon the crowd; but forth of the press came two long arms that clasped, lifted, and bore her tenderly away.

II

Perched upon the old mossy wall of the neglected orchard Robin Brooke gazed wistfully through dense leafage towards the distant house as he had done very patiently for an hour or more, whistling softly ever and anon to the blackbird in a neighbouring tree, a bold, bright-eyed fellow who whistled back to him in melodious answer.

So Robin sat and swung his long legs and whistled softly, sighed loudly, and, checking suddenly, held his breath, for, through the dense boskage of unpruned orchard and riot of flowers in the rose-garden beyond, he caught the flutter of her gown, . . . glimpsed the sweet, proud carriage of her head; and she so entirely unaware of him that he trembled lest she vanish once more without seeing him.

Softly, plaintively Robin whistled again, whereto the blackbird piped in pretty rivalry, puffing his feathers; but all unnoticed now, for—she had entered the orchard. And ah, the queenly shape of her! Those eyes so darkly blue! The small curls at snowy neck and blooming cheek, curls auburn and glossy that seemed forever kissing her . . .

"Oh Master Robin, is't you?"

Robin's hat was off, his comely head down-bent, his brown eyes so full of reverent worship that she caught her breath.

"Lady . . ." he said. "Madam . . . Mistress Cecily. . . ." And then, all in a moment, he was down from the wall, had caught her hands to his eager lips. "Ah, Cecily!" he whispered. "Dear maid, how I do love thee!"

"Nay, sir," sighed she, averting her lovely head but yielding her hands to his kisses, "thou'rt so swift . . . so marvellous sudden——"

"Not so," he answered, looking on her very wistfully with his wide-set, honest eyes, "for verily I have loved thee since first I saw thee 'mid the throng at Whitehall ——"

"Six weeks agone!" sighed she, looking down tender-eyed at the red rose she held. "Alas for that day of woeful horror!"

"Ay, truly!" he answered. "And yet a day for me of joy beyond telling, for—ah,

Cecily, when I held thee in my arms——"

"To save me out o' the crowd—and I a-swooning, Master Robin!"

"Ay,—when I bore thee so, that dear, lovely head upon mine heart, I knew there could be none other wife for me in all this world. So an I wed not thee, wed will I never."

"Wife?" she whispered, and grew all sudden red as the rose she twisted in slim, restless fingers, yet looked deep into his eyes with gaze unflinching. "Love you me so?" she questioned, softly.

"Dearer than life!" he answered. "Oh, my love, meseemeth, is more ancient than yon hills,—'tis a love that was and hath been long since, a love older than these our bodies, a love so vast, so deep, as passeth my understanding. For, Cecily, with my first sight o' thee I seemed to know and love thee with love full-grown, a love as 'twere of other days, perfected by joys and sorrows we knew together long since. Nay, i' faith these do seem wild and whirling words, yet could I but make thee understand, had I but the gift o' speech——"

"I know!" she cried breathlessly. "I know,—and there's the wonder of it. When I waked from my swoon with thine arms about me, nor fear had I nor sense of shame, since in thee was nothing strange,—for there was that in thine eyes that waked in me dim memories of other days, when . . . when I was truly thine and thou mine. Oh Robin, what marvel is upon us?"

"Love!" he answered. "Thou'rt mine and I thine—for ever!" So she yielded herself to his arms for very happiness. But even as they stood thus, and the sun warm upon them, she shivered suddenly and clung to him, hiding her face in his breast.

"Why . . . dearest maid, how now?" he questioned, touching her glossy tresses with reverent hand. "What troubleth thee here—'gainst my heart?"

"Folly!" she whispered. "'Tis no more than foolish, idle fancy . . .!" But, feeling how she trembled, he clasped her the faster in strong, cherishing arms.

"Speak me thy trouble now," he murmured tenderly, "so belike shall it vanish away." At this she lifted her head and smiled on him, though very wanly.

"Come, then," said she, loosing his embrace but giving him her hand. "Come and I will tell my folly." And he wondered to feel her hand so cold.

So she brought him to a little arbour deep-secluded in leafy corner; and when they were seated therein, side by side, she looked on him with troubled eyes.

"Ah, deem me not craven," she sighed, "nor given to wild imaginings, Robin, but of late I have dreamed . . . terribly . . . oh, hatefully!" Here, seeing how the trembling seized her anew, he ventured his arm about her again.

"Comfort ye, sweet soul!" he murmured. "What dreamed you?"

"Of . . . the headsman!" she whispered; "his so hideous mask, his . . . scarred right arm, 'twas all . . . blood-spattered—after! You saw, Robin, you saw?"

"But Lord! dear heart, this is all past and by with."

"Nay, he hath haunted my dreams of late, this headsman . . . so tall, so black . . . mysterious as Death itself. Oh, indeed the merest image of Death. And in my dreaming his arms were about me . . . his scarred arm, fouled with blood. Oh Robin, 'tis as though his black shadow were over me yet . . . waiting, waiting to come betwixt us!"

Robin kissed her dumb; and holding her close in the loving comfort of his young and vigorous embrace, kissing her thus with eager yet reverent lips, won her back at last to smiling, shy-eyed sanity.

"The question is," he murmured, "when wilt marry me?"

"Nay, first, dear Robin, 'tis what shall my father say?"

"Why, 'tis a gentle, scholarly soul. Let us to him this moment and know his mind."

"Nay, wait!" said she, shaking anxious head at him. "Though gentle indeed, yet of late he hath grown strange to me; oft-times stern and passing wilful. 'Twere better I prepared him, for verily, Robin, he hath seen thee but seldom and knows thee not at all. Even I that know thee so well to love thee so truly, know but thy name, no more."

"Ay, true. I' faith, this I had forgot. So now let us to thy father that I may forthwith pay my court and he know me better. Come."

"Stay!" she cried in troubled tones. "My father was for King Charles and, save this little house, lost all in His Majesty's cause. And thou—alas, thou wert a Roundhead!"

"Why, truly, but——"

"Nay, I love thee, so 'tis no matter. But my father, 'stead of sword used pen, and was involved in . . . Royalist plots."

"Well, our wars be over, thank God!"

"Nay, yet wait! My father hath a friend, a Parliament Colonel, a gentleman of wealth and power. Art thou a man of power, dear Robin?"

"Faith, no, sweet heart o' me. I am a yeoman,—yet in Sussex——"

"Nay, I love thee, so 'tis no matter for this. . . . But latterly my father begins to cry up this gentleman to me, and . . . and latterly this gentleman is here too often, and . . ."

"Ha, doth he woo thee?"

"Even so, dear Robin, though I heed him not but my father would seem——"

"Cecily, do you . . . love him?"

"Ah, no, no, there is that in him doth fright me; and oh Robin, methinks, sometimes, my dear father dreads him also."

"Why, then," cried Robin, starting up, "let us to your father now, for truly no time were——" He stopped as a shadow fell between them, and turning they beheld a tall man surveying them with sad, large eyes set in a face lean and melancholy yet sternly resolute:

"Madam," murmured the newcomer, bowing with a wide sweep of his feathered beaver, "your humble servant. Sir—yours!"

"Gentlemen," said Cecily as she rose, "pray know each other. Colonel Verinder, —Mr. Robert Brooke."

"Dear Mistress Cecily," said the Colonel, returning Robin's salute, "your father sent me a-seeking you. He desires your presence."

"Sir," quoth Robin, "we are about to wait upon him."

"Then, young gentleman, first I would beg a private word with you. Cecily, child, Sir Jasper waits you in his study."

Robin hesitated, but, with an anxious glance at him, Cecily turned and hasted away.

"Sir," said Robin, looking into these sad, large eyes with eyes of quick, keen scrutiny, "I wait your word; be pleased to speak it." But for a long moment there was silence while Colonel Verinder surveyed Robin with scrutiny as keen though more leisurely. At last he sighed and nodded:

"Surely," said he, "I have seen you in steel and buff ere now?"

"Having regard to the late war, sir, 'tis very like."

"You were a Cornet of horse in Cromwell's first troop, I think?"

"I was, sir."

"And what now?"

"Now, sir, the wars being done, God be thanked, I am no more than I was."

"And pray, sir, what is that?"

"A yeoman of Sussex, sir, a farming squire."

"Then, young gentleman, why not be more? The Parliament needeth men yet, men of wit that may climb vastly higher than your swashing soldier; and I have power might win such ambitious youth very speedy preferment."

"Meaning myself, sir?"

"Meaning yourself."

"Then first, sir, I have to say that I choose rather my plough-and-fallow to

winning preferment with such dishonourable ease. And second, I would beg to know wherefore you, a stranger, should so yearn to bribe me?"

"Will you sit, young sir?" enquired Colonel Verinder, his sombre, melancholy gaze upon the distance.

"Thank you, no."

"Then I will," sighed the Colonel, and, entering the arbour, sat down, his silver-hilted sword across his knees. "Young gentleman," said he in his strangely pleasant tones, "you possess a voice very soldierly and resonant; thus as I came hither I heard enough to . . . well, sir, 'tis but honourable to confess that I—listened."

"Faith, sir," retorted Robin, his black brows twitching, "and was it as honourable to listen as to confess?"

"Howbeit, young sir, I heard enough to warn me that you are a—trespasser here, in every sense. Now, sir, you are young, and to Youth love may come many times. To such as I, so much older, 'tis matter of life—and death. So here am I very humbly asking of your youth to seek and choose—elsewhere. Nay, hear me out, sir! I am here to proffer you my friendship therefore, and a gratitude so infinite 'tis beyond all expression; but whatsoever power be mine, whatsoever influence, shall be used henceforth to your benefit if——"

"In fine, sir," cried Robin, his voice harsh, his eye fierce, "you would bribe me, and to break my troth with——Enough, sir, o' Gods' name!"

"Stay! A word more, young sir! Great sorrow have I known, suffering and bitter loss, such that I have yearned for death. But here at last is a chance of happiness ineffable, beyond my fondest imagining and—no man shall snatch it from me."

"And how if she love you not?"

"I shall wed her and—hope."

"That were a damnable act!"

Colonel Verinder rose and his eyes glowed strangely, his pale brow gleamed moist, his powerful hands clutched and clutched nervously, his whole body seemed shaken as by an ague, and when he spoke again his voice whispered hoarsely:

"Woe . . . woe to him that crosseth me! Be warned. None shall snatch my happiness and live!"

"Sir," answered Robin, scowling upon that contorted face, "I esteem your threats and warnings no more than so much wind, and furthermore, I——"

Hasty feet sounded behind him. He looked round to see Sir Jasper Brand, a slender gentleman, his handsome, delicate features drawn and haggard with peevish anxiety, yet who bore himself like the aristocrat he was. Quoth he:

"So then . . . so then, this is he of whom you warned me, my dear Verinder? Ha,

pray leave us, and await me indoors with Cecily." The Colonel bowed, sighed, and strode majestically away.

"Now you, sir," said Sir Jasper in the same breathless fashion. "Master . . . Master Brooke, I think? What would you, sir? What do you here? What would you, I say?"

"Wed your daughter, sir."

"My—my daughter? My Cecily? God's name, sir, you are . . . I say you are strangely presumptuous."

"This I know very well, sir," answered Robin somewhat ruefully. "But, sir, pray suffer my very sincere love to plead my excuse and justify your kindness, for indeed ——"

"Who . . . what are you, sir?"

"A yeoman of Sussex, Sir Jasper. That is to say, a squire, though of small estate, but——"

"And now pray, sir, ha' done! Only this,—my daughter shall wed to better purpose than mother a yeoman's brood. So pray, pray begone and trouble me no more. God knoweth I have troubles enow. Go, sir, and——" But even then Cecily, flushed and breathless, was between them:

"Father," she cried, "here stands the man I have loved ever, and ever must! Him will I wed or none. So, dear Father, grant us thy blessing. Be merciful. See, thus, sir, upon my knees I do now supplicate thy——"

"Enough, girl!" cried Sir Jasper, lifting hands to head with gesture half frantic. "No and no! 'Tis out o' reason! 'Tis impossible! Ah, daughter, I love thee—oh God, yes—but this may never be! Up, girl, up, I say, and get you within doors. Away and trouble me not!"

"Robin, ah, my Robin, loved man!" she gasped, choking back her bitter grief, "so needs must we part a while, but thine am I, soul and body, thine for ever. And here, for proof and pledge, take now this most precious thing!" From her bosom she drew a small sachet, and from this again the dead King's gold-handled pen-knife.

"Take it, Robin, beloved, and know that these breasts whence it came to thee shall pillow thy dear head or none. Now go, dear, mine Heart, and be patient until . . . we meet again."

III

Day and night Robin haunted the neighbourhood for almost a week, yet saw nothing of Cecily for the very sufficient reason that she was locked securely in her

chamber; and it was upon the fifth evening that as Robin, grown desperate, made to climb the orchard wall unseen hands seized him, a bludgeon felled him, and, thus laid senseless, he was dragged off, thrown across a horse, and borne away.

And now for a month of heart-breaking days and nights Cecily watched and waited, agonizing for him who came not—a weary, weary month, what time Colonel Verinder sighed and wooed, always humbly tender, yet none the less persistent and determined, while Sir Jasper alternately threatened and implored in vain, until upon a day, finding her weeping in the orchard (that so loved place of tender memories), he wept too, and, as she sat awed and amazed, he fell on his knees, clasping her with desperate arms in a very ecstasy of supplication:

"Ah, Cecily, child! Wed him . . . Verinder . . . you must! He is rich, a gentleman . . . powerful! Wed him, my child, or a week hence I am dishonoured, thou solitary, and I 'prisoned or dead!"

"Sir? . . . sir . . . father?" she gasped.

"They will drag me to a shameful death, Cecily. The block, the headsman's axe. Ah, God, what—what have I said?"

"The—axe!" she cried in a dreadful voice, and, clasping her horror-stricken face in shaking hands, she moaned and sank at his feet like one suddenly dead.

But that night she promised herself to Colonel Verinder, and a week later they were wed.

And so came her marriage night, and she like some pale, sad ghost, speechless, inert in a great chair before the hearth where a dim fire burned, scarce conscious of the man who viewed her sorrowful loveliness with eyes of such eager love and wistful yearning—passionate desire and humble entreaty in every line of him.

"Cecily . . . beloved wife!" he murmured. "Look not so, for all that I am, all that I have is thine. And I do so love thee that I shall be ever most humbly patient, content to know thee mine, and so to wait thine own sweet will—to wait and hope and pray for thy love."

"Nay, sir," she answered, never moving, never looking up, "do as you will, I am your wife, but love is dead . . . quite dead, like my poor heart."

"Ah, beloved Cecily, hearts do not die so—and my love shall so warm and quicken thee that some day, soon or——"

A clatter at the wide casement, the heavy curtains whirled asunder, and there, a wild figure, hatless, torn, and dishevelled, stood Robin.

"Cecily!" he panted. "Though wed . . . you cannot . . . shall not suffer this man's . . . loathly embraces! Thy dream was true! This man—Colonel Verinder—is——"

Uttering a hoarse, despairing, inarticulate cry, Colonel Verinder flashed out his

sword and leapt; but in that instant Robin dashed out the candles. And there, in the darkness, they fought—sharp sword against naked hands—a dreadful, stumbling, blind grappling—now here, now there. And Cecily, knowing how it must end, yet cried upon omnipotent and almighty God for mercy on that unarmed, so-loved man . . .

There came a gasp, an awful, wheezing groan, a heavy fall. And now was dreadful silence, for Cecily's quivering, prayerful lips were smitten dumb. Only one panted heavily near by, a heavy foot stumbled towards the dying fire, a candle flickered, glared—and seeing who held it, she whispered a prayer of passionate gratitude. Then she was afoot and had clasped Robin in her arms,—sighing, sobbing, murmuring broken words of love and wonder and thankfulness until of a sudden she remembered that other . . .

"Ah, Robin," she exclaimed. "How? . . . where? Ah, God, where is——?"

Speaking no word, but with long arm fast about her, he led her across the wide chamber to where lay Colonel Verinder, his sad, great eyes wide in a sightless stare, and with something that gleamed amid the stained laces at his breast—the slim, golden handle of the King's pen-knife. But it was not this that brought the shuddering cry to her lips, for the dead man's sleeve, torn in the struggle, revealed a muscular forearm whereon, plain in the candle-light, showed a livid, triangular scar.

With a little whimpering moan she turned and hid her face against Robin's breast; so he lifted and bore her to the open window and stood there until she stirred in his arms and, sighing, looked up at him great-eyed.

"Now," she whispered, "oh, now do I thank God for thee, dear Robin."

"But oh Cecily," he groaned, "alas, dear maid, outcast am I henceforth, a man o' desperate fortunes. And thou, beloved; what must I do with thee now?"

"Canst ask? Canst doubt?" she whispered, clinging to him in sudden sweet passion. "Thine am I, now as ever, in fortune good or ill. Thy way shall be my way. So Robin . . . loved man . . . husband . . . take me!"

“In that instant Robin dashed out the candles”

No. 11

PLAGUE

I

Mr. Julius Dale was busied with a hoe in his small garden-patch when thither came Beatrice and, leaning her round, indolent arms on the low, moss-grown wall, watched him with lazy interest; a lean man, of uncertain age, whose saturnine visage was rendered more grim by the scar of an ancient hurt; thus Mistress Beatrice Pitt-Pagham, very conscious of her own radiant youth and beauty, viewed his unloveliness with looks half-disdainful and wholly coquettish.

"You are vastly industrious, sir!"

Mr. Dale started, glanced up, and, flushing painfully beneath her level gaze, honoured her with an odd, shambling, little bow: and instantly his grim face, lit and beautified by eyes gentle yet steadfast, became wonderfully transfigured.

"So much labour and so few flowers!" said she, in lofty dispraisal. "Grow you naught save weeds, Mr. Dale?"

"Nay, these be herbs," he answered gently; "rue, scabious, angelica, pimpernel, veronica——"

"Oh, lud!" she sighed, yawning rosily behind two slim fingers. "They sound fairer than they look."

"And are verily better than they sound," he nodded, "for all these herbs, properly used and blended, may prove very potent 'gainst disease and——"

"Disease?" she repeated, a little scornfully. "Oh Mr. Dale, you too! Our silly maids do naught but chatter o' disease lately! Mary, our first dairy-maid, went to London yesterday and came back full of wild talk and frighted them all with tales of folk dying,—'Oh God ha' mercy,' says she. ''Tis the end of us all, 'tis the Black Death——'"

"God forbid!" said Mr. Dale, softly.

"Nay, sir, sure you never credit such idle tales?"

"Alas, child," he answered, shaking his head, "London folk are dying strangely, I hear, as they did in King James's days and hundreds of years before, and of late in Holland. And London is but scant few miles from this village of Islington!"

"How, sir," cried Beatrice, superb in her vigorous youth, "are you, too, affrighted because folk die?"

"Nay, child, but because of the manner of their dying. 'Tis a death so foul, so

virulent and hateful."

"Oh, poor affrighted gentleman, calm your fears! As for me, I boxed our Mary's ears for a foolish chatterbox——! And Mr. Brooke, that lodges in Whitehall, says 'tis naught to matter and toucheth only poor, destitute folk."

"Mr. Brooke? He is the young, handsome gentleman so often your visitor."

"Yes. And but last week he played pall-mall with—the King!"

"Mr. Brooke is . . . very young!" sighed Julius Dale, gazing down very wistfully at his herbs.

"And my uncle, Sir Geoffrey, desires word with you, sir."

"Why, I sent him a letter by my man Tom last night."

"Indeed, yes, sir, and your letter hath put him in mighty ill-humour this morning. And his gout so troublesome too! He saith you refuse to sell him your cottage yonder?" Mr. Dale bowed. "But uncle wants it. Uncle tells me he hath offered you more than its true value?"

"His offer was indeed generous."

"Then pray why won't you sell?" Now here, meeting her serene, half-mocking scrutiny, Mr. Dale flushed more painfully than ever and, averting his gaze, answered her, stammering awkwardly:

"I . . . I find this cottage . . . the situation . . . it suits me."

"But Uncle Geoffrey is so—so masterful and mighty determined to have it, sir."

"So am I!" answered Mr. Dale gently.

"Oh! Indeed, sir?" she said with covert smile. "One would scarce judge you so. . . . But then Uncle Geoffrey is—Uncle Geoffrey, and few dare gainsay him in anything, and to-day his gout irks him. He is indoors, so will you please to walk and see him?"

Submissively Mr. Dale drew on his shabby coat, smoothed his wind-ruffled hair, vaulted nimbly over the party wall, and, sighing, followed whither he was led.

"Pray," enquired Beatrice as they crossed the wide park-like grounds, "pray, Mr. Dale, how old are you?"

At this, he flushed again, and was so long answering that she went on:

"Mr. Brooke vows you must be sixty at the least, but I wagered him you were no more than . . . fifty-two or three."

"Alas, Mistress Beatrice," sighed Julius, his grim mouth quivering to a sad smile, "I am indeed an old, old man of forty-two." Now here, quick to see the hurt look in his gentle eyes, Beatrice had the grace to flush, and, speaking on impulse, stammered in her turn:

"Nay, Mr. Julius, I . . . I . . . oh, 'twas unmannerly . . . unkind in us . . . though

indeed I . . . I knew you younger and . . .”

“Child,” said he, taking the hand she reached out to him and viewing it very wistfully, “I am even older than I seem——” Came a shrill, joyous cry and down the broad terrace steps danced a little girl, a very small person indeed, her bonnet back-thrown from bright curls, her little hands outstretched in eager greeting.

“Auntie Bee!” she cried.

“Why, ’tis little Clemency!” cried Beatrice, and running forward she sank on her knees to meet the child’s glad kisses.

“Papa bringed me—in a coach, and Mama, too!” Clemency explained. “They’re coming now, only I runned to kiss you first——” Catching sight of Mr. Dale’s lank figure she fell dumb and, sucking a small finger, viewed him with large, questioning eyes.

“This is Clemency Marlow, Mr. Dale, my sister Rose Marlow’s child.” Taking off his hat, Julius smiled down into the small, intent face, and in that moment Clemency lifted both little hands to him:

“Kiss her too, please!” she commanded. Then Mr. Dale caught her up in his long arms with a surprising gentleness and kissed those innocent lips, that bright hair, murmuring words of tender endearment.

“La, Clem—such boldness!” laughed Beatrice, turning to meet the embrace of her sister, a smaller, gentler edition of herself, and to greet her brother-in-law, a bright-eyed young cleric.

So, the introductions spoken, having bowed and curtsied, they talked and laughed awhile until from an open lattice on the terrace above issued a hoarse roar.

“Lud!” exclaimed Beatrice, “Uncle Geoffrey,—I’d forgot! Go, Mr. Dale, go to him a’ mercy’s name.” So Julius bowed and went.

A somewhat aged but very imposing gentleman was Sir Geoffrey in his laces, his velvets, and great, curled periwig, ’twixt the glossy curls of which his handsome rosy face scowled at the gouty foot cushioned on a chair before him.

“Ha, give ye good-morning, neighbour!” quoth he, affecting heartiness. “I’ve asked you hither to reconsider your letter and discuss terms.”

“Sir Geoffrey, I abide by my letter. I do not intend to sell my cottage——”

“Ha, damnation and the devil, sir,—that is to say, be reasonable, Dale. Hearkee, sir, I want that cottage, I need it in my plans of extension, and consequently I mean to have it,—name your price.”

“Sir Geoffrey, I grieve to disappoint you, but, once for all, I will not sell at any price. My mind is——”

“Mind, sir, mind? Ha, plague on’t! Never mind your mind, sir, ’tis your cottage I

want and——”

“Then, Sir Geoffrey, ’tis sad but true, in this matter want must be your master! No money shall buy——”

Sir Geoffrey fell a-roaring; he cursed his gout, himself, the world in general, and, in particular, the cottage and its owner, until his breath failed; then Mr. Dale rose and bowed:

“Sir Geoffrey,” said he, “I wish you a very good-day!”

“Death and the devil!” gasped Sir Geoffrey, writhing. “Damme but I’ll give anything in reason, man,—and your curst cottage is but a poor, tumble-down, lousy place——”

“Indeed, Sir Geoffrey, ‘’tis an ill-favoured thing, but mine own,’” said Mr. Dale, turning to be gone. “And mine, sir, it shall remain.”

“Stay a minute, Dale! Ha, curse this foot! Bide a bit, man, and tell me your reasons——”

“Sir, ’twere but waste of breath.”

“Yet there must be some explanation!” fumed Sir Geoffrey, “some tie that holds ye to such a poor, mean place . . . some lure. . . . Ha—God love us! . . . ’tis Beatrice—your sheep’s eyes,—I’ve seen ’em! Ay, ’tis my niece Beatrice, your very looks betray ye. ’Tis love o’ my niece, will ye deny it, man—hey?”

“No, sir!” answered Mr. Dale.

“Why, she’s a handsome piece, I’ll allow. Though skittish, d’ye see,—headstrong and restive; yet it might be managed, she’s wholly dependent on my bounty. Ha, managed it shall be! Sell me your cursed cottage and Beatrice shall wed ye, Dale, on my word of honour!”

“Honour, sir?” enquired Mr. Dale softly, though his scarred face seemed grimmer than usual.

“Ay, neighbour, there’s my offer! What d’ye say?”

“No!”

“Eh—no, is it? ’Sdeath, man, why so?”

“Because ’tis a bargain that dishonours you, sir, and affronts me!”

“Eh . . . eh—dishonour!” gasped Sir Geoffrey, bounding in his chair. “Will ye dare name the word to me . . . to Geoffrey Pitt-Pagham,—will ye dare so?”

“And affronts me!” repeated Mr. Dale, taking up his hat.

“You—ha? Affronts you?” roared the baronet. “And who the plague are you sir? A beggarly fellow . . . a poor nobody from God knoweth where . . . a spiritless, grubbing, gardener fellow, herbs and simples, roots, berries, and barks—bah! Gad love us, but you shouldn’t marry niece o’ mine now were you the noblest o’

gentlemen, the proudest, the most heroical—ah, were you even Lord Brandon himself! Mr. Dale dropped his hat and sank into the chair again, much as if his legs had failed him.

"Brandon?" he repeated in an altered voice. "You . . . you know——"

"Know?" roared Sir Geoffrey. "Know? Brandon saved my life at Naseby fight . . . a lion-hearted gentleman, sir . . . best swordsman I ever knew . . . could ha' drank Goring under the table . . . blown to the devil in the breach at Drogheda—there's his sword, all that's left of a true-blue, gallant gentleman!" And Sir Geoffrey pointed to the long basket-hilted sword that hung, very brightly polished, beside the mantel.

"He was . . . friend of yours, Sir Geoffrey?"

"No, sir! He was a damned Roundhead, his life and estates confiscate to the King,—and I plain Geoffrey Pitt, my cursed uncle Pagham being alive,—but I honour his memory, sir . . . for there were many valiant and noble gentlemen fought for their Parliament—and Brandon the noblest, to my thinking. But enough, sir,—you dared hold in question the honour of a Pitt-Pagham—myself. Begone, sir! But for my age and my gout—with a curse on't—I'd call ye to account,—had I a son he should blood ye for this——"

"Oh, my dear Sir Geoffrey!" cried a youthful voice. "Oh, pray, sir, suffer me the honour!" and in through the open casement vaulted a resplendent young gentleman. "Your quarrel, Sir Geoffrey, is mine!" said he, bowing. "Thus if this fellow, your so unmannerly neighbour, hath anyway affronted you, he shall instantly make good or answer to Richard Brooke here and now."

"Nay—nay," cried Sir Geoffrey, somewhat taken aback, "Mr. Dale is a man o' peace, as I judge, and——"

"Why, very well, Sir Geoffrey, then let him crave your pardon with due humility and get him back to his herbalizing. Now, sir, we await your apology!" quoth Mr. Brooke, all youthful arrogance, tapping the hilt of his rapier. Mr. Dale glanced from him to the baronet and shook his head.

"Were I i' the wrong," said he, "my redress should be prompt, but knowing myself merely right, it naturally follows that I——" Young Mr. Brooke's empty glove smote him dumb, and Mr. Brooke, sword in hand, bowed and smiled at him in youthful contempt.

"Come, sir," said he, with airy flourish of slim blade, "if you possess the least spark of gentlemanly spirit, find yourself a weapon,—I see you are swordless,—and let us settle the matter instantly!"

But Mr. Dale stood utterly still, his lean face working as with some sharp spasm;

his hands clenched, his keen eyes glanced swiftly at the sword beside the mantel and rested there a moment; then, with an awkward bow, he turned and walked forth into the sunshine.

Upon the terrace he beheld Beatrice, who turned as if to avoid him, therefore he paused and stood hesitant, but seeing how her glance went by him, he sighed and passed on his way.

Reaching his little garden gate he stood awhile, staring down at his orderly rows of herbs and simples until, roused by jingling spurs, he glanced round and beheld a squat man approaching, whose cloak and riding-boots were dusty and whose face, seamed by an old sword cut, was very grave and anxious.

"Ah, Tom," said he, "what news from London?"

"Bad, your honour, and getting worse!" answered Tom, shaking his head. "There be close on sixty dead this week in Cripplegate ward alone. . . . The plague is spreading fast, the Black Death be creeping on London and round about us, master. The Lord ha' mercy on this sinful generation,—amen!"

II

The Black Death was raging; the Spotted Plague was indeed at the height of its fury, and the terror-stricken folk of London, such as had not fled the doomed city, met the dread horrors of the disease in many and divers ways,—they prayed; they disinfected themselves with smoke of sulphur, rosin, pitch, and gunpowder; they carried amulets and charms; they drank Plague-water; they wore dried toads or horn of unicorn about their necks; they sucked gold coins—and died by the tens of thousands. Crazed with delirium they leapt from their tainted sheets to die naked upon the desolate highways; maddened with agony they rushed wildly river-wards to end their sufferings in the merciful waters of old Father Thames; they died screaming, shackled to their beds or writhing upon the littered floors of their close-shut houses. Indeed they died too fast for decent burial at last, wherefore the survivors dug great pits and sent forth hardy fellows to collect the scattered dead and shoot the ghastly loads pell-mell into the bosom of kindly Mother Earth, and thereafter to range the streets anew, morning and night, with clangour of handbells and hoarse blatant commands to:

"Bring out your dead."

And, day in and day out, undaunted by the ever-growing terror, undismayed amid the loathsome horrors of this vast charnel-house, went one whose tireless efforts for their relief and encouragement won for him a kind of fame among the

poorer sort, so that they hailed him as their "Man o' Mercy," beseeching his prayers, hearkening to his brave words, and swallowing his herbal potions with a dreadful eagerness.

Thus Mr. Dale and his man Tom (like so many other long-forgotten brave of that calamitous year) laboured amain, doing whatsoever came to hand, whether it were speaking comfort to the dying or plying spade and mattock to cover the dead from all save the eyes of God.

And every morning, waking amid this scene of universal death, grim master (a little leaner and grimmer now) and squat man (squat and stolid as ever) would each scan the other with a certain apprehensive anxiety:

"Tom, lad, how goes it with you to-day?"

"Present and all correct, your honour, hearty and well—so fur! And your honour's the same, I trust?"

"Fit for another day, Tom, thank God! And now, my good and faithful friend, for our customary dose, three minims of our elixir, Tom—or, seeing the death-roll increaseth, say four."

Now whether there was indeed any plague-defying property in Mr. Dale's curious homœopathic decoctions, or that constant activity in the open air preserved them immune, this historian witteth not, but true it is that, while thousands perished, the Black Death left these two, master and man, all untouched—as yet.

So came a certain evening of stifling heat when Mr. Dale, this Man o' Mercy, slung a bulbous knapsack to his sinewy shoulders, clapped on a weather-beaten hat, and taking a stout ash staff set out afoot, since horses were not to be had and coaches had long ceased to ply. His merciful errand took him towards Cripplegate, then a place of open fields, where was one of the newest and largest pits, a grave some sixty feet long, sixteen feet wide, and twenty-five feet deep, and his nearest way thither led through narrow streets and back lanes that echoed dismally to his own tread, and between whose cobble-stones grass was springing. It was as he traversed a somewhat gloomy court that a casement opened violently just above him and a woman's ghastly head appeared, eyes wide with horror and mouth gaping to a shrill scream:

"Oh, death . . . death . . . death!" she cried, staring towards but not at him. Mr. Dale, inured to scenes of terror, paused and, leaning upon his staff, spoke in a voice calm and soothing:

"Truly, my poor soul, death is all about us,—pray how may I serve you?" But with the same awful fixed stare and wild gesture of up-flung arms the woman vanished. Yet from that open window came another scream drowned, all at once, in

the dreadful, hoarse outcries of a man.

The house door, with its ominous red cross, was padlocked according to custom, but the yawning casement was of no great height, so, dropping his staff, Mr. Dale reached up long arms and jumped, grasped the window-sill, and drawing himself up, clambered into the room.

The woman, whimpering now, was crouched above a sprawling shape in dingy corner:

"Dead . . .!" she wailed. "Scarce ten minutes agone . . . my man! Lookee—the swelling 'neath his ear, the tokens upon his throat . . .! My man be dead o' the pest. . . . Oh God, kill me too,—my Roger be dead!"

Mr. Dale stooped and, seeing this was indeed so, turned and stumbled up a narrow stair to a chamber above, whence came that dreadful, hoarse babbling,—beheld a tumbled bed and a man who writhed naked upon the floor. . . . Mr. Dale uttered an exclamation, for, in this miserable, demented creature left thus to perish in this house of death, he recognized young Mr. Brooke.

Lifting the sick man in powerful arms, Julius Dale laid him upon the bed and, unslinging his knapsack, got to work with the assured deftness of much practice. . . . And after some while the hoarse babbling outcries were hushed, the wild eyes closed, and the patient fell asleep. Then, crossing to the window, Mr. Dale threw the lattice wide and into the mephitic stench of that disease-fouled chamber admitted a gush of cool evening air. Now presently, as he leaned out from the casement, came sounds strangely loud upon the dismal, all-pervading quiet,—the rattle of ponderous wheels, the measured plod of hoofs, and the heart-breaking lamentations of a man; slowly the dead-cart, heavy with its ghastly load, lumbered into view; and then, recognizing the solitary mourner, Mr. Dale recoiled, gasping a prayer:

"Oh God have mercy!" Then, running from the room, he leapt down the stair, and clambered back through the lower window.

"Mr. Marlow," said he, catching the distraught man's fluttering hand. "I am Dale, Julius Dale. Oh, my friend, what——?"

"Let me not, sir!" cried the young clergyman with a wild, despairing gesture. "The buryers yonder ha' suffered me to follow my dead——"

"How, sir, you . . . you mean——?"

"Both!" groaned Mr. Marlow, trudging on again after that awful cart. "My gentle wife, my little daughter . . . in the wagon yonder . . . with so many others!"

Speechlessly Julius Dale drew the young clergyman's arm within his own and went on beside him after those creaking, rattling wheels. So, as night fell, came they to the great pit, its horror dim-lighted by flickering lanterns; and here the lumbering

cart, halting at last, turned and backed.

"Loose away!" cried a gruff voice, and the cart tipped up, shooting its awful burden into the gloomy deep, whereat Mr. Marlow uttered a gasping cry and reeled:

"Oh God!" he wailed. "I didn't think they would . . . bury them so . . . like carrion! . . . My little, sweet Clemency . . . my noble wife! Oh God, Dale, a mere avalanche o' death! . . . I heard them fall—souse! They're down there—my loved ones—amid all that horror! My little Clem . . . my sweet Rose—withered so soon . . . so cruelly! There . . . there . . . down there!" And he pointed wildly to an obscene huddle of naked arms and legs a-gleam in the flickering lantern-light.

"Not so, friend," answered Mr. Dale gently, "for they bloom now with God!" And he drew the stricken man away from that ghastly pit wherein earth was beginning to thud from busy spades.

"They're down there!" cried Mr. Marlow, shuddering violently. "And I. . . . Oh, wherefore do I live?"

"I think, sir, 'tis because God hath work for you. There is a young life to be saved, mayhap. Will you come, friend Marlow? Death waits us all sometime, but whiles we live let us 'quit ourselves like men' for the sake of our beloved dead." . . . And presently, leaning on the speaker's guiding arm, the Reverend George Marlow followed whither he was led. . . . And in days ensuing, labouring desperately for others, found for himself some small solace for his breaking heart.

The weeks and months dragged by with their varying tales of dead, but with the year's end this sore-stricken city began to revive; the Plague was checked at last and, sullenly, slowly relaxed its loathsome gripe; until upon a certain morning, master (shivering before the fire) looked at man, and man at master, each with that same wistful, haunting apprehension:

"How goes it with thee, Tom, man?"

"Pretty hearty, sir—so fur! And your honour?"

"Fairish, my faithful Thomas, well enough. And the accursed Plague is broke at last . . . our work is done, thank God!"

"Amen, sir! And yet your honour do seem woundy thin!"

"Why, I was never fat, Tom,—not even comfortably plump. And I'm a-weary, —ay, heartily weary o' this great London. We'll to Islington this very day . . . to the old cottage. . . . Yet no," said he, turning swiftly to the window and opening waistcoat and shirt, "shalt ride alone, Tom . . . the tokens are on me, I'm—Plague-smit, at last."

Weeds,—they rioted everywhere, blotting out neat beds and choking the once-trim paths. . . . Mr. Dale sighed and, sinking feebly upon the rustic bench, stared at the tangled confusion all about him in wet-eyed, sorrowful dismay. Now as he sat there in his weakness, long arms drooping, chin on breast, like one that is far spent, came Beatrice, and, leaning tremulous hands on the low, moss-grown wall, surveyed his gaunt unloveliness with a new vision and eyes misted with scalding tears; gazing thus upon him she would have spoken, but a sob choked her,—and he still all unconscious of her; but at last she contrived to address him, though in a voice strangely meek:

"You are marvellous . . . idle this morning, sir!"

He started violently, lifted heavy head, and, with a visible effort, stood up to bow.

"Oh, but you're thin!" she gasped. "So worn . . . so very pale!"

"Ay, child, but there be many thousand dead, yet do I live . . . and the Lord hath spared you your young Mr. Brooke."

"Yes, he came to me a month ago, he told me how you saved his life——"

"Nay, this was more George Marlow's doing——"

"He told me the poor folk named you their Man o' Mercy . . . that you tended them living and dead! . . . And I . . . oh, I fled from it all because I was afraid! Sister Rose and . . . little Clemency . . . and I safe in the country with Uncle Geoffrey . . . because I was afraid!"

"Nay," said he gently.

"Yes!" cried she in passionate self-scorn. "Yes and yes! I fled to be safe whiles they and so many others——" She choked and fell to such agonized weeping that he stood amazed.

"Oh Mr. Julius," she sobbed, "had I but proved worthy! Better I were dead with valiant Rose and little Clem than live for ever shamed in my own eyes—and thine! Thou so unfearing and I so craven! Oh Julius, pity . . . pity me!"

"Ah, Beatrice," he answered, reaching out a thin hand towards her but keeping the breadth of the garden between them, "a woman that loves is ever more dauntless than a man,—had you but loved——"

"Oh, I do!" she sobbed. "I did,—but—never knew! And now. . . . Oh, may God help me——"

"Beatrice . . . dear child, oh, be comforted——"

"Then come you and comfort me!" she wailed, and, seeing he never stirred, reached forth tremulous hands in wistful supplication. "Julius," she whispered, "'tis only thou may comfort me, so—ah, Man o' Mercy, so tender with all others, show

mercy on me—come to me!" Now at this he began to tremble, and, sinking upon the bench, covered his lean, marred features with quick hands; and in that moment Beatrice was over the wall and was on her knees before him.

"No!" he cried, recoiling and holding her off with desperate hands. "Come not nigh me. . . . I've been sick o' late . . . the Plague . . . these clothes! I should not ha' come back, but . . . they said you were away . . . ha, never touch me, Beatrice, for God's sake——" But, even as he thus implored, her strong young arms were fast about him, his weary head was pillowed on her bosom, her eager murmurs in his ear:

"Oh Julius, let me die Plague-smitten an it come from thee, for indeed true love casteth out fear, and I think. . . . I know I loved thee even when I mocked thee . . . this dear, grim face!" Then Mr. Dale looked at her, his thin features beautified by the radiance of a great and wondering joy.

"Beatrice," he whispered in his doubting humility. "Oh, child, can this be . . . doth this mean——?" Beatrice kissed him.

"Gad love thee, wench, to 't again!" bellowed Sir Geoffrey jovially, striding down upon them with the stolid Tom at his heels, bearing glasses and a bottle. "Buss him, girl, buss him,—'tis my Lord Brandon ye be kissing! Ay, so, stare, but 'tis the very fact, the truth's out—'a babbled his secret in his sickness, so off goeth young Brooke to the King; and His Majesty, God bless him, will honour ye, my lord, reinstate ye, Brandon, by reason o' your late doings in London. . . . As for me, minding Naseby fight,—why, neighbour, there's my hand, by heaven! And if ye won't sell me your cursed cottage, why, then. . . . Egad, my lord, seeing you've got my niece I'll throw in my house along o' her. . . . And now,—ha, Tom, the wine, ye rogue . . . and bumpers!"

“‘Oh, death . . . death . . . death!’ she cried”

No. 12

HYDE PARK

I

Of the very many places, more or less remote, in and around London, where gentlemen were wont to repair early in the morning with friends and witnesses attendant, and there forthwith slay each other mercilessly yet with the utmost politeness and decorum; of such duelling-grounds, from the ancient trials by combat on hoary Smithfield to the more modern hair-trigger days of the Eyre Arms at St. John's Wood, perhaps no place was more notorious, especially in the lax days of good Queen Anne, than a certain tree-shaded grassy level in Hyde Park adjacent to Rosamond's Pond. Here many fierce duels were fought; here the grass was often trampled by desperate feet and reddened by young blood, for here many eyes were closed in death most untimely.

And it was of this particular plot of ground that my lord the Earl of Brandon was thinking this morning as the clocks struck four: despite this so early hour he was fully dressed and now sat before his mirror surveying his reflection with lack-lustre eyes, while behind him stood old Jeremy Trent, grave, sedate, silent, his confidential servitor and one privileged by long years of understanding.

"Faith, Jeremy," sighed the Earl, almost frowning. "I look my age! I wear badly, like most things in this plaguy world,—in a year or so if——"

He stopped and caught his breath, for even as he thus surveyed his features, they seemed to him marvellously transfigured: younger, leaner, bronzed by exposure, sterner by reason of hardship and achievement: the mouth showed grimmer yet less cynical, the dark eyes more kindly, instead of weary languor was an eager alertness; a face boldly indomitable for all its youth, and clasped within the battered steel of a crested Roman helmet.

The Earl closed his eyes, passed a fluttering hand across his eyes, and spoke in altered tone:

"Jeremy . . . just then I saw my face as I used to dream it so often years agone. . . . You'll mind how wondrously I dreamed as a lad! . . . And now, to-day . . . and broad awake! What shall this portend?"

"Ay—what indeed, my lord?" answered old Mr. Jeremy, his voice sharp with anxiety. "Why will you abroad so early,—ah, sir, what wild adventure, what risk do you——?"

"Was I extraordinarily drunk last night, Jeremy?"

"My lord, you were the Duke's privy guest."

"True,—and His Grace never had the virtue of sobriety. But the company broke up early and I left about midnight. Now let us consider! I took a chair to . . . Watiers . . . as I believe. Howbeit somewhere or other I met my damned cousin and divers friends of his, one a curst red-faced fellow in mulberry velvet . . . or was it green . . . or blue? We drank, we grew merry, and, by natural stages, quarrelsome . . . about what I don't recall. But I've a dim memory of striking . . . or being struck by . . . someone or other, for what reason I don't recollect. A meeting was arranged . . . Hyde Park, beside Rosamond's Pond, at six o'clock—thus much I do remember, though who I go to fight, or why—whether it be my rascally Cousin Brooke, or the rosy-faced gentleman, or other of his cronies—I've not the least idea. So let us hope 'tis Cousin Brooke,—to pink his so cherished carcass,—ha, Jeremy, 'tis a consummation devoutly to be wished."

"And, my lord," said old Mr. Jeremy, his usually sedate countenance very troubled, "Mr. Brooke is—your heir."

"Ay, devil take him,—unless I can baulk him with a wife. Faith, I might bring myself to swallow the bitter pill o' matrimony to such good purpose! Od's life, but I show devilish haggard this morning,—well, the early air shall amend it, perhaps, and clear my head. . . . And now," said my lord, rising, "a sword, Jeremy—no, not this pretty toy. I'll have the French one with the cut-steel hilt." Weapon on thigh and hat in hand my lord crossed languidly to the door, but paused there:

"By the way, Jeremy . . . if haply I should be translated to, let us hope, a nobler and more useful sphere of action—if such indeed there be . . . in such event I have seen to it that your long and faithful service hath been remembered . . . and so, old friend, a very fair good-morrow!" Here, as if moved by sudden impulse, my lord turned and reached forth his jewelled right hand, then paused as suddenly in shocked surprise to see old Jeremy's face convulsed, his cheeks wet with tears.

"Od's life!" he exclaimed. "What, Trent, man,—why, Jerry——!"

"Forgive me, sir!" gasped the old man, "but, my lord, I—served your father . . . nursed ye in these arms . . . watched thee grow up——"

"Tush, man!" said my lord, clapping hand on old Jeremy's bowed shoulder. "'Tis not as if this were my first affair, and—if it prove my last, 'tis very well, for life becometh an evergrowing weariness——"

"Nay, my lord, thou'rt young, too young for such dire thought——"

"Jerry, I'm old and life-worn, a very aged man o' thirty-seven. So all's well however it befall. . . . And, moreover, I've willed everything from my knavish Cousin

Brooke save house and title that go by entail. So adieu, old Jeremy, hast been a faithful servant and wise friend,—would I had heeded thee more." Then my lord grasped the old man's hand, smiled into his grief-filled eyes, and presently stepped out into the morning.

All about him the great city lay silent, its empty streets very strange and unfamiliar in the pearly light of dawn.

And thus, as the sun rose, my lord the Earl of Brandon came a-walking into Hyde Park, his handsome, bewigged head bowed in thought. Being much before the appointed time he walked very slowly; to fit the occasion he was attired richly, though sadly, in garments of funereal hue, since he had a precognition this was a meeting from which he would never go a-walking back. Now pacing amid the green, he became of a sudden painfully aware how sweet and fresh was the world about him, how pleasant the glad piping of the new-waked birds, how brightly the dew sparkled in the grass, until, hearing a lark's carolling ecstasy, he paused to watch the soaring bird. Quoth he:

"Thou feathered fool, life is no great boon, no matter for such rejoicing! At the least I have never found it so, being a reasoning creature and man o' sentiment. And yet perchance the more of sentiment the more of sick weariness in a stale world, thus by reason o' my reason I call folly on thee, an unreasoning bird that findeth such mighty joy in living. For Life's a bubble, a flam, and so i' faith 'twill nothing irk me to be done with it. Death at least shall prove a new experience to a soul that hath too much experience of things good and ill, of man, the world, and the devil. Go to, thou piping fool, art no more than handful of unreasoning feathers!"

So saying, the Earl paced slowly on again until he reached Rosamond's Pond, and stood there gazing wistfully at the placid waters.

To die! To be utterly lost, or to leap into a greater, nobler living—which? When body perishes must soul die also, vanish as it had never been? If so, then how and whence these dreams of other lives, dim memories of joys more complete than flesh may know, of deep and tender yearning, of terrors half forgot, of perilous hardships triumphantly endured in other times and places,—ay, but when—where?

Thus stood he, lost in troubled thought, a slim gentleman of an elegance very sombre, his sad eyes a little haggard, staring down at the pool until hearing a soft, small sound behind he started, and, turning, forgot his gloomy forebodings, the ever-approaching menace of this next hour, and all in earth and heaven except the radiant vision before him.

Tall was she and generously formed, bare of foot and head, a girl whose simple habit off-set her virginal loveliness, grace of supple body, and length of shapely limb,

with eyes bright and joyous, a red mouth whose tender curves seemed made for innocent laughter, and he saw the strange, vivid beauty of this face framed in shining bronze-gold hair. But it was her eyes that drew and held him with their frank, eager gaze, eyes that widened as in swift, awed wonder, eyes deeply blue that waked in him again the memory of those dim, half-remembered phantasies, that strange never-satisfied yearning, that memory of joys scarce tasted . . . of peril and pain. . . . My lord drew a deep breath and, striving for speech, was dumb.

Thus in strange, awed silence they viewed each other a while. And gone quite was my lord's cynical languor,—his pale cheek flushed, his glooming eyes grew bright.

"Vision . . . of . . . dreams!" he murmured; and now in look and voice was such humility, such wondering eagerness as might have been there in days before he became so well acquaint with London, and the voluptuous Court, and had learned the sick weariness and futility of wasted years. . . .

"Dreams?" she repeated, in a voice soft yet troubled. "Oh, . . . dreams?"

"Indeed!" he answered, knitting slim brows in growing perplexity. "Believe it or no, I have visioned you often in my dreams, child—strange, wild dreams. Faith, you so haunted my youthful slumbers that, waking, I would seek for your reality, believing you to be more than dream and therefore to be found—and to-day when my faith in dreams, and much beside, is dead,—at this too-late hour, do you flash upon my unexpected sight out of the infinite Past,—my very dream-maiden, yet thyself no dream, being most passionately alive,—and there's the abiding wonder and perversity of it. To behold thee real, after this tale o' weary years, on this day and in this most dismal hour, alas! Howbeit," he laughed, shaking rueful head and clapping hand to heart, "sweet maid o' dreams, accept my very humble and most reverent admiration." And he bowed with languid grace and wide-armed flourish of belaced hat. The maid never so much as moved, but viewed him with the same awed look of troubled wonder, and when she spoke something of this was in her voice also:

"And in your dreaming was there ever a horse,—a great white horse?"

The laced hat fell and lay forgotten, for my lord had recoiled a step in speechless, wide-eyed amazement.

"A white horse!" he repeated in shaken voice. "Yes . . . by heaven, yes! And I astride him . . . thou in my arms. . . ."

"And terror amid the wild wood," said she.

"A chasm leapt!" he murmured.

"Cruel steel and death!" she nodded. "Death for me, 'tis so I dream it alway."

"Death for thee . . . ah, God, yes—yes!" he gasped.

"And what then?" she questioned in her serene and gentle manner. "I prithee,—what cometh after?"

"I kiss thy young dead face and . . . leave thy sweet body lonely in the forest—ah, but thy brave spirit goeth ever with me hereafter, so do I . . . love no other woman all my days. . . ." My lord caught his breath and stared up and round about him in dazed and helpless fashion:

"Heaven refuse me!" he exclaimed, shaking his head. "But here's matter beyond me . . . ha, 'tis very marvel of marvels! Since when have you so dreamed, child?"

"Oh, sir, since ever I may remember me. And do you dream so—often, sir?"

"Not of late," he sighed, "such dreams, doubtless, are but for the young and eager, for such as be vigorous with clean life, and I——Alas, that we, meeting so oft in dreams, never saw each other until now—oh, fortune most perverse,—to-day of all days!"

"Yet, sir, is not to-day a sweet, glad morning?"

"So may God bless you in it, child. But who are you?"

"I be Rose Mary Brooker, sir, a yeoman farmer's daughter, and, he being dead, alas, tend his cows and farm, I do."

"Here in London, Rose Mary?"

"Nay, I be staying wi' my Aunt Mercy, a piece; my home's afar in Sussex."

"Faith, child, 'twas my home also, once on a time, I know it well . . . the Downs beyond Lewes . . . old Mount Caburn with the Roman Camp a-top and the road a-wind below. Ay, I knew it all very well years ago, but left it for the less real joys of London, and now——" My lord paused and turned suddenly as upon the stilly air came a faint, far sound of voices, and, almost unconsciously, his be-ruffled left hand dropped lightly on the hilt of the long slim sword he wore.

"Then, maybe," said Rose Mary, viewing him with her grave and gentle eyes, "perchance in our Sussex we may meet again . . . somewhen?"

"I think not, child," he answered, checking a sigh, "indeed, 'tis most like we shall meet no more—and mayhap 'tis just as well. And so, Rose Mary, because I do know thee all purely good, a rare sweet flower in a weedy world, I would have thee take this in memory of me and thy so wondrous dreaming." And speaking, he drew from white finger a ring whose single stone gleamed and sparkled in the young sun's level rays.

"Oh!" gasped Rose Mary in murmurous ecstasy. "Ah, no . . . 'tis all too beautiful for such as I be——"

"It was my mother's," said he, gently, "the only thing I ever truly valued . . . and

so I give it to you, child, because, as I do think, you are so purely fit to wear it." Now taking her hand with gentle mastery, a hand strong and capable, whose large shapeliness was browned by the sun's ardent kisses, he set thereon this ring whose single great sapphire gleamed blue as her own virginal eyes. Then, stooping, he kissed the ring, the finger that bore it, and turning abruptly, went his way, walking rather faster than usual.

And presently there met him four gentlemen who, one and all, returned his salutation with the utmost impressiveness, particularly one, a tallish, burly gentleman in huge flaxen periwig who advanced hat in hand:

"My lord," said he, hat gracefully a-flourish, "dear Cousin Geoffrey, alas, 'tis a most devilish unfortunate business, this!"

"D'ye think so, Cousin Brooke?" answered my lord, beginning to unbutton his coat.

"So much so, cousin, that I'm here to know if we . . . ah . . . cannot possibly discourage this meeting,—avoid effusion o' blood,—arrive at some reasonable ——"

"Which of you do I fight?" enquired my lord.

"Which, sir! 'Od's my life, kinsman, Captain Stukely, for sure."

"Do I know him, cousin?"

"Know him, my lord? Egad, sir, well enough to strike last night."

"Ay, we were all damnable drunk, I believe——"

"Ha—drunk! Oh, excellent, there it is—you have but to acknowledge as much in manner sufficiently gracious and——"

"But, Cousin Brooke, I'm seldom gracious, as you should know."

"Nay, Geoffrey, I protest, we must find some way out for you,—having regard to Stukely's known dexterity with his weapon—'faith, we must endeavour to accommodate the matter——"

"Which is Captain Stukely, cousin?"

"Lord, Geoffrey, the tall, sanguine gentleman in blue and silver, you should remember him. Now what I suggest is——"

"Heigho!" sighed my lord, pulling off his sable coat. "Pray, Cousin Brooke, be kind enough to inform your fighting Captain that I am ready when he is."

"My—fighting Captain!" repeated Mr. Brooke, his eyes narrowing. "Mine, my lord?"

"Why, then, cousin, shall we say—hired bravo?"

"How, sir," said Mr. Brooke in a whispering voice, his pallidly handsome face suffused, his hands clenched and quivering. "How, my lord, will you say . . . d'ye

suggest that I——"

"Tush, man, why palter?" sighed my lord wearily. "I know and you know. And I have ever matched your jealous hate with my bitterest scorn,—as now. So enough! Pray tell your Captain that I'm at his service, and let's ha' done."

Mr. Brooke essayed retort but choked, and turning his back walked across to the others. And so presently, the ground having been selected and swords measured and examined, all with the most extreme of care, the duellists faced each other.

"But, my lord," demurs the Captain, bowing, "I perceive you ha' no second."

"Sir," answers my lord, returning the bow, "I am very well so."

"To be sure we have witnesses, my lord, but——"

"Shall we begin, sir?"

"It is understood, my lord, that we engage until one of us is helpless or——"

"Dead, sir, precisely. And now, if you are ready?"

Then these two very modish gentlemen, being about to do their utmost to slay each other, bowed ceremoniously, saluted each other with very gracious punctilio, and crossed blades. . . .

The old sun, peeping athwart blooming thicket, beheld that he had seen all too often since that most quarrelsome of all animals called man was created,—saw the Captain leap back to flirt blood from reddened left hand; saw the deadly steel flash together again to circle and dart and glitter awhile; saw my lord stumble, check, stand rigid, pale face lifted heavenward, mouth up-curving in a strange, slow smile ere he drooped and, letting fall his sword, sank to his knees, to his face, and lay there utterly still. . . . They ran to lift him, to listen at pallid lips yet twisted by that strange smile, and laying him gently down again, they stared at each other and round about in growing dismay; only Mr. Brooke, glancing askance at that motionless form, bowed head as in grief, and face thus hidden in the long flaxen curls of his great peruke—smiled.

. . . Dead! And he Majesty's friend! What now? Well, the meeting had been secret—my lord was dead. . . . Then away and let it be secret still! . . . Sound of hasty feet . . . flutter of cloaks . . . furtive whispering . . . silence; and this shady place of trampled turf was deserted quite save for that which, but a little while since, had been a living man.

But now came one speeding from out the thickets, pale, shivering, yet resolute, white feet gleaming amid the dewy grass,—one who knelt to raise that awful thing, bowing tawny head above it, peering with eyes of dread, whispering breathless, passionate prayers. Thus praying, Rose Mary lifted that helpless shape in young strong arms and bore it slowly away.

II

Pain; deadly weariness; a chaotic darkness where furtive terrors crept, the demon of Lost Opportunity mocked, and the spirit of Wasted Years howled; and to pain of flesh thus was added an agony of mind, hopeless grief, and bitter remorse. . . . But then would come a hand to wipe his slow tears, and a voice that stilled this mental tumult, yet a voice soft and ineffably tender:

"Ah—weep not! . . . Comfort thee, oh, comfort thee . . . my arms about thee—so! Now hush and sleep, for sleep is life to thee. . . ."

Back and away through a swirling darkness shot by stealthy moon-beams. . . . Hoarse voices and wild clamour of pursuit waxing louder. . . . Rush of wind. . . . Rustle of leaves. . . . A fury of impotence. Thunder of horse-hoofs. . . . Arms that cling . . . a voice that murmuring endearments is broken by an agonized gasp. . . . Blood, death, and bitter loss. . . . A lonely soul, remote and feared by all, yet comforted by an unseen, undying presence. . . .

"Fraya——"

"There now,—rest! Sleep, 'tis life."

"Loved Fraya . . . sweet soul . . ." he gasped, struggling up from pitchy deeps to blinding light.

"Nay, 'tis only I with thee,—and I be only Rose Mary. . . . Yet nought may hurt thee here, so—sleep and live." And presently came slumber and therewith a blessed forgetfulness at last.

A fugitive sunbeam, or the blackbird piping beyond open lattice, wakened him, and in this moment a cool hand was upon his brow, sapphire eyes were gazing down at him; now seeing the quick anxiety of her look, he essayed to laugh and heard a feeble croak, strove to speak and heard a whisper:

"Rose—Mary . . . child . . .?"

"Hush thee!" she murmured, stroking his short, thick hair.

"How . . . long . . .?"

"Eight days."

"'Ods light! Where am I? . . . Nay, 'tis no matter. For now . . . now 'tis time,—Rose . . . child . . . marry me."

The hand upon his brow trembled and was still, the lovely, anxious face flushed rosily and grew pale:

"Ah, no—no. I be only Rose Mary. . . ."

"And I'm merest . . . dead man!" he gasped. "So, child . . . fear not. Wed me . . . 'twill . . . ease my dying. Ah, thou'lt never deny me . . . such small matter."

"Small?" she whispered. "Oh—small? Sure, 'twere the greatest thing in life."

"Nay, child, 'tis . . . wifehood but for . . . an hour, a day. Faith, I'm surely sped . . . my life ebbeth with . . . my every breath. So wed me, Rose Mary . . . for thine own sweet sake hereafter. Marry me this hour . . . I do entreat . . . nay, I command thee. . . . A parson, a parson . . . let him tie the knot Death shall loose anon. Shalt be bride to-day, but . . . widow to-morrow, with . . . riches to match thy beauty. A parson, I say—ha, dispatch, dispatch!"

"Nay, now—nay!" she murmured, touching his restless head with cool, cherishing fingers. "Oh, I pray be still lest thy cruel wounds bleed again."

"Ha—bleed?" he cried, glaring up at her with fever-bright eyes. "Bleed is it, wench? Faith, yes, I'll rend off my . . . bandages unless thou . . . obey!" And he lifted feeble, quivering hands, while ever his delirium increased. "Marriage!" he cried, in a high thin voice. "Aha, a . . . tame spouse, I! . . . The Wits shall chuckle. . . . D'Urfey shall versify on't . . . pen lampoon . . . wittily gross. . . . A spouse! Ho, a parson! Let me wed . . . and die! First a wife and then . . . a grave! So shall my damned cousin——"

The door opened hastily and there entered a bewigged and pompous gentleman, closely followed by one at sight of whom the sick man uttered a great gasping oath and made a weak movement with his wasted hand:

"What—Jeremy . . . ye come pat! Fetch me . . . a parson to mumble me into matrimony. . . . And speed ye, man, for . . . death's hard on me! Last time she died . . . i' the forest, now . . . 'tis my turn, so—haste. . . . Oh Fraya, beloved, reach me . . . thy arms, and death shall be . . . nothing fearful!"

The bewigged gentleman, forgetting his pomposity, stooped hurriedly and peered into these wild eyes, thumbed the bony wrist, and, having administered such restoratives as he might, shook dubious head:

"Sir," said he, glancing up into old Jeremy's pale face, "our patient must be humoured at all costs, he must be soothed, his mind eased very presently. To be sure I might bleed him——"

"No—no!" said Rose Mary.

"I say I might bleed him, sir, but seeing the high fermentation of his spirits, the *fluxio mentis*, as 'twere, I think not. Humour him, sir—be amenable to his every mandate. Medicine, alas, can do no more, for verily I greatly fear——"

But here old Jeremy, with wild pleading look at Rose Mary, turned about and hastened away.

And thus it was that, within the hour, my lord had his imperious way as was usual; and lying there at the very portal of Death, he gasped forth his responses

between pallid lips, swooning body driven by indomitable will, while Rose Mary, kneeling humbly beside his bed, lovely face down-bent to hide the wistful trouble in her eyes, took him for better or for worse.

In this strange fashion, then, were they made man and wife: but scarce was it done, the clergyman and witnesses departed, than my lord laughed, a thin, shrill cackle, and, unheeding the noble form of his wife yet upon her knees, glanced in fierce pallid triumph at old Jeremy.

"So!" he gasped. "My damned Cousin Brooke shall never . . . rule in Brandon!"

Now old Jeremy, glancing askance at that so quiet kneeling figure, saw her young face deadly pale and wet with slow tears ere she, this new-made countess, went forth of this little humble room very silently.

III

My lord opened his eyes to see around him the spacious luxury of his own bed-chamber and the faithful Trent busied with divers papers in adjacent corner.

"So then, old Jeremy, I'm not dead yet? 'Tis a curst slow business, 'twould seem, eh?" Up sprang Jeremy, sedate features flushed and joyous:

"No, no, my lord," he answered, "you are to live, thank God,—the doctors are all agreed on't."

"Ha,—to live, d'ye tell me? Why, now, here's devilish perversity! 'Ods body, I'm done with this sorry world, my mind is attuned to higher things. I am serenely composed, waiting to die as decorously as gentleman should, and now—plague on't, you tell me——"

"That your life was brought back by a very miracle of love, my lord, the never-failing care and tender nursing of—your noble lady——"

"How, man, lady—what lady, a' Gad's name?"

"My lord, your countess, your lady wife——"

"Trent, rogue, old Jerry, mock not a dying man, shock not my resigned soul with such a grim and grisly word as 'wife,' out on thee!"

"My lord, my lord, canst ha' forgot indeed . . . she that bore thee dying in her arms, bound up thy desperate hurts, tended thee, a maid young and——"

"Stay, man, stay—let me consider! A maid there was, I mind,—met me by Rosamond's Pond,—a sweet, rustical thing, well-shaped though somewhat large, a simple creature——"

"My lord, 'tis even she you wed."

"Wed?" cried the Earl, sitting up suddenly. "'Sdeath, man, never say so! I a

wedded man,—'tis absurdity passing belief! 'Tis true I—ay, I dreamed some such nightmare, being sick, but what the devil!"

"Your lordship must know 'twas no dream——"

"How, d'ye tell me then 'tis an actual, cursed reality?"

"Nothing was ever more real, my lord, in proof whereof is Master Bristow the clergyman, myself, and divers——"

"'Swounds!" gasped the Earl, falling back among his pillows. "Better dead than wed! Damme, but I must ha' been direly sick . . . out o' my mind."

"Your lordship was—direly sick."

"And you, Trent, you stood by and saw it done!"

"Indeed, sir, at your own command and tearful entreaty——"

"And so she wed me—ha? This country miss I thought all rustical simplicity . . . she hath me fast shackled——"

"Nay, my lord, she rather suffered you to marry her by reason of your lordship's so urgent pleadings, threats, commands, and—tears!"

"Why, then, mad was I beyond all doubting, a poor, raving, frantic wretch. . . . Howbeit, since I must needs bow my neck in the galling yoke matrimonial, shoulder the stark burden of wedlock, Death having refused me,—where a plague is she, this wife rustical o' mine?"

"Here, my lord!" answered a gentle voice, and from the great stamped-leather screen beside the door came Rose Mary; her large eyes, meekly wistful, were a-brim with bright tears, but she held her shapely head aloft and bore herself with an easy, natural graciousness despite the unfamiliar splendour of silks and laces and glossy ringlets artfully curled and disposed.

My lord checked himself in the act of gaping at this so glorious transformation, yet had the grace to flush and, sitting up in bed, attempted a bow:

"My lady . . . madam," said he, actually stammering, "I protest you are beautiful so."

"Nay," she sighed, keeping her face averted, "this finery doth but show forth my awkwardness."

"They say you saved my life, Rose Mary."

"Nay, sir, this was God's doing."

"But 'twas you found me bleeding to death."

"So I carried you to my aunt's little cottage, sir."

"You must be wondrous strong."

"Oh yes," she sighed, "too strong I be for fine lady. And so, my lord, when I do put off me all these splendrous clothes that become not my country looks, I will put

off my wifehood also."

"Tush, this were impossible, child, since fast wed are we, it seems."

"Ah, but 'tis no matter without love," she answered. "Howbeit as maid I am, so maid will I live and die."

"Of the which I hold grave doubts," he said grimly, whereat she turned and, meeting his smile, flushed.

"Why would you doubt me?" she questioned.

"Faith, my lady, because I am thy husband, thy spouse, thy mate,—thy master, 'tis to be supposed."

Now at this she came beside the bed and stood looking down on him with her grave and gentle eyes.

"No!" said she at last, holding him with her serene and steadfast gaze. "Ah, never without love. And so to-day, my lord, I go back to my cows."

"Indeed, madam? And pray you wherefore?"

"For that I be so strange here, all out o' place, I be . . . this great house,—so many grand servants to stare and whisper, these silks and laces,—ah, no, I be better among my cows and milkmaids."

"Thou lovely fool!" he exclaimed. "Will you begone because of my idle words to old Trent?"

"Nay, 'tis because, meaning to do thee right, I have done thee wrong. Yet . . . oh, indeed, in thy sickness thou wert so different . . . and so it was I . . . suffered them to marry us."

"And so art thou most surely my wife——"

"Not in God's sight, nor yet mine own, sir. So do I give thee back thy marriage ring," and speaking, she laid the ring upon the little table at his elbow.

"Then you . . . actually mean to . . . leave my house?" he demanded, frowning.

"Surely, my lord. Yet I would keep this ring was thy mother's, if I may——"

"Tush!" he exclaimed between anger and laughter. "You will remain here. I say you shall not go, I forbid it. So now let there be an end o' this folly."

Rose Mary smiled on him and smoothed his pillow with her large, capable hand; but reading the unshaken purpose in her mild eyes, he reached out suddenly and caught her wrist.

"I say you shall not go!" he repeated fiercely.

"I must!" she sighed, and freed herself gently yet with effortless ease.

"Ha—d'ye defy me? I say, by heaven I forbid your going——"

"Sir," she answered softly, "you cannot."

My lord, used all his days to an instant, often slavish, obedience, stared in stark

amazement.

"Positively you . . . you dare defy my will then?" he gasped at last.

"Nay, not defy you," she murmured, "only I be going back to my own folk, and so, farewell, my lord!"

Then, with a touch on his frowning brow that was a caress, she turned and went from him in her serene, large, unhurried fashion, and so was gone.

My lord lay very still awhile, staring about the wide chamber as though a little dazed: then he laughed suddenly and, as suddenly, swore fiercely.

. . . A week elapsed; and though his messengers spurred hard and far afield, my lord gained no word of his vanished bride. And sometimes his sick chamber echoed with loud, ironic laughter, and sometimes he lay plunged in fits of sullen gloom; but daily his strength returned and with it the determination to find Rose Mary and teach her the beauty of submission to his imperious will. To the which end, so soon as he might travel, he made preparations to undertake the long and arduous journey into Sussex.

Behold, then, my lord's coaches at the door—wherein, beside divers trunks and portmantles, are packed four footmen, two valets, a chef and his assistants, each and every of them silent and grim at the prospect of quitting Town at such season. Appears my lord, muffled in cloak and leaning on old Jeremy's stalwart arm, for he is yet something feeble, and mutters petulant curses on this early morning's chilly air. In the act of stepping into his great travelling chariot he is arrested by the rapid beat of approaching hoofs, and into the courtyard gallops a horseman:

"My lord," he cries, reining to a sudden stop, "my master, alas, your lordship's kinsman, Mr. Brooke!"

"That he is my kinsman, alas, indeed!" nods my lord. "And what then?"

"My lord, he—he is suddenly dead."

"Dead?" repeats my lord, taking out his snuffbox. "Ah, indeed—how so?"

"This morning, sir, not an hour since . . . a duel in Hyde Park——"

"A duel? And in Hyde Park. Are you sure he is dead?"

"My lord, 'tis but too true." My lord inhales snuff with some deliberation.

"You will swear he is positively dead, actually defunct?" he enquires.

"My lord, it is beyond all doubt."

"Why, then, Cousin Brooke's earthly troubles are past, so is he more fortunate than I." So saying, my lord turns and goes back indoors, the wondering Jeremy at his heels, who, seeing his master toss aside hat and let fall cloak, ventures a question:

"What now, my lord?"

"Have the goodness to summon Netherby, my attorney."

"Mr. Netherby? But, my lord——"

"Lookee, old Jerry, since Cousin Brooke is dead and risen above my natural hate, no need is there for this plaguy journey. And seeing my bucolic wife disdains me for cows, cows shall be her portion henceforth—with such moneys as the law shall adjudge."

"Sir . . . you mean . . .?"

"My flitting spouse shall be divorced and I a free man again. Pray summon Netherby and bid him see to 't."

IV

He was a shock-headed fellow with a yoke on his sturdy shoulders whence swung two buckets, and he stared at the splendid gentleman who leaned so languidly against the farmyard gate and beckoned him with gesture so imperious.

"Good fellow, who are you?"

"I be Sim, zur,—mistus's cow-man, I be, zur."

"Where is she, your mistress?"

"I' the dairy, yonder, zur."

"Is she alone?"

"Ay, zur, she be 'er own mistus since 'er feyther took an' doied——"

"I mean is she alone in the dairy?"

"Ay, zur."

"Why, then, Sim, take this guinea and give me your yoke and buckets."

"Eh, zur—a guinea—Lord! Wot for?"

"Your yoke and buckets, man."

"But they beant mine, zur, they'm mistus's, and no more they beant worth sich a mort o' money nohow, and——" Sim gasped, for quick fingers had thrust the coin into his palm, masterful hands had relieved him of the yoke.

"But, zur, wot be goin' to do wi' that theer——?"

"No matter. Off with you, Sim."

"Ay, zur, but wheeraway?"

"Anywhere. Go to your cows, feed 'em, milk 'em, what you will, only—begone!"

"Think praps I better tell mistus as 'ow——"

"Go!" said the gentleman, frowning.

Sim rubbed his chin, scratched his ear, goggled at the guinea, and went.

Then, stooping bewigged head, my lord adjusted the wooden yoke to his velvet-

clad shoulders and, crossing the yard, stepped daintily into the cool dairy with its red-tiled floor and gleaming milk-pans in shining array; and here with her back to him, sleeves rolled above white arms, stood Rose Mary busied with a skimmer.

My lord halted, his bright gaze on this shapely back, and rattled his buckets.

"Set them down, Sim," said Rose Mary without turning, "and bid Nancy to me."

My lord rattled the buckets so loudly that she glanced round at last, and, seeing him, let fall her skimmer and stood motionless.

"My lord!" said she in breathless whisper. "My lord!"

"Nay, mistress," he answered, his gaze fixed upon her arms' smooth shapeliness, "seeing I nothing pleased as husband I am become your cow-man."

Now at this, from rounded throat to wide brow crept a painful flush, her grave, gentle eyes grew dim, her tender mouth quivered in piteous fashion.

"Oh, my lord," she murmured, her level gaze unflinching, "it was none so easy, indeed it—hurt me, so I pray thee . . . mock me not, sir."

"Mock thee, thou lovely valiant thing?" cried the Earl, and down went yoke and pails clattering. "Mock thee, thou sweet and radiant Innocence,—not I, as God sees me. Hither come I in all humility."

"Can you be humble, my lord?"

"Most truly! More than any man for thy dear sake. Wilt have me at thy feet? See, then, here am I!" and, uncovering his head, he knelt before her. "Here then am I, Rose Mary, the wretch that in thy pride thou wouldst desert, yet 'twas noble pride and taught me better how to love thee. And so—I divorced thee, child, gave thee back to thyself, hoping that, being thine own again, thou mightest, perchance, give thyself again to me. And thus, sweet maid, here on my knees I do most humbly beseech—give now thy sweet womanhood to my keeping, surround me with thy white purity, so will I strive to prove worthy."

"Oh, my lord," she faltered, gazing down wistfully into the eyes upraised to hers, "I . . . I am nothing clever, I be only . . . Rose Mary! Dost thou, canst thou love me so indeed——?"

"Heart and soul!" he answered. "With mind and body! Wilt stoop to me, Rose Mary, wilt stoop in mercy to such as I?" And so, she kissed him; but now, suddenly trembling, he held her off, viewing her loveliness with eager, boyish eyes, and spoke with the hushed reverence of adoring, unspoiled youth:

"It was thus we kissed . . . ages since . . . within my young dreams . . . thy sweet blood upon my hands——"

"Ay, 'twas so!" she whispered, swaying towards him. "And I grieving to die and leave thee solitary. Yet . . . oh, my dear, well knowing I should find thee again—

somewhen——”

“Thy bronze-gold hair!” he murmured in the same rapt tone. “Thy noble shape—thou’rt Fraya . . . the princess that died for me i’ the forest o’ dreams, and now . . . now——”

“Now, dear my lord, I am thy Rose Mary shall live for thee henceforth.”

Now presently, coming out into the sunshine, they heard a lark carolling in the blue.

“Ha, thou wise bird!” quoth my lord, looking heavenward. “Heark to him, my Rose o’ Joy, he knoweth more than all such reasoning creatures, such purblind philosophers as I! Sing on, thou feathered Wisdom, and teach the world how Happiness, like Life itself, reacheth beyond the narrow bounds of Time.”

“. . . let fall her skimmer and stood motionless”

No. 13

THE PILGRIMS

I

George, sauntering along Cannon Street during the crowded luncheon hour, paused to gaze at a certain grimy object half-hidden in a dusty niche behind rusting iron bars; there he stood, a tall, somewhat shabby figure, quite oblivious to the stir and bustle all about him and the never-ending din of heavy traffic in the crowded street, for George's sombre gaze was fixed, his ears deaf, himself unconscious of the jostling throng, until someone bumped into him.

"What the devil?" said an Oxford voice. George glanced round, slowly and almost unwillingly, and beheld a superlative young exquisite, magnificent in morning attire from gleaming silk hat to glittering shoes. "You know—what I meantersay is what the devil—what?" demanded Magnificence, ramming monocle beneath straw-coloured eyebrow.

"Please don't mention it!" murmured George, and was about to turn his back, when upon the crowded roadway there was a sudden uproar—hoarse voices called, motor-horns, harshly persistent, tooted amain, stamping horses backed and sidled, and amid it all in a dainty two-seater car, a girl, flushed, breathless, and extremely self-conscious, vainly endeavoured to restart her stalled engine. George stepped forward, dark head bared:

"Can I help?" he enquired.

"'Lo, Rosamond!" cried Magnificence, silk hat a-flourish, "shall I have a go at the beastly thing?"

"Thank you," answered the girl, "but this gentleman spoke first."

"Yes, but I meantersay, you know——"

"And he looks more capable!" she added.

"Quite!" said George heartily.

"Here, but I say, you know," began Young Magnificence, glaring on George through his monocle, blue eye very wide, "what I mean is,—man's a stranger and I ——"

"Lady," said a policeman, stern though compassionate, "you can't stay here any longer."

"I . . . I don't want to—really!" sighed Rosamond, with a helpless gesture of slim, gauntletted hands.

"Quite!" said George, nodding to the policeman. "We'll shove her over into Dowgate Hill." So, with the cheery aid of many willing hands, the dainty little car was trundled out of the traffic into a place more secluded, and here, watched anxiously by the girl, George lifted the engine bonnet and got to work, while ensued the following between Rosamond and Magnificence:

"Here, I say, Rosamond, ye know, I know as much about a car's internal doings as the next, and what I mean to say is——" Quoth Rosamond to George:

"Do you need a spanner or anything?"

"Thanks," answered George, "my pen-knife will do."

"Why, then, Rosamond," piped Magnificence, "why not, thanking kind stranger and so forth, garage the beastly thing and, getting an expert on the job, toddle Ritzwards with yours truly for a spot or so of lunch?"

"Oh Hugh," she sighed, "do run away, we're busy!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Magnificence, lifting silk hat, "very good—as you were, right ho, cheerio, and what not."

"Fluff!" nodded George, emerging from under the bonnet.

"I . . . I beg pardon?" said Rosamond politely.

"It was fluff in the carburettor! Please try her now." Obediently a small foot pressed the starter, and lo—the engine awoke, purring gratefully.

"Thanks most awfully!" said the girl, looking her gratitude.

"'Pleasure!" murmured George, looking into a pair of beautiful and wonderfully eloquent blue eyes.

"May I . . . can I give you a lift?"

"No, thanks, I——" Beneath the small helmet-like hat George beheld a curl of lustrous red-gold hair. "You're very kind . . . if you will!" said he.

"If that means yes, please hop in!" said Rosamond. George hopped forthwith, and grasped at the seat as the little car shot off.

"She's a bit sudden!" nodded the driver.

"She is!" murmured George.

"Where shall I drop you?"

"Oh—anywhere!" he answered, glancing askance at that auburn curl.

"Sounds rather vague!" said Rosamond, shaving the wings of a lumbering taxi-cab.

"I was—thinking!" replied George, flinching from an imminent bus-wheel; "you see, it's three minutes past one and everybody is eating something or other somewhere, and I . . . was wondering——"

"Oh? What?"

“If you would care to . . . eat something too . . . with me—not at the Ritz. I know rather a jolly little place in Soho . . . the ‘Golden Mill’ . . . quiet . . . excellent prog—I mean food—and . . . would you?” said George wistfully.

“Well, I . . . oh, dash that cyclist!” exclaimed Rosamond, jamming on the brakes. “They’re a frightful menace, you know!”

“They are!” said George, straightening his hat.

“You mentioned eating, I think?” she enquired.

“I did!” he admitted. “Seeing this is a modern London and—you are you and I am I . . . well, I thought perhaps——”

“I think it will be perfectly topping!” she nodded. “And my name’s Rosamond.”

“Quite!” he murmured. “Mine’s George.”

Thus, after some while, they were facing each other across a small, companionable table, in a secluded corner of a small and cosy restaurant.

“I suppose, under the quite unexpected circumstances,” said she, looking up from her *hors-d’œuvres*, “it would be silly not to call you George, George?”

“Quite!” said he. “Will you have a cocktail?”

“No, thanks, I’ve a long drive before me. . . . But only on condition that you call me Rosamond, George.”

“It’s a pretty name, ‘Rosamond,’” said he, “very beautiful. I’ve always lov . . . liked it.”

“George isn’t so bad,” she conceded, “though I’d rather you’d sounded more . . . uncommon,—Jocelyn, say, or——” George dropped his fork and leaned back in his chair, viewing her with a look of such sudden amazement that she opened her blue eyes wide at him and forgot to eat.

“What is it?” she enquired.

“Why,” said George, absently picking up the pepper-mill, “why that name . . . why Jocelyn?”

“Well, perhaps because it is so . . . very uncommon, nowadays.”

“Nowadays—yes!” he nodded. “But my name was Jocelyn—once!”

“What . . . do . . . you mean?” said she, leaning towards him.

“I . . . hardly know. . . . Difficult to explain!” he answered, shaking his head. “What shall we drink?” he enquired as an obsequious waiter tendered him another fork. “White or red?”

“Oh, white, please. By the way, do you know Hugh—Lord Brooke?”

“Heavens, no.”

“But you were with him, I thought?”

“Hardly! He fell over me,—if you mean the hero in the eyeglass.”

“Yes, that’s Hugh. But how do you mean—fell over you?”

“Well, I was staring at the old London Stone.”

“London Stone?” she repeated, pretty brows knit in puzzlement. “Which one . . . there are millions? What do you mean?”

“Ah,” sighed George, shaking his comely head, “the poor old thing’s quite forgotten, no one seems to know of it in these bustling days, but it was tremendously important once,—the measuring-stone for London, for all England—away to imperial Rome herself. The old Romans set it up donkey’s years ago. Have you never heard of it?”

“No,—where is it?”

“Right opposite where your car jibbed this morning.”

“And why were you staring at it?”

“Well, I hardly know, but I always do whenever I happen to pass. I feel compelled to stop and look at the old relic, and somehow every time it seems more familiar,—as if I’d seen and known all about it long ago,—I mean before it was the poor broken fragment it is to-day.”

“That’s rather queer!” said Rosamond, looking at him with thoughtful, brooding eyes. “It’s awfully queer!”

“Quite!” nodded George. “It is! But this is even queerer,—when I turned from the old stone and saw you so suddenly, your eyes, your auburn hair——”

“They call it red!” she sighed.

“Tawny!” said George. “Like an ancient Briton . . . a British princess. . . . Yes, yes, that’s it!” he exclaimed so suddenly that Rosamond jumped.

“Heavens, George!” she exclaimed reproachfully, “you’ve made me spill my wine.”

“Your . . . your wonderful hair . . . the old stone!” he stammered. “But why should I say—a princess . . . and British?”

“Because you are polite! But go on—when you saw . . . my hair and me—what then?”

“That’s the extraordinary part of it all,” said George, shaking his head in a puzzled, helpless fashion, “for it seemed as if the old stone and you and I had somehow, at some time, been associated and were quite old friends,—I mean ages old.”

“Now that’s frightfully interesting!” said Rosamond, dimpled chin in folded hands, eyes intent. “Because the moment I looked at you I . . . thought I knew you . . . I mean I felt I’d seen you . . . met you before—though I haven’t, of course . . . or—have I?”

“Never!” answered George. “No, I should have remembered. We’ve never met before, except . . . perhaps . . . in dreams?”

“Oh!” whispered Rosamond, and stared at him in startled amazement. “Oh!” she gasped, “you—you’ve said it!”

“Meaning that you—have dreamed?”

“Yes! Oh, heaps of times!”

“About yourself and—me?” enquired George, fumbling with the pepper-mill again.

“Was it—you?” she murmured, viewing him with troubled eyes. “Yes . . . of course . . . you . . . or someone very like you, only—you . . . I . . . oh, we and everything seemed so . . . so different . . .”

“Tell me,” he murmured, “please tell me what you—remember.”

“Well . . . I always see a grove of trees and at the end a big stone—like an altar . . . and you—you are looking down on me from a small barred window . . .”

“And your arms are full of flowers!” said George.

“Yes,” she nodded, viewing him with the same vaguely troubled look, “and I lay them on the stone——”

“A stone blotched with dark stains!” he added.

“Yes, but how . . . how do you know all this?”

“The Stone of Sacrifice,” said George, pushing aside his plate, “perhaps the old London Stone itself! . . . And after that is the horse . . . do you remember?”

“Too well,” she answered, shuddering, “. . . a great white horse . . . and we are galloping among trees . . . and that’s the awful part!”

“Yes,” said George, “that’s where it becomes a nightmare . . . Death is so close behind us.”

“And they say,” murmured Rosamond, her gaze abstracted, “that you can’t dream yourself dead, but I have—often! And always a face is bending over me . . . a man’s face . . . why . . . of course . . . yours!”

“Quite!” said George, a little hoarsely. “But, after all, it’s only a dream, thank God!”

“Yes, but I . . . I feel. . . . Why, see, I’m actually trembling!”

“And forgetting to eat!”

“Well, so are you!” she retorted. “But . . . oh George, how can two people dream the same? What . . . what does it mean?”

“Perhaps,” answered George slowly, “that there is . . . no such thing as . . . really dying. . . .”

“But we all die . . . I did in my dream.”

"Yet here we are to-day, glory be! Will you have an ice . . . *pêche-melba* or something?"

"No, no, thanks! And just look, the place is nearly empty! . . . Heavens! The time's simply flown!"

"Thanks!" said George, and beckoned the hovering waiter.

"And your name's George, George! Quite ridiculous, considering how frightfully heroic you are in dreams!" said Rosamond, powdering her shapely nose. "You ought to be Julius, or Gyles, or Robin, or Jocelyn——Why . . . why, so you were . . ."

"Yes," he nodded, "Jocelyn, that was the time we met good Friar John——"

"On London Bridge," she nodded, forgetting her nose. "Dear Brother John who sheltered us, saved our lives, and . . ."

"Married us!" quoth George, reaching for his hat. "You know, dreams are very wonderful . . . such absolutely impossible things may happen in dreams!"

"Quite!" she mocked. And out they went into the matter-of-fact bustle of the street. Nor did they speak again until Rosamond was throned in her little car, the engine purring happily; then George somewhat haltingly propounded the question:

"Are you . . . Lord Brooke . . . I mean, is he a . . . particular friend of yours?"

"Oh, no. You see, I'm expected to marry him some day."

"Er . . . quite!" muttered George.

"And you, George, do you live in London?"

"No, I—exist in digs."

"Haven't you any—folks?"

"Not a soul."

"Is that a matter for pity or congratulation? I wonder? You see, I've an uncle—one, and he's a whole family! And you haven't asked me where I live, George."

"No. You didn't tell me. Besides, if Fortune means me to—I shall find you again, bound to, no matter where you live. If we are to meet again, well—we shall meet."

"Why, then, good-bye, George, I must fly. I ought to have been in Alfriston hours ago!"

"Thanks!" said George, taking off his hat. "Alfriston! Good-bye!"

II

George sat upon a smooth grassy hill, for he had tramped far; upon the turf before him was bread and cheese with nut-brown ale in a capacious bottle. So George, perched thus aloft, ate and drank joyously, looking down meanwhile on the glorious prospect outspread far below: winding stream, shady lanes, sombre woods,

and sunny meadows, with here and there a square church tower and cottage roofs peeping amid the distant green.

Hunger satisfied, he was in the act of lighting his pipe when he beheld a man ascending the steep slope towards him, a sturdy old man, with a wonderful crop of silvery hair, who climbed with the aid of a shepherd's crook.

. . . Now as he watched this bright-haired old man who mounted the steep with such amazing nimbleness, it seemed to George that here was the presiding genius of these immemorial hills, this wide-flung peaceful solitude. . . . Halting at last, the old man smiled, touched weather-beaten hat, and looked down on George with eyes strangely blue and ineffably serene—even as the noble downs themselves.

"It's marvellous!" said George, smiling also. "You came up that hill like a boy and you don't even pant!"

"I rackon it be use, sir," answered the old fellow, "or 'abit, say. I be on these 'ills day in an' out,—I be a shepherd, y'see. No, I don't puff nor blow, sir, but . . . I be a bit—dry-like!"

"Quite!" said George, uncorking the bottle and proffering what remained of his ale. "Finish it, and good health! Sit down, won't you?"

"Thankee, sir!" answered the old shepherd, seating himself forthwith. "'Appiness and good fortun'!" and he drank deep.

"Alfriston down there, isn't it?" enquired George, gesturing to the valley below. The old man nodded, sighing in blissful content. "These hills are rather wonderful," said George, puffing drowsily at his pipe, "they seem as if they knew all about it, I mean life and so forth."

"Well, I rackon they do, sir!" replied the shepherd, blue eyes glancing eloquently at George's pipe.

"Smoke?" enquired George, tendering a plump pouch. With a murmur of gratitude his companion filled, lighted, and puffed at his battered briar in silent enjoyment, at last:

"Yes," said he suddenly, "there ain't nothin' about life or death as these old 'ills don't know. Ye see, they've been here a tidy while, and life, sir, life ain't jest a thing o' to-day."

"True!" nodded George. "But just what do you mean?"

"Well, sir, I mean as life comes t'us, and goes, and'll come again, only we forget wot's been—most on us."

"You think some few may remember, then?" enquired George, keen eyes suddenly intent.

"Ah, sure-ly! Take me now! My name be Willyum Brooks and I been a

shepherd on these yer' 'ills arl me life. And yet I weren't allus a shepherd,—no! I minds the days when I rode 'oss-back, fine as fine, ah—and me soldiers at me back too! Things was arl diffrunt then—except these yer' old 'ills, they was jest the same,—they don't change, sir,—though the sea useter come up so fur as Alfriston then, I mind."

"Must have been a good time ago?" said George, quite forgetting his pipe.

"It were, sir—No airyplanes nor wireless nor such then,—roads was fewer and mighty bad in them days, ah, and nothin' but woods 'twixt 'ere and Battle yonder. And, sir—*They* was bolder in them days, a sight bolder!"

"Who . . . whom d'you mean by 'they'?"

"Why, *Them*, for sure. *Them* as couldn't nowise abide cold iron,—likewise *Them* as knowed the power of oak, ash, and thorn,—*Them* as was found by runnin' water and in the smoke o' fire, I means—*Them*! Lord, these yer' 'ills was thick wi' 'em, I tell ee!"

"Do you mean ghosts?"

"I means—*Them*. As was and ain't. *Them* as nobody don't see no more nowadays,—except one or two. But arl the same these old 'ills be alive wi' 'em a' nights,—I know! Though some fools says they be only ship or rabbits! Well, mebbe they be only rabbits—for such fools. But 'long down in Deepdene, yonder, of a September night, misty an' a big moon, I seen—ah, I've heered . . . and *they* wasn't rabbits—no!"

"Do they ever scare you?"

"No, sir, I be too old . . . lived too often, an' knows too much about 'em, I do. Besides 'ere in one pocket I got a luck-stone, and in t'other a shepherd's crown."

"May I have a look at them?" For answer old Will drew forth two flints, the one curiously warped, twisted, and pierced by a hole of Nature's forming, the other shaped like a heart and impressed by the spreading tentacles of a star-fish.

"And were these very potent charms?"

"Ay, sir, that they was—so long back as when the sea come right inland and folks went about in ship-skins!"

"Were they a protection against sickness, in those days?"

"No, sir—agin' *Them*, for 'twas *Them* as brought arl manner o' sickness an' evils out o' the forests and marsh. But as years and lives passed, d'ye see, these 'ere charms was wore agin' witches an' the evil eye. . . . But now——!" Old Will repocketed his charms and snorted. "Now, sir, gen'lemen from London and such-like furriners tries to tell me as they'm—fozzles, because they be only fools!"

"No, Will, only because they've—forgotten."

"Ay, happen you'm right, sir,—there ain't many, not even Sussex folk, as minds the old words wot useter be said over 'em."

"How did they go, Will?"

"Well, sir, about 'em my Grandad useter say:

> 'Them as lives on flint an' chark
> Ef they goos out arter dark
> They shall see and mebbe 'ear-like
> Things as other folk might fear-like.
> But Sussex man an' Sussex maid
> Don't nowise need to be afraid
> Ef lucky stone they bears along,
> There's none o' *Them* shall do 'em wrong.
> For luck-stones they do be a charm-like,
> And shepherds' crowns do keep off harm-like.'

My old Grandad didn't call they fozzles—no! I mind theer was another agin' axey or ager, as went:

> 'For lucky stone, ef ye be ill,
> Must lay upon the winder-sill;
> Then open winder, night an' day,
> And stone shall sickness charm away.'

Ah, well, folk don't bleeve in nothin' no more, no, not even pharysees or fairies as some calls 'em. I mind the time as these liddle bits o' chaps was up to arl manner o' tricks, changin' babies, stampedin' cattle, an' I dunno wot. But them days was long ago, why, there wasn't no Cross in Alfriston in them days, ye see, Christ 'adn't been born. No, an' the Long-Man 'e wasn't 'ere then,—th' owd Giant theer 'adn't been thought on, no!" And William pointed towards the gigantic and mysterious figure cut and outlined in the turf of the steep hillside immediately below them.

"But how," said George, peering into the old shepherd's strange blue eyes, "how do you know all this? Did you dream it too?"

"No, sir, I rackon as I jest—remember. Anyways,—I know!"

"Then, do you believe there is—no death?"

"Plenty on it, sir—folks is allus a-dyin', but then folk is bein' born—constant. Life comes an' goes, but allus comes back again an'—there y'are!"

"Well,—I've dreamed," said George.

"Ay, some does. I know one as be a powerful dreamer."

"I've dreamed myself back in the past . . . dreamed myself all kinds of fellows, but oftenest I seem to be a Roman soldier—ridiculously enough——"

"No, sir, there ain't nothin' ridiklous about dreams—some o' them,—we don't

make ’em, they jest comes. And Lord bless ee, I minds them Romans, one on ’em killed me once—shields an’ spears,—and sword not s’long as me arm, but by jigs, they knowed ’ow to use ’em! Wheelin’ ’ere, wheelin’ yon, shoulder to shoulder. . . . I useter drive a sort o’ cart in them days, with scythes on to the wheel-’ubs—,’twas over away by Exeat yonder as I got. . . . Why, theer comes another as dreams,—a rare dreamer she be and allus was! Useter tell me arl ’er dreams when ’er ’air was long an’ petticoats short,—though lady’s dresses be purty short nowadays, I think!”

George was silent, his rapt gaze on the shapely form of one who climbed the green slope slowly and with head bowed despondently.

“Lordy!” murmured old William. “Summat wrong, I guess. Whenever she be worrited she eether goes to my cottage an’ Mary, or comes up along ’ere to set by the old Giant, arl lonesome-like. I wonder if it be the Major-General again? A fair terror ’e be, sir, likewise ’er uncle, pore child! Sojered in India an’ treats everybody as if they was ’eathen, which don’t do in Sussex, no!” So saying, the old shepherd rose and, flourishing his hat, called cheerily:

“Miss Rosamond . . . Miss Rosa—’ere I be, come you to old Willyum.”

Rosamond glanced up and, seeing the tall figure standing beside the shepherd, stopped, then came on again. Her lovely face, to George’s quick vision, seemed strained and anxious, her eyes showed traces of recent tears, yet she greeted him gaily:

“Hallo, George!” she smiled, giving him her hand. “So Fate meant us to meet again?”

“Yes,” answered George, “I meant to too.”

“And my eyes all puffed and my nose a hideous blob! Look at it!”

“I am.”

“Well, isn’t it like a carrot?”

“No!”

“Nice George!” she murmured. “And hobnobbing with my old William too! How are you, Will? Let’s sit down—make room for me between you, I want to be comforted. . . . I don’t mind your pipes, sillies! If you’ve a cigarette, George,—thanks! Yes, I need a lot of tender cherishing, for I’ve just been—cast forth upon the world!”

“Oh?” murmured George.

“Lord, Miss Rosamond!” quoth William, staring.

“Yes!” she nodded, frowning at her cigarette. “It’s come at last, Will. Uncle Arthur was too awful, so I . . . I told him I’d had enough and walked out, and . . . well, here I am,—alone in the world, penniless, and without a roof to shelter my

poor devoted head . . . and I don't care—yet!"

"Well, Miss Rosamond," said old William, his blue eyes very bright, "there be my cottage,—me an' Mary'll find room for ee . . . ef no better offers,—and j'yful."

"God bless you, Will!" said Rosamond; and turning suddenly, she kissed him. "I shall come to you, of course. . . ."

"Was the General very 'ard on ye, Miss Rosa?"

"He was—hateful! And Lord Brooke there, to make it worse . . . and. . . . Oh, Will, dear, whatever should I do without you and Mary?"

"A cup o' tea!" exclaimed the old shepherd, fondling the hand she had given him. "Happen now you'll be wantin' a cup o' tea—like? Shall I step along to Mary and ——"

"No—don't trouble, Will . . . and yet I should simply love some tea! We'll all go, now—you won't mind George, will you?"

"'Twill be an honner, sure-ly!" answered old William, with the grave courtesy of a grand *seigneur*. Then down the hill they went together, though somewhat silently, until, reaching the lane, William insisted he must hurry on before and so left them together, like the kindly old diplomat he was.

"A grand old chap!" murmured George, looking after him.

"Yes!" she nodded. "I've known and loved him all my life. And like you and me, George, he's had visions!"

"And the wonderful thing is," said George, pausing to tap out his pipe, "the longer I listen to him the surer I am that death, after all, is only a . . . a kind of . . . interlude,—if you know what I mean? . . . But, Miss Rosamond, please tell——"

"What? Master George?"

"Why, then, Rosamond, shall you go back to your uncle?"

"No! Not after—certainly not!"

"Then what shall you do?"

"Stay with Mary and Will and hunt up a job of some sort."

"Sounds rather bleak!" said George.

"Frightfully!" she sighed.

"Why, then, I . . . I'm rather hoping," stammered George, "that . . . well—that you might try . . . marrying me instead."

"Of course I might!" she nodded. "Only I'll never marry any man for a . . . a roof!"

"Great mistake!" murmured George. "Roofs are useful . . . keep out rain and things. . . ." Rosamond laughed unsteadily and turned to look up at him through sudden tears:

“You’re . . . a . . . frightful dear, George!” said she, trying not to sob.

“Quite!” sighed he. “But——?”

“But,—exactly! That’s just why I can’t and won’t marry you. And besides—oh, goodness drat him,—there’s Hugh!”

Lord Brooke indeed, impeccably attired for golf, had suddenly appeared round a bend in the narrow lane:

“’Lo, Rosamond!” he exclaimed. “There you are—good egg and what not. Been looking for you hither and yon! Sir Arthur’s cooled down, calm as a cooing whatsaname—if you know what I mean,—wants to express regrets, return home and all’s forgiven, so—shall we toddle?”

“No, Hugh. Please tell uncle I’m not coming back, my mind’s made up and ——”

“But here, I say, you know, Rosamond, old thing, I mean, you must, old boy expects you . . . make friends or jolly old scandal, what! Besides what about me? I always thought we were engaged, if you know what——”

“Nonsense, Hughie! I’ll write you a nice letter of congratulation when you’re really engaged to—one more worthy. Now do trot along, I’m dying for a cup of tea.”

“Oh!” exclaimed his lordship, a little dazed; but becoming aware of George he instantly rammed in monocle and scowled. “Ah!” he exclaimed, “so it’s you again! What the—I mean, who are you—what?”

“Just George,” answered George.

“Why, then, if you’re a sportsman step into the field, and I——”

“No!” said Rosamond.

“Right-ho!” quoth my lord, buttoning up his coat. “Then we’ll have it here.”

“Another time,” suggested George.

“No! Now! This very——” His lordship stopped, arrested by George’s tie. “Belsize?” he enquired.

“Belsize!” answered George.

“And a heavyweight!” murmured my lord. “Does your name happen to be—Brandon?”

“Why, yes . . . yes,” cried Rosamond stepping between them but looking only at George. “Of course it’s Brandon—it simply has to be!”

“Quite!” murmured George, looking only at Rosamond.

“Good enough!” quoth my lord cheerily. “I’m after no world’s titles to-day. So . . . cheerio . . . happy days . . . good luck and so forth!” With which he ambled back down the lane, while Rosamond gazed at George and George at Rosamond.

“Brandon!” she repeated softly. “It’s the only name, so familiar and—dear!”

“So is Rosamond,” he answered. “There was a dream Rosamond. . . . She married the wrong man and I had to kill him with a pen-knife,—ridiculous, of course, melodrama of the crudest, but . . .”

“George, we’ve been saving each other’s lives and marrying each other through so many centuries of Pilgrimage that we . . . almost seem to belong to each other, don’t we?”

“Yes,” he answered, “yes . . . but to-day—is to-day and I . . . I’m only George.”

“Quite!” she mocked, reaching out her hands to him. “But if there is any truth in our dreams, or instincts, or what old William says,—why, then, you were also . . . my loved Julius, Metellus,—and then Gilles, and Giles, and Miles, and Robert, and Jocelyn, and . . . oh, but always—yes, always, my own dear—George!”

“Always!” he answered fervently. “And yet, Rosamond, d’you know I haven’t even ventured to kiss you—yet.”

“Yes, I . . . had noticed it, George. And now, of course, you would think of it just here,—where He can see us!” And she gestured towards that abiding wonder of this countryside, this mighty, wide-armed Giant cut into the immemorial turf by vanished hands long since forgotten. “I’ve often wondered who he is and what he means. I suppose he’s frightfully old?”

“Yes,” murmured George, “old as England, I guess. Some say he is Wotan with the spears, some say he is Thor, but I like to think he is the Spirit of Humanity holding open the gates of Life. . . . And, being so old, he’s seen many a kiss, my dear, but in all his length of days—none so wonderful as . . . this!”

“Ha—Rosamond!” barked an imperious voice. “What the . . . I say, confound it all—what’s all this?” And a square-shouldered, red-faced, grizzle-headed autocrat came striding to glare on them with fiery eye. “What the purple blazes is all this?” he demanded.

“Just George, uncle!” she answered serenely. “George, this is uncle—Sir Arthur Pitt-Pagham.”

“Quite!” murmured George, pocketing the cool, slim hand she had given him. “Honoured General!”

“Who are you, Sir? Who and—what?”

“Well, sometimes I write and——”

“Write, sir, write? What the dev——”

“Books,” said George, “and rather indifferent verse——”

“Verse? A poet? Bah, sir! Hugh told me you were an old Belsize man.”

“Hugh was right, General.”

“Well, so was I, sir!” barked Sir Arthur. “Hum! . . . Name of Brandon, eh? Face seems familiar too.”

“Yes, sir,” nodded George. “I dug divers pieces of shrapnel out of you at Number Three Hospi——”

“Eh? . . . Doctor Brandon? Well, da——amazing! So you are the doctor man?”

“I—was, sir.”

“And what now?”

“I am engaged to Rosamond.”

“The devil you are? Brandon—hum! You’re the Cholera man—Serbia, hey?”

“I was there, General.”

“Then . . . my hand, sir! And you’re engaged to my niece? What do you say, Rosamond?”

“That . . . oh Uncle Arthur, I’ve found . . . my ‘Man of Mercy’!”

“Your—what?”

“Tea!” said old William, the shepherd, approaching, “Tea be ready, Miss Rosamond, if you all be ready for it.”

“We are, Will,” she answered, “so please take uncle along,—we’ll follow.”

“Tea?” snorted the General. “You’d better dine with us, Brandon, I’ll find you something more heartening than tea.” And away marched the old soldier, shoulder to shoulder with the old shepherd.

The sun was setting and Rosamond paused to look back at that shape of wonder rising above them on the sun-kissed slope and from this to George’s wistful, reverent eyes.

“My ‘Man of Mercy’!” she whispered. “Oh George, I’m almost afraid . . . it is all so wonderful! You and I . . . this marvel of Life . . . our sudden love, so new and yet so very old! What does it mean?”

“Who knows?” he answered, drawing her near, “I can only repeat the lines I once wrote . . . verses you may remember,—these, my Rosamond:

‘Dear, Life and Love and Time, these be
Eternal all, the Deathless Three
The Veritable Trinity
That cannot fade away.

‘So, if cold Death a while benight us
True Love shall like good angel light us
Back into life and reunite us
Through all eternity.’”

‘“Oh Hugh,’ she sighed, ‘do run away, we’re busy!’”

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TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *Voices from the Dust* by John Jeffery Farnol]