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The Adventures of Harry Revel

THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY REVEL.

BY

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PREFACE

When I started to set down these early adventures of Harry Revel, I meant to dedicate them to my friend Mr. W. F. Collier of Woodtown, Horrabridge: but he died while the story was writing, and now cannot twit me with the pranks I have played among his stories of bygone Plymouth, nor send me his forgiveness—as he would have done. Peace be to him for a lover of Dartmoor and true gentleman of Devon!

So now I have only to beg, by way of preface, that no one will bother himself by inquiring too curiously into the geography, topography, *etc.* of this tale, or of any that I have written or may write. If these tales have any sense of locality, they certainly will not square with the ordnance maps; and even the magnetic pole works loose and goes astray at times—a phenomenon often observed by sailors off the sea-coast of Bohemia.

It may be permissible to add that the story which follows by no means exhausts the adventures, civil and military, of Harry Revel. But the recital of his further campaigning in company with Mr. Benjamin Jope, and of the verses in which Miss Plinlimmon commemorated it, will depend upon public favour.

A.T. QUILLER-COUCH.
THE HAVEN, FOWEY, March 28th, 1903.

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CHAPTER I.

I FIND MYSELF A FOUNDLING.

My earliest recollections are of a square courtyard surrounded by high walls and paved with blue and white pebbles in geometrical patterns—circles, parallelograms, and lozenges. Two of these walls were blank, and had been coped with broken bottles; a third, similarly coped, had heavy folding doors of timber, leaden-grey in colour and studded with black bolt-heads. Beside them stood a leaden-grey sentry-box, and in this sat a red-faced man with a wooden leg and a pigtail, whose business was to attend to the wicket and keep an eye on us small boys as we played. He owned two books which he read constantly: one was Foxe's *Martyrs*, and the other (which had no title on the binding) I opened one day and found to be *The Devil on Two Sticks*.

The arch over these gates bore two gilt legends. That facing the roadway ran: "*Train up a Child in the Way he should Go,*" which prepared the visitor to read on the inner side: "*When he is Old he will not Depart from it.*" But we twenty-five small foundlings, who seldom evaded the wicket, and so passed our days with the second half of the quotation, found in it a particular and dreadful meaning.

The fourth and last wall was the front of the hospital, a two-storeyed building of grey limestone, with a clock and a small cupola of copper, weather-greened, and a steeply pitched roof of slate pierced with dormer windows, behind one of which (because of a tendency to walk in my sleep) I slept in the charge of Miss Plinlimmon, the matron. Below the eaves ran a line of eight tall windows,

the three on the extreme right belonging to the chapel; and below these again a low-browed colonnade, in the shelter of which we played on rainy days, but never in fine weather—though its smooth limestone slabs made an excellent pitch for marbles, whereas on the pebbles in the yard expertness could only be attained by heart-breaking practice. Yet we preferred them. If it did nothing else, the Genevan Hospital, by Plymouth Dock, taught us to suit ourselves to the world as we found it.

I do not remember that we were unhappy or nursed any sense of injury, except over the porridge for breakfast. The Rev. Mr. Scougall, our pastor, had founded the hospital some twenty years before with the money subscribed by certain Calvinistic ladies among whom he ministered, and under the patronage of a Port Admiral of like belief, then occupying Admiralty House. His purpose (to which we had not the smallest objection) was to rescue us small jetsam and save us from many dreadful Christian heresies, more especially those of Rome. But he came from the north of Britain and argued (I suppose) that what porridge had done for him in childhood it might well do for us— a conclusion against which our poor little southern stomachs rebelled. It oppressed me worse than any, for since the discovery of my sleep-walking habit my supper (of plain bread and water) had been docked, so that I came ravenous to breakfast and yet could not eat.

Nevertheless, I do not think we were unhappy. Perhaps we were too young, and at any rate we had nothing with which to contrast our lot. Across the roadway outside lay blue water, and of this and of roving ships and boats and free passers-by glimpses came to us through the wicket when Mr. George, the porter (we always addressed him as "Mr." and supposed him to resemble the King in features), admitted a visitor, or the laundress, or the butcher's boy. And sometimes we broke off a game to watch the topmasts of a vessel gliding by silently, above the wall's coping. But if at any time the world called to us, we took second thoughts, remembering our clothes.

We wore, I dare say, the most infernal costume ever devised by man—a tightish snuff-coloured jacket with diminutive tails, an orange waistcoat, snuff-coloured breeches, grey-blue worsted stockings, and square-toed shoes with iron toe-plates. Add a flat-topped cap with an immense leathern brim; add Genevan neck-bands; add, last of all, a leathern badge with "G.F.H." (Genevan Foundling Hospital) depending from the left breast-button; and you may imagine with what diffidence we took our rare walks abroad. The dock-boys, of course, greeted us with cries of "Yellow Hammer!" The butcher-boy had once even dared to fling that taunt at us within our own yard; and we left him in no doubt about the hammering, gallant fellow though he was and wore a spur on his left heel. But no bodily deformity could have corroded us as did those thrice-accursed garments with terror of the world without and of its laughter.

Of a world yet more distant we were taught the gloomiest views. Twice a week regularly, and incidentally whenever he found occasion, Mr. Scougall painted the flames of hell for us in the liveliest colours. We never doubted his word that our chances of escaping them were small indeed; but somehow, as life did not allure, so eternity did not greatly frighten us. Meanwhile we played at our marbles. We knew, in spite of the legend over the gateway, that at the age of ten or so our elder companions disappeared. They went, as a fact, into various trades and callings, like ordinary parish apprentices. Perhaps we guessed this; if so, it must have been vaguely, and I incline to believe that we confused their disappearance with death in our childish musings on the common lot. They never came back to see us; and I remember that we were curiously shy of speaking about them, once gone.

From Miss Plinlimmon's window above the eaves I could look over the front wall on to an edge of roadway, a straight dock like a canal— crowded with shipping—and a fort which fired a gun in the early morning and again at sunset. And every morning, too, the drums would sound from the hill at our back; and be answered by a soldier, who came steadily down the roadway beside the dock, halted in front of our gates, and blew a call on his bugle. Other bugle-calls sounded all around us throughout the day and far into our sleep-time: but this was the only performer I ever saw. He wore a red coat, a high japanned hat, and clean white pantaloons with black gaiters: and I took it for granted that he was always the same soldier. Yet I had plenty of opportunities for observing him, for Miss Plinlimmon made it a rule that I should stand at the window and continue to gaze out of it while she dressed.

One day she paused in the act of plaiting her hair. "Harry," said she, "I shall always think of you and that tune together. It is called the Revelly, which is a French word."

"But the soldier is English?" said I.

"Oh, I truly trust so—a heart of oak, I should hope! England cannot have too many of them in these days, when a weak woman can scarce lay herself down in her bed at night with the certainty of getting up in the same position in the morning."

(They were days when, as I afterwards learnt, Napoleon's troops and flat-bottomed boats were gathered at Boulogne and waiting their opportunity to invade us. But of this scarcely an echo penetrated to our courtyard, although the streets outside were filled daily with the tramping of troops and rolling of store-wagons. We knew that our country—whatever that might mean—was at war with France, and we played in our yard a game called "French and English." That was all: and Miss Plinlimmon, good soul, if at times she awoke in the night and shuddered and listened for the yells of Frenchmen in the town, heroically kept her fears to herself. This was as near as she ever came to imparting them.)

"I have often thought of you, Harry," she went on, "as embracing a military career. Mr. Scougall very kindly allows me to choose surnames for you boys when you—when you leave us. He says (but I fear in flattery) that I have more invention than he." And here, though bound on my word of honour not to look, I felt sure she was smiling to herself in the glass. "What would you say if

I christened you Revelly?"

"Oh, please, no!" I entreated. "Let mine be an English name. Why—why couldn't I be called Plinlimmon? I would rather have that than any name in the world."

"You are a darling!" exclaimed she, much to my surprise; and, the next moment, I felt a little pecking kiss on the back of my neck. She usually kissed me at night, after my prayers were said: but somehow this was different, and it fetched tears to my eyes—greatly to my surprise, for we were not given to tears at the Genevan Hospital. "Plinlimmon is a mountain in Wales, and that, I dare say, is what makes me so romantic. Now, you are not romantic in the least: and, besides, it wouldn't do. No, indeed. But you shall be called by an English name, if you wish, though to my mind there's a *je ne sais quoi* about the French. I once knew a Frenchman, a writing and dancing master, called Duvelleroy, which always seemed the beautifullest name."

"Was he beautiful himself?" I asked.

"He used to play a kit—which is a kind of small fiddle—holding it across his waist. It made him look as if he were cutting himself in half; which did not contribute to that result. But suppose, now, we call you Revel—Harry Revel? That's English enough, and will remind me just the same—if Mr. Scougall will not think it too Anacherontic."

I saw no reason to fear this: but then I had no idea what she meant by it, or by calling herself romantic. She was certainly soft-hearted. She possessed many books, as well as an album in her own handwriting, and encouraged me to read aloud to her on summer mornings when the sun was up and ahead of us. And once, in the story of *Maximilian, or Quite the Gentleman: Founded on Fact and Designed to excite the Love of Virtue in the Rising Generation*, at a point where the hero's small brother Felix is carried away by an eagle, she dissolved in tears. "In my native Wales," she explained afterwards, "the wild sheep leap from rock to rock so much as a matter of course that you would, in time, be surprised if they didn't. And that naturally gives me a sympathy with all that is sublime on the one hand or affecting on the other."

Yet later—but I cannot separate these things accurately in time—I awoke in my cot one night and heard Miss Plinlimmon sobbing. The sound was dreadful to me and I longed to creep across the room to her dark bedside and comfort her; though I could tell she was trying to suppress it for fear of disturbing me. In the end her sobs ceased and, still wondering, I dropped off to sleep, nor next day did I dare to question her.

But it could not have been long after this that we boys got wind of Mr. Scougall's approaching marriage with a wealthy lady of the town. I must speak of this ceremony, because, as the fates ordained, it gave me my first start in life.

CHAPTER II.

I START IN LIFE AS AN EMINENT PERSON

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Mr. Scougall was a lean, strident man who, if he lectured us often, whipped us on the whole with judgment and when we deserved it. So we bore him no grudge. But neither did we love him nor take any lively interest in him as a bridegroom, and I was startled to find these feelings shared by Mr. George in the porter's box when I discussed the news with him. "I'm to have a new suit of clothes," said Mr. George, "but whoever gets Scougall, he's no catch." This sounded blasphemous, while it gave me a sort of fearful joy. I reported it, under seal of secrecy, to Miss Plinlimmon. "Naval men, my dear Harry," was her comment, "are notoriously blunt and outspoken, even when retired upon a pension; perhaps, indeed, if anything, more so. It is in consequence of this habit that they have sometimes performed their grandest feats, as, for instance, when Horatio Nelson put his spy-glass up to his blind eye. I advise you to do the same and treat Mr. George as a chartered heart of oak, without remembering his indiscretions to repeat them." She went on to tell me that sailor-men were beloved in Plymouth and allowed to do pretty well as they pleased; and how, quite recently, a Quaker lady had been stopped in Bedford Street by a Jack Tar who said he had sworn to kiss her. "Thee must be quick about it, then," said the Quaker lady. And he was.

I suppose this anecdote encouraged me to be more familiar with Mr. George. At any rate, I confided to him next day that I thought of being a soldier.

"Do you know what we used to say in the Navy?" he answered. "We used to say, 'A friend before a messmate, a messmate before a shipmate, a shipmate before a dog, and a dog before a soldier.'"

"You think," said I, somewhat discouraged, "that the Navy would be a better opening for me?"

"Ay," he answered again, eyeing me gloomily; "that is, if so be ye can't contrive to get to jail." He cast a glance down upon his jury-leg and patted the straps of it with his open palm. "The leg, now, that used to be here—I left it in a French prison called Jivvy, and often I thinks to myself, 'That there leg is having better luck than the rest of me.' And here's another curious thing. What d'ye think they call it in France when you remember a person in your will?"

I hadn't a notion, and said so.

"Why, 'legs,'" said he. "And they've got one of mine. If a man was superstitious, you might almost call it a coincidence, hey?"

This was the longest conversation I ever had with Mr. George. I have since found that sentiments very like his about the Navy have been uttered by Dr. Samuel Johnson. But Mr. George spoke them out of his own experience.

Mr. Scougall's bride was the widow of a Plymouth publican who had sold his business and retired upon a small farm across the Hamoaze, near the Cornish village of Anthony. On the wedding morning (which fell early in July) she had, by agreement with her groom, prepared a delightful surprise for us. We trooped after prayers into the dining-hall to find, in place of the hateful porridge, a feast laid out—ham and eggs, cold veal pies, gooseberry preserves, and—best of all—plate upon plate of strawberries with bowl upon bowl of cool clotted cream. Not a child of us had ever tasted strawberries or cream in his life, so you may guess if we ate with prudence. At half-past ten Miss Plinlimmon (who had not found the heart to restrain our appetites) marshalled and led us forth, gorged and torpid, to the church where at eleven o'clock the ceremony was to take place. Her eyes were red-rimmed as she cast them up towards the window behind which Mr. Scougall, no doubt, was at that moment arraying himself: but she commanded a firm step, and even a firm voice to remark outside the wicket, as she looked up at the chimney-pots, that Nature had put on her fairest garb.

The day, to be sure, was monstrously hot and stuffy. Not a breath of wind ruffled the waters of the dock, around the head of which we trudged to a recently erected church on the opposite shore. I remember observing, on our way, the dazzling brilliance of its weathercock.

We found its interior spacious but warm, and the air heavy with the scent—it comes back to me as I write—of a peculiar sweet oil used in the lamps. Perhaps Mr. Scougall had calculated that a ceremony so interesting to him would attract a throng of sightseers; at any rate, we were packed into a gallery at the extreme western end of the church, and in due time watched the proceedings from that respectful distance and across a gulf of empty pews.

—That is to say, some of us watched. I have no doubt that Miss Plinlimmon did, for instance; nay, that her attention was riveted. Otherwise I cannot explain what followed.

On the previous night I had gone to bed almost supperless, as usual. I had come, as usual, ravenous to breakfast, and for once I had sated, and more than sated, desire. For years after, though hungry often enough in the course of them, I never thought with longing upon cold veal or strawberries, nor have I ever recovered an unmitigated appetite for either.

It is certain, then, that even before the ceremony began—and the bride arrived several minutes late—I slumbered on the back bench of the gallery. The evidence of six boys seated near me agrees that, at the moment when Mr. Scougall produced the ring, I arose quietly, but without warning, and made my exit by the belfry door. They supposed that I was taken ill; they themselves were feeling more or less uncomfortable.

The belfry stairway, by which we had reached the door of our gallery, wound upward beyond it to the top of the tower, and gave issue by a low doorway upon the dwarf battlements, from which sprang a spire some eighty feet high. This spire was, in fact, a narrowing octagon, its sides hung with slate, its eight ridges faced with Bath stone, and edged from top to bottom with ornamental crockets.

The service over, bride and bridegroom withdrew with their friends to the vestry for the signing of the register; and there, while they dallied and interchanged good wishes, were interrupted by the beadle, a white-faced pew-opener, and two draymen from the street, with news (as one of the draymen put it, shouting down the rest) that "one of Scougall's yellow orphans was up clinging to the weathercock by his blessed eyebrows; and was this a time for joking, or for feeling ashamed of themselves and sending for a constable?"

The drayman shouted and gesticulated so fiercely with a great hand flung aloft that Mr. Scougall, almost before comprehending, precipitated himself from the church. Outside stood his hired carriage with its pair of greys, but the driver was pointing with his whip and craning his neck like the rest of the small crowd.

It may have been their outcries, but I believe it was the ringing of the dockyard bell for the dinner-hour, which awoke me. In my dreams my arms had been about some kindly neck (and of my dreams in those days, though but a glimpse ever survived the waking, in those glimpses dwelt the shade, if not the presence, of my unknown mother). They were, in fact, clasped around the leg

of the weathercock. Unsympathetic support! But I have known worse friends. A mercy it was, at any rate, that I kept my embrace during the moments when sense returned to me, with vision of the wonders spread around and below. Truly I enjoyed a wonderful view—across the roofs of Plymouth, quivering under the noon sun, and away to the violet hills of Dartmoor; and, again, across the water and shipping of the Hamoaze to the green slopes of Mount Edgcumbe and the massed trees slumbering in the heat. Slumber, indeed, and a great quiet seemed to rest over me, over the houses, the ships, the whole wide land. By the blessing of Heaven, not so much as the faintest breeze played about the spire, or cooled the copper rod burning my hand (and, again, it may have been this that woke me). I sat astride the topmost crocket, and glancing down between my boot heels, spied the carriage with its pair of greys flattened upon the roadway just beyond the verge of the battlements, and Mr. Scougall himself dancing and waving his arms like a small but very lively beetle.

Doubtless, I had ascended by the narrow stairway of the crockets: but to descend by them with a lot of useless senses about me would be a very different matter. No giddiness attacked me as yet; indeed I knew rather than felt my position to be serious. For a moment I thought of leaving my perch and letting myself slip down the face of the slates, to be pulled up short by the parapet; but the length of the slide daunted me, and the parapet appeared dangerously shallow. I should shoot over it to a certainty and go whirling into air. On the other hand, to drop from my present saddle into the one below was no easy feat. For this I must back myself over the edge of it, and cling with body and legs in air while I judged my fall into the next. To do this thirty times or so in succession without mistake was past hoping for: there were at least thirty crockets to be manoeuvred, and a single miscalculation would send me spinning backwards to my fate. Above all, I had not the strength for it.

So I sat considering for a while; not terrified, but with a brain exceedingly blank and hopeless. It never occurred to me that, if I sat still and held on, steeplejacks would be summoned and ladders brought to me; and I am glad that it did not, for this would have taken hours, and I know now that I could not have held out for half an hour inactive. But another thought came. I saw the slates at the foot of the weathercock, that they were thinly edged and of light scantling. I knew that they must be nailed upon a wooden framework not unlike a ladder. And at the Genevan Hospital, as I have recorded, we wore stout plates on our shoes.

I am told that it was a bad few moments for the lookers-on when they saw me lower myself sideways from my crocket and begin to hammer on the slates with my toes: for at first they did not comprehend, and then they reasoned that the slates were new, and if I failed to kick through them, to pull myself back to the crocket again would be a desperate job.

But they did not know our shoe-leather. Mr. Scougall, whatever his faults, usually contrived to get value for his money, and at the tenth kick or so my toes went clean through the slate and rested on the laths within. Next came the most delicate moment of all, for with a less certain grip on the crocket I had to kick a second hole lower down, and transfer my hand-hold from the stone to the wooden lath laid bare by my first kicks.

This, too, with a long poise and then a flying clutch, I accomplished; and with the rest of my descent I will not weary the reader. It was interminably slow, and it was laborious; but, to speak comparatively, it was safe. My boots lasted me to within twenty feet of the parapet, and then, just as I had kicked my toes bare, a steeplejack appeared at the little doorway with a ladder. Planting it in a jiffy, he scrambled up, took me under his arm, bore me down and laid me against the parapet, where at first I began to cry and then emptied my small body with throe after throe of sickness.

I recovered to find Mr. Scougall and another clergyman (the vicar) standing by the little door and gazing up at my line of holes on the face of the spire. Mr. Scougall was offering to pay.

"But no," said the vicar, "we will set the damage down against the lad's preservation; that is, if I don't recover from the contractor, who has undoubtedly swindled us over these slates."

CHAPTER III.

I AM BOUND APPRENTICE.

Although holidays were a thing unknown at the Genevan Hospital, yet discipline grew sensibly lighter during Mr. Scougall's honeymoon, being left to Miss Plinlimmon on the understanding that in emergency she might call in the strong and secular arm of Mr. George. But we all loved Miss Plinlimmon, and never drove her beyond appealing to what she called our better instincts.

Her dearest aspiration (believe it if you can) was to make gentlemen of us—of us, doomed to start in life as parish apprentices! And to this her curriculum recurred whether it had been divagating into history, geography, astronomy, English composition, or religious knowledge. "The author of the book before me, a B.A.—otherwise a Bachelor of Arts, but not on that account necessarily unmarried— observes that to believe the sun goes round the earth is a vulgar error. For my part I should hardly go so far: but it

warns us how severely those may be judged who obtrusively urge in society opinions which the wise in their closets have condemned." "The refulgent orb—another way, my dears, of saying the sun—is in the vicinity of Persia an object of religious adoration. The Christian nations, better instructed, content themselves with esteeming it warmly, and as they follow its course in the heavens, draw from it the useful lesson to look always on the bright side of things." Humble beneficent soul! I never met another who had learned that lesson so thoroughly. Once she pointed out to me at the end of her dictation-book a publisher's colophon of a sundial with the word *Finis* above it, and, underneath, the words "Every Hour Shortens Life." "Now, I prefer to think that every hour lengthens it," said she, with one of her few smiles; for her cheerfulness was always serious.

Best of all were the hours when she read to us extracts from her album. "At least," she explained, "I *call* it an album. I ever longed to possess one, adorned with remarks—moral or sprightly, as the case might be—by the Choicest Spirits of our Age, and signed in their own illustrious handwriting. But in my sphere of life these were hard—nay, impossible—to come by; so in my dilemma I had recourse to subterfuge, and having studied the career of this or that eminent man, I chose a subject and composed what (as it seemed to me) he would *most likely* have written upon it, signing his name below—but in print, that the signatures may not pass hereafter for real ones, should the book fall into the hands of strangers. You must not think, therefore, that the lines on Statesmanship which I am about to read you, beginning 'But why Statesmans *ship*? Because, my lords and gentlemen, the State is indeed a ship, and demands a skilful helmsman'—you must not think that they were actually penned by the Right Honourable William Pitt. But I feel sure the sentiments are such as he would have approved, and perhaps might have uttered had the occasion arisen."

This puzzled us, and I am not sure that we took any trouble to discriminate Miss Plinlimmon's share in these compositions from that of their signatories. Indeed, the first time I set eyes on Lord Wellington (as he rode by us to inspect the breaches in Ciudad Rodrigo) my memory saluted him as the Honourable Arthur Wellesley, author of the passage, "Though educated at Eton, I have often caught myself envying the quaintly expressed motto of the more ancient seminary amid the Hampshire chalk-hills, *i.e. Manners makyth man*"; and to this day I associate General Paoli with an apostrophe "O Corsica! O my country, bleeding and inanimate!" etc., and with Miss Plinlimmon's foot-note: "N.B.—The author of these affecting lines, himself a blameless patriot, actually stood godfather to the babe who has since become the infamous Napoleon Bonaparte. Oh, irony! What had been the feelings of the good Paoli, could he have foreseen this eventuality, as he promised and vowed beside the font! (if they have such things in Corsica: a point on which I am uncertain)."

I dwell on these halcyon days with Miss Plinlimmon because, as they were the last I spent at the Genevan Hospital, so they soften all my recollections of it with their own gentle prismatic haze. In fact, a bare fortnight had gone by since my adventure on the spire when I was summoned to Mr. Scougall's parlour and there found Miss Plinlimmon in conversation with a tall and very stout man: and if her eyelids were pink, I paid more attention to the stout man's, which were rimmed with black—a more unusual sight. His neck, too, was black up to a well-defined line; the rest of it, and his cheeks, red with the red of prize beef.

"This is the boy—hem—Revel, of whom we were speaking." Miss Plinlimmon smiled at me and blushed faintly as she uttered the name. "Harry, shake hands with Mr. Trapp. He has come expressly to make your acquaintance."

Somehow I gathered that this politeness took Mr. Trapp aback; but he held out his hand. It was astonishingly black.

"Pray be seated, Mr. Trapp."

"The furniture, ma'am!"

"Ah, to be sure!" Mr. Scougall's freshly upholstered chairs had all been wrapped in holland coverings pending his return. "Mr. Trapp, Harry, is a—a chimney-sweep."

"Oh!" said I, somewhat ruefully.

"And if I can answer for your character (as I believe I can)," she went on with a wan, almost wistful smile, "he is ready to make you his apprentice."

"But I had rather be a soldier, Miss Plinlimmon!"

She still kept her smile, but I could read in it that my pleading was useless; that the decision really lay beyond her.

"Boys will be boys, Mr. Trapp." She turned to him with her air of gentility. "You will forgive Harry for preferring a red coat to —to your calling." (I thought this treacherous of Miss Plinlimmon. As if she did not prefer it herself!) "No doubt he will learn in time that all duty is alike noble, whether it bids a man mount the deadly breach or climb a—or do the sort of climbing required in your profession."

"I climbed up that spire in my sleep," said I, sullenly.

"That's just it," Mr. Trapp agreed. "That's what put me on the track of ye. 'Here's a tacker,' I said, 'can climb up to the top of Emmanuel's in his sleep, and I've been wasting money and temper on them that won't go up an ord'nary chimbley when they're

wideawake, 'ithout I lights a furze-bush underneath to hurry them.'"

"I trust," put in Miss Plinlimmon, aghast, "you are jesting, Mr. Trapp?"

"Jesting, ma'am?"

"You do not really employ that barbarous method of acceleration?"

"Meaning furze-bushes? Why, no, ma'am; not often. Look ye here, young sir," he continued, dismissing (as of no account) this subject, so interesting to me; "you was wide awake, anyway, when you came down, and that you can't deny."

"Harry," persisted Miss Plinlimmon, "has not been used to harsh treatment. You will like his manners: he is a very gentlemanly boy."

Mr. Trapp stared at her, then at me, then slowly around the room. "Gentlemanly?" he echoed at length, in a wondering way, under his breath.

"I have used my best endeavours. Yes, though I say it to his face, you will really—if careful to appeal to his better instincts—find him one of Nature's gentlemen."

Mr. Trapp broke into a grin of relief; almost you could say that he heaved a sigh.

"Oh, that's all?" said he. "Why, Lord love ye, ma'am, I've been called that myself before now!"

So to Mr. Trapp I was bound, early next week, before the magistrates sitting in petty sessional division, to serve him and to receive from him proper sustenance and clothing until the age of twenty-one. And I (as nearly as could be guessed, for I had no birthday) had barely turned ten. Mr. Scougall arrived in time to pilot me through these formalities and hand me over to Mr. Trapp: but at a parting interview, throughout which we both wept copiously, Miss Plinlimmon gave me for souvenir a small Testament with this inscription on the fly-leaf:

H. REVEL,

from his affectionate friend, A. Plinlimmon.

O happy, happy days, when childhood's cares
Were soon forgotten!
But now, when dear ones all around are still the same,
Where shall we be in ten years' time?

"They were my own composition," she explained. Mr. George bade me a gloomier farewell. "You might come to some good," he said contemplatively; "and then again you mightn't. I ain't what they call a *pessimist*, but I thinks poorly of most things. It's safer."

Mr. Trapp was exceedingly jocose as he conveyed me home to his house beside the Barbican, Plymouth; stopping on the way before every building of exceptional height and asking me quizzically how I would propose to set about climbing it. At the time, in the soreness of my heart, I resented this heavy pleasantry, and to be sure, after the tenth repetition or so, the diversity of the buildings to which he applied it but poorly concealed its sameness. But, in fact, he was doing his best to be kind, and succeeded in a sort; for it roused a childish scorn in me and so fetched back my heart, which at starting had been somewhere in my boots.

I took it for granted that a sweep must inhabit a dingy hovel, and certainly the crowded filth of the Barbican promised nothing better as we threaded our way among fishermen, fish-jowters, blowzy women, and children playing hop-scotch with the heads of decaying fish. At the seaward end of it, and close beside the bow-fronted Custom House, we turned aside into an alley which led uphill between high blank walls to the base of the Citadel: and here, stuck as if it were a marten's nest under the shadow of the ramparts, a freshly whitewashed cottage overhung the slope, with a sweep's brush dangling over its doorway and the sign "S. Trapp, Chimney Sweep in Season."

While I wondered what might be the season for chimney-sweeps, a small bead-eyed woman emerged from the doorway and shook a duster vigorously: in the which act catching sight of us, she paused.

"I've a-got en, my dear," said Mr. Trapp much as a man might announce the capture of a fish: and though he did not actually lift me for inspection his hand seemed to waver over my collar.

But it was Mrs. Trapp, who, after a fleeting glance at me, caught her husband by the collar.

"And you actilly went in that state, you nasty keerless hulks! O, you heart-breaker!"

Mr. Trapp in custody managed to send me a sidelong, humorous grin.

"My dear, I thought 'twould be a surprise for you—business taking me that way, and the magistrates being used to worse."

"You heart-breaker!" repeated Mrs. Trapp. "And me slaving morn and night to catch up with your messy ways! What did I tell you the first time you came back from the Hospital looking like a malkin, and with a clean shift of clothes laid out for you and the water on the boil, that I couldn't have taken more trouble, no, not for a funeral? Didn't I tell you 'twas positively lowering?"

"I ha'n't a doubt you did, my dear."

"That's what you are. You're a lowering man. And there by your own account you met a lady, with your neck streaked like a ham-rasher, and me not by—thank goodness!—to see what her feelings were; and now 'tis magistrates. But nothing warns you. I suppose you thought that as 'twas only fondlings without any father or mother it didn't matter how you dressed!"

Mrs. Trapp, though she might seem to talk at random, had a wifely knack of dropping a shaft home. Her husband protested.

"Come, come, Maria—you know I'm not that sort of man!"

"How do I know what sort of man you are, under all that dirt? For my part, if I'd been a magistrate, you shouldn't have walked off with the boy till you'd washed yourself, not if you'd gone down on your hands and knees for it; and him with his face shining all over like a little Moses on the Mount, which does the lady credit if she's the one you saw; though how they can dress children up like pickle-herrings it beats me. Your bed's at the top of the house, child, and there you'll find a suit o' clothes that I've washed and aired after the last boy. I only hope you won't catch any of his nasty tricks in 'em. Straight up the stairs and the little door to the left at the top."

"Unless"—Mr. Trapp picked up courage for one more pleasantry—"you'd like to make a start at once and go up by way of the chimbley."

He was rash. As a pugilist might eye a recovering opponent supposed to be stunned, so Mrs. Trapp eyed Mr. Trapp.

"I thought I told you plain enough," she said, "that you're a lowering man. What's worse, you're an unconverted one. Oh, you nasty, fat, plain-featured fellow! Go indoors and wash yourself, this instant!"

I spent close upon four years with this couple: and good parents they were to me, as well as devoted to each other. Mrs. Trapp may have been "cracked," as she certainly suffered from a determination of words to the mouth: but, as a child will, I took her and the rest of the world as I found them. She began to mother me at once; and on the very next morning took my clothes in hand, snipped the ridiculous tails off the jacket, and sent it, with the breeches, to the dyer's. The yellow waistcoat she cut into pin-cushions, two for upstairs and two for the parlour.

Having no children to save for, Mr. Trapp could afford to feed and clothe an apprentice and take life easily to boot. Mrs. Trapp would never allow him to climb a ladder; had even chained him to *terra firma* by a vow—since, as she explained to me once, "he's an unconverted man. There's no harm in 'en; but I couldn't bear to have him cut off in his sins. Besides, with such a figure, he'd scatter."

I recollect it as a foretaste of his kindness that on the first early morning, as he led me forth to my first experiment, we paused between the blank walls of the alley that I might practise the sweep's call in comparative privacy. The sound of my own voice, reverberated there, covered me with shame, though it could scarcely have been louder than the cheeping of the birds on the Citadel ramparts above. "Hark to that fellow, now!" said my master, as the notes of a bugle sang out clear and brave in the dawn. "He's no bigger than you, I warrant, and has no more call to be proud of his business." In time I grew bold enough and used to begin my "Sweep, Swee—eep!" at the mouth of the alley to warn Mrs. Trapp of our return.

My first chimney daunted me, though it was a wide one, belonging to a cottage, well fitted with climbing brackets, and so straight that from the flat hearthstone you could see a patch of blue sky with the gulls sailing across it. Mr. Trapp instructed me well and I listened, setting my small jaws to choke down the terror: but, once started, with his voice guiding me from below and growing hollower as I ascended, I found that all came easily enough. "Bravo!" he shouted up from the far side of the street, whither he had run out to see me wave my brush from the summit. In a day or two he began to boast of me, and I had to do my young best to live up to a reputation; for the fame of my feat on Emmanuel Church spire had spread all over the Barbican. Being reckoned a bold fellow, I had to justify myself in fighting with the urchins of my age there; in which, and in wrestling, I contrived to hold my own. My shame was that I had never learnt to swim. All my rivals could swim, and even in the winter weather seemed to pass half their time in the filthy water of Sutton Pool, or in running races, stark naked, along the quay's edge.

Our trade, steady and leisurable until the last week of March, then went up with a rush and continued at high pressure through April and May, so that, dog-tired in every limb, I had much ado to drag myself to bed up the garret stairs after Mrs. Trapp had rubbed my ankles with goose-fat where the climbing-irons galled them. While this was doing, Mr. Trapp would smoke his pipe and watch and assure me that mine were the "growing-pains" natural to sweeps, and Mrs. Trapp (without meaning it in the least) lamented the fate which had tied her for life to one. "It being well known that my birthday is the 15th of the month and its rightful motto in Proverbs thirty-one, 'She riseth also while it is yet night and giveth meat to her household and a portion to her maidens'; and me never able to hire a gel at eight pounds a year even!"

"If you did," retorted Mr. Trapp, "I don't see you turning out at midnight to feed her."

Early in June this high-tide of business slackened, and by the close of the second week we were moderately idle. On Midsummer morning I descended to find, to my vast astonishment, Mr. Trapp seated at table before a bowl of bread and milk and wearing a thick blue guernsey tucked inside his trousers, the waist of which reached so high as to reduce his braces to mere shoulder-straps. I could not imagine why he, a man given to perspiration, should add to his garments at this season.

Breakfast over, he beckoned me to the door and jerked his thumb towards the lintel. The usual, sign had been replaced by a shorter one: "S. Trapp. Gone Driving."

"If folks," said he, "ha'n't the foresight to get swept afore Midsummer, I don't humour 'em."

"Are—are you really going for a drive, sir?" I stammered.

"To be sure I am. I drive every day in the summer. What do you suppose?"

"It won't be a chaise and pair, sir?" I hazarded, though even this would not have surprised me.

"Not to-day. Lord knows what we may come to, but to-day 'tis mackerel and whiting; later on, pilchards."

He took me down to the quay; and there, sure enough, we stepped on board a boat lying ready, with two men in her, who fended off and began to hoist sails at once. Mr. Trapp took the helm. It turned out that he owned a share in the vessel and worked her from Midsummer to Michaelmas with a crew of two men and a boy. The men were called Isaac and Morgan (I cannot remember their other names), the one extremely old and surly, the other cheerful, curly-haired and active, and both sparing of words. I was to be the boy.

We baited our hooks and whiffed for mackerel as we tacked out of the Sound. And by and by we came to what Isaac called the "grounds" (though I could see nothing to distinguish it from the rest of the sea) and cast anchor and weighted our lines differently and caught a few whiting while we ate our dinner. The wind had fallen to a flat calm. After dinner Mr. Trapp looked up and said to Isaac:

"Got a life-belt on board?"

"What in thunder do 'ee want it for?" asked Isaac.

"That's my business," said Mr. Trapp.

So Isaac hunted up a belt made of pieces of cork and then was ordered to lash one of the sweeps so that it stuck well outboard. "Now, my lad," said Mr. Trapp, turning to me, "you've been a very good lad 'pon the whole, and I see you fighting with the tackers down 'pon the quay and holding your own. But they can swim, and you can't, and it's wearing your spirit. So here's a chance to larn. I can't larn' ee myself, for the fashion's come up since I was a youngster. Can you swim, Morgan?"

Morgan could not; and old Isaac said he couldn't see the use of it— if you capsized, it only lengthened out the trouble.

"Well, then, you must larn yourself," said Mr. Trapp to me. "I've heard that pigs and men are the only animals it don't come to by nature. And that's a scandal however you look at it."

So strip I did, and was girt with the belt under my armpits, tied to a rope, and slipped over the side in fear and trembling. I swallowed a pint or two of salt water and wept (but they could not see this, though they watched me curiously), I dare say, half a pint of it back in tears of fright. I knew by observation how legs and arms should be worked, but made disheartening efforts to put it into practice. At length, utterly ashamed, I was hauled out and congratulated: at which I stared.

"As for the swimmin'," said Isaac, "I can't call to mind that I've seen worse: but for pluck, considering the number of sharks at about this season, I couldn't ask better of his age."

I had not thought of sharks—supposed them, indeed, to inhabit the tropics only. We caught one towards sunset, after it had fouled all our lines, and smashed its head with the unshipped tiller as it came to the surface. It measured five feet and a little over, and we lashed it alongside the gunwale and carried it home in triumph next morning (having shot the nets at sundown and slept and

hauled them up empty at sunrise—the pilchards being scarce as yet, though a few had been caught off the Eddystone). I don't suppose the shark would have interfered with my bath, but I gave myself airs on the strength of him.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS PLINLIMMON.

Late in August, and a week or two before Mr. Trapp changed his signboard and resumed his proper business, I was idling by the edge of the Barbican one evening when a boy, whose eye I had blacked recently, charged up behind me and pushed me over. I pretended to be drowning, and sank theatrically as he and half a dozen others, conveniently naked, plunged to the rescue. They dived for my body with great zeal, while I, having slipped under the keel of a trading-ketch and climbed on board by her accommodation-ladder dangling on the far side, watched them from behind a stack of flower-pots on her deck. When they desisted, and I had seen the culprit first treated as a leper by the crowd, then haled before two constables and examined at length, finally led homeward by the ear and cuffed at every few steps by his mother (a widow), I slipped back into the water, dived back under the ketch, and, emerging, asked the cause of the disturbance. This made a new reputation for me, at the expense of some emotion to Mrs. Trapp, to whom the news of my decease had been borne on the swiftest wings of rumour.

But I have tarried too long over those days of my apprenticeship, and am yet only at the beginning. Were there no story to be told, I might fill a chapter by fishing up recollections of Plymouth in those days; of the women, for instance, carried down in procession to the Barbican and ducked for scolding. A husband had but to go before the Mayor (Mr. Trapp sometimes threatened it) and swear that his wife was a common scold, and the Mayor gave him an order to hoist her on a horse and take her to the ducking-chair to be dipped thrice in Sutton Pool. At last a poor creature died of it, and that put an end to the bad business. Then there were the press-gangs. Time and again I have run naked from bathing to watch the press as, after hunting from tavern to tavern, it dragged a man off screaming to the steps, the sailors often man-handling him and the officer joking with the crowd and behaving as cool and gentlemanly as you please. Mr. Trapp and I were by the door one evening, measuring out the soot, when a man came panting up the alley and rushed past us into the back kitchen without so much as "by your leave." Half a minute later up came the press, and the young officer at the head of them was for pushing past and into the house; but Mr. Trapp blocked the doorway, with Mrs. Trapp full of fight in the rear.

"Stand by!" says the officer to his men. "And you, sir, what the devil do you mean by setting yourself in the way of his Majesty's Service?"

"An Englishman's house," said Mr. Trapp, "is his castle."

"D'ye hear that?" screamed Mrs. Trapp.

"An Englishman's house," repeated Mr. Trapp slowly, "is his castle. The storms may assail it, and the winds whistle round it, but the King himself cannot do so."

The officer knew the law and called off his gang. When the coast was clear we went to search for the man, and found he had vanished, taking half a flitch of bacon with him off the kitchen-rack.

All those days, too, throb in my head to the tramp of soldiers in the streets, and ring with bugles blown almost incessantly from the ramparts high above my garret. On Sundays Mr. Trapp and I used to take our walk together around the ramparts, between church and dinner-time, after listening to the Royal Marine Band as it played up George Street and Bedford Street on the way from service in St. Andrew's Church. If we met a soldier we had to stand aside; indeed, even common privates in those days (so proudly the Army bore itself, though its triumphs were to come) would take the wall of a woman—a greater insult then than now, or at least a more unusual one. A young officer of the '—'th Regiment once put this indignity upon Mrs. Trapp, in Southside Street. The day was a wet one, and the gutter ran with liquid mud. Mrs. Trapp recovered her balance, slipped off her pattens, and stamped them on the back of his scarlet coat—two oval O's for him to walk about with.

Those were days, too, which kept our Plymouth stones rattling. Besides the coaches—the "Quicksilver," which carried the mails and a coachman and guard in scarlet liveries, the humdrum "Defiance" and the dashing "Subscription" or "Scrippy" post-chaises came and went continually, whisking naval officers between us and London with dispatches: and sometimes the whole populace turned out to cheer as trains of artillery wagons, escorted by armed seamen, marines, and soldiers, horse and foot, rumbled up from Dock towards the Citadel with treasure from some captured frigate. I could tell, too, of the great November Fair in the Market Place, and the rejoicings on the King's Jubilee, when I paid a halfpenny to go inside the huge hollow bonfire built on the Hoe: but all this would keep me from my story— for which I must hark back to Miss Plinlimmon.

For many months I heard nothing of this dear lady, and it seemed that I had parted from her for ever, when one evening as I returned from carrying a bag of soot out to Mutley Plain (where a market-gardener wanted some for his beds), Mrs. Trapp put into my hands a letter addressed in the familiar Italian hand to "H. Revel, residing with Mr. S. Trapp, House Renovator, near the Barbican." It ran:

"My dearest Harry,—I wonder if, amid your new avocations, you will take the pleasure in the handwriting of an *old friend*? I remember you many times daily, and often when I wake in the night; and commend you to God morning and evening, kneeling on the place where your cot used to stand, for I have no one now to care for in my room. There is little change in our life here; though Mr. Scougall, as I foreboded, takes less heart in his ministrations, and I should not wonder if he retired before long. But this is between ourselves. Punctual as ever in his duties, he rarely spends the night here, but departs at six p.m. for his wife's farm, where Mrs. S. very naturally prefers to reside. Indeed, I wish she would absent herself altogether; for when she comes, it is to criticise the housekeeping, in which I regret to say she does not maintain that generous spirit of which she gave promise in the veal pies, etc., of that *ever memorable* morning. I never condescended to be a bride: yet I feel sure, that had I done so, it would have given me an extra compassion for the fatherless."

"But enough of myself. My object in writing is to tell-you that my birthday falls on Wednesday next (May 1st, dedicated by the Ancient Romans to the Goddess of Flowers, as I was yearly reminded in my happy youth. But how often Fate withholds from us her seeming promises!). It might be a bond between us, my dear boy, if you will take that day for your birthday too. Pray humour me in this; for indeed your going has left a void which I cannot fill, and perhaps do not wish to, except with thoughts of you. I trust there used to be no *partiality*; but for some reason you were dearer to me than the others; and I feel as if God, in His mysterious way, sent you into my life *with meaning*. Do you think that Mr. Trapp, if you asked him politely (and I trust you have not forgotten your politeness), would permit you to meet me at 5 p.m. on Wednesday, in Mr. Tucker's Bun Shop, in Bedford Street, to celebrate your birthday with an affectionate friend? Such ever is,"

"Amelia Plinlimmon."

"Oh, very well," said Mr. Trapp when I showed him the letter and put my request; "only don't let her swell you out of shape. Chimbleys is narrower than they used to be. May-day is Sweeps' Holiday, too, though we don't keep it up in Plymouth: I dare say the lady thought 'pon that. In my bachelor days I used to be Jack in the Green reggilar."

"It's just as well I never saw ye, then," said his wife tartly. "And to imagine that a lady like Miss Plinlimmon would concern herself with your deboshes! But you'd lower the King on his throne."

Indeed, Mr. Trapp went on to give some colour to this. "I wonder what she means, talking about Roman goddesses?" he mused. "I seen one, once, in a penny show; and it was marked outside 'Men only Admitted.'"

Mrs. Trapp swept me from the room.

On May-day, then, I entered Mr. Tucker's Bun Shop with a beating heart, a scrubbed face and a sprig of southernwood in my button-hole, and Miss Plinlimmon fell on my neck and kissed me. All the formality of the Genevan Hospital dropped away from her as a garment, and left only the tender formality of her own nature, so human that it amazed me. I had never really known her until now. She had prepared a feast, including Mr. Tucker's famous cheese-cakes, "as patronised by Queen Charlotte," and cakes called "maids of honour." "To my mind," said Miss Plinlimmon, taking one, "there is always an air of refinement about this shop." She praised my growth, and the cleanliness of my skin, and the care with which Mrs. Trapp kept my clothes; and laughed when I reported some of Mrs. Trapp's sayings— but tremulously: indeed, more than once her eyes brimmed as she gazed across the table. "You cannot think how happy I am!" she almost whispered, and broke off to draw my attention to a young officer who had entered the shop, with two ladies in fresh summer gowns of sprigged muslin, and who stood by the counter buying sweetmeats. "If you can do so without staring, Harry, always make a point of observing such people as that. You will be surprised at the little hints you pick up." I told her, growing bold, that I knew no finer lady than she, and never wanted to—which I still think a happy and highly creditable speech for a boy of eleven. She flushed with pleasure. "I have birth, I hope," she said, and with that her colour deepened, perhaps with a suspicion that this might hurt my feelings. "But since our reverses," she went on hurriedly, "we Plinlimmons have stood still; and one should move with the times. I am not with those who think good manners need be old-fashioned ones." She recurred to Mrs. Trapp. "I feel sure she must be an excellent woman. Your clothes are well kept, and I read more in needlework than you think. Also folks cannot neglect their cleanliness and then furbish themselves up in a day. I see by your complexion that she attends to you. I hope you are careful not to laugh at her when she makes those ludicrous speeches?"

But I shifted the talk from Mrs. Trapp.

"What did you mean, just now, by 'we,' Miss Plinlimmon?" I asked.

"Did I say 'we'?"

"You talked about your reverses—'our reverses,' you said. I wish you would tell me about it: I never heard, before, of anyone belonging to you."

"'We' means 'my brother and I,'" she said, and said no more until she had paid the bill and we walked up to the Hoe together. There she chose a seat overlooking the Sound and close above the amphitheatre (in those days used as a bull-ring) where Corineus the Trojan had wrestled, ages before, with the giant Gogmagog and defeated him.

"My brother Arthur—Captain Arthur Plinlimmon of the King's Own—is the soul of honour. I do not believe a nobler gentleman lives in the whole wide world: but then we are descended from the great Glendower, King of Wales (I will show you the pedigree, some day), and have Tudor blood, too, in our veins. When dear papa died and we discovered he had been speculating unfortunately in East India Stock—'buying for a fall' was, I am told, his besetting weakness, though I could never understand the process—Arthur offered me a home and maintenance for life. Of course I refused: for the blow reduced him, too, to bitter poverty, and he was married. And, besides, I could never bear his wife, who was a woman of fashion and extravagant. She is dead now, poor thing, so we will not talk of her: but she could never be made to understand that their circumstances were altered, and died leaving some debts and one child, a boy called Archibald, who is now close on twenty years old. So there is my story, Harry; and a very ordinary one, is it not?"

"Where does Captain Plinlimmon live?" I asked.

"He is quartered in Lancaster just now, with his regiment: and Archie lives with him. He had hoped to buy the poor boy a commission before this, but could not do so honourably until all the debts were paid. 'The sins of the fathers—'" She broke off and glanced at me nervously.

But I was not of an age to suspect why, or to understand my own lot at all. "I suppose you love this Archibald better than anybody," said I with a twinge of jealousy.

"Oh, no," she exclaimed quickly, and at once corrected herself. "Not so much as I ought. I love him, of course, for his father's sake: but in features he takes after his mother very strikingly, and that—on the few occasions I have seen him—chilled me. It is wrong, I know; and no doubt with more opportunity I should have grown very fond of him. Sometimes I tax myself, Harry, with being frail in my affections: they require renewing with a sight of—of their object. That is why we are keeping our birthdays together to-day."

She smiled at me, almost archly, putting out a hand to rest it on mine, which lay on my knee; then suddenly the smile wavered, and her eyes began to brim; I saw in them, as in troubled water, broken images of a hundred things I had known in dreams; and her arm was about my neck and I nestled against her.

"Dear Harry! Dear boy!"

I cannot tell how long we sat there: certainly until the ships hung out their riding-lights and the May stars shone down on us. At whiles we talked, and at whiles were silent: and both the talk and the silences (if you will not laugh) held some such meanings as they hold for lovers. More than ever she was not the Miss Plinlimmon I remembered, but a strange woman, coming forth and revealing herself with the stars. She actually confessed that she loathed porridge!— "though for example's sake, you know, I force myself to eat it. I think it unfair to compel children to a discipline you cannot endure with them."

She parted with me under the moonlit Citadel, at the head of a by-lane leading to the Trapps' cottage. "I shall not write often, or see you," she said. "It is seldom that I get a holiday or even an hour to myself, and we will not unsettle ourselves"—mark, if the child could not, the noble condescension—"in our duties that are perhaps the more blessed for being stern. But a year hence for certain, if spared, we will meet. Until then be a gentleman always and—I may ask it now—for my sake."

So we parted, and for a whole year I saw nothing of her, nor heard except at Christmas, when she sent me a closely written letter of six sheets, of which I will transcribe only the poetical conclusion:

"Christmas comes but once a year:
And why? we well may ask.
Repine not. We are probably unequal
To a severer task."

CHAPTER V.

THE SHADOW OF ARCHIBALD.

It is not only children who, having once tasted bliss, suppose fondly that one has only to prepare a time and place for it again and it can be repeated. But he must be a queer child who starts with expecting any less. Certainly no doubts assailed me when the anniversary came round and I made my way to Mr. Tucker's Bun Shop; nor did Miss Plinlimmon's greeting lack anything of tenderness. She began at once to talk away merrily: but children are demons to detect something amiss, and there was a note in her gaiety which somehow did not sound in key. After a while she broke off in the middle of a sentence and sat stirring her tea, as with a mind withdrawn; recovered herself, and catching at her last words, continued—but on a different subject; then, reading some puzzlement in my eyes, exclaimed abruptly, "My dear Harry, you have grown beyond knowledge!"

"Were you thinking of that?" I asked, for I had heard it twice already.

She answered one question with another. "Of what were *you* thinking?"

I hesitated, for in truth I had been thinking how much older she had grown. A year is a long time to a child, but it did not account to me for a curious wanness in her colour. Her hair was greyer, too, and there were dark rings under her eyes. "You seem different somehow, Miss Plinlimmon."

"Do I? The Hospital has been wearing me out, of late. I have thought sometimes of resigning and trying my fortune elsewhere: but the thought of the children restrains me. I make many mistakes with them—perhaps more as the years go on: they love me, however, for they know that I mean well, and it would haunt me if they fell into bad hands. Now I am not sure that Mr. Scougall would choose the best successor. Before he married I could have trusted his judgment." She fell amusing again. "Archibald is here in Plymouth," she added inconsequently. "My nephew, you know."

I nodded, and asked, "Is he quartered here?"

"Why, how did you know he was in the Army?"

"You told me Major Arthur was saving up to buy him a commission."

"How well you remember!" she sighed. "Alas! no: the debts were too heavy. Archibald is in the Army, but he has enlisted as a private, in the 105th, the North Wilts Regiment. His father advised it: he says that, in these days, commissions are to be won by young men content to begin in the ranks; and the lad has (I believe) a good friend in Colonel Festonhaugh, who commands the North Wilts. He and Arthur are old comrades in arms. But garrison life does not suit the poor boy, or so he complains. He is a little sore with his father for subjecting him to it, and cannot take his stern view about paying the debts. That is natural enough, perhaps." She heaved another sigh. "His regiment—or rather the second battalion, to which he belongs—was ordered down to Plymouth last January, and since then has been occupied with drill and petty irritating duties at which he grumbles sorely—though I believe there is a prospect of their being ordered out to Portugal before long."

"You see him often?" I asked.

She seemed to pause a moment. "Yes; oh, yes to be sure, I see him frequently. That is only natural, is it not?"

We left the shop and strolled towards the Hoe. I felt that something was interfering to spoil our day; and felt unreasonably sure of it on finding our old seat occupied by three soldiers—two of them supporting a drunken comrade. We made disconsolately for an empty bench, some fifty yards away.

"They belong to Archibald's regiment," said Miss Plinlimmon as we settled ourselves to talk. I had noted that she scanned them narrowly. "Why, here *is* Archibald!" she exclaimed: and I looked up and saw a young red-coat sauntering towards us.

Her tone, I was jealously glad to observe, had not been entirely joyous. And Master Archibald, as he drew near, did not seem in the best of tempers. He was beyond all doubt a handsome youth, and straight-limbed; but apparently a sullen one. He kept his eyes on the ground and only lifted them for a moment when close in front of us.

"Good afternoon, aunt."

"Good afternoon, Archibald. This is Harry—my friend of whom you have heard me speak."

He glanced at me with a curt nod. I could see that he considered me a nuisance. An awkward silence fell between the three of us, broken at length by a start and a smothered exclamation from Miss Plinlimmon.

Archibald glanced over his shoulder carelessly. "Oh, yes," said he, "they are baiting a bull down yonder."

The ridge hid the bull-ring from us. Dogs had been barking there when we seated ourselves, but the noise held no meaning for us. It was the bull's roar which had startled Miss Plinlimmon.

"Pray let us go!" She gathered her shawl about her in a twitter. "This is quite horrible!"

"There's nothing to be afraid of," he assured her. "The brute's tied fast enough. Don't go, aunt: I want a word with you."

He glowered at me again, and this time with meaning. I saw that he wished me gone, and I moved to go.

"This is Harry's birthday. I am keeping it with him: his birthday as well as mine, Archibald."

"Gad, I forgot! I'm sorry, aunt—Many happy returns of the day!"

"Thank you," said she drily. "And now if you particularly wish to speak to me, I will walk with you, but only a short way. Harry shall find another seat."

As they walked away side by side, I turned my head to look for a bench farther removed from the bull-ring; and so became aware of another soldier, in uniform similar to Mr. Archibald's, stretched prone on the turf a few paces behind me.

When I stood up and turned to have a look at him, his head had dropped on his arms and he appeared to be sleeping. But I could have sworn that when I first caught sight of him he had been gazing after the pair.

Well, there was nothing in this (you will say) to disturb me; yet for some reason it made me alert, if not uneasy. I chose another seat, but at no great distance, and kept him in view. He raised his head once, stared around like one confused and not wholly awake, and dropped into slumber again. Miss Plinlimmon and Archibald turned and came pacing back; turned again and repeated this quarter-deck walk three or four times. He was talking, and now and then using a slight gesture. I could not see that she responded. At any rate, she did not turn to him. But the man on the grass occupied most of my attention, and I missed the parting. An odd fancy took me to watch if he stirred again while I counted a hundred. He did not, and I shifted my gaze to find Miss Plinlimmon coming towards me unescorted. Archibald had disappeared.

Her eyes were red, and her voice trembled a little. "And now," said she, "that's enough of my affairs, please God!" She began to put questions about the Trapps. And while I answered them I happened to look along the flat stretch of turf to the right, in time to see, at perhaps a hundred yards' distance, a soldier cross it from behind and go hurrying down the slope towards the bull-ring. I recognised him at a glance. He was the black-avised man who had pretended to be sleeping.

Almost at once, as I remember it—but I dare say some minutes had passed—a furious hubbub arose below us, mixed with the yelling of dogs and a few sharp screams. And, before we knew what it meant, at the point where the black-avised man had disappeared, he came scrambling back, found his legs and headed desperately towards us, with a bull behind him in full chase.

I managed to drag Miss Plinlimmon off the bench, thrust her like a bundle beneath it, and scrambled after her into shelter but a second or two before the pair came thundering by; for the bull's hooves shook the ground; and so small a space—ten or twelve yards at the most—divided him from the man, that they passed in one rush, and with them half a dozen bulldogs hanging at the brute's heels as if trailed along by an invisible cord. Next after these pelted Master Archibald, shouting and tugging at his side-arm; and after him again, but well in the rear, a whole rabble of bull-baiters, butchers, soldiers, boys and mongrels, all yelping together with excitement and terror, the men flourishing swords and pitchforks.

To speak of the man first.—I have since seen soldiers crazed and running in battle, but never such a face as passed me in that brief vision. His lips were wide, his eyes strained and almost starting from his head, the pupils turned a little backward as if fascinated by the terror at his heels, imploring help, seeking a chance to double—all three together—and yet absolutely fixed and rigid.

The bull made no account of us, though below the seat I caught the light of his red eye as he plunged past, head to ground and so close that his hot breath smote in our faces and the broken end of rope about the base of his horns whipped the grass by my fingers. Perhaps the red coat attracted his rage. But he seemed to nurse a special grudge against the man.

This appeared when, a stone's-throw beyond our seat, the man sprang sideways to the left of his course—in the nick of time, too, for as he sprang he seemed to clear the horns by a bare foot. The bull's heavier rush carried him forward for several yards before he swerved himself on to the new line of pursuit; and this let up Master Archibald, who by this time had his side-arm loose.

"Hamstring 'en!" yelled a blue-shirted butcher, pausing beside us and panting. "Quick, you fool—hamstring 'en!"

For some reason the young man seemed to hesitate. Likely enough he did not hear; perhaps had lost presence of mind. At any rate, for a second or so, his arm hung on the stroke, and as the bull swerved again he jabbed his bayonet feebly at the haunch.

The butcher swore furiously. "Murdered by folly if ever man was! Ye bitter fool," he shouted, "it's pricked him on, ye've done!"

The black-faced man, having gained maybe a dozen yards by his manoeuvre, was now heading for the Citadel gate; beside which—so far away that we saw them as toys—stood a sentry-box and the figure of a sentry beside it. Could he reach this gate? His altered course had taken him a little downhill, to the left of the ridge, and to regain it by the Citadel he must fetch a slight loop. Luckily the bull could not reason: he followed his enemy. But there was just a chance that by running along the ridge the chase might be headed off. The crowd saw this and set off anew, with Master Archibald still a little in front and increasing his lead. I scrambled from under the seat and followed.

But almost at once it became plain that we were out-distanced. Alone of us Master Archibald had a chance; and if the man were to be saved, it lay either with him or with the sentry at the gate.

I can yet remember the look on the sentry's face as we drew closer and his features grew distinct. He stood in the middle of the short roadway which led to the drawbridge, and clearly it had within a few moments dawned upon him that *he* was the point upon which these fatal forces were converging. A low wall fenced him on either hand, and as he braced himself, grasping his Brown Bess —a fine picture of Duty triumphing over Irresolution—into this narrow passage poured the chase, rolled as it were in a flying heap; the hunted man just perceptibly first, the bull and Archibald Plinlimmon cannoning against each other at the entrance. Master Archibald was hurled aside by the impact of the brute's hindquarters and shot, at first on all fours, then prone, alongside the base of the wall; but he had managed to get his thrust home, and this time with effect. The bull tossed his head with a mighty roar, ducked it again and charged on his prey, who flung up both arms and fell spent by the sentry-box. The sentry sprang to the other side of the roadway and let fly his charge at random as box, man, and bull crashed to earth together, and a dreadful bellow mingled with the sharper notes of splintered wood.

It was the end. The bullet had cut clean through the bull's spine at the neck, and the crowd dragged him lifeless, a board of the sentry-box still impaled on his horns, off the legs of the black-avised man—who, at first supposed to be dead also, awoke out of his swoon to moan feebly for water.

While this was fetching, the butcher knelt and lifted him against his knee. He struck me as ill-favoured enough—not to say ghastly—with the dust and blood on his face (for a splinter had laid open his cheek), and its complexion an unhealthy white against his matted hair. I took note that he wore sergeant's stripes.

"What's the poor thing called?" someone inquired of the sentry.

The sentry, being an Irishman, mistook the idiom. "He's called a Bull," said he, stroking the barrel of his rifle. "H'what the divvle else?"

"But 'tis the man we mean."

"Oh, *he's* called Letcher; sergeant; North Wilts."

Letcher gulped down a mouthful of water and managed to sit up, pushing the butcher's arm aside.

"Where's Plinlimmon?" he asked hoarsely. "Hurt?"

"Here I am, old fellow," answered Archibald, reeling rather than stepping forward. "A crack on the skull, that's all. Hope you're none the worse?" His own face was bleeding from a nasty graze on the right temple.

"H'm?" said Letcher. "Mean it? You'd better mean it by—!" he snarled suddenly, his face twisted with pain or malice. "You weren't too smart, the first go. Why the deuce didn't you hamstring the brute? You heard them shouting?"

"That's asackly what I told 'en," put in the butcher.

"Oh, stow your fat talk, you silly Devonshire-man!" The butcher's tongue was too big for his mouth, and Letcher mimicked him ferociously and with an accuracy quite wonderful, his exhaustion considered. He leaned back and panted. "The brute touched me—under the thigh, here. I doubt I'm bleeding." He closed his eyes and fainted away.

They found, on lifting him, that he spoke truth. The bull had gored him in the leg: a nasty wound beginning at the back of the knee, running upward and missing the main artery by a bare inch. A squad of soldiers had run out, hearing the shot, and these bore him into the Citadel, Master Archibald limping behind.

The crowd began to disperse, and I made my way back to Miss Plinlimmon.

"A providential escape!" said she on hearing my report. "I am glad that Archibald acquitted himself well." She went on to tell me of a youthful adventure of her own with a mountain bull, in her native Wales.

Some days later she sent me a poem on the occurrence:

"Lo, as he strides his native scene,
The bull—how dignified his mien!
When tethered, otherwise!
Yet *one* his tether broke and ran
After a military man
Before these very eyes!"

"I feel that I have been more successful with the metre than usual," she added, "having been guided by a little poem, a favourite of mine, which, as it also inculcates kindness to the brute creation, you will do well, Harry, to commit to memory. It runs:

"'Poor little birds! If people knew
What sorrows little birds go through,
I think that even boys
Would never deem it sport, or fun,
To stand and fire a frightful gun
For nothing but the noise.'"

The shadow of Mr. Archibald seemed doomed to rest upon our anniversaries. This second one, though more than exciting enough, had not answered my expectations: and, on the third, when I presented myself at the Bun Shop it was to learn with dismay that Miss Plinlimmon had not arrived; with dismay and something more—for I had walked into the country towards Plympton early that morning and raided an orchard under the trees of which grew a fine crop of columbines, seeded from a neighbouring garden. Also I jingled together in my pocket no less a sum than two bright shillings, which Mr. Trapp had magnificently handed over to me out of a wager of five he had made with an East Country skipper that I could dive and take the water, hands first, off the jib-boom of any vessel selected from the shipping then at anchor in Cattewater. I knew that Miss Plinlimmon wanted a box to hold her skeins, and I also knew the price of one in a window in George Street, and had the shopman's promise not to part with it before five o'clock that evening. I wished Miss Plinlimmon to admire it first, and then I meant to enter the shop in a lordly fashion and, emerging, to put the treasure in her hands.

So I paced the pavement in front of Mr. Tucker's, the prey of a thousand misgivings. But at length, and fully half an hour late, she hove in sight.

"I have been detained, dear," she explained as we kissed, "—by Archibald," she added.

Always that accursed Archibald! "Did he wish you many happy returns?" I asked, thrusting my bunch of columbines upon her with a blush.

"You dear, dear boy!" she chirruped. But she ignored my question. When we were seated, too, she made the poorest attempt to eat, but kept exclaiming on the beauty of my flowers.

The meal over, she drew out her purse to pay. "We shan't be seeing Mr. Archibald to-day?" I asked wistfully, preparing to go.

"You may be certain—" With that she paused, with a blank look which changed to one of shame and utter confusion. The purse was empty.

"Oh, Harry—what shall I do? There were five shillings in it when—. I counted them out and laid the purse on the table beside my gloves. I was just picking them up when—when Archibald—" Her voice failed again and she turned to the shopwoman. "Something most unfortunate has happened. Will you, please, send for Mr. Tucker? He will know me. I have been here on several previous occasions—"

I had not the slightest notion of the price of eatables; but I, too, turned on the shopwoman with a bold face, albeit with a fluttering heart.

"How much?" I demanded.

"One-and-ninepence, sir."

I know not which made me the happier—relief, or the glory of being addressed as "sir." I paid, pocketed my threepence change, and in the elation of it offered Miss Plinlimmon my arm. We walked down George Street, past the work-box in the window. I managed to pass without wincing, though desperately afraid that the shopman might pop out—it seemed but natural he should be lying in wait—and hold me to my bargain.

Our session upon the Hoe, though uninterrupted, did not recapture the dear abandonment of our first blissful birthday. Miss Plinlimmon could neither forget the mishap to her purse, nor speak quite freely about it. A week later she celebrated her redemption in the following stanza:

"A friend in need is a friend indeed,
We have oft-times heard:
And King Richard the Third
Was reduced to crying, 'My kingdom for a horse!'
O, may we never want a friend!
'Or a bottle to give him,' I omit, as coarse."

She enclosed one-and-ninepence in the missive: and so obtained her work-box after all—it being, by a miracle, still unsold.

CHAPTER VI.

I STUMBLE INTO HORRORS.

It was exactly seven weeks later—that is to say, on the evening of June 18th, 1811—that as I stood in the doorway whistling *Come, cheer up, my lads*, to Mrs. Trapp's tame blackbird, the old Jew slop-dealer came shuffling up the alley and demanded word with my master.

His name was Rodriguez—"I. Rodriguez, Marine Stores"—and his shop stood at the corner of the Barbican as you turn into Southside Street. He had an extraordinarily fine face, narrow, emaciated, with a noble hook to his nose (which was neither pendulous nor fleshy) and a black pointed beard divided by a line of grey. We boys feared him, one and all: but in a furred cloak and skull-cap he would have made a brave picture. The dirt of his person, however, was a scandal. I told him that Mr. Trapp had walked over and taken the ferry to Cremyll, where his boat was fitting out for the summer. "But Mrs. Trapp is washing-up at the back. Shall I call her?"

"God forbid!" said he. "I am not come to listen, but to speak."

I asked him then if I could take a message.

"As wine in a leaky vessel, so is a message committed to a child. Two of my chimneys need to be swept."

"I can remember that, sir," said I.

He eyed me in a way that made me feel uncomfortable. "Yes; you will remember," he said, as if somehow he had satisfied himself. Yet his eyes continued to search me. "You have not swept my chimneys before?"

"I have been working for Mr. Trapp almost three years," said I demurely.

"Yes, I have seen your face. But I do not often have my chimneys swept: it is dreadful waste of money. The soot, now—your master and I cannot agree about it. I say that the soot is mine, that I made it, in my own chimney, with my own fuel; therefore it should be my property, but your master claims it. Five years ago I left my chimneys un-swept while I argued this; but one of them took fire, and so I lost my soot, and the Corporation fined me five shillings. It was terrible." He fell back a pace and studied me again. "If my brother Aaron could see your face, boy, he would want to paint it and you might make money."

"Where does he live, sir?" I asked.

"Eh? Good boy—good boy! He lives in Lisbon, in the Ghetto off the Street of the Four Evangelists." He laughed, high up in his nose, at my discomfiture. "If you ever meet him, mention my name: but first of all tell your master I shall expect him at five o'clock to-morrow morning." He wished me good night and shuffled away down the alley, still laughing at his joke.

At five o'clock next morning, or a little before, Mr. Trapp and I started for the house. The Barbican had not yet awaked to business. Its frowzy blinds were down, and out on the Pool nothing moved but a fishing-boat sweeping in upon the first of the flood.

At the entrance of Southside Street, however, we almost overtook a soldier walking towards the town. He walked slowly and with a very slight limp, but seemed to quicken his pace a little, and kept ahead of us. The barracks being full just then, many soldiers had their billets about the town, and that one should be abroad at such an hour was nothing suspicious: yet my eyes were still following him when Mr. Trapp halted and knocked at the Jew's door. At the sound, I saw the man start and hesitate for an instant in his stride: and in that instant, though he held on his pace and was lost to sight around the street-corner, I recognised him and

understood the limp. He was the man of the bull-chase—Sergeant Letcher (as the sentry had named him) of the North Wilts.

Nobody answered Mr. Trapp's knock, though he repeated it four or five times. He stepped back into the roadway and scanned the unshuttered upper windows. They were uncurtained, too, every one, and grimed with dust: and through this dust we could see rows of cast-off suits dangling within like limp suicides.

"Very odd," commented Mr. Trapp. "You're sure he said five o'clock?"

"Sure," said I.

"Besides—five o'clock or six—why can't the old skin-flint answer?"

He knocked again vigorously. A blind-cord creaked, a window went up over a ship-chandler's shop next door, and a man thrust out his head.

"What's wrong?" he demanded.

"Sorry to disturb ye, Clemow; but old Rodriguez, here, bespoke us to sweep his chimneys at five, and we can't get admittance."

"Why, I heard him unbolt for ye an hour ago!" said the ship-chandler. "He woke me up with his noise, letting down the chain."

The door had a latch-handle and Mr. Trapp grasped it. "Drat me, but you're right!" he exclaimed, as he pressed his thumb and the door at once yielded. "Huh!" He stared into the empty passage, out of which a room opened on either hand, each hung with cast-off suits which seemed to sway slightly in the scanty light filtered through the shutter-holes. "I don't stomach moving among these. Even in broad daylight I'm never too sure there ain't a man hidden in one of 'em. He might be dead, too—by the smell."

He stepped to the foot of the uncarpeted stairs. "Mister Rodriguez!" he called. His voice echoed up past the cobwebbed landing and seemed to go wandering aloft among unclean mysteries to the very roof. Nobody answered.

"Mister Rodriguez!" he called again, and waited. "Let's try the kitchen," he suggested. "We started with that, last time: and, if my memory holds good, 'tis the only chimney he uses. He beds in a small room right over us, next the roof, and keeps a fire going there through the winter: but the flue of it leads into the same shaft—a pretty wide shaft as I rec'llect."

We groped our way by the foot of the staircase and along a line of cupboards to the kitchen. The window of this looked out upon a backyard piled with refuse timber, packing-cases, and plaster statuary broken and black with soot. Within, the hearth had been swept as if in preparation for us. On the dirty table stood a milk-jug with a news-sheet folded and laid across its top, a half-loaf of bread, and a plate of meat—but of what kind we did not pause to examine. It looked nauseous enough. A brindled cat made a dash past us and upstairs. Its unexpected charge greatly unsettled Mr. Trapp.

"It daunts me—I declare it do!" he confided hoarsely. "But he's been here, anyway; and he expects us." He waved a hand towards the hearth. "Shall I call again? Or what d'ye say to getting it over?"

"I'm ready," said I. To tell the truth, the inside of the chimney seemed more inviting to me than the rest of the house. I was accustomed to chimneys.

"Up we go, then!" Mr. Trapp began to spread his bags. He always used the first person plural on these occasions—meaning, no doubt, that I took with me his moral support. "The shaft's easy enough, I mind— two storeys above this, and all the flues leadin' to your right. I'll be out in the street by the time you hail."

I hadn't a doubt he would. "One week to Midsummer!" I cried, to hearten me—for we were both counting the days now between us and the fishing. He grinned, and up I went.

The chimney was foul, to be sure, but once past the first ten or a dozen feet I mounted quickly. Towards the top the shaft narrowed so that for a while I had my doubts if it could be squeezed through: but I found, on reaching it, that the brickwork shelved inwards very slightly, though furred or crusted with an extra thick coating of soot below the vent. Through this I broke in triumph, sweating from my haste; and brushing the filth from my eyes, leaned both arms on the chimney-pot while I scanned the roofs around for a glimpse between them, down to the street and Mr. Trapp. I did so at ease, for a flue entered the main shaft immediately below the stack, which was a decidedly dumpy one—in fact, less than five feet tall; so that I supported myself not by the arms alone but by resting my toes on the ridge where flue and shaft met.

Now, as the reader will remember, it was the height of summer, and the day had brightened considerably since we entered the house. The sudden sunshine set me blinking, and while I cleared my eyes it seemed to me that a man—a dark figure—something, at any rate, and something a great deal too large to be mistaken for a cat—stole from under the gable above which my chimney rose, and, swiftly crossing a patch of flat leaded roof to the right, disappeared around a chimney-stack on the far side of it.

I ceased rubbing my eyes and stared at the stack. It was a tall one, rising from a good fifteen feet below almost to a level with mine, and I could not possibly look over it. *Something*, I felt sure, lurked behind it, and my ears seemed to hold the sound of a soft footstep. I forgot Mr. Trapp. By pulling myself a little higher I could get a better view, not of the stack, but of the stretch of roof beyond it: nobody could break cover in that direction and escape me. I took a firm grip on the corroded bricks and heaved on them.

Next moment they had given way under my hands, falling inwards: and I was falling with them.

I kicked out, striving to find again with my toes the ridge where the flue joined the shaft—missed it—and went shooting down to the right through a smother of soot.

The total fall—or slide, rather—was not a severe one, after all; twenty feet perhaps, though uncomfortable enough for sixty. I pulled myself up quite suddenly, my feet resting on a ledge which, as I shook the soot off and recovered my wits, turned out to be the upper sill of a grate. Then, growing suddenly cautious when the need for caution was over, I descended the next foot or two back foremost, as one goes down a ladder, and jumped out into the room clear of the hearthstone.

And with that, as I turned, a scream rose to my throat and died there. I had almost jumped upon the stretched-out body of a man.

CHAPTER VII.

I ESCAPE FROM THE JEW'S HOUSE.

It was Mr. Rodriguez. He lay face downward and slantwise across the front of the hearth, with arms spread, fingers hooked, and his neck protruding from the collar of his dingy dressing-gown like a plucked fowl's. He had cast a slipper in falling, and the flesh of one heel showed through its rent stocking. For a moment I supposed him in a fit; the next, I was recoiling towards the wall, away from a dark moist line which ran from under his left armpit and along the uneven boards to the far corner by the window, and there, under a disordered truckle-bed, spread itself in a pool.

With my eyes glued upon this horrid sight I slowly straightened myself up—having crouched back until I felt the wall behind me—and so grew aware of a door beside the chimney-breast, and that it stood ajar upon the empty landing. The dead man's heels pointed towards it, his head towards the window at the foot of the bed.

And still my shaken wits could not clutch at the meaning of what I saw. I only felt that there was something horrible, menacing, hideously malignant in the figure at my feet: only craved for strength of will to dash by it, reach the door and fling myself down the stairs—anywhere—away from it. Had it stirred, I believe it had then and there destroyed my reason.

But it did not stir. And all the while I knew that the thing lay with its breast in a bath of blood; that it had been stabbed in the back and the blood welling down under the clothes had gathered in a pool, ready to gush and spread on all sides as soon as the body should be lifted or its attitude interfered with. I cannot tell how I found time to reason this out; but I did.

I knew, too, that I could not scream aloud if I tried: but I had no desire to try. *It* might wake and lift up its head! I felt backwards with my hand along the wall, groping unconsciously for something to aid my spring towards the door; but desisted. For the moment I could not lift a foot.

With that—either this was all a dream or I heard footsteps on the flat roof outside; very slow, soft footsteps, too, as of somebody walking on tiptoe. But if on tiptoe, why was he coming *towards* me? Yet so it was; my ear told me distinctly.

As his feet crunched the leads close outside the window I caught a gleam of scarlet; then the frame grew dark between me and the daylight, and through the pane a man peered cautiously into the room.

It was Archibald Plinlimmon.

He peered in, turning his face sideways for a better view and shading it, after a moment, with his hand. So shaded, and with the daylight behind it, his face after that first instant became an inscrutable blur.

But while he peered speech broke from me—words and a wild laugh.

"Look at it! Look at it!" I cried, and pointed.

He drew back instantly, and was gone.

"Don't leave me! Mr. Plinlimmon—please don't leave me!" I made a leap for the window—halted helplessly—and fell back again from the body. I was alone again. But power to move had come back, and I must use it while it lasted. If I could gain the stairs now&#8230

Stealthily, and more stealthily as the fear returned and grew, I reached the door, pushed it open, and looked out on the landing. But for a worm-eaten trunk and a line of old suits dangling from pegs around the wall, it was bare. The little light filtered through a cracked and discoloured window high up in the slope of the roof. The stairhead lay a short two yards from me, to be reached by one bold leap.

This, however, was not what I first saw; nay, how or when I saw it is a wonder still. For, across the landing, a door faced me; and, as I pushed mine open, this door had moved—was moving yet, as if to shut.

It did not quite shut. It came to a standstill when almost a foot ajar. Beyond it I could see yet other suits of clothes hanging: and among these lurked someone, watching me, perhaps, through the chink by the hinges. I was sure of it—was almost sure I had seen a hand on the edge of the door; a hand with a ring on one of its fingers, and just the edge, and no more, of a black cuff.

For perhaps five seconds I endured it, my hair lifting: then, with one sharp scream I dashed back into the room and across the corpse; struggled for a moment with the window-sash; and flinging it up, dropped out upon the leads.

Out there, in the restorative sunshine, my first thought was to crawl away as fast and as far as possible; to reach some hiding-place where I might lie down and pant, unpursued by the horrors of that house. The roofs on my right were flat; I staggered along them, halting at every few steps to lean a hand for support against one or other of the chimney-stacks, now growing warm in the sunshine.

From the far side of one, as I leaned clinging, a man sprang up, almost at my feet. It was Archie Plinlimmon again. He had been flattening himself against its shadow; and at first—so white and fierce was his face—I made sure he meant to hurl me over and on to the street below.

"What do you want? What have you seen?" Though he spoke fiercely, his teeth chattered. "Oh—it's you!" he exclaimed, recognising me through my soot.

"Mr. Plinlimmon—" I began.

"I didn't do it. I didn't—" He broke off. "For Heaven's sake, how are we to get down out of this?"

"There's no way on the street side," I answered, "unless—"

He took me up short. "The street? We can't go that way—it's as much as my neck's worth. Yours, too."

"Mr. Trapp's waiting for me," I answered stupidly.

"Who knows who isn't waiting?" he snapped. "We'll have to cut out of this." He pointed downward on the side away from the street. "I say, what happened? Who did it, eh?"

"I slipped in the chimney," I answered again. "He wanted his chimneys swept this morning. We knocked—Mr. Trapp and I—and no one answered: then we tried the door, and it opened. There was no one about, and no one in the street but Sergeant Letcher."

He began to shake. "Sergeant Letcher? What do you know about Sergeant Letcher?"

"Nothing, except that he was in the street—the man the bull chased, you know."

He was shaking yet. "I ought to kill you," said he. "But I didn't do it. Look here, show me a way down and I'll let you off. You're used to this work, ain't you?"

"How did you come up?" I asked, innocently enough.

"By the Lord, if you ask questions, I'll strangle you! You were in the room with—with *it*! I saw you: I'll swear I saw you. Get me down out of this, and hide—get on board some ship, and clear. See? If you breathe a word that you've seen me, I'll cut your heart out. You understand me?"

I hadn't a doubt then that he was guilty. His fear was too craven. "There's a warehouse at the end here," said I, and led the way to it. But when we reached it, its roof rose in a sharp slope from the low parapet guarding the leads where we stood.

"But I don't see," he objected; "and, anyway, I can't manage that."

I pointed to a louver skylight half-way up the roof. "We can prise that open, or break it. It's easy enough to reach," I assured him.

He was extraordinarily clumsy on the slates, but obeyed my instructions like a child. I wrenched at the wooden louvers.

"Got a knife?" I asked.

He produced one—an ugly-looking weapon, but clean. By good luck, we did not need it; for as he passed it to me, the louver at which I was tugging broke and came away in my hand. We easily loosened another and, squeezing through, dropped into the loft upon a sliding pile of grain.

The loft was dark enough; but a glimmer of light shone through the chinks of a door at the far end. Unbolting it, we looked down, from the height of thirty feet or so, into a deserted lane. Or rather *I* looked down: for while I fumbled with the bolts Master Archie had banged his head into something hard, and dropped, rubbing the hurt and cursing.

It proved to be the timber cross-piece of a derrick used for hoisting sacks of grain into the loft, working on an axle, and now swung inboard for the night. A double rope ran through the pulley at its end and had been hitched back over the iron winch which worked it. We pushed the derrick out over the lane and I manned the winch handle, while Master Archie caught hold of the hook and pulley at the end of the double line. Checking the handle with all my strength I lowered him as noiselessly as I could. As his feet touched the cobbles below he let go and, without a thought of my safety, made off down the lane.

I tugged the derrick inboard and recaptured the rope; cogged the winch, swung out, dropped hand over hand into the lane, and raced up it with all the terrors of the law at my heels.

CHAPTER VIII.

POOR TOM BOWLING.

Master Archibald's advice to me—to escape down to the waterside and conceal myself on shipboard—though acute enough in its way, took no account of certain difficulties none the less real because a soldier would naturally overlook them. To hide in a ship's hold you must first get on board of her unobserved, which in broad daylight is next to impossible. Moreover, to reach Cattewater I must either fetch a circuit through purlieus where every householder knew me and every urchin was a nodding acquaintance, or make a straight dash close by the spot where by this time Mr. Trapp would be getting anxious—if indeed Southside Street and the Barbican were not already resounding with the hue and cry. No: if friendly vessel were to receive and hide me, she lay far off, across the heart of the town, amid the shipping of the Dock. Yonder, too, Miss Plinlimmon resided.

If you think it absurd that my thoughts turned to her, whose weak arms could certainly shield no one from the clutches of the law, I beg you to remember my age, and that I had never known another protector. She, at least, would hear me and never doubt my innocence. She must hear, too, of Archie's danger.

That to reach her, even if I eluded pursuit to the Hospital gate, I must run the gauntlet of Mr. George—who would assuredly ask questions—and possibly of Mr. Scougall, scarcely occurred to me. To reach her—to sob out my story in her arms and hear her voice soothing me—this only I desired for the moment; and it seemed that if I could only hear her voice speaking, I might wake and feel these horrors dissolve like an evil dream. Meanwhile I ran.

But at the end of a lane leading into Treville Street, and as I leapt aside to avoid colliding with the hind-wheels of a hackney-coach drawn in there and at a standstill close by the kerb, to my unspeakable fright I felt myself gripped by the jacket-collar.

"Hi! Bring-to and 'vast kicking, young coal-dust! Where're ye bound, hey? Answer me, and take your black mop out of a gentleman's weskit."

"To—to Dock, sir," I stammered. "Let me go, please: I'm in a hurry."

My captor held me out at arm's length and eyed me. He was a sailor, and rigged out in his best shore-going clothes—tarpaulin hat, blue coat and waistcoat, and a broad leathern belt to hold up his duck trousers, on which my sooty head had left its mark. He grinned at me good-naturedly. I saw that he had been drinking.

"In a hurry? And what's your hurry about? Business?"

"Ye—es, sir."

"'Stonishing what spirit boys'll put into work nowadays! I've seen boys run for a leg o' mutton, and likewise I've seen 'em run when they've broken ship; but on the path o' duty, my sonny, you've the legs of any boy in my experience. Well, for once, you'll put pleasure first. I'm bound for Dock or thereabouts myself, and under convoy." He waved his hand up the street, where twelve or fifteen hackney-coaches stood in line ahead.

"If you please, sir—"

He threw open the coach door. "Jump in. The frigate sets the rate o' sailing. That's Bill."

I hesitated, rebellious.

"That's Bill. Messmate o' mine on the *Bedford*, and afore that on the *Vesuvius* bomb. There, sonny—don't stand gaping at me like a stuck pig: I never expected ye to *know* him! And now the time's past, and ye'll go far afore finding a better. Bill Adams his name was; but Bill to me, always, and in all weathers." Here for a moment he became maudlin. "Paid off but three days agone, same as myself, and now—cut down like a flower! He's the corpse, ahead, in the first conveyance."

"Is this a funeral, sir?"

"Darn your eyes, don't it look like one? And after the expense I've been to!" He paused, eyed me solemnly, opened his mouth, and pointed down it with his forefinger. "Drink done it." His voice was impressive. "Steer you wide of the drink, my lad; or else drop down on it gradual. If drink must be your moorings, don't pick 'em up too rash. 'A boiled leg o' mutton first,' says I, persuasive; '*and* turnips,' and got him to Symonds's boarding-house for the very purpose, Symonds being noted. And Symonds—I'll do him that justice—says the same. Symonds says—"

But at this point a young woman—and pretty, too, though daubed with paint—thrust her hat and head out of a window, three carriages away, and demanded to know what in the name of Moses we were waiting for.

"Signals, my dear. The flagship's forra'd; and keep your eye lifting that way, *if* you please. I'm main glad you fell in with us," he went on affably, turning to me; "because you round it up nicely. Barring the sharks in black weepers, you're the only mourning-card in the bunch, and I'll see you get a good position at the grave."

"Thank you, sir."

"Don't mention it. We're doin' our best. When poor Bill dropped down in Symonds's"—he jerked his thumb towards the boarding-house door—"Symonds himself was for turning everyone out. Very nice feeling he showed, I will say. 'Damn it, here's a go!' he says; 'and the man looked healthy enough for another ten year, with proper care!'—and went off at once to stop the fiddlers and put up the shutters. But, of course, it meant a loss to him, the place being full at the time; and I felt a sort of responsibility for having introduced Bill. So I went after him and says I, 'This is a most unforeseen occurrence.' 'Not a bit,' says he; 'accidents will happen.' I told him that the corpse had never been a wet blanket; it wasn't his nature; and I felt sure he wouldn't like the thought. 'If that's the case, says Symonds, 'I've a little room at the back where he'd go very comfortable—quite shut off, as you might say. We must send for the doctor, of course, and the crowner can sit on him to-morrow—that is, if you feel sure deceased wouldn' think it any disrespect.' 'Disrespect?' says I. 'You don't know Bill. Why, it's what he'd arsk for!' So there we carried him, and I sent for the undertaker same time as the doctor, and ordered it of oak; and next morning, down I tramped to Dock and chose out a grave, brick-lined, having heard him say often, 'Plymouth folk for wasting, but Dock folk for lasting.' I won't say but what, between whiles, we've been pretty lively at Symonds's; and I won't say—Hallo! Here's more luck! Your servant, sir!"

He stepped forward—leaving me shielded and half hidden by the coach door—and accosted a stranger walking briskly up the pavement towards us with a small valise in his hand; a gentlemanly person of about thirty-five or forty, in clerical suit and bands.

"Eh? Good-morning!" nodded the clergyman affably.

"Might I arsk where you're bound?" Then, after a pause, "My name's Jope, sir; Benjamin Jope, of the *Bedford*, seventy-four, bo'sun's mate—now paid off."

The clergyman, at first taken aback by the sudden question, recovered his smile. "And mine, sir, is Whitmore—the Reverend John Whitmore— bound just now in the direction of Dock. Can I serve you thereabouts?"

Mr. Jope waved his hand towards the coach door. "Jump inside! Oh, you needn't be ashamed to ride behind Bill!"

"But who is Bill?" The Rev. Mr. Whitmore advanced to the coach door like a man in two minds. "Ah, I see—a funeral!" he exclaimed as a mute advanced—assailed from each coach window, as he passed, with indecorous obloquy—to announce that the *cortege* was ready to start. For the last two minutes heads had been popping out at these windows—heads with dyed ringlets and heads with artificially coloured noses—and their owners demanding to know if Ben Jope meant to keep them there all day, if the

corpse was expected to lead off the ball, and so on; and I, cowering by the coach step, had shrunk from their gaze as I flinched now under Mr. Whitmore's.

"Hallo!" said he, and gave me (as I thought) a searching look. "What's this? A chimney-sweep?"

"If your Reverence will not object?"

I turned my eyes away, but felt that this clergyman was studying me. "Not at all," said he quietly after a moment's pause. "Is he bound for Dock, too?"

"He said so."

"Eh? Then we'll see that he gets there. After you, youngster!" To my terror the words seemed charged with meaning, but I dared not look him in the face. I clambered in and dropped into a seat with my back to the driver. He placed himself opposite, nursing the valise on his knees. Ben Jope came last and slammed-to the door after him.

"Way-ho!" he shouted. "Easy canvas!" and with that plumped down beside me, and took off his tarpaulin hat, extracted a handkerchief, and carefully wiped his brow and the back of his neck.

"Well!" he sighed. "Bill's launched, anyhow."

"Shipmate?" asked the clergyman.

"Messmate," answered Mr. Jope; and, opening his mouth, pointed down it with his forefinger. "Not that a better fellow ever lived."

"I can quite believe it," said Mr. Whitmore sympathetically. He had a pleasant voice, but somehow I did not want to catch his eye. Instead I kept my gaze fastened upon the knees of his well-fitting pantaloons. No divine could have been more correctly attired, and yet there was a latent horsiness about his cut. I set him down for a sporting parson from the country, and wondered why he wore clothes so much superior to those of the Plymouth parsons known to me by sight.

"Just listen to that now!" exclaimed Mr. Jope. A cornet in one of the coaches ahead had struck up *Tom Bowling*, and before we reached the head of the street from coach after coach the funeral party broke into song:

"Here, a sheer hulk, lies poor Tom Bowling,
The darling of his crew-ew;
No more he'll hear the te—empest how—wow—ling,
For death has broach'd him to.
His form was of the—e ma—hanliest beau—eau—ty—"

"I wouldn't say that, quite," observed Mr. Jope pensively. "To begin with, he'd had the small-pox."

"*De gustibus nil nisi bonum*," Mr. Whitmore observed soothingly.

"What's that?"

"Latin."

"Wonderful! Would ye mind saying it again?"

The words were obligingly repeated.

"Wonderful! And what might be the meaning of it, making so bold?"

"It means 'Speak well of the dead.'"

"Well, we're doing of it, anyhow. Hark to 'em ahead there!"

The *cortege*, in fact, was attracting general attention. Folks on the pavement halted to watch and grin as we went by: one or two, catching sight of familiar faces within the coaches, waved their handkerchiefs or shouted back salutations: and as we crawled out of Old Town Street and past St. Andrew's Church a small crowd raised three cheers for us. And still above it the cornet blared and the mourners' voices rose uproarious:

"His friends were many and true-hearted,
His Poll was kind and fair;
And then he'd sing so blithe and jolly,

Ah, many's the time and oft!
But mirth is turned to melanchol—ol—y—
For Tom is gone aloft."

"Bill couldn't sing a note," Mr. Jope murmured: "but as you say, sir—Would you oblige us again?" Again the Latin was repeated, and he swung round upon me. "Think of that, now! Be you a scholar, hey?—read, write and cipher? How would you spell 'sojer' for instance?"

The question knocked the wind out of me, and I felt my face whitening under the clergyman's eyes.

"Soldier—S.O.L.D.I.E.R," I managed to answer, but scarce above a whisper.

"Very good: now make a rhyme to it."

"I—please, sir, I don't know any rhymes."

"Well, that's honest, anyway. Now I'll tell you why I asked." He turned and addressed Mr. Whitmore. "I'm Cornish born, sir; from Saltash, up across the river. Afore I went to sea there was a maid livin' next door to us that wanted to marry me. Well, when she found I wasn't to be had, she picked up with a fellow from the Victualling Yard and married he, and came down to Dock to live. Man's name was Babbage, and they hadn't been married six months afore he tumbled into a brine-vat and was drowned. 'That's one narrow escape to me,' I said. Next news I had was a letter telling me she'd a boy born, and please would I stand godfather? I didn't like to say no, out of respect to her family. So I wrote home from Gibraltar that I was agreeable, only it must be done by proxy and she mustn't make it no precedent. That must be ten years back; and what with one thing and another I never set eyes 'pon mother or child till yesterday when— having to run down to Dock to order Bill's grave—I thought 'twould be neighbourly to drop 'em a visit. I found the boy growed to be a terrible plain child, about the size of this youngster. I didn't like the boy at all. So I says to his mother, 'I s'pose he's clever?'—for dang it! thinks I, he must be clever to make up for being so plain-featured as all that. 'Benjy'—she'd a-called him Benjamin after me—'Benjy's the cleverest child for his age that ever you see,' she says. 'Why,' says she, 'he'll pitch-to and make up a rhyme 'pon anything!' 'Can he so?' I says, pulling a great crown-piece out of my pocket (not that I liked the cut of his jib, but the woman had been hinting about my being his godfather): 'Now, my lad, let's see if you're so gifted as your mother makes out. There's a sojer now passin' the window. Make a rhyme 'pon he, and you shall have the money.' What d'ye think that ghastly boy did? 'Aw, that's easy,' he says—"

'Sojer, sojer,
Diddy, diddy, dodger!'

"'Now hand me over the money,' he says. I could have slapped his ear."

Almost as he ended his simple story, the procession came to a halt: the strains of *Tom Bowling* changed into noisy—and, on the part of the ladies, very unladylike—expostulations. Mr. Jope started forward and leaned out of the window.

"I think," said the Rev. Mr. Whitmore, "we have arrived at the toll-gate."

"D'ye mean to say the sharks want to take toll on Bill?"

"Likely enough."

"On Bill? And him a-going to his long home? Here—hold hard!" Mr. Jope leapt out into the roadway and disappeared.

Upon us two, left alone in the coach, there fell a dreadful silence. Mr. Whitmore leaned forward and touched my knee; and I met his eye.

The face I looked into was thin and refined; clean-shaven and a trifle pale as if with the habit of study. A slight baldness by the temples gave the brow unusual height. His eyes I did not like at all: instead of soothing the terror in mine they seemed to be drinking it in and tasting it and calculating.

"I passed by the Barbican just now," said he; "and heard some inquiries about a small chimney-sweep."

He paused, as if waiting. But I had no speech in me.

"It was a very strange story they were telling—a very dreadful and strange story: still when I came upon you I saw, of course, it was incredible. Boys of your size"—he hesitated and left the sentence unfinished. "Still, you may have seen something—hey?"

Again I could not answer.

"At any rate," he went on, "I gave you the benefit of the doubt and resolved to warn you. It was a mistake to run away: but the

mischief's done. How were you proposing to make off?"

"You—you won't give me up, sir?"

"No, for I think you must be innocent—of what they told me, at least. I feel so certain of it that, as you see, my conscience allows me to warn you. In the first place, avoid the Torpoint Ferry. It will without doubt be watched. I should make for the docks, hide until night, and try to stow myself on shipboard. Secondly"—he put out a hand and softly unfastened the coach door—"I am going to leave you. Our friend Mr. Jope is engaged, I see, in an altercation with the toll-keeper. He seems a good-natured fellow. The driver (it may help you to know) is drunk. Of course, if by ill-luck they trace me out, to question me, I shall be obliged to tell what I know. It amounts to very little: still—I have no wish to tell it. One word more: get a wash as soon as you can, and by some means acquire a clean suit of clothes. I may be then unable to swear to you: may be able to say that your face is as unfamiliar to me as it was—or as mine was to you—when Mr. Jope introduced us. Eh?" His look was piercing.

"Thank you, sir."

He picked up his valise, nodded, and after a swift glance up the street and around at the driver, to make sure that his head was turned, stepped briskly out upon the pavement and disappeared around the back of the coach.

CHAPTER IX.

SALTASH FERRY.

Apparently the hackney coachman was accustomed to difficulties with the toll-gate; for he rested on the box in profoundest slumber, recumbent, with his chin sunk on his chest; and only woke up—with a start which shook the vehicle—when a black hearse with plumes waving went rattling by us and back towards Plymouth.

A minute later Mr. Jope reappeared at the coach door, perspiring copiously, but triumphant.

"Oh, it's been heavinly!" he announced. "Why, hallo! Where's his Reverence?"

"He couldn't wait, sir. He—he preferred to walk."

"Eh? I didn't see 'en pass the toll-bar. That's a pity, too; for I wanted to take his opinion. Oh, my son, it's been heavinly! First of all I tried argyment and called the toll-man a son of a bitch; and then he fetched up a constable, and, as luck would have it, Nan—she's in the second coach—knew all about *him*; leastways, she talked as if she did. Well, the toll-man stuck to his card of charges and said he hadn't made the law, but it was threepence for everything on four wheels. 'Four wheels?' I said. 'Don't talk so weak! We brought nothing into the world and we can't take it out; but you'd take the breeches off a Highlander,' I says. 'He's on four wheels,' says the fellow, stubborn as ever. 'So was Elijah,' says I; 'but if you're so mighty particular, we'll try ye another way.' I paid off the crew of the hearse, gave the word to cast loose, and down we dumped poor Bill slap in the middle of the roadway. 'Now,' says I, 'we'll leave talking of wheels. What's your charge for 'en on the flat?' 'Eight bearers at a ha'penny makes fourpence,' he says. 'No, no, my son,' I says, 'there ain't a-going to be no bearers. *He's* happy enough if he stops here all night. You may charge 'en as a covered conveyance, as I see you've a right to; but the card says nothing about rate of drivin', except that it mustn't be reckless; and, you may lay to it, Bill won't be that.' At first the constable talked big about obstructing the traffic: but Nan was telling the crowd such terrible things about his past that for very shame he grew quiet, and the pair agreed that, by lashin' Bill a-top of the first coach, we might pass him through *gratis* as personal luggage—Why, what's the boy cryin' for? It's all over now; and a principle's a principle."

But still, as the squadron got under way again and moved on amid the cheers of the populace, I sat speechless, dry-eyed, shaken with dreadful sobs.

"Easy, my lad—don't start the timbers. In trouble—hey?"

I nodded.

"I thought as much, when I shipped ye. Sit up, and tell me; but first listen to this. All trouble's big to a boy, but one o' your age don't often do what's past mendin', if he takes it honest. That's comfort, hey? Very well: now haul up and inspect damages, and we'll see what's to be done."

"It's about a Jew, sir," I stammered at length.

He nodded. "Now we're making headway."

"He—he was murdered. I saw him—"

"Look here," said Mr. Jope, very grave but seemingly not astonished: "hadn't you best get under the seat?"

"I—I didn't do it, sir. Really, I didn't."

"I'm not suggestin' it," said Mr. Jope. "Still, all circumstances considered, I'd get under the seat."

"If you wish it, sir."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say *that*: but 'tis my advice." And under the seat I crawled obediently. "Now, then," said he, with an absurd air of one addressing vacancy; "if you didn' do it, who did?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Then where's your difficulty?"

"But I saw a man staring in at the window—it was upstairs in a room close to the roof; and afterwards I found him on the roof, and he was all of a tremble, and in two minds, so he said, about pitching me over. I showed him the way down. If you please, sir," I broke off, "you're not to tell anyone about this, whatever happens!"

"Eh? Why not?"

"Because—" I hesitated.

"Friend of yours?"

"Not a friend, sir. He's a young man, in the Army; and his aunt—she used to be very kind to me. I ran away at first because I was afraid: but they can't do anything to me, can they? I didn't find the—the—the—Mr. Rodriguez, I mean—until he was dead. But if they catch me I shall have to give evidence, and Mr. Archie—though I don't believe he did it—"

"Belay there!" commanded Mr. Jope! "I'm beginning to see things clearer, though I won't say 'tis altogether easy to follow ye yet. Far as I can make out, you're not a bad boy. You ran away because you were scared. Well, I don't blame ye for that. I never seen a dead Jew myself, though I often wanted to. You won't go back if you can help it, 'cos why? 'Cos you don't want to tell on a man: 'cos his aunt's a friend o' yourn: and 'cos you don't believe he's guilty. What's your name?"

"Harry, sir: Harry Revel."

"Well, then, my name's Ben Jope, and as such you'll call me. I'm sorry, in a way, that it rhymes with 'rope,' which it never struck me before in all these years, and wouldn't now but for thinkin' 'pon that ghastly godson o' mine and how much better I stomach ye. I promise nothing, mind: but if you'll keep quiet under that seat, I'll think it over."

Certainly, having made my confession, I felt easier in mind as I lay huddled under the seat, though it seemed to me that Mr. Jope took matters lightly. For the squadron ahead had resumed the singing of *Tom Bowling* and he sat humming a bar or two here and there with evident pleasure, and paused only to bow out of window and acknowledge the cheers of the passers-by.

At the end of five minutes, however, he spoke aloud again.

"The first thing," he announced, "is to stay where you are. Let me think, now—Who seen you? There's the parson: he's gone. And there's the jarvey: he's drunk as a lord. Anyone else?"

"There was one of the young ladies that looked out of window."

"True: then 'tis too risky. When the company gets out, you'll have to get out. Let the jarvey see you do it: the rest don't matter. You can pretend to walk with us a little way, then slip back and under the seat again—takin' care that this time the jarvey *don't* see you. That's easy enough, eh?"

I assured him I could manage it.

"Then leave the rest to me, and bide still. I got to think of Bill, now; and more by token here's the graveyard gate!"

He thrust the door open and motioned me to tumble out ahead of him. As the rest of the funeral guests alighted, he worked me very skilfully before him into the driver's view, having taken care to set the coach door wide on the off side.

"It's understood that you wait, all o' ye?" said Mr. Jope to the driver.

The man lifted a lazy eye. "Take your time," he said: "don't mind me. I hope "—he stiffened himself suddenly—"I knows a gentleman when I sees one."

Mr. Jope turned away and from that moment ignored my existence. The coffin was unlashed and lowered from the leading coach; the clergyman at the gate began to recite the sacred office, and the funeral train, reduced to decorum by his voice, followed him as he turned, and trooped along the path towards the mortuary chapel. I moved with the crowd to its porch, drew aside to make way for a lady in rouge and sprigged muslin, and slipped behind the chapel wall. The far end of it hid me from the view of the coaches, and from it a pretty direct path led to a gap in the hedge, and a stile. Reaching and crossing this, I found myself in a by-lane leading back into the high road. There were no houses with windows to overlook me. I sauntered around at leisure, took the line of coaches in the rear, and crawled back to my hiding-place—it astonished me with what ease. Every driver sat on his box, and every driver slumbered.

The mystery of this was resolved when—it seemed an hour later; but actually, I dare say, Bill's obsequies took but the normal twenty minutes or so—Mr. Jope shepherded his flock back through the gates and, red-eyed, addressed them while he distributed largess along the line of jarveys.

"I thank ye, friends," said he in a muffled voice which at first I attributed to emotion. "The fare home is paid to the foot of George Street—I arranged that with the jobmaster, and this here little gift is private, between me and the drivers, to drink Bill's health. And now I'll shake hands." Here followed sounds of coughing and choking, and he resumed in feeble gasping sentences, "Thank ye, my dear; I've brought up the two guineas, but you've a-made me swallow my quid o' baccy. Hows'ever, you meant it for the best. And that's what I had a mind to say to ye all." His voice grew firmer—"You're a pleasant lot, and we've spent the time very lively and sociable, and you done this here last service to Bill in a way that brings tears to my eyes. Still, if you won't mind my saying it, a little of ye lasts a long time, and I'm going home to live clean. So here's wishing all well, and good-bye!"

Not one of the party seemed to resent this dismissal. The women laughed hilariously and called him a darling. There was a smacking exchange of kisses; and the coaches, having been packed at length, started for home to the strains of the cornet and a chorus of cheers. Mr. Jope sprang in beside me, and leaning out of the farther window, waved his neckerchief for a while, then pensively readjusted it, and called to the driver—

"St. Budeaux!"

The driver, after a moment, turned heavily in his seat, and answered, "Nonsense!"

"I tell ye, I want to drive to St. Budeaux, by Saltash Ferry."

"And *I* tell *you*, 'Get out!' St. Budeaux? The idea!"

"Why, what's wrong with St. Budeaux?"

"Oh, I'm not goin' to *argue* with you," said the driver. "I'm goin' home."

And he began to turn his horse's head. Mr. Jope sprang out upon the roadway. The driver, with sudden and unexpected agility, dropped off—on the other side.

"Look here, it's grindin' the faces of the poor!" he pleaded, breathing hard.

"It *will* be," assented Mr. Jope grimly.

"I been up all night: at a ball."

"If it comes to that, so've I: at Symonds's."

"Mine was at Admiralty House," said the driver. "I wasn' dancin'."

"What about the horse?"

"The horse? the ho—Oh, I take your meanin'! The horse is all right: he's a fresh one. Poor I may be," he announced inconsecutively, "but I wouldn' live the life of one of them there women of fashion, not for a million of money." He ruminated for a moment. "Did I say a million?"

"You did."

"Well I don't wishaggerate. I don't, if you understand me, wish—to—exaggerate: so we'll put it at half a million."

"All right: jump up!"

To my astonishment, no less than to Mr. Jope's (who had scarcely time to skip back into the coach), the man scrambled up to his seat without more ado, flicked his whip, and began to urge the horse forward. At the end of five minutes or so, however, he pulled up just as abruptly.

"Eh?" Mr. Jope put forth his head. "Ah, I see—public-house!"

He alighted, and entered; returned with a pot of porter in one hand and a glass of brandy in the other; dexterously tipped half the brandy into the porter, and handed up the mixture. The driver took it down at one steady draught.

The pot and glass were returned and we jogged on again. We were now well beyond the outskirts of Stoke and between dusty hedges over which the honeysuckle trailed. Butterflies poised themselves and flickered beside us, and the sun, as it climbed, drew up from the land the fragrance of freshly mown hay and mingled it with the stuffy odour of the coach. By and by we halted again, by another roadside inn, and again Mr. Jope fetched forth and administered insidious drink.

"If this is going to last," said the charioteer dreamily, "may I have strength to see the end o't!"

I did not catch this prayer, but Mr. Jope reported it to me as he resumed his seat, with an ill-timed laugh. The fellow, who had been gathering up his reins, lurched round suddenly and gazed in through the glass front.

"You was sayin'?" he demanded.

"Nothing," answered Mr. Jope hastily. "I was talking to myself, that's all."

"The point is, Am I, or am I not, an objic of derision?"

"If you don't drive on this moment, I'll step around and punch your head."

"Tha's all right. Tha's right as ninepence. It's not much I arsk— only to have things clear." He drove on.

We halted at yet another public-house—I remember its name, the Half a Face—and must have journeyed a mile or so beyond it when the end came. We had locked wheels in the clumsiest fashion with a hay-wagon; and the wagoner, who had quartered to give us room and to spare, was pardonably wroth. Mr. Jope descended, pacified him, and stepped around to the back of the coach, the hinder axle of which, a moment later, I felt gently lifted beneath me and slewed clear of the obstruction.

"My word, mister, but you've a tidy strength!" exclaimed the wagoner.

"No more than you, my son—if so much: 'tain't the strength, but the application. That's 'Nelson's touch.' Ever heard of it?"

"I've heard of *him*, I should hope. Look y' here, mister, did you ever know him? Honour bright, now!"

"Friends, my son: dear, dear friends! And the gentleman 'pon the box, there, drunk some of the very rum he was brought home in. He's never recovered it."

"And to think of my meeting you!"

"Ay, 'tis a small world," agreed Mr. Jope cheerfully: "like a cook's galley, small and cosy and no time to chat in it. Now then, my slumb'ring ogre!"

The driver, who from the moment of the mishap had remained comatose, shook his reins feebly and we jogged forward. But this was his last effort. At the next sharp bend in the road he lurched suddenly, swayed for a moment, and toppled to earth with a thud. The horse came to a halt.

Mr. Jope was out in a moment. He glanced up and down the road.

"Tumble out, youngster! There's no one in sight."

"Is—is he hurt?"

"Blest if *I* know." He stooped over the prostrate body. "Hurt?" he asked, and after a moment reported, "No, I reckon not: talkin' in his sleep, more like—for the only word I can make out is 'Jezebel.' That don't help us much, do it?" He scanned the road again. "There's only one thing to do. I can't drive ye: I never steered yet with the tiller lines in front—it al'ays seemed to me un-Christian. We must take to the fields. I used to know these parts, and by the bearings we can't be half a mile above the ferry. Here, through that gate to the left!"

We left the man lying and his horse cropping the hedgerow a few paces ahead; and struck off to the left, down across a field of young corn interspersed with poppies. The broad estuary shone at our feet, with its beaches uncovered—for the tide was low—and across its crowded shipping I marked and recognised (for Mr. Trapp had often described them to me) a line of dismal prison-hulks, now disused, moored head to stern off a mudbank on the farther shore.

"Plain sailing, my lad," panted Mr. Jope, as the cornfield threw up its heat in our faces. "See, yonder's Saltash!" He pointed up the river to a small town which seemed to run toppling down a steep hill and spread itself like a landslip at the base. "I got a sister living there, if we can only fetch across; a very powerful woman; widowed, and sells fish."

We took an oblique line down the hillside, and descended, some two or three hundred yards below the ferry, upon a foreshore firm for the most part and strewn with flat stones, but melting into mud by the water's edge. A small trading ketch lay there, careened as the tide had left her; but at no great angle, thanks to her flat-bottomed build. A line of tattered flags, with no wind to stir them, led down from the truck of either mast, and as we drew near I called Mr. Jope's attention to an immense bunch of foxgloves and pink valerian on her bowsprit end.

"Looks like a wedding, don't it?" said he; and turning up his clean white trousers he strolled down to the water's edge for a closer look. "Scandalous," he added, examining her timbers.

"What's scandalous?"

He pointed with his finger. "Rotten as touch"; and he pensively drew out an enormous clasp-knife. "A man ought to be fined for treating human life so careless. See here!"

He drove the knife at a selected spot, and the blade sank in to the hilt.

From the interior, prompt on the stroke, arose a faint scream.

CHAPTER X.

I GO ON A HONEYMOON.

"Sure-ly I know that voice?" said Mr. Jope.

He drew out the knife reflectively. It relieved me to see that no blood dyed the blade.

"Oh, Mr. Jope, I was afraid you'd stabbed him!"

"'Tisn't a him, 'tis a her. I touched somebody up, and that's the truth."

"Ahoy there!" said a voice immediately overhead; and we looked up. A round-faced man was gazing down on us from the tilted bulwarks. "You might ha' given us notice," he grumbled.

"I knew 'twas soft, but not so soft as all that," Mr. Jope explained.

"Got such a thing as a scrap o' chalk about ye?"

"No."

The round-faced man felt in his pocket and tossed down a piece. "Mark a bit of a line round the place, will ye? I'll give it a lick of paint afore the tide rises. It's only right the owner should have it pointed out to him."

"Belong to these parts?" asked Mr. Jope affably, having drawn the required circle. "I don't seem to remember your face."

"No?" The man seemed to think this out at leisure. "I was married this morning," he said at length with an air of explanation.

"Wish ye joy. Saltash maid?"

"Widow. Name of Sarah Treleaven."

"Why that's my sister!" exclaimed Mr. Jope.

"Is it?" The round-faced man took the news without apparent surprise or emotion. "Well, I'm married to her, any way."

"Monstrous fine woman," Mr. Jope observed cheerfully.

"Ay; she's all that. It seems like a dream. You'd best step on board: the ladder's on t'other side."

As we passed under the vessel's stern I looked up and read her name— *Glad Tidings, Port of Fowey*.

"I've a-broken it to her," our host announced, meeting us at the top of the ladder. "She says you're to come down."

Down the companion we followed him accordingly and so into a small cabin occupied—or, let me rather say, filled—by the stoutest woman it has ever been my lot to meet. She reclined—in such a position as to display a pair of colossal feet, shoeless, clothed in thick worsted stockings—upon a locker on the starboard side: and no one, regarding her, could wonder that this also was the side towards which the vessel listed. Her broad recumbent back was supported by a pile of seamen's bags, almost as plethoric as herself and containing (if one might judge from a number of miscellaneous articles protruding from their distended mouths) her bridal outfit. Unprepared as she was for a second visitor in the form of a small chimney-sweep, she betrayed no astonishment; but after receiving her brother's kiss on either cheek bent a composed gaze on me, and so eyed me for perhaps half a minute. Her features were not uncomely.

"O.P.," she addressed her husband. "Ask him, Who's his friend?"

"Who's your friend?" asked the husband, turning to Mr. Jope.

"Chimney-sweep," said Mr. Jope; "leastways, so apprenticed, as I understand."

The pair gazed at me anew.

"I asked," said the woman at length, "because this is a poor place for chimbleys."

"He's in trouble," Mr. Jope explained; "in trouble—along o' killing a Jew."

"Oh no, Mr. Jope!" I cried. "I didn't—"

"Couldn't," interrupted his sister shortly, and fell into a brown study. "Constables after him?" she asked.

Mr. Jope nodded.

Her next utterance struck me as irrelevant, to say the least of it. "Ben, 'tis high time you followed O.P.'s example."

"Meaning?" queried Ben.

"O, Onesimus. P, Pengelly. Example, marriage. There's the widow Babbage, down to Dock: she always had a hankering for you. You're neglecting your privileges."

"Ever seen that boy of hers?" asked Ben in an aggrieved voice. "No, of course you haven't, or you wouldn't suggest it. And why marry me up to a widow?"

"O.P.," said the lady, "tell him you prefer it."

"I prefer it," said Mr. Pengelly.

"Oh," explained Ben, "present company always excepted, o' course. I wish you joy."

"Thank ye," the lady answered graciously. "You shall drink the same by and by in a dish o' tea; which I reckon will suit ye best this morning," she added eyeing him. "O.P., put on the kettle."

Ben Jope winced and attempted to turn the subject. "What's your cargo, this trip?" he asked cheerfully.

"I didn't write," she went on, ignoring the question. "O.P. took me so sudden."

"Oh, Sarah!" Mr. Pengelly expostulated.

"You did; you know you did, you rogue!"

Mr. Pengelly took her amorous glance and turned to us. "It seems like a dream," he said, and went out with the kettle.

The lady resumed her business-like air. "We sail for Looe next tide. It's queer now, your turning up like this."

"Providential. I came o' purpose, though, to look ye up."

"I might ha' been a limpet."

"Eh?"

"By the way you prised at me with that knife o' yours. And you call it Providence."

Ben grinned. "Providence or no, you'll get this lad out o' the way, Sarah?"

"H'm?" She considered me. "I can't take him home to Looe."

"Why not?"

"Folks would talk," she said modestly.

"'Od rabbit it!" exclaimed Ben. "He's ten year old; and you were saying just now that the man took ye sudden!"

"Well, I'll see what can be done: but on conditions."

"Conditions?"

"Ay, we'll talk that over while he's cleanin' himself." She lifted her voice and called, "O.P., is that water warm?"

"Middlin'," came O.P.'s voice from a small cuddy outside.

"Then see to the child and wash him. Put him inside your foul-weather suit for the time, and then take his clothes out on the beach and burn 'em. That seam'll be the better for a lick of pitch afore the tide rises, and you can use the same fire for the caldron."

So she dismissed me; and in the cuddy, having washed myself clean of soot, I was helped by Mr. Pengelly into a pair of trousers which reached to my neck, and a seaman's guernsey, which descended to my knees. My stockings I soaped, scrubbed, wrung out and laid across the companion rail to dry: but, as it turned out, I was never to use them or my shoes again. My sweep's jumper, waistcoat, and breeches Mr. Pengelly carried off, to burn them.

All this while Ben Jope and his sister had been talking earnestly: I had heard at intervals the murmur of their voices through the partition; but no distinct words save once, when Mrs. Pengelly called out to her husband to keep an eye along the beach and report the appearance of constables. Now so ludicrous was the figure I cut in my borrowed clothes that on returning to the cabin I expected to be welcomed with laughter. To my surprise, Ben Jope arose at once with a serious face and shook me by the hand.

"Good-bye, my lad," he said. "She makes it a condition."

"You're not leaving me, Mr. Jope!"

"Worse'n that. I'm a-goin to marry the widow Babbage."

"Oh, ma'am!" I appealed.

"It'll do him good," said Mrs. Pengelly.

"I honestly think, Sarah," poor Ben protested, "that just now you're setting too much store by wedlock altogether."

"It's my conditions with you; and you may take it or leave it, Ben." His sister was adamant, and he turned ruefully to go.

"And you're doing this for me, Mr. Jope!" I caught his hand.

"Don't 'ee mention it. Blast the child!" He crammed his tarpaulin hat on his head. "I don't mean you, my lad, but t'other one. If he makes up a rhyme 'pon me, I'll—I'll—"

Speech failed him. He wrung my hand, staggered up the companion, and was gone.

"It'll be the making of him," said Mrs. Pengelly with composure. "I don't like the woman myself, but a better manager you wouldn't meet."

She remembered presently that Ben had departed without his promised dish of tea, and this seemed to suggest to her that the

time had arrived for preparing a meal. With singular dexterity and almost without shifting her posture she slipped one of the seamen's bags from somewhere beneath her shoulders, drew it upon her lap, and produced a miscellaneous feast—a cheek of pork, a loaf, a saffron cake; a covered jar which, being opened, diffused the fragrance of marinated pilchards; a bagful of periwinkles, a bunch of enormous radishes, a dish of cream wrapped about in cabbage-leaves, a basket of raspberries similarly wrapped; finally, two bottles of stout.

"To my mind," she explained as she set these forth on the table beside her, each accurately in its place, and with such economy of exertion that only one hand and wrist seemed to be moving, "for my part, I think a widow-woman should be married quiet. I don't know what *your* opinion may be?"

I thought it wise to say that her opinion was also mine.

"It took place at eight o'clock this morning." She disengaged a pin from the front of her bodice, extracted a periwinkle from its shell, ate it, sighed, and said, "It seems years already. I gathered these myself, so you may trust 'em." She disengaged another pin and handed it to me. "We meant to be alone, but there's plenty for three. Now you're here, you'll have to give a toast—or a sentiment," she added. She made this demand in form when O.P. appeared, smelling strongly of pitch, and taking his seat on the locker opposite, helped himself to marinated pilchards.

"But I don't know any sentiments, ma'am."

"Nonsense. Didn't they learn you any poetry at school?"

Most happily I bethought me of Miss Plinlimmon's verses in my Testament—now alas! left in the Trapps' cottage and lost to me; and recited them as bravely as I could.

"Ah!" sighed Mrs. Pengelly, "there's many a true word spoken in jest. 'Where shall we be in ten years' time?' Where indeed?"

"Here," her husband cheerfully suggested, with his mouth full.

"Hush, O.P.! You never buried a first."

She demanded more, and I gave her Wolfe's last words before Quebec (signed by him in Miss Plinlimmon's Album).

"'They run!'—but who? 'The Frenchmen!' Such
Was the report conveyed to the dying hero.
'Thank Heaven!' he cried, 'I thought as much.'
In Canada the glass is frequently below zero."

On hearing the author's name and my description of Miss Plinlimmon, she fell into deep thought.

"I suppose, now, she'd look higher than Ben?"

I told her that, so far as I knew, Miss Plinlimmon had no desire to marry.

"She'd look higher, with her gifts, you may take my word for it." But a furrow lingered for some time on Mrs. Pengelly's brow, and (I think) a doubt in her mind that she had been too precipitate.

The meal over, she composed herself to slumber; and Mr. Pengelly and I spent the afternoon together on deck, where he smoked many pipes while I scanned the shore for signs of pursuit. But no: the tide rose and still the foreshore remained deserted. Above us the ferry plied lazily, and at whiles I could hear the voices of the passengers. Nothing, even to my strained ears, spoke of excitement; and yet, in the great town beyond the hill, murder had been done and men were searching for me. So the day dragged by.

Towards evening, as the vessel beneath us fleeted and the deck resumed its level, Mr. Pengelly began to uncover the mainsail. I asked him if he expected any crew aboard? For surely, thought I, he could not work this ketch of forty tons or so single-handed.

He shook his head. "There was a boy, but I paid him off. Sarah takes the helm from this night forth. You wouldn't believe it, but she can swig upon a rope too: and as for pulling an oar—" He went on to tell me that she had been rowing a pair of paddles when his eye first lit on her: and I gathered that the courtship had been conducted on these waters under the gaze of Saltash, the male in one boat pursuing, the female eluding him in another, for long indomitable, but at length gracefully surrendering.

My handiness with the ropes, when I volunteered to help in hoisting sail, surprised and even perplexed him. "But I thought you was a chimney-sweeper?" he insisted. I told him then of my voyages with Mr. Trapp, yet without completely reassuring him.

Hitherto he had taken me on my own warrant, and Ben's, without a trace of suspicion: but henceforth I caught him eyeing me furtively from time to time, and overheard him muttering as he went about his preparations.

As he had promised, when the time came for hauling up our small anchor, Mrs. Pengelly emerged from the companion hatch like a *geni* from a bottle. She bore two large hunches of saffron cake and handed one to each of us before moving aft to uncover the wheel.

CHAPTER XI.

FLIGHT.

The sails drew as we got the anchor on board; and by the time O.P. and I had done sluicing the hawser clean of the mud it brought up, we were working down the Hamoaze with a light and baffling wind, but carrying a strong tide under us. Evening fell with a warm yellow haze: the banks slipping past us grew dim and dimmer: here and there a light shone among the long-shore houses. I felt more confident, and no longer concealed myself as we tacked under the sterns of the great ships at anchor or put about when close alongside.

As we cleared Devil's Point and had our first glimpse of the grey line where night was fast closing down on open sea, I noted a certain relaxation in Mr. Pengelly, as if he too had been feeling the strain. He began to chat with me. The wind, he said, was backing and we might look for this spell of weather to break up before long. Once past the Rame we should be right as ninepence and might run down the coast on a soldier's wind: it would stiffen a bit out yonder unless he was mistaken. He pulled out his pipe and lit it. Aft loomed the bulk of Mrs. Pengelly at the wheel. Save for a call now and again to warn us that the helm was down, to put about, she steered in silence. And she steered admirably.

We had opened the lights of Cawsand and were heading in towards it on the port tack when, as O.P. smoked and chatted and I watched the spark of the Eddystone growing and dying, her voice reached us, low but distinct.

"There's a boat coming. Get below, boy!"

Sure enough as I scrambled for the hatchway in a flutter, someone hailed us out of the darkness.

"Ahoy, there!"

"Ahoy!" O.P. called back, after a moment, into the darkness.

"What's your name?"

"The *Glad Tidings*, of Looe, and thither bound. Who be you?"

"Water-guard. Is that you speaking, Mr. Pengelly?"

"Ay, sure. Anything the matter?"

"Seen such a thing as the body of a young chimney-sweep on your way down? Age, ten or thereabouts. There's one missing."

"You don't say so! Drowned?"

His wife having put about, Mr. Pengelly obligingly hauled a sheet or two to windward, and brought the *Glad Tidings* almost to a standstill, allowing the boat to come close alongside.

"Drowned?" he asked again.

"Worse than that," said the officer's voice (and it sounded dreadfully close); "there's been murder committed, and the child was in the house at the time. The belief is, he's been made away with."

"Save us all! Murder? Whereto?"

"On the Barbican—an old Jew there, called Rodriguez. Who's that you've got at the helm?"

"Missus."

"Never knew ye was married."

"Nor did I, till this mornin'."

"Eh? Wish ye luck, I'm sure; and you, ma'am, likewise!"

"Thank ye, Mr. Tucker," answered the lady. "The same to you and many of 'em—which by that I don't mean wives."

"Good Lord, is that *you*, Sally? Well, I'm jiggered! And I owe you ninepence for that last pair of flatfish you sold me!"

"Tenpence," said Mrs. Pengelly. "But I can trust a gentleman. Where d'ye say this here murder was committed?"

"Barbican."

"I don't wonder at anything happening there. They're a stinking lot. Why don't ye s'arch the shipping there and in Cattewater?"

"We've been s'arching all day. And now the constables are off towards Stoke—it seems a child answering all particulars was seen in that direction this morning."

"That don't look like being made away with."

"In a case like this," answered Mr. Tucker sagely, "as often as not there's wheels within wheels. Well, I won't detain ye. Good-night, friends!"

"Good-night!"

I heard the creak of thole-pins as the rowers gave way, and the wash of oars as the boat shot off into the dark. Mr. Pengelly sent me a low whistle and I crept forth.

"Hear what they said?" he asked.

"They—they didn't give much trouble."

"Depends what you call trouble." He seemed slightly hurt in his feelings, and added, with asperity and obvious truth, "Carry it off how you will, a honeymoon's a honeymoon, and a man doesn't expect to be interrupted with questions about a sweep's apprentice."

"Stand by!" cautioned the voice aft, low and firm as before. "By the sound of it they've stopped rowing."

"If they come on us again, we're done for. That Tucker's a fool, but I noticed one or two of the men muttering together."

"Sounds as if they were putting about. Can the boy swim?" asked Mrs. Pengelly anxiously.

"I'll bet he can't."

"But I can," said I. "If you'll put the helm down, ma'am, and hold in, I think she'll almost fetch Penlee Point. I don't want to get you into trouble."

We all listened. And sure enough the sound of oars was approaching again out of the darkness.

"Mr. Pengelly can lower me overside," I urged, "as soon as we're near shore. It's safest in every way."

"So best," she answered shortly, and again put the *Glad Tidings* about. I began to pluck off my clothes.

The boat was evidently watching us: for, dark as the evening had grown, almost as soon as our helm went down the sound of oars ceased astern—to begin again a few seconds later, but more gently, as if someone had given the order for silence. O.P. peered under the slack of the mainsail.

"There she is!" he muttered. "Tucker will be trying to force her alongside under our lee." He picked up and uncoiled a spare rope. "You'd best take hold o' this and let me slip ye over the starboard side, forra'd there, as she goes about. Bain't afeard, hey?"

"I'm not afraid of anything but being caught, sir."

"Sarah will take her in close: there's plenty water."

"O.P.," said the voice aft.

"My angel."

"Tell 'en he's a good boy, and I wouldn' mind having one like him."

"You're a good boy," said O.P., and covered the remainder of the message with a discreet cough. "Seems to me Tucker's holdin' off a bit," he added, peering again under the sail. "Wonder what his game is?"

But I was already stripped, and already the high land loomed over us. Down went the helm again, and "Now's your time," muttered O.P. as we scrambled forward to cast off sheets. Amid the flapping of her head sails as she hung for a moment or two in stays, I slipped overside and took the water easily while the black mass of her stern swung slowly round and covered me from view of the boat. Then, as the tall side began to gather way and slip by me, I cast a glance towards land and dived.

I came to the surface warily and trod water whilst I spied for the boat, which—as I reckoned—must be more than a gunshot distant. The sound of oars guided me, and I dived again in a terror. For she had not turned about to follow the ketch, but was heading almost directly towards me, as if to cut me off from the shore.

My small body was almost bursting when I rose for air and another look. The boat had not altered her course, and I gasped with a new hope. What if, after all, she were not pursuing me? I let my legs sink and trod water. No: I had not been spied. She was pointing straight for the shore. But what should take a long-boat, manned (as I made out) by a dark crowd of rowers and passengers, at this hour to this deserted spot? Why was she not putting-in for Cawsand, around the point? And did she carry the water-guard? Was this Tucker's boat after all, or another?

Still treading water, I heard her nose take the ground, and presently the feet of men shuffling, as they disembarked, over loose stones: then a low curse following on a slip and a splash. "Who's that talking?" a voice inquired, quick and angry. "Sergeant! Take that man's name." But apparently the sergeant could not discover him. The footfalls grew more regular and seemed to be mounting the cliff, along the base of which, perhaps a hundred yards from shore, the tide was now sweeping me. I gave myself to it and noiselessly, little by little working towards land, was borne out of hearing.

Another ten minutes and my feet touched bottom. I pulled myself out upon a weed-covered rock, and along it to a slate-strewn foreshore overhung by a low cliff of shale, grey and glimmering in the darkness. But even in the darkness a ridge of harder rock showed me a likely way. I remembered that the cliff hereabouts was of no great height and scalable in a score of places. Very cautiously, and sometimes sitting and straddling the ridge while my fingers sought a new grip, I mounted to the edge of a heathery down; and there, after pricking myself sorely among the furze-bushes that guarded it, found a passage through and cast myself at full length on the short turf.

For a while I lay and panted, flat on my back, staring up at the stars: for the wind had chopped about and was now drawing gently off shore, clearing the sky. But, though gentle, it had an edge of chill which by and by brought me to my feet again. Far out on the dark waters of the Sound glimmered the starboard light of the *Glad Tidings*, and it seemed to me that she was heading in for shore. Had the Pengellys too discovered that the boat was not the water-guard's? And was O.P. working the ketch back to give me a chance of rejoining her? Else why was she not slackening sheets and running? Vain hope! I suppose that the new slant of wind took some time in reaching her; for, just as I was preparing to creep back between the furze-whins and scramble down to the foreshore again, the green light was quenched. She had altered her helm and was clearing the Sound.

I dared not hail her. Indeed, had I risked it, the odds were against my voice carrying so far, to be recognised. And while I stood and searched the darkness into which she had disappeared, my ear caught again the muffled tramp of the soldiers, this time advancing towards me. I waited no longer, but started running for dear life up the shoulder of the down.

The swim and the chill breeze had numbed my legs and arms. After a few hundred yards, however, I felt life coming back to them, and I ran like a hare. I was stark naked, and here and there my feet struck a heather root pushed above the turf, or wounded themselves on lowlying sprouts of furze; but as my eyes grew used to the dark sward I learned to avoid these. So close the night hung around me that even on the sky-line I had no fear of being spied. I crossed the ridge and tore down the farther slope; stumbled through a muddy brook and mounted another hillside. My heart was drumming now, but terror held me to it—over this second ridge and downhill again.

I supposed myself but half-way down this slope, or only a little more, when in springing aside to avoid a low bush I missed footing altogether; went hurling down into night, dropped plumb upon another furze-bush—a withered one—and heard and felt it snap under me; struck the cliff-side, bruising my hip, and slid down on loose stones for another few yards. As I checked myself, sprawling, and came to a standstill, some of these stones rolled on and splashed into water far below.

For a minute or so, at full length on this treacherous bed, I could pluck up no heart to move. Then, inch by inch at first, I drew myself up to the broken bush and found beside it a flat ledge, smooth and grassy, which led inland and downwards. I think it must have been a sheep-track. I kept to it on hands and knees, and it brought me down to the head of a small cove where a faint line of briming showed the sea's edge rippling on a beach of flat grey stones.

My hip was hurting me, and I could run no farther. I groped along the base of the eastern cliff and crawled into a shallow cave close by a pile of seaweed which showed the high mark of the tide now receding. With daylight I might discover a better hiding-place. Meanwhile I snuggled down and drew a coverlet of seaweed over me for warmth.

CHAPTER XII.

I FALL AMONG SMUGGLERS.

I awoke to a most curious sensation. The night was still black and only the ridge of the cliff opposite showed, by the light of the many stars, its dull outline above; yet I felt that the whole beach had suddenly become crowded with people—that they were moving stealthily about me, whispering, picking their way among the loose stones, hunting me and yet hushing their voices as though themselves afraid.

At first, you may be sure—wakened as I was from sleep—I had no doubt but that this unseen band of folk was after me. All that followed my awakening passed so quickly that I cannot separate dreams now from guesses nor apprehensions from realities. I do remember, however, that, whereas the soldiers from whom I had run had been on foot, my first fears were of a pursuit by cavalrymen, and therefore it seems likely that some sound of horses' trampling must have set them in train: but, though I strained my ears, they detected nothing of the sort—only a subdued murmur, as of human voices, down by the water's edge, and now and again the cautious crunch of a footstep upon shingle. Even this I had not heard but for the extreme quiet on the sea under the off-shore wind.

Gradually, by the light of the stars, I separated from the surrounding shadows that of a whole mass of people inert and darkly crowded there: and then—almost as I guessed their business—the cliff above me shot up a flame; and their forms and their dismayed upturned faces stood out distinct in the glare of it.

"Loose the horses and clear!" yelled someone; and another voice deep and wrathful began to curse, but was drowned by a stampede of hoofs upon the shingle. Straight forth from the sea—or so it looked to me—some twenty or thirty naked horses, without rider, bit, or bridle, broke from the crowd and came plunging up the beach at a gallop. They were met by a roar from the cove-head, and with that a line of glittering helmets and cuirasses sprang out of the night and charged past me.

"Dragoons! Dragoons!"

As the yell reached me from the waterside and the men there scattered and ran, I saw the shock of the double charge—the flame overhead lighting up every detail of it. The riderless horses, though they opened and swerved, neither turned tail nor checked their pace, but heading suddenly towards the left wing of the troop went through it as water through a gate, the dragoons either vainly hacking at them with their sabres, or leaning from their saddles and as vainly attempting to grip the brutes. Grip there was none to be had. These were smugglers' horses, clipped to the skin, with houghed manes, and tails and bodies sleek with soft soap. Nor did the dragoons waste more trouble upon them, but charged forward and down upon the crowd at the water's edge.

And as they charged I saw—but could not believe—that on a sudden the crowd had vanished. A moment before they had been jostling, shouting, cursing. They were gone now like ghosts. The light still flared overhead. It showed no boat beyond the cove—only the troopers reaching right across it in an irregular line, as each man had been able to check his horse—the most of them on the verge of the shingle, but many floundering girth-deep, and one or two even swimming. The Riding Officer, who had followed them, was bawling and pointing with his whip towards the cliff—at what I could not tell.

I had no time to wonder: for an unholy din broke out, on the same instant, at the head of the beach. A couple of the smugglers' horses had been hurled over by the dragoons' impact, and lay, hurt beyond recovery, lashing out across the shingle with their heels. A third had gone down under a sabre-cut, but had staggered up and was lobbing after his comrades at a painful canter. They had traversed the heavy shingle, reached the harder stones at the cove's head and were sailing away at stretched gallop when a volley rang out from the shadow of the cliff there, and the scream of more than one mingled with fresh shouting. At that moment, and just before the flame above me sank and died almost as swiftly as it had first shot up, a soldier—not a dragoon, but a man in red coat and white breeches—ran forward and sprang at the girth of the wounded horse, which had stumbled again. He did the wise thing—for a single girth was these horses' only harness: but whether he caught it or not I could not tell. Ten or a dozen soldiers followed, to help him. And, the next instant, total darkness came down on the scene like a shutter.

It did not last long. The red-coats, it turned out, had brought lanterns, and now, at a shouted order from their commanding officer answering the call of the dragoon officer below, began to light them. They meant, I doubted not, to make a strict search of the cliffs; and, if they did—my cave being but a shallow one—there was no hope for me. But just then a dismounted trooper came

running up the beach, his scabbard scraping the shingle as he went by: and his first words explained the mystery of the crowd's disappearance.

"Where's your officer commanding?" he panted. "The devils have got away into the next cove through a kind of hole in the cliff—a kind of archway so far as we make out. They've blocked it with stones and posted three-four men there, threatening sudden death. By their own account they're armed. Major Dilke's holding them to parley, and wants the loan of a lantern while you, sir, march your men round and take the gang in the rear. They reckon they've none but us to deal with."

The infantry officer grunted that he understood, sent the trooper back with a lantern, and quietly formed up and marched off his company. From my hiding-place I caught scraps of the parley at the lower end of the beach—or rather of Major Dilke's share in it; for the smugglers answered him through a tunnel, and I could only hear their voices mumbling in response to the threats which he flung forth on the wide night. He was in no sweet temper, having been cheated of a rich haul: for the flare had, of course, warned away the expected boat, and I supposed that some of the red-coats had been dispatched at once to search the headland for the man who lit it. Revenge was now the Major's game, and, by his tune, he meant to have it.

But while I lay listening, a stone trickled from the cliff overhead and plumped softly upon the seaweed at the mouth of my cave. It was followed by a rush of small gravel (had the Major not, at the moment, been declaiming at his loudest, his men must surely have heard it): and this again by the plumb fall of a heavy body which still lay for a full five seconds after alighting, and then emitted a groan so eloquent that it raised the roots of my hair.

I held my breath. More seconds passed, and the body groaned again, still more dolefully.

We were within three yards of one another; and, friend or foe, if he continued to lie and groan like this for long, flesh and blood could not stand it.

"Are you hurt?" I summoned up voice to ask.

"The devil!" I had feared that he would scream. But he sat up— I saw his shoulders fill the mouth of the cave between me and the starlight. By his attitude he was peering at me through the darkness. "Who are you?"

"If you please, sir, I'm a boy."

"Glad to hear it. I took you at first for one of those cursed soldiers. Hiding, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"So am I: but this is a mighty poor place for it. They may be here any moment with their lanterns: we had better cut across while everything's dark. Gad!" he said, throwing his head back as if to stare upwards, "I must have dropped twenty feet. Wonder if I've broken anything?" He stood up, and appeared to be feeling his limbs carefully. "Sound as a bell!" he announced. "Come along, youngster: we'll get out of this first and talk afterwards."

He put out a hand, seeking for mine; but, missing it, touched my ribs with his open palm and drew it away sharply.

"Good Lord, the boy's naked!"

"I've been swimming," said I.

"All right. Get out of this first and talk afterwards, that's the order. There's a rug in my tilbury, if we can only reach it. Now then, follow me close—and gently over the shingle!"

Like shadows we stole forth and across the cove. No one spied us, and, thanks perhaps to Major Dilke's sustained oratory, no one heard.

"There's a track hereabouts," my new friend whispered as we gained the farther cliff. "This looks like it—no—yes, here it is! Close after me, sonny, and up we go. Surely, 'tis Robinson Crusoe and man Friday with a touch of something else thrown in—can't think what, for the moment, unless 'tis the scaling of Plataea. Ever read Thucydides?"

"No, sir."

"He's a nigger. He floored me at Brasenose: but I bear the old cock no malice. Now you wouldn't think I was a University man, eh?"

"No, sir." I had not the least notion of his meaning.

"I am, though; and, what's more, I'm a Justice of the Peace and Deputy-Lieutenant for the county of Cornwall. Ever heard of

Jack Rogers of Brynn?"

Once more I had to answer "No, sir."

"Then, excuse me, but where in thunder do you come from?" He halted and confronted me in the path. This was a facer, for the words "Justice of the Peace" had already set me quaking.

"If you please, sir, I'd rather not tell."

"No, I dare say not," he replied magisterially. "It's my fate to get into these false positions. Now there was Josh Truscott of Blowinghouse—Justice of the Peace and owned two thousand acres—what you might call a neat little property. *He* never allowed it to interfere, and yet somehow he carried it off. Do I make myself plain?"

"Not very, sir."

"Well, for instance, one day he was expecting company. There was a fountain in the middle of the lawn at Blowinghouse, and a statue of Hercules that his old father had brought home from Italy and planted in the middle of it. Josh couldn't bear that statue—said the muscles were all wrong. So, if you please, he takes it down, dresses himself in nothing at all—same as you might be, bare as my palm—and a Justice of the Peace, mind you—and stands himself in the middle of the fountain, with all the guests arriving. Not an easy thing to pass off, and it caused a scandal: but folks didn't seem to mind. 'It was Truscott's way,' they said: 'after all, he comes of a clever family, and we hope his son will be better.' A man wants character to carry off a thing like that."

I agreed that character must have been Mr. Truscott's secret.

"Now *I* couldn't do that for the life of me," Mr. Rogers sighed, and chuckled over another reminiscence. "Josh had a shindy once with a groom. The fellow asked for a rise in wages. 'You couldn't have said anything more hurtful to my feelings,' Josh told him, and knocked him down. There was a hole in one of his orchards where they'd been rooting up an old apple-tree. He put the fellow in that, tilled him up to his neck in earth, and kept him there till he apologised. Not at all an easy thing for a Justice of the Peace to pass off: but, bless you, folks said that he came of a clever county family, and hoped his son would be better. The fellow didn't even bring an action." Mr. Rogers broke off suddenly, and seemed to meditate a new train of thought. "Hang it!" he exclaimed. "I believe 'tis a hundred pounds. I must look it up when I get back."

"What is a hundred pounds, sir?" I asked.

"Penalty for showing a coast-light without authority. Lydia laid me ten pounds I hadn't the pluck, though; and that'll bring it down to ninety at the worst. She'd a small fortune in this trip, too, which she stood to lose: but, as it turns out, I've saved that for her. Oh, she's a treasure!"

"Did you light the flare?" I began to see that I had fallen in with an original, and that he might be humoured.

"Eh?—to be sure I did! 'Slocked away the man in charge by mimicking Pascoe's voice—he's the freighter, and talks like a man with no roof to his mouth. I'm a pretty good mimic, though I say it. Nothing easier, after that. You see, Lydia had laid me ten pounds that as a Justice of the Peace I hadn't wit nor pluck to spoil her next run; honestly, that is. She knows I wouldn't blow on her for worlds. Oh, we understand one another! Now you and I'll go off and call on her, and hear what she says about it. For in a way I've won, and in a way I've not. I stopped the run, but also I've saved the cargo for her: for the devil a notion had I that the soldiers had wind of it; and, but for the flare, the boats would have run in and lost every tub. Here we are, my lad!"

We had climbed the cliff and were crossing a field of stubble grass, very painful to my feet. I saw the shadow of a low hedge in front, but these words of Mr. Rogers conveyed nothing to me. "Soh, soh, my girl!" he called softly, advancing towards the shadow: and at first I supposed him to be addressing the mysterious Lydia. But following I saw him smoothing the neck of a small mare tethered beside the hedge, and the next moment had almost blundered against a light two-wheeled carriage resting on its shafts a few yards away.

Mr. Rogers whispered to me to lift the shafts. "And be quiet about it: there's a road t'other side of the hedge. Soh, my girl—sweetly, sweetly!" He backed the mare between the shafts, harnessed her, and led her along to a gate opening on the road.

"Jump up, my lad," he commanded, as he steered the tilbury through; and up I jumped. "There's a rug somewhere by your feet, and Lydia'll do the rest for you. Cl'k, my darling!"

Away we bowled.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN IN THE VERANDAH.

The mare settled down to a beautiful stride and we spun along smoothly over a road which, for a coast road, must have been well laid, or Mr. Rogers's tilbury was hung on exceptionally good springs. We were travelling inland, for the wind blew in our faces, and I huddled myself up from it in the rug—on which a dew had fallen, making it damp and sticky. For two miles or so we must have held on at this pace without exchanging a word, meeting neither vehicle nor pedestrian in all that distance, nor passing any; and so came to a sign-post and swerved by it into a broader road, which ran level for maybe half a mile and then began to climb. Here Mr. Rogers eased down the mare and handed me the reins, bidding me hold them while he lit a cigar.

"We're safe enough now," said he, pulling out a pocket tinder-box: "and while I'm about it we'd better light the lamps." He slipped them from their sockets and lit the pair cleverly from the same brimstone match. "The *Highflier*'s due about this time," he explained; "and Russell's Wagon 's another nasty thing to hit in the dark. We're on the main road, you know." Before refixing the lamp beside him, he held it up for a good stare at me, and grinned. "Well, you're a nice guest for a spinster at this hour, I must say! But there's no shyness about Lydia."

"Is she—is this Miss Lydia unmarried?" I made bold to ask.

"Lydia Belcher 's a woman in a thousand. There's no better fellow living, and I've known worse ladies. Yes, she's unmarried."

He took the reins from me and the mare quickened her pace. After sucking at his cigar for a while he chuckled aloud. "She's to be seen to be believed: past forty and wears top-boots. But she was a beauty in her day. Her mother's looks were famous—she was daughter to one of the Earl's cottagers, on the edge of the moors"—here Mr. Rogers jerked his thumb significantly, but in what direction the night hid from me: "married old Sam Belcher, one of his lordship's keepers, a fellow not fit to black her boots; and had this one child, Lydia. This was just about the time of the Earl's own marriage. Folks talked, of course: and sure enough, when the Earl came to die, 'twas found he'd left Lydia a thousand a year in the funds. That's the story: and Lydia—well she's Lydia. Couldn't marry where she would, I suppose, and wouldn't where she could; though they do say Whitmore 's trimming sail for her."

"Whitmore?" I echoed.

"Ay, the curate: monstrous clever fellow, and a sportsman too: Trinity College Dublin man. Don't happen to know him, do you?"

"Is he a thin-faced gentleman, very neatly dressed? Oh, but it can't be the gentleman I mean, sir! The one I mean has a slow way of speaking, and the hair seems gone on each side of his forehead—"

"That's Whitmore, to a T. So you know him? Well, you'll meet him at Lydia's, I shouldn't wonder. He's there most nights."

"If you please, sir, will you set me down? I can shift for myself somehow—indeed I can! I promised—that is, I mean, Mr. Whitmore won't like it if—if—"

While I stammered on, Mr. Rogers pulled up the mare, quartering at the same time to make room for the mail-coach as it thundered up the road from westward and swept by at the gallop, with lamps flashing and bits and swingles shaken in chorus.

"Look here, what's the matter?" he demanded. "Why don't you want to meet Whitmore?" Then as I would not answer but continued to entreat him, "There's something deuced fishy about you. Here I find you, stark naked, hiding from the soldiers: yet you can't be one of the 'trade,' for you don't know the country or the folks living hereabouts—only Whitmore: and Whitmore you won't meet, and your name you won't tell, nor where you come from—only that you've been swimming. 'Swimming,' good Lord! You didn't swim from France, I take it." He flicked his whip and fell into a muse. "And I'm a Justice of the Peace, and the Lord knows what I'm compounding with." He mused again. "Tell you what I'll do," he exclaimed; "I'll take you up to Lydia's as I promised. If Whitmore's there, you shan't meet him if you don't want to: and if the house is full, I'll drop you in the shrubbery with the rug, and get them to break up early. Only I must have your solemn davey that you'll stay there and not quit until I give you leave. Eh?"

I gave that promise.

"Very well. I'll tip the wink to Lydia, and when we've cleared the company, we'll have you in and get the rights of this. Oh, you may trust Lydia!"

As he said this we were passing a house the long whitewashed front of which abutted glimmering on the road. A light shone behind the blind of one lower window and showed through a chink under the door. "The Major 's sitting up late," observed Mr. Rogers, and again flicked up the mare.

Two minutes later he pulled the left rein and we swung through an open gateway and were rolling over soft gravel. Tall bushes

of laurel on either hand glinted back the lights of the tilbury, and presently around a sweep of the drive I saw a window shining. Mr. Rogers pulled up once more.

"Jump out and take the path to the left. It'll bring you out almost facing the front door. Wait among the laurels there."

I climbed down and drew my rug about me as he drove on and I heard the tilbury's wheels come to a halt on the gravel before the house. Then, following the path which wound about a small shrubbery, I came to the edge of the gravel sweep before the porch just as a groom took the mare and cart from him and led them around to the left, towards the stables. I saw this distinctly, for on the right of the porch, where there ran a pretty deep verandah, each window on the ground floor was lit and flung its light across the gravel to the laurel behind which I crouched. There were in all five windows; of which three seemed to belong to an empty room, and two to another filled with people. The windows of this one stood wide open, and the racket within was prodigious. Also the company seemed to consist entirely of men. But what surprised me most was to see that the tables at which these guests drank and supped—as the clatter of knives and plates told me, and the shouting of toasts—were drawn up in a semicircle about a tall bed-canopy reaching almost to the ceiling in the far right-hand corner. The bed itself was hidden from me by the broad backs of two sportsmen seated in line with it and nursing a bottle apiece under their chairs.

Now while I wondered, Mr. Jack Rogers passed briskly through the room with the closed windows towards this chamber of revelry, preceded by an elderly woman with a smoking dish in her hands. I could not see the doorway between the two rooms; but the company announced his appearance with a shout, and several guests pushing back their chairs and rising to welcome him, in the same instant were disclosed to me, first, the pale face of the Rev. Mr. Whitmore under a sporting print by the wall opposite, and next, reclining in the bed, the most extraordinary figure of a woman.

So much of her as appeared above the bedclothes was arrayed in an orange-coloured dressing-gown and a night-cap the frills of which towered over a face remarkable in many ways, but chiefly for its broad masculine forehead and the firm outline of its jaw and chin. Indeed, I could hardly believe that the face belonged to a woman. A slight darkening of the upper lip even suggested a moustache, but on a second look I set this down to the shadow of the bed-canopy.

A round table stood at her elbow, with a bottle and plate upon it: and in one hand she lifted a rummer to Mr. Rogers's health, crooking back the spoon in it with her forefinger as she drank, that it might not incommode her aquiline nose.

"Good health, Jack, and sit you down!" she hailed him, her voice ringing above the others like a bell. "Tripe and onions it is, and Plymouth gin—the usual fare: and while you're helping yourself, tell me—do I owe you ten pounds or no?"

"That depends," Mr. Rogers answered, searching about for a clean plate and seating himself amid the hush of the company. "All the horses back?"

"Five of 'em. They came in together, nigh on an hour ago, and not a tub between 'em. The roan's missing."

"Maybe the red-coats have him," said Mr. Rogers, holding out his tumbler. "Here, pass the kettle, somebody!"

"Red-coats?" she cried sharply. "You don't tell me—" But the sentence was drowned by a new and (to me) very horrible noise—the furious barking of dogs from the stables or kennels in the rear of the house. Here was a new danger: and I liked it so little—the prospect of being bayed naked through those pitch-dark shrubberies by a pack of hounds—that I broke from my covert of laurel, hurriedly skirted the broad patch of light on the carriage sweep, and plumped down close to the windows, behind a bush of mock-orange at the end of the verandah, whence a couple of leaps would land me within it among Miss Belcher's guests. And I felt that even Mr. Whitmore was less formidable than Miss Belcher's dogs.

Their barking died down after a minute or so, and the company, two or three of whom had started to their feet, seemed to be reassured and began to call upon Jack Rogers for his explanation. It now turned out that, quite unintentionally, I had so posted myself as to hear every word spoken; and, I regret to say, was deep in Mr. Rogers's story—from which he considerately omitted all mention of me—when my eye caught a movement among the shadows at the far end of the verandah.

A man was stealing along it and towards me, close by the house wall.

He reached the first of the lighted windows, and peeped warily round its angle. This room, as I have said, was empty: but while he assured himself of this, the light rested on his face, and through the branches of the mock-orange bush I saw his features distinctly. It was Sergeant Letcher.

He wore his red uniform and white pantaloons, but had slipped off his boots and—as I saw when he rapidly passed the next two panels of light—was carrying them in his hand. Reaching the first of the open windows, he stood for a while in the shade beside it, listening; and then, to my astonishment, turned and stole back by the way he had come. I watched him till he disappeared in the darkness beyond the house-porch.

Meanwhile Miss Belcher had been calling to clear away the supper and set the tables for cards.

"Nonsense, Lydia!" Mr. Rogers objected. "It's a good one-in-the-morning, and the company tired. Where's the sense, too, of keeping the place ablaze on a night like this, with Gauger Rosewarne scouring the country, and the dragoons behind him, and all in the worst possible tempers?"

"My little Magistrate," Miss Belcher retorted, "there's naught to hinder your trotting home to bed if you're timorous. Jim's on his way to the moor by this time with the rest of the horses: 'twas at his starting the dogs gave tongue just now, and I'll have to teach them better manners. As for the roan, if he's hurt or Rosewarne happens on him, there's evidence that I sold him to a gipsy three weeks back, at St. Germans fair. Here, Bathsheba, take the keys of my bureau upstairs; you'll find some odd notes in the left-hand drawer by the fire-place. Bring Mr. Rogers down his ten pounds and let him go. We'll not compromise a Justice of the Peace if we can help it."

"Don't play the fool, Lydia," growled Mr. Rogers, and added ingenuously, "The fact is, I wanted a word with you alone."

"Oh, you scandalous man! And me tucked between the sheets!" she protested, while the company haw-haw'd. "You'll have to put up with some more innocent amusement, my dear. There's a badger somewhere round at the back, in a barrel: we'll have him in with the dogs— unless you prefer a quiet round with the cards."

"Oh, damn the badger at this hour!" swore Mr. Rogers. "Cards are quiet at any rate. Here, Raby—Penrose—Tregaskis—which of you'll cut in? Whitmore—you'll take a hand, won't you?"

"The Parson's tired to-night, and with better excuse than you. He's ridden down from Plymouth."

"Hallo, Whitmore—what were you doing in Plymouth?"

Mr. Whitmore ignored the question. "I'm ready for a hand, Miss Belcher," he announced quietly: "only let it be something quiet—a rubber for choice."

"Half-guinea points?" asked somebody.

"Yes, if you will."

I heard them settle to cards, and their voices sink to a murmur. Now and again a few coins clinked, and one of the guests yawned.

"You're as melancholy as gib-cats," announced Miss Belcher. "The next that yawns, I'll send him out to fetch in that badger. Tell us a story, somebody."

"I heard the beginning of a queer one," said Mr. Whitmore in his deliberate voice. "The folks were discussing it at Torpoint Ferry as I crossed. There's, been a murder at Plymouth, either last night or this morning."

"A murder? Who's the victim?"

"An old Jew, living on the Barbican or thereabouts. My deal, is it not?"

"What's his name?"

"His name?" Mr. Whitmore seemed to be considering. "Wait a moment, or I shall misdeal." After a pause, he said, "A Spanish-sounding one—Rodriguez, I think. They were all full of it at the Ferry."

"What! Old Ike Rodriguez? Why, he was down in these parts buying up guineas the other day!" exclaimed Mr. Rogers.

"Was he?"

"Why, hang it all, Whitmore," said a guest, "you know he was! More by token I pointed him out to you myself on Looe hill."

"Was that the man?"

"Of course it was. Don't you remember admiring his face? It put you in mind of Caiaphas—those were your very words, and at the moment I didn't clearly recollect who Caiaphas was. It can't be three weeks since."

"Three weeks less two days," said Miss Belcher; "for he called here and bought fifteen off me: gave me twenty-four shillings and sixpence apiece for all but one, which he swore was light. Who's murdered him?"

"There was talk of a boy," said Mr. Whitmore, still very deliberately. "At least, a boy was missing who had been seen in the house just previously, and they were watching the ferries for him. Why, surely, Rogers, that's a revoke!"

"A revoke?" stammered Mr. Rogers. "So it is—I beg your pardon, Tregaskis! Damn the cards! I'm too sleepy to tell one suit from another."

"That makes our game then, and the rubber. Rub and rub—shall we play the conqueror? No? As you please then. How do we stand?"

"We owe three guineas on points," growled a voice which, to judge by its sulkiness, belonged to Mr. Tregaskis.

"I'm a clumsy fool," Mr. Rogers again accused himself. "Here, Whitmore, give me change out of a note."

"With pleasure. It's as good as a gift, though, with the cards you held," said Mr. Whitmore, and I heard the coins jingle in changing hands, when from the shrubbery, where the gravel sweep narrowed, there sounded the low hoot of an owl. Being town-bred and unused to owls, I took it for a human cry in the darkness and shrank closer against my mock-orange bush.

"Hallo, Whitmore, you've dropped a guinea. Here it is, by the table-leg. Take twenty-four shillings for it, now that old Rodriguez is gone?"

Mr. Whitmore thanked the speaker as the coin was restored to him. "The room's hot, as Mr. Rogers says, and I think I'll step out for a mouthful of fresh air. Phe—ew!" he drew a long breath as he appeared at the window.

He strolled carelessly out beneath the verandah and stood for a moment by one of its pillars. And at that moment the owl's cry sounded again, but more softly, from the shrubbery on my left. I knew, then, that it came from no true bird. With a swift glance back into the room Mr. Whitmore stepped out upon the gravel and followed the sound, almost brushing the mock-orange bush as he passed.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MOCK-ORANGE BUSH.

To my dismay, he halted but five paces from me.

"Is that you, Leicester?" he whispered.

"Sergeant Letcher, if you please," answered a quiet voice close by; "unless you wish to be called Pickthall."

"Not so loud—the windows are open. How on earth did you come here? You're not with the van to-night?"

"I came on a horse, and a lame one: one of your tub-carriers. The captain saw me mount him, down at the cove, and sent me off to scour the country for evidence. I guessed pretty well in what direction he'd take me. But you're a careless lot, I will say. Look at this bit of rope."

"For God's sake don't talk so loud! Rope? What rope?"

"Oh, you needn't be afraid! It's not *your* sort! Here—if you can't see, take hold and feel it. Left-handed, you'll notice—French sling-stuff. And that Belcher woman has no more sense of caution than to tie up her roses with it! Now see here, my son"—and his voice became a snarl—"it may do for her to play tricks. All the country knows her, the magistrates included. But for the likes of you this dancing on the edge of the law is risky, and I can't afford it. Understand? Why the devil you haunt the house as you do is more than I can fathom, unless maybe you're making up to marry the old fool." He paused and added contemplatively, "'Twould be something in your line to be sure. Women were always your game."

"You didn't whistle me out to tell me this," said Mr. Whitmore stiffly. "No, I did not. I want ten pounds."

Mr. Whitmore groaned. "Look here, Leicst—"

"Be careful!"

"But this makes twice in ten days. It's pushing a man too hard altogether!"

"Not a bit of it," Letcher assured him cheerfully. "You're too devilish fond of your own neck, my lad; and I know it too devilish well to be come over by that talk." He chuckled to himself. "How's the beauty down at the cottage?"

"I don't know," Mr. Whitmore answered sulkily. "Is Plinlimmon there?"

"No, he's not; and you ought to know he's not. Where have you been, all day?"

The curate was silent.

"He'll be down again on Saturday, though. Leave of absence is going cheap, just now. I've an idea that our marching orders must be about due. Maybe I'll be able to run down myself, though my father hadn't the luck to be a friend of the Colonel's. If I don't, you're to keep your eye lifting, and report."

"Is there really a chance of the order coming?" asked Mr. Whitmore, with a shake in his low voice.

"Dissemble your joy, my friend! When it comes, I shall call on you for fifty. Meanwhile I tell you to keep your eye lifting. The battalion's raw, yet. About the order, it's only my guesswork, and before we sail you may yet do the christening."

"It's damnable!"

"Hush, you fool! Gad, if somebody hasn't heard you! Who's *that*?"

They held their breath; and I held mine, pressing my body into the mock-orange bush until the twigs cracked. Mr. Jack Rogers stepped out upon the verandah, and stood by one of the pillars, not a dozen yards from me, contemplating the sky where the dawn was now beginning to break over the dark shrubberies. I heard the two men tiptoeing away through the laurels.

He, too, seemed to catch the sound, for he turned his head sharply. But at that moment Miss Belcher's voice called him back into the room.

A minute later he reappeared with a loaf of bread in either hand, and walked moodily past my bush without turning his head or observing me.

I faced about cautiously and looked after him. From the end of the verandah the ground, sheltered on the right by a belt of evergreen trees, fell away steeply to a valley where, under the paling sky, a sheet of water glimmered. Towards this, down the grassy slope, Mr. Rogers went with long strides. I broke cover, and ran after him.

I ran as fast as my hurt hip and the trailing folds of the rug allowed. The grass underfoot was grey with dew, and overhead the birds were singing. An old horse that had been sleeping in his pasture heaved himself up and gazed at me as I went by, and either his snort of contempt or the sound of my footsteps must have struck on Mr. Rogers's ear. He turned and allowed me to catch up with him.

"It's you, eh?" He eyed me between pity and distrust. "Here, catch hold, if you're feeling peckish."

He thrust a loaf into my hands and I fell on it ravenously, plucking off a crust and gnawing it while I trotted beside him.

"Got to feed her blessed swans now!" he muttered. "The deuce is in her for perversity to-night."

He kept growling to himself, knitting his brow and pausing once or twice for a moody stare. He was not drunk, and his high complexion showed no trace of his all-night sitting; and yet something had changed him utterly from the cheerful gentleman of a few hours back.

The water in the valley bottom proved to be an artificial lake, very cunningly contrived to resemble a wild one. At the head of it, where we trod on asphodels and sweet-smelling mints and brushed the young stalks of the loose-strife, stood a rustic bridge partly screened by alders. Here Mr. Rogers halted, and a couple of fine swans came steering towards him out of the shadows.

He broke his loaf into two pieces. "That's for you," he exclaimed, hurling the first chunk viciously at the male bird. The pair turned in alarm at the splash and paddled away, hissing. "And that's for you!" The second chunk caught the female full astern, and Mr. Rogers leaned on the rail and laughed grimly. He thrust his hand into his breeches pocket and drew forth a guinea. The young daylight touched its edge as it lay in his palm.

"I'm a Justice of the Peace; or I'd toss that after the bread."

"What's the matter with it, sir?"

He turned it over gingerly with his forefinger. "See?" he said. "I put that mark on it myself, for sport, three weeks ago, and this very night I won it back."

"Was it one you sold to Mr. Rodriguez?"

"Hey?" I thought he would have taken me by the collar. "So you *are* the boy! What do you know of Rodriguez, boy?"

"I—I was listening in the verandah, sir. And oh, but I've something to tell you! I'm the boy, sir, that Mr. Whitmore spoke about —the boy that's being searched for—"

"Look here," Mr. Rogers interrupted, "I'm a Justice of the Peace, you know."

"I can't help it, sir—begging your pardon. But I was in the house, and I saw things: and if they catch me, I must tell."

"Tell the truth and shame the devil," said Mr. Rogers.

"But the more truth I told, sir, the worse it would look for someone who's innocent."

"Whitmore?"

"You changed a note with Mr. Whitmore, didn't you, sir?"

This confused him. "You've been using your ears to some purpose," he growled.

"I don't know how Mr. Whitmore comes to be mixed up in it. But here's another thing, sir—You remember that he walked out after the game—for fresh air, he said?"

"Well?"

"And he didn't come back?"

"Well?"

"He stepped out because he was whistled out. There was a man waiting for him."

"What man?"

"His name's Letcher—at least—"

"I don't know the name."

"He was one of the soldiers on the beach this evening."

"The devil!"

"But he hadn't come about *that* business."

"About what, then?"

"Well now, sir, I must ask you a question. They were talking about 'the beauty down at the cottage.' Who would that be?"

"That," said he slowly, "would be Isabel Brooks, for a certainty."

"And the cottage?"

"Remember the one we passed on the road?—the one with a light downstairs? That's it. She lives there with her father—an old soldier and three-parts blind. There's no mischief brewing against *her*, I hope?"

"I don't know sir," I went on breathlessly. "But if you please, go on answering me. Do you know a young man called Plinlimmon— Archibald Plinlimmon?"

"Plinlimmon? Ay, to be sure I do. Met him there once—another soldier, youngish and good-looking—in the ranks, but seemed a gentleman—didn't catch his Christian name. The Major introduced him as the son of an old friend—comrade-in-arms, he said, if I remember. He was there with a black-faced fellow, whose name I didn't catch either."

"That was Letcher!"

"What? The man Whitmore was talking with? What were they saying?"

"They said something about a christening. And Letcher asked for money."

"A christening? What in thunder has a christening to do with it?"

"That's what I don't know, sir."

Mr. Rogers looked at me and rubbed his chin. "I meant to take you to Lydia," he said; "but now that Whitmore's mixed up in this, I'll be shot if I do. That fellow has bewitched her somehow, and where he's concerned—" He glanced up the slope and clutched me suddenly by the shoulder: for Whitmore himself was there, walking alone, and coming straight towards us. "Talk of the devil—here, hide, boy—duck down, I tell you, there behind the bushes! No! Through the hedge, then—"

I burst across the hedge and dropped through a mat of brambles, dragging my rug after me. The fall landed me on all-fours upon the sunken high road, along which I ran as one demented—stark naked, too—a small Jack of Bedlam under the broadening eye of day; ran past Miss Belcher's entrance gate with its sentinel masses of tall laurels, and had reached the bend of the road opening the low cottage into view, when a sudden jingling of bells and tramp of horses drove me aside through a gate on the left, to cower behind a hedge there while they passed.

Two wagons came rumbling by, each drawn by six horses and covered by a huge white tilt bearing in great letters the words "Russell and Co., Falmouth to London." On the front of each a lantern shone pale against the daylight. At the head of each team rode a wagoner, mounted on a separate horse and carrying a long whip. Beside the wagons tramped four soldiers with fixed bayonets, and two followed behind: they wore the uniform of the North Wilts Regiment.

I knew them well enough by repute—these famous wagons conveying untold treasure between London and the Falmouth Packets. They passed, and I crept out into the road again, to stare after them.

With that, turning my head, I was aware of a girl in the roadway outside the cottage door. But if she had come out to gaze after the wagons, she was gazing now at me. It was too late to hide, and moreover I had come almost to the end of my powers. With a cry for pity I ran towards her.

CHAPTER XV.

MINDEN COTTAGE.

Stark naked though I was, she did not flinch as I came; only her eyes seemed to widen upon me in wonder. And for all my desperate hurry I had time to see, first, that they were graver than other girls' eyes, and next that they were exceedingly beautiful.

In those days I had small learning (I have little enough, even now), or I might have fancied her some goddess awaiting me between the night and the dawn. She stood, tall and erect, in a loose white wrapper, the collar of which had fallen open and revealed the bodice-folds of her nightgown—a cloud at the base of her firm throat. Her feet were thrust into loose slippers: and her hair hung low on her neck in dark masses as she had knotted them for the night.

"Where do you come from, boy?" she asked; but an instant later she put that question aside as an idle one. "Someone has been ill-treating you! Come indoors!"

She held out a hand and, as I clung to it, led me to the door; but turned with her other hand on the latch. "Is anyone following?"

I shook my head. She was attempting now, but gently, to draw back the hand to which I clung; and, in resisting, my fingers met and pulled against a ring—a single ring of plain gold.

Seeing that I had observed it, she made no further effort, but let her hand lie, her eyes at the same moment meeting mine and searching them gravely and curiously.

"Come upstairs," she said; "but tread softly. My father is a light sleeper."

She took me to a room in the corner of which stood a white bed with the sheets neatly turned down, prepared and ready for a guest. The room was filled with the scent of flowers—fragrant scent of roses and clean aromatic scent of carnations. There were fainter scents, too, of jasmine and lavender; the first wafted in from a great bush beyond the open lattice, the second (as I afterwards discovered) exhaled by the white linen of the bed. But flowers were everywhere, in bowls and jars and glasses; and as though other receptacles for them had failed, one long spray of small roses climbed the dressing-table from a brown pitcher at its foot.

She motioned me to a chair beside the bed, and, almost before I knew what was intended, she had fetched a basin of water and was kneeling to wash my feet.

"No—please!" I protested.

"But I love children," she whispered; "and you are but a child."

So I sat in a kind of dream while she washed away the dust and blood, changing the water twice, and afterwards dried each foot in a towel, pressing firmly but never once hurting me.

When this was done, she rose and stood musing, contemplating me seriously and yet with a touch of mirth in her eyes.

"You are such a little one!" she said. "Father's would never fit." And having poured out fresh water and bidden me wash my body, she stole out.

She returned with a white garment in her hand and real mirth now in her eyes. My toilet done, she slipped the garment over me. It fell to my feet in long folds, yet so lightly that I scarcely felt I was clothed: and she clapped her hands in dumb-show. It was one of her own nightgowns.

I glanced uneasily towards the bed. Its daintiness frightened me, used as I was to the housekeeping—coarse if clean—of Mrs. Trapp.

"Your prayers first," she whispered. "Don't you know any?" She eyed me anxiously again. "But you are a good boy? Surely you are a good boy? Don't boys say their prayers? They ought to."

Since passing out of Miss Plinlimmon's tutelage, I had sadly neglected the habit: but I knelt down obediently and in silence.

She stepped close behind me. "But you're not speaking," she murmured. "Father always says his aloud, and so do I. You mustn't pretend, if you don't really know any. I can teach you."

She knelt down beside me, and began to say the Lord's Prayer softly. I repeated it after her, sentence by sentence: and this was really shamming, for of course I knew it perfectly. At the time I felt only that she—this beautiful creature beside me—was in a strange state of exaltation which I could not in the least understand. I know now something of the springs I had touched and loosened

within her—I, a naked waif coming to her out of the night and catching her hand for protection. It was not I she taught, nor over me that she yearned. She was reaching through me to a child unknown, using me to press against a strange love tearing at the roots of her body, and to break the pain of it—the roots of her body, I say; for he who can separate a woman's soul from her body is a wiser man than I.

She rose from her knees; threw back the sheets and tucked them about me as I snuggled down.

"What is your name?"

"Harry Revel. Are you Miss Isabel Brooks?"

"I am Isabel."

"Why were you crying, out in the road?"

"Was I crying?"

"Well, not crying exactly: but you looked as if you wanted to."

She smiled. "We both have our secrets it seems; and you shall tell me yours to-morrow. Will yours let you sleep?"

"I think so, Miss Isabel. I am so tired—and so clean—and this bed is so soft—" I stretched out my arms luxuriously, and almost before I knew it she was bending to kiss me, and they were about her neck. Her hair fell over me in a shower and in the shade of it she laughed happily, kissing me by the ear and whispering, "I have my happy secret, too!"

She straightened herself up, tossed back the dark locks with curved sweep of arm and wrist, and moved to the door.

"Good night, Harry Revel!"

A bird was cheeping in the jasmine bush when I dropped asleep, and when I awoke he was cheeping there still. Of my dreams I only remember that they ended in a vague sense of discomfort, somehow arising from a vision of Mr. Rogers in the act of throwing bread at the swans, and of the hen bird's flurry as she paddled away. But the sound which I took for the splashing of water came in fact from the rings of the window curtain, which Miss Isabel was drawing to shut out the high morning sun.

She heard me stir and faced about, with her hand yet on the curtain. "Awake?" she cried, and laughed. "You shall have a basin of bread-and-milk presently: and after that you may get up and put on these." She held out a suit of clothes which lay across her arm. "I have borrowed them from Miss Belcher, who distributes all sorts of garments at Christmas among the youngsters hereabouts, and has rummaged this out of her stock. And after that my father will be glad to make your acquaintance. We shall find him in the garden. Now I must go and see to preparing dinner: for it is past noon, though you may not know it."

Behold me, half an hour later, clad in a blue jacket very tight at the elbows and corduroy breeches very tight at the knees and warm for the time of year, as I descended with Isabel into the walled garden at the back of the cottage. Its whole area cannot have been an acre, and even so the half of it was taken up by a plot of turf, smooth as a bowling green: but beyond this stretched a miniature orchard, and along the walls ran two deep borders crowded with midsummer flowers— tall white lilies and Canterbury bells; stocks, sweet williams, mignonette, candytuft and larkspurs; bushes of lemon verbena, myrtle, and the white everlasting pea. Near the house all was kept in nicest order, with trim ranks of standard roses marching level with the turfed verges, and tall carnations staked and bending towards them across the alley: but around the orchard all grew riotous. The orchard ended in a maze of currant bushes, through which the path seemed to wander after the sound of running water till it emerged upon another clearing of turf, with a tall filbert tree, and a summer-house beneath it, and a row of beehives set beside a stream. The stream, I afterwards learned, came down from Miss Belcher's park, and was the real boundary of the garden: but Miss Belcher had allowed the Major to build a wall for privacy, on the far side of it, yet not so high as to shut off the sun from his bee-skeps; and had granted him a private entrance through it to the park—a narrow wooden door approached by a miniature bridge across the stream.

"Papa!" called Isabel.

I heard a movement in the summer-house, and her father appeared in the doorway. He was old, but held himself so erect that his head almost touched the lintel of the summer-house door, the posts of which he gripped and so stood framed—a giant of close upon six and a half feet in stature. He wore a brown holland suit, with grey stockings and square-toed shoes; and at first I mistook him for a Quaker. His snow-white hair was gathered back from his temples, giving salience to a face of ineffable simplicity and goodness—the face of a man at peace with God and all the world, yet touched with the scars of bygone passions.

"Papa, this is Harry Revel."

He bowed with ceremony, a little wide of me. I saw then that his eyes were sightless.

"I am happy to make your acquaintance, young sir. My daughter informs me that you are in trouble."

"He has promised to tell me all about it," Isabel put in. "We need not bother him with questions just now."

"Assuredly not," he agreed. "Well, if you will, my lad, tell it to Isabel. What is your age? Barely fourteen? Troubles at that age are not often incurable. Only whatever you do—and you will pardon an old man for suggesting it—tell the whole truth. When a man, though he be much older than you and his case more serious than yours can possibly be—when a man once brings himself to make a clean breast of it, the odds are on his salvation. Take my word for that, and a wiser man's—By the way, do you understand Latin?"

"No, sir."

"I am sorry to hear it. But perhaps you play the drum?"

"I—I have never tried, sir."

"Dear, dear, this is unfortunate: but at least you can serve me by leading me round the garden and telling me where the several flowers grow, and how they come on. That will be something."

"I will try, sir: but indeed I can hardly tell one flower from another."

At this his face fell again. "Do you, by chance, know a bee when you see one?" "A bee? Oh yes, sir."

"Come, we have touched bottom at length! Do you understand bees? Can you handle them?"

Here Isabel, seeing my chapfallen face, interposed.

"And if he does not, papa, you will have the pleasure of teaching him."

"Very true, my dear. You must excuse me"—here Major Brooks turned as if seeing me with his sightless eyes. "But understand that I like you far better for owning up. There are men—there is a clergyman in our neighbourhood for one—capable of pretending a knowledge of Latin which they don't possess."

"Doesn't Mr. Whitmore know Latin?" I asked.

"Hey? Who told you I was speaking of Whitmore?"

I glanced at Isabel, for her eyes drew me. They were fixed on me almost in terror.

"I have heard him talk it, sir."

"Excuse me: you may have heard him pretending."

"But, papa—" Isabel put forth a hand as if in protest, and I noted that it trembled and that the ring was missing which she had worn overnight. "You never told me that he—that Mr. Whitmore—"

"Was an impostor? My dear, had you any occasion to seek my opinion of him, or had I any occasion to give it? None, I think: and but for Master Revel's incomprehensible guess you had not discovered it now. I have been betrayed into gossip."

He turned abruptly and, feeling with his hand over the surface of the summer-house table, picked up a small volume lying there. It struck me that his temper for the moment was not under perfect control.

Isabel cast at me a look which I could not interpret, and went slowly back to the house.

"The meaning of my catechism just now," said her father, addressing me after listening for awhile to her retreating footsteps, "may be the plainer when I tell you that I am translating the works of the Roman poet Virgil, line for line, into English verse, and have just reached the beginning of the Fourth Georgic. He is, I may tell you, a poet, and the most marvellous that ever lived; so marvellous, that the middle ages mistook him for a magician. That any age is likely to mistake me—his translator—for a conjuror I think improbable. Nevertheless I do my best. And while translating I hold this book in my hand, not that I can see to read a line of it, but because the mere touch of it, my companion on many campaigns, seems to unloose my memory. Except in handling this small volume, I have none of the delicate gift of touch with which blind men are usually credited. But this is page 106, is it not?" He held out the open book towards me, and added, with sudden apprehension, "You can read, I trust?"

I assured him that I could.

"And write? Good again! Come in—you will find pen, ink, and paper on the side-drum in the corner. Bring them over to the table and seat yourself. Ready? Now begin, and let me know when you cannot spell a word."

I seated myself, silently wondering what might be the use of the side-drum in the corner.

"Let me see—let me see—" He thumbed the book for a while, murmuring words which I could not catch; then thrust it behind his back with a finger between its pages, straightened himself up, and declaimed:

"Next of aerial honey, gift divine,
I sing. Maecenas, be once more benign!"

He paused and instructed me how to spell "aerial" and "Maecenas." The orthography of these having been settled, I asked his advice upon "benign," which, as written down by me (I forget how) did not seem convincing.

"You are indisputably an honest boy," said he; "but I have yet to acquire that degree of patience which, by all accounts, consorts with my affliction. Continue, pray:

"Prepare the pomp of trifles to behold:
Proud peers—a nation's polity unrolled—
Customs, pursuits—its clans, and how they fight,
Slight things I labour; not for glory slight,
If Heaven attend and Phoebus hearken me.
First, then, for site. Seek and instal your Bee—"

—"With a capital B, if you please. The poet says 'bees': but the singular, especially if written with a capital, adds in my opinion that mock-heroic touch which, as the translator must frequently miss it for all his pains, he had better insert where he can. By the way, how have you spelt 'Phoebus'?"

"F.e.b.u.s," I answered.

"I feared so," he sighed. "And 'site'?"

"S.i.g.h.t." I felt pretty sure about this. He smote his forehead.

"That is how Miss Plinlimmon taught me," I urged almost defiantly.

"I beg your pardon—'Plinlimmon,' did you say? An unusual name. Do you indeed know a Miss Plinlimmon?"

"It is the name of my dearest friend, sir."

"Most singular! You cannot tell me, I dare say, if she happens to be related to my old friend Arthur Plinlimmon?"

"She is his sister."

"This is most interesting. I remember her, then, as a girl. You must know that Arthur Plinlimmon and I were comrades in the old Fourth Regiment, and dear friends—are dear friends yet, I trust, although time and circumstances have separated us. His sister used to keep house for him before his marriage. A most estimable person! And pray where did you make her acquaintance?"

"In the hospital, sir."

"The hospital? Not an eleemosynary institution for the diseased, I hope?"

I did not know what this meant. "It's a place for foundlings, sir," I answered.

"But—excuse me—Miss Plinlimmon—Agatha? Arabella? I forget for the moment her Christian name—"

"Amelia, sir."

"To be sure; Amelia. Well, she could not be a foundling, nor—as I remember her—did she in the least resemble one."

"Oh no, sir: she is the matron there."

"I see. And where is this hospital?"

"At Plymouth Dock."

"Hey?"

"At Plymouth Dock. A Mr. Scougall keeps it—a sort of clergyman."

"This is most strange. My friend Arthur's son, young Archibald Plinlimmon, is quartered with his regiment there, and often pays us a visit, poor lad."

"Indeed, sir?"

"His circumstances are not prosperous. Family troubles—money losses, you understand: and then his father made an imprudent marriage. Not that anything can be said against the Leicesters— there are few better families. But the lady, I imagine, did not take kindly to poverty: never learnt to cut her coat according to the cloth. Her uncle might have helped her—Sir Charles, that is—the head of the family—a childless man with plenty of money. For some reason, however, he had opposed her match with Arthur. A sad story! And now, when their lad is grown and the time come for him to be a soldier, he must start in the ranks. But why in the world, if she lives at Plymouth Dock, has Archibald never mentioned his aunt to us?"

This was more than I could tell him. And you may be sure that the name Leicester made me want to ask questions, not to answer them. But just now Isabel came across the lawn, bearing a tray with a plateful of biscuits, a decanter of claret, and a glass.

"My dear," asked her father, "has our friend Archibald ever spoken to you of an aunt of his—a Miss Plinlimmon—residing at Plymouth Dock?"

"No, papa." She turned on me, again with that fear and appeal in her eyes, as if in some way I was persecuting her; and the decanter shook and tinkled on the rim of the glass as she poured out the claret.

The old man lifted the wine and held it between his sightless eyes and the sunshine.

"A sad story," he mused: "but, after all, the lad is young and the world young for him! Rejoice in your youth, Mr. Revel, and honour your Creator in the days of it. For me, I enjoyed it by God's grace, and it has not forsaken me: no, not when darkness overtook and shut me out of the profession I loved. I cannot see the colour of this wine, nor the face of this my daughter, nor my garden, yonder, full of flowers."

"Seasons return, but not to me returns
Day, or the sweet approach of even or morn,
Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summer's rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine—"

"Yet memory returns and consoles my blindness. The colour of the wine is there, the flowers are about me, and Isabel—I am told— resembles her mother. Yes, and away on the edge of Spain, the army I served is planting fresh laurels—my old regiment too, the King's Own, though James Brooks is by this time scarcely a name to it. Here I sit, hale in wind and limb, and old age creeps on me kindly, telling me that no man is necessary. And yet, if God should come and lay a command on me—some task that a blind man might undertake—I am at God's service. I sit with my loins girt and my soul, I hope, shriven. That is my sermon to you, young sir: a clean breast and no baggage. I bid you welcome to Minden Cottage!" He drank to me.

"Is it named from the battle of Minden, sir?" I asked.

"It is, my lad."

"Were you there?"

He laughed. "My father won his captaincy there, in a regiment that mistook orders, charged three lines of cavalry, and broke them one after another. It also broke a sound maxim of war by charging between flanking batteries. The British Army has made half its reputation by mistaking orders—you will understand why, if ever you have the honour to belong to it. Isabel, get me my drum!"

She fetched it from its corner, with the drumsticks; hitched the sling over her beautiful neck; tightened the straps carefully; and began to play a soft tattoo.

The old man leaned back in his chair; felt in his pocket; and having found a silk bandanna handkerchief, unfolded it deliberately, cast it over his head and composed himself to slumber.

The tattoo ran on, peaceful as a brook. Isabel's arms hung lax and motionless: only her hands stirred, from the wrists, and so slightly, or else so rapidly without effort, that they too scarcely seemed to move. Her eyes were averted.

My ear could not separate the short taps. They ran on and on in a murmur as of bees or of leaves rustling together in a wood; grew imperceptibly gentler; and almost imperceptibly ceased. Isabel glanced at her father, and set the drum back in its corner. We

stole out of the summer-house together, and across to the orchard.

But under the shade of the apple-boughs she turned and faced me.

"Boy, what do you know?"

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. JACK ROGERS AS A MAN OF AFFAIRS.

"I know," said I, meeting her gaze sturdily, "that you are in danger."

"How should I be in danger?"

"That I cannot tell you, Miss Isabel, unless you first tell me something."

She waited, her eyes searching mine.

"Last night," I went on, "in the road—you were expecting someone."

Her chin went up proudly; but a tide of red rose with it, flushing her throat and so creeping up and colouring her face.

"Was it Archibald Plinlimmon?"

She put up a hand as if to push me aside: but on a sudden turned and hastened from me, with bowed head, towards the cottage.

"Miss Isabel!" I cried, following her close. "I meant no harm—how could I mean you harm? Miss Isabel!"

I would not let her go, but followed her to the door, entreating; even pushed after her into the small kitchen, where at last she faced on me.

"Why cannot you let me alone, boy? Into what have you come here to pry? You are odious—yes, odious!" She stamped her foot. "And I thought last night, that you were in trouble. Was I not kind to you for that, and that only?" She broke off pitifully. "Oh, Harry, I am dreadfully unhappy!"

She sank into a chair beside the table, across which she flung an arm and so leaned her brow and let the sobs shake her.

"And I am here to help you, Miss Isabel: only so much is puzzling me! Last night you said you had a secret, and that it was a happy one. To-day you are crying, and it is miserable to see."

"And why should I not be happy?" She lifted a hand to the bosom of her bodice, and slipped over her third finger the ring she had worn overnight.

"Why should I not be expecting him?" she murmured.

For the moment I was slow in understanding. But I suppose that at length she saw that in my eyes which satisfied her: for she drew down my head to her lap, and sat laughing and weeping softly.

A kettle hanging from a crook in the chimney-place boiled over, hissing down upon the hot wood-ashes. She sprang up and lifted it down to the hearth.

"Oh, and I forgot!" Her hand went back to her bodice again. "Mr. Jack Rogers was here this morning inquiring for you. He drove up in his tilbury, and said he was on his way to Plymouth. But he left this note."

I took it and deciphered these words, scrawled in an abominable hand:

"Meet me to-night, nine o'clock, at the place where we parted. J. R."

"Was Mr. Rogers going to Plymouth?" I asked.

"Yes, and in a hurry, by the pace he was driving."

As you may guess, this news discomposed me. Could Mr. Rogers be preparing a trap? No: certainly not for me. Whitmore, if anyone, was his quarry. But I mistrusted that, if he once started this game, it would lead him on to another scent. That Archibald Plinlimmon was innocent of the Jew's murder I felt sure. Still—what had he been seeking on the roofs by the Jew's house? It would be an ugly question, if Mr. Rogers blundered on it; and in the way of honest blundering I felt Mr. Rogers to be infinitely capable. Would that, trusting in his good nature, I had made a clean breast to him!

A clean breast? Isabel too, poor girl, was aching to make confession to her father. For weeks her secret had been a sword within her, wearing the flesh, and it eased her somewhat (as I saw) even to have made confession to me. But she would not speak to her father without first consulting Archibald. It was he, I gathered, who had enjoined silence. Major Brooks (and small blame to him) would assuredly have imposed a probation: old men with lovely daughters do not surrender them at call to penniless youths, even when the penniless youth happens to be the son of an old friend. I wished Master Archibald to perdition for a selfish fool.

I talked long with Isabel: first in the kitchen, and again on our way back to the summer-house, where her father sat awake and expecting me, book in hand.

There she left me, and he began to dictate at once as I settled myself to write.

"First, then, for site. Seek, and instal your Bee
Where nor may winds invade (for winds forbid
His homeward load); nor sheep, nor heady kid
Trample the flowers; nor blundering heifer pass,
Brush off the dew and bruise the tender grass;
Nor lizard foe in painted armour prowl
Round the rich hives. Ban him, ban every fowl—
Bee-bird with Procne of the bloodied breast:
These rifle all—our Hero with the rest,
Snapped on the wing and haled, a tit-bit, to the nest.
—But seek a green moss'd pool, with well-spring nigh;
And through the turf a streamlet fleeting by."

So much, with interminably slow pauses, we accomplished before the light waned in the summer-house and Isabel called us in to supper, which we ate together in a low-ceiled parlour overlooking the garden. At a quarter to nine, on pretence that I had still to make up arrears of sleep, she signed to me to wish her father good-night and escorted me out into the passage. A slip of the bolt, and I was free of the night.

I found the spot where I had dropped into the road, and cautiously mounted the hedge, putting the brambles aside and peering through them into the fast falling twilight. A low whistle sounded, and Mr. Rogers stepped into view on the footbridge. But he left a companion behind him in the shadow of the alders, and who this might be I could neither see nor guess.

"Is that you, Master Revel?"

There was no help for it now; so over the hedge I climbed and met him.

"How did you find out—"

—"Your name? Miss Brooks told me, this morning. But, for that matter, it's placarded all over Plymouth and at every public and forge and signpost along the road. You're a notorious character, my son."

I began to quake.

"Parson," he went on, turning and addressing the figure in the shadow, "here's the boy. Better make haste, if you have any questions to ask him before we get to business."

There stepped forward, not Mr. Whitmore (as I was fearfully expecting), but a figure unknown to me; an old shovel-hatted man leaning on a stick and buttoned to the chin in a black Inverness cape. I felt his eyes peering at me through the dusk.

"He seems very young to be a trustworthy witness," croaked this old gentleman in a voice which seemed to be affected by the night air.

"He's right enough," Mr. Rogers answered cheerfully.

"He shall tell his tale, then, in Mr. Whitmore's presence. I will not yet believe that a minister of Christ's religion, whose papers — as I have proved to you—are in order, whose testimonials are unexceptionable, who has the Bishop's licence—"

"The Bishop's fiddlestick! The Bishop didn't license him to carry marked guineas in his pocket, and I don't wait for a licence to carry a warrant in mine."

"You will at least afford him an opportunity of explaining before you execute it. To be plain with you, Mr. Rogers, this business is like to be scandalous, however you look at it."

"The constables shall remain outside, and the warrant I'll keep in my pocket until your reverence's doubts are at rest." Mr. Rogers gave another low whistle and two men, hitherto concealed at a little distance in the trees' shadow, stepped silently forward and joined us. "Ready, lads? Quick march, then!"

We took the path up the valley bottom, and across a grassy shoulder of the park to a small gate in the ring-fence. Beyond this gate a lane, or cart-road, dipped steeply downhill to the right; and following it, we came on a high stone wall overtopped by trees.

"Here's your post, Hodgson," whispered Mr. Rogers, after waiting for the constables to come up. "Jim will take the back of the house: and understand that no one is to enter or leave. If anyone attempts it, signal to me: one whistle from you, Hodgson, and two from Jim. Off you go, my lad! The signal's the same if I want you—one whistle or two, as the case may be."

The constable he called Jim crept away in the darkness, while Mr. Rogers found and cautiously opened a wicket-gate leading to a courtlage, across which a solitary window shone on the ground-floor of a house lifting its gables and heavy chimneys against a sky only less black than itself.

"Gad!" said Mr. Rogers softly, "I wonder what Whitmore's doing? The fun would be, now, to find one of these windows unfastened, and slip in upon him without announcing ourselves. 'Twouldn't be the thing, though, for a Justice of the Peace, let alone Mr. Doidge here. No: we'll have to do it in order and knock. The maid knows me. Only you two must keep back in the shadow here while she opens the door."

He stepped forward and knocked boldly.

To the astonishment of us all the door opened almost at once, and without any noise of unlocking or drawing of bolts.

"For Heaven's sake, my dear—unless you want to wake the village—" began a voice testily. It was Mr. Whitmore's, and almost on the instant, by the light of a candle which he held, he recognised the man on the doorstep.

"Mr. Rogers? To what do I owe—"

"Good evening, Whitmore! May I come in? Won't detain you long— especially since you seem to be expecting company."

"It's the maid," answered Mr. Whitmore coldly, though he seemed confused. "She has stepped down to the village for an hour, to her mother's cottage, and I am alone."

"So you call her 'my dear'? That's a bit pastoral, eh?"

"Look here, Rogers: if you're drunk, I beg you to call at some other time. To tell the truth, I'm busy."

"Writing your sermon? I thought Saturday was the night for that. 'Pon my honour now I wouldn't intrude, only the business is urgent." He waited while Mr. Whitmore somewhat grudgingly set the door wide to admit him. "By the way I've brought a couple of friends with me."

"Confound it all, Rogers—"

"Oh, you know them." Mr. Rogers, with his foot planted over the threshold, airily waved us forward out of the darkness. "Mr. Doidge, your Rector," he announced; "also Mr. Revel—a recent acquaintance of yours, as I understand."

"Good evening, Whitmore," said the Rector stepping forward. "I owe you an apology (I sincerely hope) for the circumstances of this visit, as I certainly discommend Mr. Rogers's method of introducing us."

Now, as we two stepped forward, Mr. Whitmore had instantly shot out his right hand to the door—against which Mr. Rogers, however, had planted his foot—with a gesture as if to slam it in our faces. But the sombre apparition of the Rector seemed to freeze him where he stood—or all of him but his left hand which, grasping the candlestick, slowly and as if involuntarily lifted it above the level of his eyes. Then, before the Rector had concluded, he lowered it, turned, and walked hastily before us down the passage.

Still without speaking he passed through a door on his right, and we followed him into a sparely furnished room lined with empty book-shelves. A few books lay scattered on the centre table where also, within the shaded light of a reading lamp, stood a tray with a decanter and a couple of glasses. Beside this lamp he set down the candle and faced us. In those few paces down the passage I had observed that he wore riding-boots and spurs, and that they were spotlessly bright and clean. But from this moment I had eyes

only for his face, which was ashen white and the more horrible because he was essaying a painful smile.

"My dear Rector," he began, "this is indeed a—a surprise. You said nothing of any such intention when I had the honour to call on you in Plymouth, two days ago."

"Good reason for why," interrupted Mr. Rogers. "Look here, Whitmore—with the Rector's leave we'll get this over. Do you know this coin?"

He held forward a guinea under the lamp.

I could see the unhappy man pick up his courage to fix his gaze on the coin and hold it fixed.

"I don't understand you, Rogers," he answered. "I have, of course, no knowledge of that coin or what it means. To me it looks like an ordinary guinea."

"I had it from you last night, Whitmore: and it is not an ordinary guinea, but a marked one. What's more, I marked it myself—see, with this small cross behind the king's head. What's more I sold it, so marked, to Rodriguez, the Jew."

—"Who, I suppose, promptly put it into circulation in Plymouth, where by chance it was handed to me amid the change when I paid my hotel-bill—if indeed you are absolutely sure you were given this coin by me." "Come, Rogers, that's an explanation I myself suggested," put in the Rector.

"The folks at the Royal Hotel," answered Mr. Rogers curtly, "tell me that you paid your bill in silver."

It seemed to me that Mr. Rogers was pressing Whitmore harshly, almost with a note of private vindictiveness in his voice. But while I wondered at this my eyes fell on the curate's hand as it played nervously with the base of the brass candlestick. There was a ring on the little finger: and in an instant I knew—though I could not have sworn to it in court—yet knew more certainly than many things to which I could have testified on oath—that this was the hand I had seen closing the door in the Jew's House.

Through a buzzing of the brain I heard him addressing the Rector and protesting against the absurdity, the monstrosity, of the charge—yet still with that recurring agonised glance at me. But my eyes now were on Mr. Rogers; and the buzzing ceased and my brain cleared when he swung round, inviting me to speak. I cannot tell what question he put to me, but what I said was:

"If you please, sirs, the runners are after me; and it isn't fair to make me tell yet what happened in the Jew's house, or what I saw there: for what I told might be twisted and turned against me."

"Nonsense!" interrupted Mr. Rogers. But the Rector nodded his head. "The boy's right. He's under suspicion himself, and should have a lawyer to advise him before he speaks. That's only fair play."

"But," I went on "there's another thing, if you'll be pleased to ask Mr. Whitmore about it. Why is he paying money to a soldier—a man who calls himself Letcher, but his real name is Leicester? And what have they been plotting against Miss Isabel down at the Cottage?"

CHAPTER XVII.

LYDIA BELCHER INTERVENES.

The effect of my words astounded me. As a regiment holding itself bravely against an attack in front will suddenly melt at an unexpected shout on its flank and collapse without striking another blow, so Mr. Whitmore collapsed. His jaw fell; his eyes wildly searched the dim corners of the room; his hands gripped the edge of the table; he dropped slowly into the chair behind him, dragging the tablecloth askew as he sank.

With that I felt Mr. Rogers's grip on my shoulder—no gentle one, I can assure you. He, too, had been gazing at the curate, but now stared down, searching my face.

"You've hit him, by George! Quick, boy!—have you learnt more than you told me last night? Or is it only guessing?"

"Ask him," said I, "why he married Miss Isabel."

"Married! Isabel Brooks married!"—Mr. Rogers's eyes, wide and round, turned slowly from me and fastened themselves on the

curate.

"Not to *him*, but to Archibald Plinlimmon. Mr. Whitmore married them privately. Ask him why!"

"Why?" Mr. Rogers released me and springing on the curate, seized him by the collar. "Why, you unhanged cur? Why? Or better, say it's not true—say *some*thing, else by the Lord I'll kill you here and now!"

Mr. Whitmore slid from his chair and grovelling on the floor clasped Mr. Doidge's knees. "Take him off!" he gasped. "Have mercy—take him off! You shall hear everything, sir: indeed you shall. Only have mercy, and take him off!"

"Pah!" Mr. Rogers hurled him into a corner.

"Enough, Mr. Rogers!" commanded the Rector. The two stood eyeing the culprit who, crouching where he fell, gazed up at them dumbly, pitifully, as a dog between two thrashings.

"Now, sir," the Rector continued. "You married this couple, it seems. At whose request?"

"At their own," came the answer in a whisper.

"Ay," said Mr. Rogers, "at their own request. You—not being a priest at all, or in orders, but a swindler with a forged licence—married that lady at her own request."

"Is that true?" the Rector demanded.

The poor wretch made as if to crawl towards him, to clasp his knees again. "Mercy!" he whined, between two sobs.

"One moment," Mr. Rogers insisted, as the Rector held up a hand. "Did young Plinlimmon know of the fraud?"

"No."

"Does he know now?"

"No."

"Thank the Lord for that small mercy! For, by the Lord, I'd have shot him without grace to say his prayers."

"Mr. Rogers!" Again the Rector lifted a reproving hand.

"You don't understand, sir. For this marriage—which isn't a marriage—Isabel Brooks gave the door to an honest man. He may be a bit of a fool, sir: but since she wasn't for him, he prayed she might find a better fellow. That's sound Christianity, hey? I can tell you it came tough enough. And now—" He swung round upon Whitmore. "Did this man Letcher know?" he demanded.

"He did, Mr. Rogers. Oh, if you only knew what agonies of mind—"

"Stow your agonies of mind. We'll begin with those you've caused. What was Letcher's game?"

"His right name is Leicester, sir. He is Mr. Plinlimmon's cousin —or second cousin, rather—though Mr. Plinlimmon don't know it." Mr. Whitmore, with his gloss rubbed off, was fast returning to his native style even in speech. You could as little mistake him now for a gentleman as for a priest.

"And how does that bear on your pretty plot?"

"I will tell you, gentlemen: for when George Leicester forced me to it—and it was only under threats so terrible that you would hardly believe—"

"In other words, he knew enough to hang you."

"It was terrorism, gentlemen: I was his slave, body and soul. But when he came and proposed this, and never told me what he was to get by it—for the plan was all his, and I stood to win nothing, absolutely nothing—I determined to find out for myself, thinking (you see) that by getting at his secret I might put myself on level terms."

"You mean, that you might discover enough to hang *him*. I hope you succeeded."

"To this extent, Mr. Rogers—George Leicester and Archibald Plinlimmon's mother were first cousins. There were three Leicesters to begin with, as you might say—Sir Charles, who was head of the family and is living yet, though close on eighty, and two younger brothers, Archibald and Randall, both dead. Sir Charles was a bachelor, and for years his brothers lived with him in a

sort of dependence. Towards middle-age they both married—I was told, by his orders—and near about at the same time. At any rate each married and each had a child—Archibald a daughter and Randall a son. Archibald's daughter—he died two years after her birth—was brought up by her uncle, Sir Charles, who made a pet of her; but she spoilt her prospects by marrying a poor soldier, Captain Plinlimmon. She ran away with him. And the old man would never speak to her again, nor see her, but cut her out of his will."

"I see. And she—this daughter of Archibald Leicester—was Archibald's Plinlimmon's mother. Is she living?"

"Mrs. Plinlimmon died some years ago," I put in.

"Hey? What do *you* know about all this?" asked Mr. Rogers.

"A little, sir," I answered.

"But what little you know—does it bear this man's story out?"

"Yes, sir."

"It's as well to have some check on it, for I'd trust him just so far as I could fling him by the eyebrows."

"There was no profit for me in this business, Mr. Rogers," protested Whitmore. "I'm telling you the truth, sir!" And indeed the poor rogue, having for the moment another's sins to confess, rattled on with his story almost glibly. "As I was saying, sir, the old man cut her out of his will: and not only this, but had a Bible fetched and took his oath upon it that no child of hers should ever touch a penny of his money. Be so good as to bear that in mind, sir, for it's important."

"I see," Mr. Rogers nodded. "So that cuts out Master Archibald. And the money, I suppose, went to her brother's child—the boy you spoke of?"

"Softly sir, for now we come to it. That boy—Randall Leicester's son—was George Leicester—the man who calls himself Letcher. Randall Leicester lived long enough to have his heart broken by him. He started in the Navy, with plenty of pocket-money, and better prospects; for Sir Charles turned all his affection over to him and meant to make him his heir. But—if you knew George Leicester, gentlemen, as I do! That man has a devil in him; and the devil showed himself early. First there was an ugly story about a woman—a planter's wife in one of the West India islands, where he was serving under Abercromby—Santa Lucia, I think, or it may have been St. Vincent. They say that after getting her to run with him, he left her stranded and bolted back to the ship with his pockets full of her jewels. On top of that came a bad business at Naples—an affair of cards—which cost him his uniform. After that he disappeared, and for years his uncle has believed him to be dead."

"Then who gets the money?"

"There's the villainy, sir"—he spoke as if indeed he had taken no hand in it. "Sir Charles, you see, had vowed never to leave it to young Plinlimmon: but it seems he's persuaded himself that the oath doesn't apply to young Plinlimmon's children, should he marry and have children. To whom else should it go? 'Lawful heirs of his body': and if the inheritance is made void by bastardy, you see, he turns up as the legitimate heir and collars the best of the property."

"My God!" shouted Mr. Rogers, and would have leapt on him again had not the Rector, with wonderful agility for his years, flung himself between. "You dare to stand there and tell me that, to aid this devilry, you pushed a woman into shame—and that woman Isabel Brooks?"

"Mr. Rogers," the Rector implored, "control yourself! I know better than you—every man knows who has been a parish priest—what vileness a man can be guilty of to save his skin. Reserve your wrath for Leicester, but let this poor creature be—he has an awful expiation before him—and consider with me if the worst of this evil cannot be remedied." He turned to the curate. "You have the registers—the parish papers? Where are they? Here?"

Whitmore nodded towards a door in the corner.

"Is the licence for this marriage among them? Give me the key."

The curate seemed to search in his pocket for a moment; then jerked a hand towards the door, as if meaning that no key was necessary. The Rector strode across to search.

"By God, it shall be remedied!" Mr. Rogers shouted. "Rector!"

The old man turned.

"Well?" he asked.

"You can marry them yet?"

"To be sure I can. And if the licence is in order, little time need be lost. Let me search for it."

"Man, there's no time to lose! The North Wilts Regiment sails to-morrow night for Portugal. I heard the news as I left Plymouth."

"If that's so," I put in, "Plinlimmon will be down at the cottage to-night, or to-morrow morning to say good-bye."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure," said I. "Miss Isabel told me that he had his Colonel's promise."

Mr. Rogers slapped his thigh. "Egad, boy, it seems to me you're the good angel in this business! We'll send down to the Cottage at once."

He pulled a dog-whistle from his pocket and blew two shrill calls upon it. But above the second sounded the Rector's voice in a sharp exclamation, and we spun round in time to see him fling back the door in the corner. It opened on a lighted room.

I was running towards this door to see what his exclamation might mean when at the other appeared the constable whom Mr. Rogers called "Jim"—a youngish man, and tall, with a round head set like a button on top of a massive pair of shoulders.

"You whistled for me, sir?"

"I did. You will not be wanted to keep watch any longer. Step down to Minden Cottage and give this note to Miss Brooks." He pulled out a pencil, searched his pockets, found a scrap of paper, and, leaning over the table, scribbled a few lines. "If Miss Brooks has gone to bed, you must knock her up."

"Very good, sir." Constable Jim touched his hat and retired.

"And now what's the matter in there? Come along, you Whitmore. Has he found the licence?"

But this was not what the Rector's cry had announced. The room into which we passed had apparently served Mr. Whitmore for a bed-chamber and private study combined, for a bed stood in the corner, and a bookcase and bureau on either side of the chimneypiece. In the middle of the floor lay an open valise, and all around it a litter of books and clothes, tossed here and there as their owner had dragged them out to make a selection in his packing.

Mr. Rogers uttered a long whistle. "So you were bolting?" He stared around, rubbing his chin, and fastened his eyes again on Whitmore. "Now why to-night?"

"My conscience, Mr. Rogers—"

"Oh, the devil take your conscience! Your conscience seems to have timed matters pretty accurately. Say that your nose smelt a rat. But why to-night?"

I cannot say wherefore; but, as he stared around, a nausea seemed to take the unfortunate man. Perhaps, the excitement of confession over, the cold shadow of the end rose and thrust itself before him. He was, I feel sure, a coward in grain. He swayed and caught at the ledge of the chimneypiece, almost knocking over one of the two candles which burned there.

With that there smote on our ears the sounds of two voices in altercation outside—one a woman's high contralto. Footsteps came bustling through the outer room and there stood on the threshold— Miss Belcher.

She was attired in a low-crowned beaver hat and a riding habit the skirt of which, hitched high in her left hand, disclosed a pair of tall boots cut like hessians. On this hand blazed an enormous diamond. The other, resting on her hip, held a hunting-crop and a pair of gauntleted gloves.

"I bid ye be quiet, Sam Hodgson," she was saying to the expostulating constable. "Man, if you dare to get in my way, I'll take the whip to ye. To heel, I say! 'Mr. Rogers's orders?' Damn your impidence, what do I care for Mr. Rogers? Why hallo, Jack!—"

As her gaze travelled round the room, Mr. Rogers stepped up and addressed the constable across her.

"It's all right, Hodgson: you may go back to your post. Begad, Lydia," he added as the constable withdrew, "this is a queer hour for a call."

But Miss Belcher's gaze moved slowly from the Rector—whose bow she answered with a curt nod—to me, and from me to the figure of Whitmore by the fireplace.

"What's wrong?" she demanded. "Lord, if he's not fainting!"—and as she ran, the curate swayed and almost fell into her arms. "Brandy, Jack! I saw a bottle in the next room, didn't I? No, thank ye, Rector. I can manage him."

As Mr. Rogers hurried back for the brandy, she lifted the man and carried him, rejecting our help, to an armchair beside the window. There for a moment, standing with her back to us, she peered into his face and (as I think now) whispered a word to him.

"Open the window, boy—he wants air," she called to me, over her shoulder.

While I fumbled to draw the curtains she reached an arm past me and flung them back: and so with a turn of the wrist unlatched the casement and thrust the pane wide. In doing so she leaned the weight of her body on mine, pressing me back among the curtain-folds.

I heard a cry from the Rector. An oath from Mr. Rogers answered it. But between the cry and the answer Mr. Whitmore had rushed past me and vaulted into the night.

"Confound you, Lydia!" Mr. Rogers set down the tray with a crash, and leapt over it towards the window, finding his whistle and blowing a shrill call as he ran. "We'll have him yet! Tell Hodgson to take the lane. Oh, confound your interference!"

Across the yard a clatter of hoofs sounded, cutting short his speech.

"The gate!" he shouted, clambering across the sill.

But he was too late. As he dropped upon the cobbles and pelted off to close it, I saw and heard horse and rider go hurtling through the open gate—an indistinguishable mass. A shout—a jet or two of sparks—a bang on the thin timbers as on a drum—and the hoofs were thudding away farther and farther into darkness.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE OWL'S CRY.

Silence—and then Mr. Rogers's voice uplifted and shouting for Hodgson!

But Hodgson, it seemed, had found out a way of his own. For a fresh sound of hoofs smote on our ears—this time in the lane—a tune pounded out to the accompaniment of loose stones volleyed and dropping between the beats.

"Drat the man's impidence," said Miss Belcher coolly; "he's taken my mare!"

"What's that you say?" demanded Mr. Rogers's angry voice from the yard.

"You won't find another horse, Jack, unless you brought him. Whitmore keeps but one."

"Confound it all, Lydia!" He came sullenly back towards the window.

"You've said that before. The man's gone, unless Hodgson can overtake him—which I doubt. He rides sixteen stone if an ounce, and the mare's used to something under eleven. So give over, my boy, and come in and tell me what it's all about."

"Look here," he growled, clambering back into the room, "there's devilry somewhere at the bottom of this. The fellow's nag was ready saddled—I got near enough to see that: and the yard-gate posted open: and—the devil take it, Lydia, I believe you opened that window on purpose! Did you?"

"That's telling, my dear. But, if you like, we'll suppose that I did."

"Then," said Mr. Rogers bitterly, "it may interest you to know that you've given him bail from the gallows. He's no priest at all: by his own confession he's a forger: and I'll lay odds he's a murderer too, if that's enough. But perhaps you knew this without my telling you?"

Miss Belcher took a step or two towards the fireplace and back. Her face, hidden for a moment, was composed when she turned it again upon us.

"Don't be an ass, Jack. I knew nothing of the sort."

"You knew enough, it seems," Mr. Rogers persisted sulkily, "to guess he was in a hurry. And you'll excuse me, Lydia, but this is a serious business. Whether you knew it or not, you've abetted a criminal in escaping from the law, and I've my duty to do. What brought you here to-night?"

"Are you asking that as a Justice of the Peace?"

"I am," he answered, flushing angrily.

"Then I shall not answer you. Who is this boy?"

"His name is Harry Revel?"

"What? The youngster the hue-and-cry's after?"

"Quite so: and in a pretty bad mess, since you've opened the cage to the real bird."

"Jack Rogers, you don't mean to tell me that he—that Mr. Whitmore—"

"Killed the Jew Rodriguez? Well, Lydia, I've no doubt of it in my own mind: but when you entered we were investigating another crime of his, and a dirtier one."

She swept us all in a gaze, and I suppose that our faces answered her.

"Very well," she said; "I will answer your questions. You may put them to me as a magistrate later on, but just now you shall listen to them as a friend and a gentleman." With her hunting-crop she pointed towards the door. "In the next room and alone, if you please. Thank you. You will excuse us, Rector?"

She bowed to the old man. Mr. Rogers stood aside to let her pass, then followed. The door closed behind them.

Mr. Doidge fumbled in his pockets, found his spectacles, adjusted them with a shaking hand, and sat down before the bureau to search for the licence. The pigeon-holes contained but a few bundles of papers, all tied very neatly with red tape and docketed. (Neatness, at any rate, was one of Mr. Whitmore's virtues. Although the carpet lay littered with books, boots, and articles of clothing which by their number proclaimed the dandy, the few selected for the valise had been deftly packed and with extreme economy of space.) In the first drawer below the writing flap the Rector found the register and parish account-books in an orderly pile. He seized on the register at once, opened it, and ran his eyes down the later pages, muttering while he read.

"There is no entry here of Miss Brooks's marriage," he announced. "One, two, three, five marriages in all entered in his handwriting: but no such name as Brooks or Plinlimmon. Stay: what is the meaning of this?—a blank line between two entries—one of March 20th, the other of the 25th—both baptisms. Looks as if he'd left room for a post-entry. Let's have a look at the papers."

He tossed the bundles over and found one labelled "Marriages"; spread the papers out and rubbed his head in perplexity. Isabel's licence was not among them.

Next he began to open the books and shake them, pausing now and again as a page of figures caught his eye.

"Accounts seem in order, down to the petty cash." He stooped, picked up and opened a small parcel of coin wrapped in paper, which his elbow had brushed off the ledge. "Fifteen and ninepence—right, to a penny. But where in the world's that licence?"

There were drawers in the lower half of the bookcase, and he directed me to search in these while he hunted again through the bureau. And while we were thus occupied the door opened and Miss Belcher re-entered the room with Mr. Rogers at her heels. Had it been possible to associate tears with Miss Belcher, I could have sworn she had been weeping. Her first words, and the ringing masculine tone of them, effaced that half-formed impression.

"What the dickens are you two about?"

"We are searching for a licence," the Rector answered. "I am right, Mr. Rogers—am I not?—in my recollection that Whitmore indicated it to be here, in this room, and easily found?"

"To be sure he did," said Mr. Rogers.

"I cannot find it among his papers—which, for the rest, are in apple-pie order."

Thereupon we all fell to searching. In half an hour we had ransacked the room, and all to no purpose; and so, as if by signal, broke off and eyed one another in dismay.

And as we did so Miss Belcher laughed aloud and pointed at the valise lying in the middle of the floor—the only thing we had left unexplored.

Mr. Rogers flung himself upon it, tossed its contents right and left, dived his hand under a flap, and held up a paper with a shout.

The Rector clutched it and hurried to the bureau to examine it by the light of the candles he had taken from the chimneypiece and placed there to assist his search.

"It's the licence!" he announced.

The two others pressed forward to assure themselves. He put the paper into their hands and, stepping to the rifled valise, bent over it, rubbing his chin meditatively.

"Now why," he asked, "would he be taking this particular paper with him?"

"Because," Miss Belcher answered, with a glance at Mr. Rogers, "he was a villain, but not a complete one. He was a weak fool—oh, yes, and I hate him for it. But I won't believe but that he loathed this business."

"I don't see how you get that out of his packing the paper, to carry it off with him: though it's queer, I allow," said Mr. Rogers.

"It's plain enough to me. He meant, if he reached safety, to send the thing back to you, Rector, and explain: he meant to set this thing right. I'll go bail he abominated what he'd done, and abominated the man who compelled him."

"He called it damnable," said I.

The words were scarcely out of my mouth when my ears and senses stiffened at a sound from the night without, borne to us through the open window—the hoot of an owl.

The others heard it too.

"There he is!" I whispered.

"Who?" asked Miss Belcher. But I nodded at Mr. Rogers.

"Letcher: that's his call."

Mr. Rogers glanced at the window, and grinned.

"Now here's a chance," he said softly.

"Eh?"

"He hasn't seen us. Stand close, everyone—oh, Moses, here's a game!" He seemed to be considering.

"Let's have it, Jack," Miss Belcher urged. "Don't be keeping all the fun to yourself."

"Whist a moment! I was thinking what to do with you three. The door's in line with the window, and he'll spot anyone that crosses the room."

I pointed to the window-skirting. "Not if one crossed close under the window, sir—hands and knees."

"Good boy! Can you manage it, Lydia? Keep close by the wall, tuck in your tuppeny and slip across."

She nodded. "And where after that?"

"Under the bed or behind the far curtain—which you will: and no tricks, this time! The near curtain will do for the Rector. Is that your hat, sir—there beside you, on the bureau?"

"No: I left mine in the next room. This must belong to Whitmore."

"Better still! Pass it over—thank you. And now, if you please, we'll exchange coats." Mr. Rogers began to strip.

The Rector hesitated, but after a moment his eye twinkled and he comprehended. The coats were exchanged, and he, too, began to steal towards the window.

"This will do for me, sir," said I, pointing to a cupboard under the bookcase.

"Plenty of room beneath the bed," he decided, as Miss Belcher disappeared behind her curtain. And so it happened that better than either she or the Rector I saw what followed.

We were hiding some while before the owl's cry sounded again and (as it seemed to me) from the same distance as before. Mr. Rogers, in the Rector's coat and the curate's hat, stepped hurriedly to the valise and began to re-pack it, kneeling with his back to the window, and full in the line of sight. I am fain to say that he played his part admirably. The suspense, which kept my heart knocking against my ribs, either did not trouble him or threw into his movements just the amount of agitation to make them plausible. By and by he scrambled up, collected a heap of garments, and flung them back into a wardrobe beside the bed; stepped to the bureau—still keeping his face averted from the window—picked up and pocketed the licence which the Rector had left there; returned to the valise, and, stooping again, rammed its contents tighter. I saw that he had disengaged the leather straps which ran round it, pulling them clear of their loops.

It was then that I heard a light sound on the cobbles outside, and knew it for a footstep.

"W'st!" said a voice. "W'st—Whitmore!"

CHAPTER XIX.

CHECKMATE.

Mr. Rogers's attitude stiffened with mock terror. So natural was it that I cowered back under the bed. He closed the valise with a snap as a heel grated on the window-ledge and George Leicester dropped into the room.

"Wh—ew! So *that's* why you couldn't hear an old friend's signal! Bolting, were you? No, no, my pretty duck—pay first, if you please!"

"Take it then!"

Mr. Rogers swung round on him and smote him full on the jaw—a neat blow and beautifully timed. The man went down like an ox, his head striking the floor with a second thud close beside my hiding-place.

Miss Belcher ran from her curtain, clapping her hands. But Mr. Rogers had not finished with his man.

"Shut the window!" he commanded, flinging himself forward and gripping Leicester's hands as they clutched at the carpet. "Here, youngster—pass the straps yonder and hold on to his legs!"

The blow had so rattled Leicester—had come so very near to smiting him senseless—that he scarcely struggled whilst we bound him, trussing him like a fowl with the aid of Miss Belcher's riding-crop which she obligingly handed. He was not a pretty object, with his mouth full of blood and two of his teeth knocked awry, and we made him a ludicrous one. Towards the end of the operation he began to spit and curse.

"Gently, my lad!" Mr. Rogers turned him over.

"You came here to settle up and we don't mean to disappoint you. Let's see what you're worth." He plunged a hand into Leicester's breeches pocket and drew forth a coin or two.

"Let me alone, you '—' thief!" roared Leicester, his voice coming back to him in full strength.

"Indeed, Mr. Rogers," the Rector protested, "this is going too far, I doubt."

"It's funny work for a Justice of the Peace, I'll own," he answered, with a grin at Miss Belcher. "Lydia, my dear, be so good as to bring one of those candles: I want to have a look at these coins.&#8230 Ah, I thought so!"

"Put that money back where you found it!" snarled Leicester. "By God! I don't know what you're after, but I'll have the law of you for this evening's work!"

"All in good time, my friend: you shall have as much law as you like, and a trifle over. See, Rector?" Mr. Rogers pointed to a scratch on the face of one of the coins.

Leicester began to smell danger. "What's wrong with the money?" he demanded. Then as no one answered, "There's nothing wrong with it, is there?" he asked.

"Depends where you got it, and how," he was answered.

"Look here—you're not treating me fair," urged the rogue, changing his tune. "If it's over the money you're knocking me about like this, you're maltreating an innocent man; for I had it from Parson Whitmore—every penny."

"Ah, if you can prove that"—Mr. Rogers's face was perfectly grave— "you're a lucky man! The Reverend Mr. Whitmore has disappeared."

The scoundrel's face was a study. Miss Belcher turned to the window, and even the Rector was forced to pull his lip.

"Disappeared," Mr. Rogers repeated, "and most mysteriously. The unfortunate part of the business is that before leaving he made no mention of any money actually paid to you. On the contrary, we gathered that for some reason or other he owed you a considerable sum which he found a difficulty in paying. Let me see"—he looked around on us as if for confirmation—"the sum was fifty pounds, if I mistake not? We found it difficult to guess how he, a priest in Holy Orders, came to owe you this substantial amount. But perhaps you met him on his way, and these guineas in my hand were tendered as part-payment?"

George Leicester blinked. Accustomed to play with the fears of others, he understood well enough the banter in Mr. Rogers's tone, and that he was being sauced in his own sauce. He read the menace in it too. But what could he answer?

"I had the money from Whitmore," he repeated doggedly.

"When?"

"That I'll leave you to find out." He laughed a short laugh, between rage and derision. "Gad! you've a fair stock of impudence among you! First you assault me, half kill me, and tie me up here without a penn'orth of reason given: and now you're inviting me to walk into another trap-for all I can learn, merely because it amuses you. It won't do, my fine Justice-fellow; and that you'll discover."

"The question is important, nevertheless. I may tell you that at one time or another these coins were in the possession of the Jew Rodriguez, who was found murdered in Southside Street, Plymouth, yesterday morning. You perceive, therefore, that something depends on when and how you came by them. Still, since you prefer—and perhaps wisely—to keep your knowledge to yourself, I'll start by making out the warrant and we'll have in the constables." Mr. Rogers stepped towards the bureau.

"Wh—" Leicester attempted a low whistle, but his mouth hurt him and he desisted. An ugly grin of comprehension spread over his face—of comprehension and, at the same time, of relief. "That explains," he muttered. "But where did he find the pluck?"

"Eh?" Mr. Rogers, in the act of seating himself by the bureau, had caught the tone but not the words. As he slewed round with the query I heard another sound in the adjoining room.

"Oh, go ahead with your warrant, my Jessamy Justice! It tickles you and don't hurt me. Shall I help you spell it?"

"I was thinking to ask you that favour," Mr. Rogers replied demurely. "Your name, now?"

"Letcher—L.e.t.c.h.e.r—Sergeant, North Wilts Regiment."

"Thank you—'Letcher,' you say? Now I was on the point of writing it 'Leicester.'"

In the dead silence that followed he laid down his pen, and with his hands behind him came slowly across the room and stared into Leicester's face.

"The game is up, my friend."

Leicester met the stare, but his jaw and throat worked as though he were choking. I thought he was trying to answer. If so, the words refused to come.

Someone knocked at the door.

Mr. Rogers stepped to it quickly. "That you, Jim?"

"Yessir."

"Is Miss Brooks with you?" He held the door a very little ajar—not wide enough to give sight of us behind him.

"Yessir. A gentleman, too, sir: leastways he talks like one, though dressed like a private soldier. He won't give his name." Jim's tone was an aggrieved one.

"Thank you: that's quite right. You may go home to bed, if you wish: but be ready for a call. I may want you later on."

"Be this all you want of me?" Jim was evidently disappointed.

"I fear so."

"P'rhaps you don't know it, sir, but Hodgson's gone. There was nobody at the gate when we came by."

"Hodgson has a little job on hand. It will certainly occupy him all night, but I am afraid you cannot help him. Now don't stay asking questions, my man, but be off to bed. I'll send word if I want you."

Jim grumbled and withdrew. "Best to get him out of the way," Mr. Rogers explained to the Rector. "You and I can take this fellow back to Plymouth at daybreak." He listened for a moment and announced, "He's gone. Keep an eye on our friend, please, while I prepare Isabel for it. My word!"—and he heaved a prodigious sigh— "I'd give something to be through with the next ten minutes!"

He opened the door and, passing through, closed it as quickly behind him. He was absent for half an hour perhaps. We could hear the mutter of his voice in the next room and now and again another masculine voice interrupting—never Isabel's. The Rector had found a seat for Miss Belcher beside the bureau. He himself took his stand beside the chimney and fingered a volume of the registers, making pretence to read but keeping his eye alert for any movement of Leicester. No one spoke; until the prisoner, intercepting a glance from Miss Belcher, broke into a sudden brutal laugh.

"Poor old lady!" he jeered, and his eyes travelled wickedly across the disordered floor. "Whitmore left a lot behind him, eh?"

She rose and turning her back on him, walked to the window. There she leaned out, seeming to study the night: but I saw that her shoulders heaved.

The Rector looked across with a puzzled frown. Leicester laughed again: and with that, Miss Belcher came back to him, slipped out the riding-crop which trussed him, and held it under his nose. Her face was white, but calm. She lifted the stick slowly to bring it across his face, paused, and flung it on the floor.

"You tempt me to be as dirty as yourself," she said. "But one woman has shown you mercy to-night, despising you. Think of that, George Leicester."

The door opened again and Mr. Rogers nodded to us.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, perceiving the riding-crop on the floor.

"He can't run," said Miss Belcher nonchalantly. "But he can stand now, I fancy—and walk, if you loosen his legs a bit. He'll be wanted for a witness, won't he?"

"You're all wanted." Mr. Rogers helped Leicester to stand and slackened the bond about his ankles. "We'll tighten it again in the next room, my friend. Stay a moment, Rector!" He pointed to the wardrobe. The Rector went to it and unhitching a clean surplice laid it across his arm. So we filed into the room where Isabel and Archibald Plinlimmon awaited us.

They stood in the shadow of the window-curtains, talking together in low tones: and by their attitudes she was vehemently pleading for a favour which he as vehemently rejected. But when she caught him by both hands he yielded, and they faced us together—she with her beautiful face irradiated.

Miss Belcher stepped to her at once and kissed her; and across that good lady's shoulder she cast one look at the prisoner, now being shuffled into the room by Mr. Rogers. It was neither vindictive nor recriminatory, but cheerful and calm with an utter scorn. I looked nervously at Archibald Plinlimmon. His face was dusky red and sullen with rage; but I noted with a leap of my heart that he, too, looked Leicester squarely in the face: and from that moment (if a boy may say so) I felt there was hope for him.

The Rector unfolded and donned the surplice. Isabel disengaged herself from Miss Belcher's arms and, drawing off her ring, handed it to her lover. Their eyes met, and hers were smiling bravely: but they brimmed on a sudden as the tears sprang into his. And now I felt that there was strong hope for him.

Thus I came to be present at their wedding. Indeed, the prisoner claimed so much of Mr. Rogers's attention during the ceremony that you might almost say I acted as groomsman.

CHAPTER XX.

ISABEL'S REVENGE.

When all was over, and the book signed, Isabel walked across to Mr. Rogers and held out her hand.

"You have been a good friend to me to-night. God will surely bless you for what you have done." She paused, with heightened colour.

Mr. Rogers awkwardly stammered that he hoped she wouldn't mention it. But if the speech was inadequate, his action made up for it. He took her hand and kissed it respectfully.

It seemed that she had more to say. "I have still another favour to ask," she went on—I have heard since that a woman always keeps some tenderness for an honest man who has once wooed her, however decidedly she may have said "no." Isabel's smile was at once tender and anxious; but it drew no response from Mr. Rogers, who had let drop her fingers and stood now with eyes uncomfortably averted.

"I want a wedding gift," said she.

"Eh?" He turned a flushed face and perceived that she was pointing at Leicester.

"I want this man from you. Will you give him to me?"

"For what?"

"You shall see." She knelt at the prisoner's feet and began to unbuckle the strap about his ankles; shrinking a little at first at the touch of him, but resolutely conquering her disgust.

Mr. Rogers put down a hand to prevent her.

"You never mean to set him free?"

"That is what I ask," she answered, with an upturned look of appeal.

"My dear Miss Brooks," he said, inadvertently using her maiden name, "I am sorry—no, that's a lie—I am jolly glad to say that it can't be done."

"Why? Against whom else has he sinned, to injure them?"

"Against a good many, even if we put it on that ground only. Besides, he'll have to answer another charge altogether."

"What charge?"

"Of having murdered the Jew Rodriguez. Did I not tell you that we found marked money in his pocket?"

"But he never took that money from Mr. Rodriguez?"

Mr. Rogers shrugged his shoulders. "That's for him to prove."

"But we know he did not," Isabel insisted, and turned to me. "He never took that money from Mr. Rodriguez?"

"No," said I; "it was given him last night by Mr. Whitmore in Miss Belcher's shrubbery."

"He is not guilty of this murder?"

"No," said I again, "I think not: indeed, I am sure he is not." I glanced at Archibald Plinlimmon who had been standing with eyes downcast and gloomy, studying the dim pattern of the carpet at his feet. He looked up now: his face had grown resolute.

"No," he echoed in a strained voice; "he had nothing to do with the murder."

"Why, what on earth do *you* know?" cried Mr. Rogers, and Isabel, too, bent back on her knees and gazed on him amazedly.

"I was there."

"*Where*, in Heaven's name?"

"On the roof outside the garret. I looked in and saw the body lying."

"You were on the roof—you looked in and saw the body—" Mr. Rogers repeated the words stupidly, automatically, searching for speech of his own. "Man alive, how came you on the roof? What were you doing there?"

"We were billeted three doors away," said Archibald, and paused. "I can tell you no more just now."

"'We'?"

"That man and I." He pointed at Leicester.

"And you looked in. What else did you see?" Mr. Rogers's voice was sharp.

"That I cannot tell you."

"The murderer?"

"No: not the murderer," he answered slowly.

"Then what? Whom?"

"I have said that I cannot tell you."

"But he can, sir!" I cried recklessly. "He saw *me*! I had just found the body and was standing beside it when he looked in." I stopped, panting. It seemed as if all the breath in me had escaped for the moment with my confession.

Mr. Rogers turned from me to Archibald. "I think I see. You supposed the boy to be guilty, and helped him to get away."

"No," answered Archibald, "I did not think him guilty. I did not know what to think. And it was he who helped me to get away."

"Why should he help you to get away?"

"I will tell that—but not to you. I will tell it to my wife."

Isabel had risen from her knees. She went to him and would have taken his hand. "Not yet," he said hoarsely, and turned from her.

Mr. Rogers eyed the Rector in despair. But the Rector merely shook his head.

"But confound it all! Where's the murderer, in all this?"

"Sakes alive! Isn't that as clear as daylight?" interjected Miss Belcher. "Didn't I let him out of the window more than an hour ago? And isn't Hodgson foundering my mare at this moment in chase of him? See here, Jack," she went on judicially, "you've played one or two neat strokes to-night: but one or two neat strokes don't make a professional. You'll have to give up this justicing. You've no head for it."

"Indeed?" retorted Mr. Rogers. "Then since it seems you see deeper into this business than most of us, perhaps you'll favour us with your advice."

"With all the pleasure in life, my son," said the lady. "I can see holes in a ladder: but I don't look deep into a brick wall, for the reason that I don't try. There's some secret between Mr. Plinlimmon and this boy. What it is I don't know, and you don't know: and I've yet to discover that 'tis any business of ours. All I care to hear about it is that Mr. Plinlimmon means to tell his wife, for which I commend him. Now you don't propose to make out a warrant against *him*, I take it? As for the boy, he's done us more services to-night than we can count on our fingers. He's saved more than one, and more than two, of us here, let alone five couples married by Whitmore in the four months he was curate. Reckon them in, please, and their children to come. Ah, my dear," she laid a hand on Isabel's shoulder. "I know what I'm speaking of! He has ended a scandal for the Rector, and in time for the mischief to be repaired. He has even saved that dirty scoundrel there, if it helps a man on Judgment Day that his villainies have miscarried. Well then, what about the boy? There's a hue-and-cry after him; but you can't give him up. Let alone the manner of your meeting him—that business of the bonfire—and a pretty tale 'twould make against a Justice of the Peace—"

"I never gave that a thought, Lydia," Mr. Rogers protested.

"I know you didn't, my lad: that's why I mentioned it. Well, letting that alone, how are you to give the child up? You can't. You know you can't. We've to hide him now, though it cost your commission. Eh? to be sure we must. Give him up? Pretty gratitude indeed, and what next, I wonder!"

"I never thought of giving him up."

"I know you didn't, again: but I'm combing out your brains for you, if you'll only stand quiet and not interrupt. Keep your mind fixed on Whitmore. Whitmore's your man. If Hodgson catches him—"

"If Hodgson catches him, he'll be charged with the murder. I've the warrant in my pocket. Then how are we to hide the boy, or keep any silence on what has happened here to-night?"

"Ye dunderhead!" Miss Belcher stamped her foot. "What in the name of fortune have we to do with the murder? If Hodgson catches him, he'll be charged with forging the Bishop of Exeter's licence: that's to say with a crime he's already confessed to you. If you want to hang him, that'll do it. You don't want to hang him twice over, do you? And I don't reckon he'll be so anxious to be hanged twice that he'll confess to a murder for the fun of the thing. If you say nothing, he'll say nothing. Upon my word you seem to have that Jew on the brain! Who made out the warrant?"

"I, of course."

"Then keep it in your pocket: and when you get home, burn it. It beats me to think why you can't let that murder alone. Rodriguez was no friend of yours, was he? You can't bring him to life again, can you? And what's your evidence? A couple of marked coins? Barring us few here, who knows of them? Nobody. Barring us few here, who knows a whisper beside, to connect Whitmore with the murder? Nobody again. Very well, then: you came here to-night to expose Whitmore as a false priest and a forger. You took the villain on the hop, and he confessed: so the boy's evidence is not needed. Having confessed, he made his escape. You can say, if you will, that I helped him. That's all you need remember, and what more d'ye want? It's odds against Hodgson catching him. It's all Lombard Street to a china orange against his bothering you, if caught, with any plea but Guilty." She ceased, panting with her flow of words.

"Well, but about this Leicester?" Mr. Rogers objected.

"What about him? Let him go. Isabel was right in begging him off— though you did it, my dear, for other reasons than mine: but when the heart's right, God bless you, it usually speaks common sense. Let him go. D'ye want to hang him? He's ugly enough, but I don't see how you're to do it, unless first of all you catch Whitmore and then force him to turn cat-in-the-pan, at the risk of his talking too much and with the certainty of dragging Isabel into the exposure. Even so, I doubt you'll get evidence. This man is a deal too shrewd to have done any of the forging himself. If Whitmore had known enough to hang him, Whitmore wouldn't have gone in awe of him. And what Whitmore don't know, Whitmore can't tell."

All this while the prisoner had kept absolute silence; had stood motionless, except that his eyes turned from one speaker to another, and now and then seemed to seek Archibald Plinlimmon's—who, however, refused to return the look. But now he twisted his battered mouth into something like an appreciative grin.

"Bravo, Madam!" said he. "You've the wits of the company, if you'll take my compliments."

"I misdoubt they're interested ones," she answered drily, and so addressed herself again to Mr. Rogers. "Let the man go: you've drawn his sting. If ever he opens his mouth on to-night's work, we've a plum or two to pop into it. If Mr. Plinlimmon chooses to take him at the door and horsewhip him, I say nothing against it. Indeed he's welcome to the loan of my hunting-crop."

"But no," put in Isabel quickly, and knelt again; "my husband will not hurt where I have pardoned!" Rapidly she unloosed the strap about Leicester's ankles and stood up. "Now hold out your hands," she said.

He held them out. She looked him in the face, and a sudden tide of shame forced her to cover her own. In the silence her husband stepped to her side. His eyes were steady upon Leicester now.

"How could you? How could you?" she murmured.

Then, dragging—as it were—her hands down to the task, she unbuckled the strap around his wrist and pointed to the door.

Said Miss Belcher, "So two women have shown you mercy to-night, George Leicester!"

He went, without any swagger. His face was white. Miss Belcher and the Rector drew back as though he carried a disease, and let him pass. At the door he turned and his eyes, with a kind of miserable raillery in them, challenged Archibald Plinlimmon.

"Yes, you are right." The young man took a step towards him. "Between us two there is a word to be said." He turned on us

abruptly. "I have been afraid of that man—yes, afraid. To say this out, and before Isabel, costs me more courage than to thrash him. Through fear of him I have been a villain. Worse wrong than I did to my wife—worse in its consequences—I could not do: you know it, all of you; and I must go now and tell it to her father. I did it unknowingly, by this man's contrivance; but not in any fear of him. What I did in fear, and knowingly, was worse in another way—worse in intention. I tell you that but for an accident I might—I might have—" He stammered and came to a halt. "No, I cannot tell it yet," he muttered half defiantly, with a shy look at the Rector. "But this I can tell"—and his voice rose—"that no fear of *him* stays me. You? I have your secret now. You have none of mine I dare not meet. You may go: you have my wife's pardon, it seems. I do not understand it, but you have mine—with this caution. You are my superior officer. If to-morrow, outside of the ranks, you dare to say a word to me, I promise to strike you on the mouth before the regiment, and afterwards to tell the whole truth of us both, and take what punishment may befall."

So he too pointed towards the door. Leicester bowed and went from us into the night.

"That's all very well," groaned Mr. Rogers, "but I'll have to resign my commission of the peace."

"If it's retiring from active service you mean," said Miss Belcher cheerfully, "that's what I began by advising. But stick to the title, Jack: you adorn it—indeed you do. And for my part," she wound up, "I think you've done mighty well to-night, considering."

"I've let one villain escape, you mean, and t'other go scot free."

"And the nuisance of it is," said she with a broadening smile, "I shan't be able to congratulate you in public."

"Well"—Mr. Rogers regained his cheerfulness as he eyed his knuckles—"we've let a deal of villainy loose on the world: but I got in once with the left, and that must be my consolation. What are we to do with this boy?"

"Hide him."

"Easier said than done."

"Not a bit." Miss Belcher turned to me. "Have you any friends, boy, who will be worrying if we keep you a few days?"

"None, ma'am," said I, and thereby in my haste did much injustice to the excellent Mr. and Mrs. Trapp.

"Eh? You have the world before you? Then maybe you're luckier than you think, my lad. What would you like to be? A sailor, now? I can get you shipped across to Guernsey to-morrow, if you say the word."

"That would do very well, ma'am: but if you ask me to choose—"

"I do."

"Then I'll choose to be a soldier," said I stoutly.

"H'm! You'll have to grow to it."

"I could start as a drummer, ma'am." The drum in Major Brooks's summer-house had put that into my head.

"My father can manage it, I am sure!" cried Isabel. "And meanwhile let him come back to the Cottage. No one will think of searching for him there: and to-night, when I have spoken to my father—"

"You will speak to your father to-night?"

Isabel glanced at her bridegroom, who nodded. "To-night," said he firmly. "We sail to-morrow."

Miss Belcher wagged her head at him. "I had my doubts of you, young man. You've been a fool: but I've a notion you'll do, yet."

"Good-night, then!" Isabel went to her and held up her cheek to be kissed.

"Eh? Not a bit of it! I'm coming with you. Don't stare at me now— I've a word to say, and I think maybe 'twill help."

We left the Rector and Mr. Rogers to their task of overhauling the house while they sat up on the chance of Hodgson's returning with Whitmore or with news of him: and trooped up the lane and down across the park to Minden Cottage.

"Take the child to bed," said Miss Belcher, as we reached the door: and so to my room Isabel conducted me, the others waiting below.

She lit my candles and kissed me. "You won't forget your prayers to-night, Harry? And say a prayer for me: I shall need it,

though I have more call to thank God for sending you."

A minute later I heard her tap on her father's door. He was awake and dressed, apparently—for it seemed at any rate but a moment later that her voice was guiding his blind footsteps by whispers down the stairs. Had I guessed more of the ordeal before her, my eyes had closed less easily than they did. As it was, I tumbled into bed and slept almost as soon as my head touched the pillow.

I had forgotten to blow out the candles, and they were but half burnt, yet extinguished, when I awoke from a dream that Isabel was kneeling beside me in their dim light to find her standing at the bed's foot in a fresh print gown and the room filled again with sunshine. Her eyes were red. Poor soul! she had but an hour before said good-bye to Archibald; and Spain and its battlefields lay before him, and between their latest kiss and their next—if another there might be. Yet she smiled bravely, telling me that all was well, and that her father would be ready for me in the summer-house.

Major Brooks, when I found him there, made no allusion to the events of the night. His face was mild and grave as at our first meeting. At the sound of my footsteps he picked up his Virgil and motioned me to be seated.

"Let me see," he began: "*liquidi fontes*, was it not?"—and forthwith began to dictate at his accustomed pace.

"But seek a green-moss'd pool, with well-spring nigh,
And through the grass a streamlet fleeting by.
The porch with palm or oleaster shade—
That when the regents from the hive parade
Its gilded youth, in Spring—their Spring!—to prank,
To woo their holiday heat a neighbouring bank
May lean with branches hospitably cool.
And midway, be your water stream or pool,
Cross willow-twigs, and massy boulders fling—
A line of stations for the halting wing
To dry in summer sunshine, has it shipped
A cupful aft, or deep in Neptune dipped.
    Plant cassias green around, thyme redolent,
    Full-flowering succory with heavy scent,
And violet-beds to drink the channel'd stream.
And let your hives (sewn concave, seam to seam,
Of cork; or of the supple osier twined)
Have narrow entrances; for frosts will bind
Honey as hard as dog-days run it thin:
—In bees' abhorrence each extreme's akin.
Not purposeless they vie with wax to paste
Their narrow cells, and choke the crannies fast
With pollen, or that gum specific which
Out-binds or birdlime or Idxan pitch—"

—And so on, and so on, until midday arrived, and Isabel with the claret and biscuits. She lingered while he ate: and when he had done he shut his Virgil, saying (in a tone which, though studiously kind, told me that she was not wholly forgiven):

"Take the drum, Isabel, and give the lad his first lesson. It will not disturb me."

She choked down a sob, passed the drum to me, and put the drumsticks into my hands. And so by signs rather than by words, she began to teach me; scarcely letting me tap the vellum, but instructing me rather how to hold the sticks and move my wrists. So quiet were we that the old man by and by dropped asleep: and then, as she taught, her tears flowed.

This was the first of many lessons; for I spent a full fortnight at Minden Cottage, free of its ample walled garden, but never showing my face in the high road or at the windows looking upon it. I learned from Isabel that Whitmore had not been found, and that Archibald and his regiment had sailed for Lisbon. Sometimes Miss Belcher or Mr. Rogers paid us a visit, and once the two together: and always they held long talks with the Major in his summer-house. But they never invited me to be present at these interviews.

So the days slipped away and I almost forgot my fears, nor speculated how or when the end would come. My elders were planning this for me, and meanwhile life, if a trifle dull, was pleasant enough. What vexed me was the old man's obdurate politeness towards Isabel, and her evident distress. It angered me the more that, when she was not by he gave never a sign that he brooded on what had befallen, but went on placidly polishing his petty and (to me) quite uninteresting verses.

But there came an evening when we finished the Fourth Georgic together.

"Of tillage, timber, herds, and hives, thus far
My trivial lay—while Caesar thunders war
To deep Euphrates, conquers, pacifies,
Twice wins the world and now attempts the skies.
Pardon thy Virgil that Parthenope
Sufficed a poor tame scholar, who on thee
Whilom his boyish pastoral pipe essayed,
—Thee, Tityrus, beneath the beechen shade."

He closed the book.

"Lord Wellington is not a Caesar," he said and paused, musing: then, in a low voice, "Parthenope—Parthenope—and to-morrow 'Arms and the man.' Boy," said he sharply, "we do not translate the Aeneid."

"No, sir?"

"Mr. Rogers calls for you to-night. A draft of the 52nd Regiment sails from Plymouth to-morrow. You will find, when you join it in Spain, that—that my son-in-law"—he hesitated and spoke the word with a certain prim deliberateness—"has been gazetted to an ensigncy in that gallant regiment. I may tell you that he owes this to no intervention of mine, but solely to the generosity of Miss Belcher. Before departing—I will do him so much justice—he spoke to me very frankly of his past, and for my daughter's sake and his father's I trust that, as under Providence you were an instrument in averting its consequences, so you may sound him yet to some action which, whether he lives or falls, may redeem it. Mr. Rogers will sup with us to-night. If I mistake not, I hear his wheels on the road." He drew himself up to his full height and bowed. "You have done a service, boy, to the honour of two families. I thank you for it, and shall not omit to remember you daily when I thank God. Shall we go in?"

I had, as I said just now, almost forgotten my fears of the Law: but that the Law had not relaxed its interest in me was evident from my friends' precautions. Night had fallen before Mr. Rogers rose from table and gave the word for departure, and after exchanging some formal farewells with Major Brooks, and some very tender ones with Isabel, I was packed in the tilbury and driven off into darkness in which the world seemed uncomfortably large and vague and my prospects disconcertingly ill lit.

"D'ye know what *that* is?" asked Mr. Rogers at the end of five minutes, pulling up his mare and jerking his whip towards a splash of white beside the road.

"No, sir."

He pulled a rein, and brought the light of the offside lamp to bear on a milestone with a bill pasted upon it.

"A full, particular, and none too flattering description of you, my lad, with an offer of twenty pounds. And I'm a Justice of the Peace! Cl'k, lass!"

On went the mare; and I, who had been feeling like a needle in a bundle of hay, now shrank down within my wraps as though the night had a thousand eyes.

We reached the village of Anthony: and here, instead of holding on for Torpoint and the ferry, Mr. Rogers struck aside into a lane on our right, so steep and narrow that he alighted and led the mare down, holding one of the lamps to guide her as she picked her steps.

The lane ended beside a sheet of water, pitch-black under the shadow of a wooded shore, and glimmering beyond it with the reflections of a few stars. Mr. Rogers gave a whistle; and a soft whistle answered him. I heard a boat's nose grate on the shingle and take ground.

"All right, Sergeant?"

"Right, sir. Got the boy?"

"Climb down, Harry," whispered Mr. Rogers. "Shake hands and good luck to you!"

I was given a hand over the bows by a man whose face I could not see. The boat was full of men, and one dark figure handed me to another till I reached the stern-sheets.

"Give way, lads!" called a voice beside me, as the bow-man pushed us off. We were travelling fast when at a bend of the creek a line of lights shot into view—innumerable small sparks clustered low on the water ahead and shining steadily across it. I knew them at once. They were the lights of Plymouth Dock.

"Where are you taking me?" I cried.

"That's no question for a soldier," said a voice which I recognised as the sergeant's. And one or two of the crew laughed.

CHAPTER XXI.

I GO CAMPAIGNING WITH LORD WELLINGTON.

The vessel to which they rowed me was the *Bute* transport, bound for Portugal with one hundred and fifty officers and men of the 52nd Regiment, one hundred and twenty of the third battalion 95th Rifles, and a young cornet and three farriers of the 7th Light Dragoons in charge of fifty remounts for that regiment.

We weighed anchor at daybreak (the date, I may mention, was July 28th), and cleared the Sound. At ten o'clock or thereabouts the wind fell, and for two days and nights we drifted aimlessly about the Channel at the will of the tides, while the sergeant—a veteran named Henderson, who had started twenty-five years before by blowing a bugle in the 52nd, and therefore served me as index and example of what by patience I might attain to—filled the most of my time between sleep and meals with lessons upon that instrument. From a hencoop abaft the mainmast (the *Bute* was a brig, by the way) I blew back inarticulate farewells to the shores receding from us imperceptibly, if at all; and so illustrated a profound remark of the war's great historian, that the English are a bellicose rather than a martial race, and by consequence sometimes find themselves committed to military enterprises without having counted the cost or made complete preparation.

On the third day the wind freshened and blew dead foul, decimating the horses with seasickness, prostrating three-fourths of the men, and shaking the two regiments down into a sociability which outlasted their sufferings. To be sure my comrades of the 52nd (as, with a fearful joy, I named them to myself in secret), being veterans for the most part, recovered or recovering from wounds taken in the land to which they were returning with common memories of Sir John Moore, of Benevente, Calcabellos and Corunna, treated the riflemen with that affable condescension which was all that could be claimed by third battalion youngsters with their soldiering before them. But the 52nd knew the 95th of old. And, veterans and youths, were they not bound to be enrolled together in that noble Light Division, the glory of which was already lifting above the horizon, soon to blaze across heaven?

Sergeant Henderson did not suffer from seasickness. For no reward— unless it be the fierce delight of tackling a difficulty for its own sake—he had sworn to make a bugler of me, given moderately bad weather: and when the evening of September 2nd brought us off the coast of Portugal, he allowed me to shake hands over his success. Early next morning we began to disembark at a place called Figueira, by the mouth of the Mondego river. I stepped ashore with a swelling heart.

But I carried also a portentously swollen under-lip, with a crack in it which showed signs of festering. Now there was a base hospital at Figueira, to the surgeon in charge of which fell the duty of inspecting the men as they landed and detaining those who were sick or physically unfit. I need not say that his eye was arrested at once by my unfortunate lip. He examined it.

"Blood-poisoning," he announced. "Nasty, if not attended to. Detained for a week."

He saw my eyes fill with tears at this blow, the more cruel because quite unexpected; and added not unkindly:

"Eh? What? In a hurry? Never mind, my lad—you'll go up with the next draft I dare say. Jericho won't fall between this and then."

I was young, and never doubted that even so slight a promise must be remembered.

Still, that my merit might leave him no excuse for forgetting, I determined that it should not escape attention: and finding myself confined to hospital with a trifling hurt which in no way interfered with my activity, and being at once pounced upon by an over-worked and red-eyed orderly and pressed into service as emergency-man, nurse, and general bottle-washer for three over-crowded tents, I flung into my new duties a zeal which ended by undoing me. Drummers might be wanted at the front, but meanwhile the hospital-camp was undoubtedly short-handed. And my hopes faded as, with the approach of Christmas, wagon after wagon laden with sick soldiers crawled back to us from the lowlying country over which Lord Wellington had spread his forces between the Agueda and the upper Mondego—men shuddering with ague or bent double with rheumatism, and all bringing down the same tales of short food, sodden quarters, and arrears of pay. For three days, they told me, the army had gone without bread, and the commissariat crawled over unthreatened roads at the pace of five to nine miles a day. They cursed the war, the Government at home, above all the Portuguese and everything in Portugal; and yet their hardships seemed heaven to me in comparison with the hospital in which, though its duties were frequently disgusting, I had plenty to eat and nothing to complain of but over-work.

It was not until Christmas that I won my release, and by a singular accident.

It happened that after nightfall on the 23rd of December an ambulance train arrived of six wagons, all full of sick demanding instant attention; and, close upon these, four other wagons laden with cavalrymen, wounded more or less severely in a foraging excursion beyond the Agueda, which had brought them into conflict with a casual party of Marmont's dragoons. The weather was bitterly cold; the men, apart from this, were unfit for so long a journey and should have been attended to promptly at their own headquarters. To make matters worse, one of the wagons had been overturned six miles back on the frozen road, and the assistant-surgeon who, owing to the seriousness of the business, had been sent down in attendance, lost his balance completely. Three of the poor fellows had succumbed as they lay, of cold, wounds and exhaustion, and a dozen others were in desperate case.

Our surgeons went to work at once, and until midnight I attended on them, preparing the lint, washing the blood-stained instruments, changing the water in the pails, and performing other necessary but more gruesome tasks which I need not particularise. At midnight the young cavalry surgeon, who had been freely dosed with brandy, professed himself ready to take over the minor casualties. The two hospital surgeons, by this time worn out, accepted the offer and withdrew. No one thought of me.

I understand that about an hour later as I sat waiting for orders on the edge of an unoccupied bed (from which a dead man had been carried out a little before midnight) I must have dropped across it in a sleep of utter exhaustion. It appears too that the young doctor, finding me there a short while after, carried me out and laid me on the ground with my head against the hut. He never admitted this: for I had been attending upon him, off and on, since his arrival, and that he failed to recognise me might have been awkwardly accounted for. But I cannot believe (as certainly I do not remember) that of my own motion I crawled outside the hut and stretched myself on the frozen ground, or that, exhausted as I was, I could have walked ten yards in my sleep.

At all events, the chill of the bitter dawn awoke me there; and with a yawn I stretched out both arms. My right hand encountered—what?— the body of a man stretched beside me! Still dazed and numb, I rolled over to my elbow, raised myself a little and peered into his face.

It was pinched and cold. Its eyes stared straight up at the dawn. From it my gaze travelled slowly over the faces of three other men laid out accurately alongside of him, feet to feet, head to head.

I sank back, not yet comprehending, gazed up at the grey sky for a while, then slowly raised myself on my left elbow.

On that side lay a score of sleepers, all flat on their backs, and all equally still. Then I understood and leapt up with a scream. It was a line of corpses, and I had been laid out beside them for burial at dawn.

A sleepy orderly—a friend of mine—poked his head out of the doorway of the next hut. I pointed to the spot where I had been lying.

"They must ha' done it in the dark," he said, slowly regarding the bodies.

I suppose that my story, spreading about the camp, at length penetrated to headquarters: for on Christmas Day, a transport arriving and landing some light guns and a detachment of artillery, I was sent forward with them towards Villa del Ciervo on the left bank of the Agueda, where, by all accounts, the 52nd were posted.

Our battery was but six light six-pounders; yet even with these we moved over the frozen and slippery roads at a snail's pace, the men tearing their boots to ribbons as they hung on to the drag-ropes—for the artillery captain was a martinet and refused to lock the wheels, declaring that it would damage the carriages. Of damage to his men he never seemed to think: and I, being fool enough to volunteer— though my weight on the rope could have counted for next to nothing— found myself on the second day without heels to my shoes, and on the third without shoes at all. Nor is it likely that I had ever reached the Agueda in time for the fighting had we not been met at Coimbra by an order to leave our guns in the magazine there and hurry forward to Ciudad Rodrigo, where my comrades were required to work the 24-pounders which composed the bulk of Lord Wellington's siege-train.

Having been supplied with new boots from the stores in Coimbra, we pushed on eastward through torrents of rain which converted every valley bottom into a quag, so that our march was scarcely less toilsome than before, and the men grumbled worse than they had when dragging the guns over the frozen hill-roads. They had been forced to leave their wagons behind at Coimbra, and marched like infantry soldiers, each man carrying a haversack with four days' provisions, as well as an extra pair of boots. But what seemed to vex and deject them most was a rumour that Quartermaster-General Murray had been sent down from the front on leave of absence for England. They argued positively that, with Murray absent, the Commander-in-Chief could not be intending any action of importance: they doubted that he had twenty siege-guns at his call even if he stripped Almeida and left that fortress defenceless. Moreover, who would open a siege in such a country, in the depth of such a winter as this?

Nevertheless we had no sooner passed the bridge of the Coa than we discovered our mistake; the roads below Almeida being choked with a continuous train of mule transports, tumbrils, light carts, and wagons heaped with fascines, gabions, long balks of timber, sheaves of spades and siege implements—all crawling southwards. Our artillerymen were now halted to await and take charge of three brass guns said to be on their way down from Pinhel under an escort of Portuguese militia; and, taking leave of them,

I was handed over to a company of the 23rd Regiment—hurrying in from one of the outlying hamlets near Celorico—with whom I reached on the 7th of January the squalid village of Boden, in and around which the 52nd lay in face of the doomed fortress across the river.

"Here then is war at last," thought I that night, as I curled myself to sleep in a loft where Sergeant Henderson considerately found a corner for me under some pathetically empty fowl-roosts. Sergeant Henderson in his captain's absence had claimed me from a distracted adjutant who wanted to know where the devil I had come from, and why, and if I would kindly make myself scarce and leave him in peace—a display of temper pardonable in a man who had just come in wet to his middle from fording the river amid cannoning blocks of ice.

Here was war at last, and I was not long in making acquaintance with it. I awoke to find, by the light of the lantern swung from the roost overhead, the dozen men in the loft awake and pulling on their boots. They had lain in their sodden clothes all night: but of their boots, I found, they were as careful as dandies, and to grease them would hoard up a lump of fat even while their stomachs craved for it. Sergeant Henderson motioned me to pull on mine. From my precious bugle I had never parted, even to unsling it, since leaving Figueira. And so I stood ready.

We bundled on our great-coats, climbed down the ladder, and filed out into the street. It was dark yet, though I could not guess the hour; and bitter cold, with an east wind which seemed to set the very stars shivering. The men stamped their feet on the frozen road as we hurried to the alarm-post, and there I walked into a crowd of dark figures which closed around me at once. For a moment I supposed the whole army to be massed there in the darkness, and wondered foolishly if we were to assault Ciudad Rodrigo at once. A terrible murmur filled the night—the more terrible because, while the few words spoken near me were idle and jocular, it ran down the jostling crowd into endless darkness, gathering menace as it went.

But the sergeant, gripping my shoulder, ordered me gruffly to keep close beside him, and promised to find me my place. The jostling grew regular, almost methodical, and by and by an officer came down the road carrying a lantern, and spoke with Henderson for a moment. At a word from him the men began to number off. Far up the road, other lanterns were moving and voices calling. Then after a long pause, on the reason of which the company speculated in whispers, the troops ahead began to move and the order came down to us—"Order arms—Fix bayonets—Shoulder arms!"—a pause—"By the right, quick march!"

An hour later, still in darkness, we halted beside the Agueda while company after company marched down into the water. A body of cavalry had been drawn across the upper edge of the ford, four deep—the horses' bodies forming a barrier against the swirling blocks of ice; and under this shelter we crossed, the water rising to my small ribs and touching my heart with a shiver that I recall as I write. But the sergeant's hand was on my collar and steadied me over.

"How much farther?" I made bold to whisper to him as we groped our way up the bank.

"Three miles, maybe: that's as the crow flies. But you mustn't talk."

And not another word did I say. We plodded on—not straight for the fortress, the distant lights of which seemed to be waiting for us, but athwart and, for a mile and more, almost away from it. By and by the road began to climb; and, a little later, we had left it and were crossing the shoulder of a grassy hill behind which the lights of Ciudad Rodrigo disappeared from view.

Here the dawn overtook us; and here at length, along the northern slope of the hill and close under its summit, we were halted.

Sergeant Henderson gave a satisfied grunt. "Good for *The* Division—the One and Only!" he remarked. "Now, for my part, I'm ready for breakfast."

CHAPTER XXII.

ON THE GREATER TESSON.

I turned for a look behind us and below. At the foot of the slope, where daylight had just begun to touch the dark shadows, stood a line of mules—animals scarcely taller than the loads they carried, which a crowd of Portuguese had already begun to unpack; and already, on the plateau to the left of us half a dozen markers, with a quartermaster, were mapping out a camp for the 52nd. They went to work so deliberately, and took such careful measurements with their long tapes, that even a tyro could no longer mistake this for an ordinary halt.

I looked at Sergeant Henderson. Word had just been given to the ranks to dismiss, and he returned my look with a humorous wink.

"That'll do, eh?" He nodded towards the markers.

"What does it mean?" I asked.

"It means that we've done with cold baths, my son, and may leave 'em to the other divisions. What else it means you'll discover before you sleep, maybe." He glanced up at the ridge, towards which at a dozen different points our sentries were creeping—some of them escorted by knots of officers—and ducking low as they neared the sky-line.

"May I go down and watch?" I asked again, pointing at the plateau; for I was young enough to find all operations of war amusing.

"Ay—if you won't get in the way and trip over the pegs. I'll be down there myself by 'n by with a fatigue party."

I left him and strolled down the hill. The morning air was cold and the turf, on this north side of the hill, frozen hard underfoot. But I felt neither hunger nor weariness. Here was war, and I was in it!

As I drew near the plateau a young officer came walking across it and, halting beside the quartermaster, held him in talk for a minute. He wore the collar of his great-coat turned up high about his ears: but I recognised him at once. It was Archibald Plinlimmon.

Leaving the quartermaster, he strolled towards the edge of the plateau, hard by where I stood; halted again, and gazed down through his field-glasses upon the muleteers unloading beneath us; but by and by closed his glasses with a snap, faced round, and was aware of me.

"Hallo!" said he, as I saluted: but his voice was listless and I thought him looking wretchedly ill. "You're in Number 4 Company, are you not? I heard that you'd joined."

It struck me that at least he might have smiled and seemed glad to welcome me. He did indeed seem inclined to say something more, but hesitated, and fumbled as he slipped back the glasses into their cases.

"Are they looking after you?" he asked.

I told him of the sergeant. "But are you well, sir?" I made bold to ask.

He put the question aside. "Henderson's a good man," he said: "I wish we had him in our company. Ah," he broke off, "they won't be long pitching tents now!"

He swung slowly on his heel and left me, at a pace almost as listless as his voice. I felt hurt, rebuffed. To be sure he was an officer now, and I a small bugler: still, without compromising himself, he might (I felt) have spoken more kindly.

The fatigue party descended, the tents were brought up and distributed, and at a silent signal sprang up and expanded like lines of mushrooms. The camp was formed; and the 52nd, in high good humour, opened their haversacks and fell to their breakfast.

The meal over, the men lit their pipes and stretched themselves within the tents to make up arrears of sleep. It does not take a boy long to learn how to snatch a nap even on half-thawed turf packed with moisture, and to manage it without claiming much room. We were eleven in our tent, not counting the sergeant—who had gone off on some errand which he did not explain, but which interested the men sufficiently to keep them awake for a while discussing it in low voices.

I was at once too shy to ask questions and too sleepy to listen attentively. Here was war, I told myself, and I was in it. To be sure, I had not yet seen a shot fired, nor—save for the infrequent boom of a gun beyond the hill—had I heard one: and yet all my ideas of war were undergoing a change. My uppermost sense— odd as it may seem—was one of infinite protection. It seemed impossible that, with all these cheerful men about me, joking and swearing, I could come to much harm. It surprised me, after my months of yearning and weeks of tramping to reach this army, to discover how little my presence was regarded even in my own regiment. The men took me for granted, asking no questions. I might have strolled in upon them out of nowhere, with my hands in my pockets. And the officers, it appeared, were equally incurious. Captain Lockhart, commanding the company, had scarcely flung me a look. The Colonel I had not seen: the Adjutant had dismissed me to the devil: and Archibald Plinlimmon had treated me as I have told. All this indifference contained much comfort. I began to understand the restfulness of a great army—a characteristic left clean out of account in a boy's imaginings, who thinks of war as a series of combats and brilliant personal efforts at once far more glorious and more terrifying than the reality.

So I dreamed, secure, until awakened by my comrades' voices, lifted all together and all excitedly questioning Sergeant Henderson, whose head and shoulders intruded through the flap-way.

"Light Company and Number 3," he was announcing.

"Blasted favouritism!" swore the man next to me. "Ain't there no other battalion company in the regiment, that Number 3's been

picked for special twice now in four days?"

"The Major's sweet on 'em, that's why," snarled another.

"I ain't saying nothing against the Bobs. But what's the matter with *us*, I'd like to know? Why Number 3 again? Ugh, it makes me sick!"

"Our fun'll come later, lads," said the sergeant cheerfully. "When you reach *my* years you'll have learnt to wait. Now, if you'd asked *me*, I'd have chosen the grenadiers: they're every bit as good as a light company for this work."

"Ay—grenadiers and Number 4. Why not? It's cruel hard."

I asked in my ignorance what was happening. My neighbour turned to me with a grin. "Happening? Why, you've a-lost your chance of death or victory, that's all. Here you are, company bugler for twenty-four hours by the grace of Heaven and the sergeant's contrivance, and because everyone's forgot you and because, as it happens, for twenty-four hours there's no bugling wanted. To-morrow you'll be found out and sent back to the band, where there's five supernumeraries waiting for your shoes. And the bandmaster'll cuff your head every day for months before you get such another chance. Whereas, if No. 4 Company had been chosen for to-night, by to-morrow you'd have blown the charge, and half the drummers in the regiment would be blacking your eyes out of envy. See?"

I did not, very clearly. "Is there to be an attack to-night?" I asked. "And shan't we even see it?"

"Oh yes, we'll *see* it fast enough. I reckon they won't go so far as to grudge us free seats for the show."

Sure enough, at eight o'clock, we formed up by companies and were marched over the dark crest of the hill and a short way down it in face of the lights of Ciudad Rodrigo. Right below us, on our left, shone a detached light. We ourselves showed none. The word for silence in the ranks had been given at starting, and the captains spoke in the lowest of voices as they drew their companies together in battalion. The light company having been withdrawn, we found ourselves on the extreme left flank, parted by a few yards only from another dark mass of men—the 43rd, as a tallish young bugler whispered close beside me.

"But how the hell do *you* come here?" he went on, mistaking me in the darkness, I suppose, for one of the youngsters in the band.

"Shut your head, bugler," commanded a corporal close on my right.

The men grounded arms and waited, their breath rising like a fog on the frozen air. Their two tall ranks made a wall before us, shutting out all view of the lights in the valley. The short or supernumerary line of non-commissioned officers on our right stood motionless as a row of statues.

Suddenly a rocket shot up from below, arched its trail of light, and exploded: and on the instant the whole valley answered and exploded below us. Between the detonations a cheer rang up the hillside and was drowned in the noise of musketry, as under a crackle of laughter. Forgetting discipline, I crawled forward three paces and tried to peer between the legs of the rank in front, but was hauled back by the ear and soundly cursed. The musketry crackled on without intermission. Away in Ciudad Rodrigo the walls seemed to open and vomit fireworks, shell after shell curving up and dropping into the valley.

"Glory be!" cried someone. "The old man's done it! The Johnnies wouldn't be shelling their own works."

"Ah, be quiet with ye!" answered an Irish voice; "and the fun not ten minutes old!"

"He's done it, I say! Whist now, see yonder—there's Elder going down with his Greasers! Heh? What did I tell you?"

"Silence in the ranks!" commanded an officer, but his own voice shook with excitement, and we read that he believed the news to be true.

"Arrah now, sir," a man in the front rank wheedled softly, "it's against flesh and blood you're ordering us."

"Wait a moment, then. They've done it, I believe—but no cheering, mind!"

What had been done was this. From the summit of the hill where we stood we looked into Ciudad Rodrigo over a lesser hill, and between these two (called the Great and the Lesser Tesson) the French had fortified and palisaded a convent and built a lunette before it, protecting that side of the town where the ground was least rocky and could be worked by the sappers. Upon the lunette before this Convent of San Francisco, Colborne (our Colonel of the 52nd) had now flung himself, with two companies from each of the Light Division regiments, and carried it with a rush: and this feat, made possible by our night march across the Agueda and the negligence of the French sentries, in its turn gave the signal for the siege to open. The place was scarcely carried before Elder had his Portuguese at work spading a trench to the right of it and under what cover its walls afforded from the artillery of the town, which

ceased not all night to pound away at the lost redoubt.

The caçadores—seven hundred in all—toiled with a will under shot and shell; and when day broke a trench three feet deep and four wide had been opened and pushed for no less than six hundred yards towards the town! Next night the Portuguese were replaced by the First Division, which had been marched over the Agueda. While the Light Division cooked its food and enjoyed itself on Mount Tesson, the others had to cross and recross the river between their work and their quarters; and I fear that we took their misfortunes philosophically, feeling that our luck was deserved. To be sure I had been taken from my company and relegated to the band: but during the twelve days the siege lasted there was always a call for boys to watch the explosions from the town and warn the workmen when a shell was coming: and, on the whole, since Ciudad Rodrigo contained plenty of ammunition and did not spare it, I enjoyed myself amazingly.

On the night of the 9th, while the First Division dug at the trenches, our men helped with the building of three counter-batteries a little ahead of the convent; and, because the French guns began to make our hill uncomfortable, we shifted camp and laid a shallow trench from it, along which we could steal to work under fair cover. On the 10th the Fourth Division took over the siege trenches, and on the 11th the Third Division relieved: on the 12th came our turn.

The day breaking with a thick fog, Lord Wellington determined to profit by it and hurry on the digging, which the bitter frost was now miserably impeding. To him, or to someone, it occurred that by scooping pits in front of the trenches our riflemen (the 95th) might give ease to the diggers by picking off the enemy's gunners. And with this object we were hurried down in force to take up the work as the Third Division dropped it.

Now I knew the North Wilts to belong to this Division, and it had occurred to me on the way down that as likely as not I might run across Leicester. And keeping a sharp look-out as his regiment filed forth from the trench, I spied him before he caught sight of me. He recognised me at once; but instead of passing with a scowl (as I had expected) he treated me to a grin as nearly humorous as his sallow face allowed, and came to a halt.

"D'ye know who's in there?" he asked, jerking his thumb back towards Ciudad Rodrigo.

"No, sir," I answered, scarcely grasping the question, but quaking as this man always made me quake.

"Thought you mightn't. Well then, our friend is in there."

"Our friend?" I echoed. "Who?"

"Whitmore." His grin became ferocious now. "We have him, now—have him sure enough, this time—eh?"

But how on earth could Mr. Whitmore have come in Ciudad Rodrigo? Leicester read the question in my eyes, and answered it, pushing his face close to mine in the fog.

"He's a deserter. If the river don't come down in flood, we'll have him sure enough. And it won't, you mark my words! Two or three days of flood would let up Marmont upon us and spoil everything. But this weather's going to hold, and—it's a bad death for deserters," he wound up, with a snarling laugh.

"Mr. Whitmore a deserter? But how?"

"Ah, you've come to the right man to ask. I bear you no grudge, boy; and as for Plinlimmon—how's *he* doing, by the way?"

"I've scarcely seen him since I joined. He passed you just now, didn't he?"

"Ay, I saw him. For a man in luck's way he carries a queer sort of face. What's wrong with him?"

"Nothing wrong that I know of. The men reckon him a good officer, too."

"Well, I'll be even with Master Archibald yet. You hear? But about Whitmore now—I caught up with him in Lisbon. You see, he'd got this money off the Jew and he counted on another pocketful from that Belcher woman. He always was a devil to get around women, 'specially the old ones. I don't know if you guessed it, that night, but he'd persuaded the old fool to run off and marry him. Yes, and meantime he'd taken his passage in one of the Falmouth packets, meaning to give her the slip—and give me the slip too—as soon as he'd laid hands on her purse. Well, you headed him off that little plan; and to save his skin, as you know, he rounded on me. Now what puzzles me is, how you let him slip?"

I did not answer this.

"The Belcher woman had a hand in it, I'll lay odds. Never mind— don't you answer if you'd rather not. But when I caught up with him, he didn't escape *me*: that's to say, he won't: and it'll be a sight worse for him than if he hadn't tried."

He paused again, and laughed to himself silently—a laugh unhealthy to watch.

"I came on him in Lisbon streets," he went on; "came on him from behind and put a hand on his shoulder. He's an almighty coward— that's his secret—and the way he jumped did me good. 'Recruit for the North Wilts,' said I. He turned and his knees caved under him. 'Wha—what do you mean by that?' says he"—and here Leicester burlesqued the poor cold stammering knave to the life —'"Oh, for the Lord's sake, Leicester, have mercy on me!' 'You'll see the kind of mercy you're going to get,' says I; 'but meantime you've a choice between hanging and coming along to join the North Wilts.' 'But why should I join the North Wilts?' he asked. 'Well, to begin with,' I said, 'you're a dreadful coward, and there you'll have some chance to feel what it's really like. And what's more,' I said, 'I'll take care you're in my company, and I'm going to live beside you and give you hell. I'm going to eat beside you, sleep beside you, march beside you: and when things grow hot, and your lilywhite soul begins to shiver, I'll be close to you still—but *behind* you, my daisy!' So I promised him, and, being a coward, he chose it. I tell you I kept my word too: it's lucky for you, boy, that I'm a connoisseur in my grudges. But Whitmore—he'd betrayed me, you see. Often and often I had him alone and crying! and I promised myself to be behind him on just such a job as we're in for—a night assault: oh, he'd have enjoyed that! But he couldn't stand it. At Celorico he gave me the slip and deserted: and now he's in Ciudad Rodrigo, yonder, and the trap's closing, and—what's he feeling like, think you? Eh? I know him: it'll get worse and worse for him till the end, and—it's a bad death for deserters."

He paused, panting with hate and coughing the fog out of his lungs. I shrank away against the wall of the trench.

"When he's done with, I won't say but what I'll turn my attention to you—or to Plinlimmon. You know what Plinlimmon was after—that morning—on the roof? He was there to steal."

He eyed me.

"Yes," said I with sudden courage, "he was there to steal. And you were waiting below, to share profits."

He fell back a pace, still eyeing me.

"I'll have to find another way with you than with Whitmore—that's evident," he said with a short laugh, and was gone.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN CIUDAD RODRIGO.

Two days later our breaching batteries opened on the town.

It is not for me to describe this wonderful siege, the operations of which, though witnessing them in part, I did not understand in the least. I have read more than one book about it since, and could draw you a map blindfold and tell you where the counter-batteries stood, and where the lunette which Colborne carried, and how far behind it lay the Convent of San Francisco; where the parallels ran, where the French brought down a howitzer, and where by a sortie they came near to cutting up a division. I could trace you the *fausse braye* and the main walls, and put my finger on the angle where our guns pierced the greater breach, and carry it across to the tower where, by the lesser breach, our own storming-party of the Light Division climbed into the town. During the next five days I saw a many things shattered to lay the foundations of a fame which still is proved the sounder the closer men examine it—I mean Lord Wellington's: and in the end I, Harry Revel, contributed my mite to it in a splintered ankle. I understand now many things which were then a mere confused hurly-burly: and even now—having arrived at an age when men take stock of themselves and, casting up their accounts with life, cross out their vanities—I am proud to remember that along with the great Craufurd, Mackinnon, Vandeleur, Colborne our Colonel, and Napier, I took my unconsidered hurt. To this day you cannot speak the name of Ciudad Rodrigo to me but I hear my own bugle chiming with the rest below the breaches and swelling the notes of the advance, and my heart swells with it. But I tell you strictly what I saw, and I tell it for this reason only—that the story to which you have been listening points through those breaches, and within them has its end.

To me, watching them day by day from the hillside, they appeared but trifling gaps in the fortifications. On the 19th I never dreamed that they were capable of assault; indeed, in the lesser breach to the left my inexpert eyes could detect no gap at all. What chiefly impressed me at this time was our enemy's superiority in ammunition. Their guns fired at least thrice to our once.

Still holding myself strictly to what I saw, I can tell you even less of the assault itself. I can tell, indeed, how, on the evening of the 19th, when we were looking forward to another turn at the trenches with the Third Division, General Craufurd unexpectedly paraded us; and how, at a nod from him, Major Napier addressed us. "Men of the Light Division," he said, "we assault to-night. I have the honour to lead the storming party, and I want a hundred volunteers from each regiment. Those who will go with me, step forward."

Instantly the battalions surged forward—the press of the volunteers carrying us with them as if we would have marched on Ciudad Rodrigo with one united front.

The Major flung up a hand and turned to General Craufurd. Their eyes met, and they both broke out laughing.

This much I saw and heard. And when, at six o'clock, they marched us down under the lee of San Francisco, I saw Lord Wellington ride up, dismount, give over his horse to an orderly and walk past our column into the darkness. He was going to give the last directions to Major Napier and the storming party: but they were drawn up behind an angle of the convent wall; and we, the supporting columns, massed in the darkness two hundred yards in the rear, neither saw the conference nor caught more than the high clear tones of Craufurd addressing his men for the last time.

Then, after many minutes of silence, suddenly the sky over the convent wall opened with a glare and shut again, and we heard the French guns tearing the night. The attack of the Third Division on our right had begun, and the noise of it was taken up by the 95th riflemen, spread wide in three companies to scour the *fausse braye* between the two breaches, and keep the defenders busy along it. As the sound of the assault spread down to us, interrupted again and again by the explosion of shells, we were marched forward for two or three hundred yards and halted, put into motion and halted again. We could see the city now, opening and shutting upon us in fiery flashes; and, in the intervals, jet after jet of fire streamed from the rifles on our right.

Then someone shouted to us to advance at the double, and I ran blowing upon my bugle, for now the calls were sounding all about me. I had no thought of death in all this roar—the crowd seemed to close around and shut that out—until we came to the edge of the counterscarp facing the *fausse braye*: and by that time the worst of the danger had passed. The *fausse braye* itself was dark, and the darker for a blaze of light behind it. Our stormers had carried it and swept the defenders back into the true breach beside the tower. Some stray bullets splashed among us as we toppled down the ditch and mounted the scarp—shots fired from Heaven knows where, but probably from some French retreating along the top of the *fausse braye*.

While we were mounting the scarp Napier and his men must have carried the inner breach. At the top we thronged to squeeze through the narrow entrance, for all the world like a crowd elbowing its way into a theatre: and as I pressed into the skirts of the throng it seemed to suck me in and choke me. My small ribs caved inwards as we were driven through by the weight of men behind. The pressure eased, and an explosion threw a dozen of us to earth between the *fausse braye* and the slope of rubble by which the stormers had climbed.

I picked myself up—gripped my bugle—and ran for the slope, still blowing. A man of the 43rd gave me a hand and helped me up, for now we were stumbling among corpses. What had become of the stormers? Some we were trampling under foot: the rest had swept on and into the town.

"Fifty-second to the left," said my friend as we gained the top of the rampart, catching up a cry which now sounded everywhere in the darkness. "Forty-third to the right—fifty-second to the left!" I turned sharply to the left and ran from him.

A rush of men overtook me. "This way!" they shouted, swerving aside from the line of the ramparts and sliding down the steep inner slope towards the town. They were mad for loot, but in my ignorance I supposed them to be obeying orders, and I turned aside and clambered down after them.

We crossed a roadway and plunged into a dark and deserted street at the foot of which shone a solitary lamp. Then I learned what my comrades were after. The first door they came to they broke down with their musket-butts. An old man was crouching behind it; and, dragging him out, they tossed him from one to another, jabbing at him with their bayonets. I ran on, shutting my ears to his screams.

I was alone now; and, as it seemed, in a forsaken town. Here and there a light shone beneath a house-door or through the chinks of a shutter. I *felt* that behind the windows I passed Ciudad Rodrigo was awake and waiting for its punishment. Behind me, along the ramparts, the uproar still continued. But the town, here and for the moment, I had to myself: and it was waiting, trembling to know what my revenge would be.

I came next to a small open square; and was crossing it, when in the corner on my right a door opened softly, showing a lit passage within, and a moment later was as softly shut. Scarcely heeding, I ran on; my feet sounding sharply on the frozen cobbles. And with that a jet of light leapt from under the door-sill across the narrow pavement, almost between my legs: and I pitched headlong, with a shattered foot.

Doubtless I fainted with the pain: for it could not have been—as it seemed—only a minute later that I opened my eyes to find the square crowded and bright with the glare of two burning houses. A herd of bellowing oxen came charging past the gutter where I lay, pricked on by a score of redcoats yelling in sheer drunkenness as they flourished their bayonets. Two or three of them wore monks' robes flung over their uniforms, and danced idiotically, holding their skirts wide. I supposed it had been raining, for a flood ran through the gutter and over my broken ankle. In the light of the conflagration it showed pitch black, and by and by I knew it for wine flowing down from a whole cellarful of casks which a score of madmen were broaching as they dragged them forth from a

house on the upper side of the square. A child—he could not have been more than four years old—ran screaming by me. From a balcony right overhead a soldier shot at him, missed, and laughed uproariously. Then he reloaded and began firing among the bullocks, now jammed and goring one another at the entrance of a narrow alley. And his shots seemed to be a signal for a general salvo of random musketry. I saw a woman cross the roadway with a rifleman close behind her; he swung up his rifle, holding it by the muzzle, and clubbed her between the shoulders with the butt.

All night these scenes went by me—these and scenes of which I cannot write; unrolled in the blaze of the houses which burnt on, as little regarded as I who lay in my gutter and watched them to the savage unending music of yells, musketry, and the roar of flames.

In the height of it my ear caught the regular footfall of troops, and a squad of infantry came swinging round the corner. I supposed it to be a patrol sent to clear the streets and restore order. A small man in civilian dress—a Portuguese, by his look—walked gingerly beside the sergeant in charge, chatting and gesticulating. And, almost in the same instant, I perceived that the men wore the uniform of the North Wilts and that the sergeant he held in converse was George Leicester.

By the light of the flames he recognised me, shook off his guide and stepped forward.

"Hurt?" he asked. "Here, step out, a couple of you, and take hold of this youngster. He's a friend of mine, and I've something to show him: something that will amuse him, or I'm mistaken."

They hoisted me, not meaning to be rough, but hurting me cruelly nevertheless: and two of them made a "chair" with crossed hands; but they left my wounded foot dangling, and I swooned again with pain.

When I came to, we were in a street—dark but for their lanterns— between a row of houses and a blank wall, and against this wall they were laying me. The houses opposite were superior to any I had yet seen in Ciudad Rodrigo and had iron balconies before their first-floor windows, broad and deep and overhanging the house-doors.

On one of these doors Leicester was hammering with his side-arm, the Portuguese standing by on the step below. No one answering, he called to two of his men, who advanced and, setting the muzzles of their muskets close against the keyhole, blew the door in. Leicester snatched a lantern and sprang inside, the two men after him. The Portuguese waited. The rest of the soldiers waited too, grounding arms—some in the roadway, others by the wall at the foot of which they had laid me.

A minute passed—two minutes—and then with a crash a man sprang through one of the first-floor windows, flung a leg over the balcony rail, and hung a moment in air between the ledge and the street. The window through which he had broken was flung up and Leicester came running after, grabbing at him vainly as he swung clear.

There were two figures now on the balcony. A woman had run after Leicester. She leaned for a moment with both hands on the balcony rail, and turned as if to run back. Leicester caught her around the waist and held her so while she screamed—shrilly, again and again.

The man dangled for a moment, dropped with a horrible thud, and answered with one scream only—but it was worse even than hers to hear. Then the soldiers ran forward and flung themselves upon him.

"Hold the lantern higher, you fools!" shouted Leicester, straining the woman to him, as she struggled and fought to get away. "Over there, by the wall—I want to see his face! Steady now, my beauty!"

The woman sank in his arms as if fainting, and her screams ceased. There was a stool on the balcony and he seated himself upon it, easing her down and seating her on his knee. This brought his evil face level with the balcony rail; and the lanterns, held high, flared up at it.

"Out of the way, youngster!" one of the soldiers commanded grimly. "That wall's wanted."

He dragged me aside as they pulled Whitmore across the roadway. I think his leg had been broken by the fall. It trailed as they carried him, and when they set him against the wall it doubled under him and he fell in a heap.

"Turn up his face, anyway," commanded Leicester from the balcony. "I want to see it! And when you've done, you can leave me with this beauty. Hey, my lass? The show's waiting. Sit up and have a look at him!"

I saw Whitmore's face as they turned it up, and the sight of it made me cover my eyes. I heard the men step out into the roadway, and set back their triggers. Crouching against the wall, I heard the volley.

As the echoes of it beat from side to side of the narrow street I looked again—not towards the wall—but upwards at the balcony, under which the men waved their lanterns as they dispersed, leaving the corpse where it lay. To my surprise Leicester had released the woman. She was stealing back through the open window and I caught but a glimpse of her black head-veil in the wavering lights. But Leicester still leaned forward with his chin on the balcony rail, and grinned upon the street and the wall opposite.

I dragged myself from the spot. How long it took me I do not know; for I crawled on my belly, and there were pauses in my progress of which I remember nothing. But I remember that at some point in it there dawned upon me the certainty that this was the very street down which I had struck on my way from the ramparts. If not the same street, it must have been one close beside and running parallel with it: for at daybreak, with no other guidance than this certainty, I found myself back at the breach, nursing my foot and staring stupidly downward at the bodies on the slope.

Across the foot of it a young officer was picking his way slowly in the dawn. A sergeant followed him with a notebook and pencil, and two men with lanterns. They were numbering the corpses, halting now and again to turn one over and hold a light to his face, then to his badge. Half-way down, between them and me, a stink-pot yet smouldered, and the morning air carried a horrible smell of singed flesh.

As the dawn widened, one of the men opened his lantern and blew out the candle within it. The young officer—it was Archibald Plinlimmon—paused in his search and scanned the sky and the ramparts above. I sent down a feeble hail.

He heard. His eyes searched along the heaped ruins of gabions, fascines, and dead bodies; and, recognising me, he came slowly up the slope.

"Hallo!" said he. "Not badly hurt, I hope? I thought we'd cleared all the wounded. Where on earth have you come from?"

"From the town, sir."

"We'll take you back to it, then. They've rigged up a couple of hospitals, and it's nearer than camp. Besides, I doubt if there's an ambulance left to take you." He knelt and examined my foot. "Hi, there!" he called down. "You—O'Leary—come and help me with this boy! Hurt badly, does it? Never mind—we'll get you to hospital in ten minutes. But what on earth brought you crawling back here?"

"Mr. Archibald!" I gasped, "I saw *him*!"

"Him?"

"Whitmore!"

He stared at me. "You're off your head a bit, boy. You'll be all right when we get you to hospital."

"But I saw him, sir! They shot him—against the wall. He was a deserter, and they hunted him out."

"Well, and what is that to me, if they did?" He turned his face away. "Isabel, my wife, is dead," he said slowly.

"Dead?"

"She is dead—and the child."

He bowed his face, while I gazed at him incredulous, sick at heart.

"If what you say is true," he said, lifting his eyes till, weary and desperate, they met mine, "she has been avenged to-night."

"You shall see," I promised; and as the two soldiers picked me up and laid me along a plank, I made signs that they were to carry me as I directed. He nodded, and fell into pace beside my litter.

The body of Whitmore lay along the foot of the wall where it had fallen. But when we drew near, it was not at the body that I stared, putting out a hand and gripping Archibald Plinlimmon's arm.

On the balcony opposite, George Leicester still leaned forward and grinned down into the street.

He did not move or glance aside even when Archibald commanded the men to set me down; nor when he passed in at the open door and we waited; nor again when he stepped out on the balcony and called him by name. The corpse stared down still. For it was a corpse, with a woman's bodkin-dagger driven tight home between the shoulder-blades.

And so, by an unknown sister's hand, Isabel's wrongs had earthly vengeance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

I EXCHANGE THE LAUREL FOR THE OLIVE.

Thus, in hospital in Ciudad Rodrigo, ended my first campaign; and here in a few words may end my story. The surgeons, having their hands full, and detecting no opportunities of credit in a small bugler with a splintered ankle, sent me down to Belem, splinters and splints and all, to recover: and at Belem hospital, just as the surgeons were beginning to congratulate themselves that, although never likely to be fit again for active service, I might in time make a fairly active hospital orderly, the splinters began to work through the flesh; and for two months I lay on my back in bed and suffered more pain than has been packed into the rest of my life.

The curious part of it was that, having extracted the final splinter, they promptly invalided me home. From the day I limped on board the *Cumberland* transport in the Tagus, leaning on two crutches, I began to mend: and within twelve months—as may hereafter be recounted—I was back again, hale and hearty, marching with no perceptible limp, on the soil of Spain.

But I must not, after all, conclude in this summary fashion. And why? Because scarcely had I set foot in the *Cumberland* when a voice from somewhere amidships exclaimed:

"My blessed Parliament!"

I looked up and found myself face to face with—Ben Jope!

"And you've grown!" he added, as we shook hands.

"But Ben, I thought you were married and settled?"

He turned his eyes away uneasily.

"Whoever said so told you a thundering lie."

"Nobody told me," said I; "but when you left me, I understood—"

"My lad," he interrupted hoarsely, "I couldn't do it. I went straight back, same as you saw me start—now don't say a word till you've heard the end o't!—I went straight back, and up to door without once looking back. There was a nice brass knocker to the door (I never denied the woman had some good qualities); so I fixed my eyes hard on it and said to myself, if there's peace to be found in this world—which was a Bible text that came into my head—the heart that is humble, which is the case with me, may look for it here. And with that I shut my eyes and let fly at it, though every knock brought my heart into my mouth. Now guess: who d'ye think answered the door? Why, that ghastly boy of hers! There he stood, all freckles and pimples; and says he, grinning:"

'Mr. Benjamin Jope
Moderately well, I hope.'

"I couldn't stand it. I turned tail and ran for my life."

"But was that quite honourable?" I asked.

"Ain't I tellin' you to wait till I've done? You don't suppose as it ended there, do you? No; I passed my word to that sister of mine, and my word I must keep. So I went back to Symonds's—who was that pleased to see me again you'd have thought I'd been half round the world—and I ordered up three-pennorth of rum, and pens and ink to the same amount: and this is what I wrote, and I hope you'll get it by heart before you're in a hurry again to accuse Ben Jope of dishonourable conduct—'*Respected Madam*,' I wrote, '*this is to enquire if you'll marry me. Better late than never, and please don't trouble to reply. I'll call for an answer when I wants it. Yours to command, B. Jope. N.B.: We might board the boy out*.' Symonds found a messenger, and I told him on no account to wait for an answer. Now, I hope you call that acting straight?"

"Well, but what was the answer?" I asked.

He hung his head. "To tell you the truth, I ha'n't called for it yet. You notice I didn't specify no time; and being inclined for a v'yage just then, I tramped it down to Falmouth and shipped aboard the *Marlborough*, Post Office Packet, for Lisbon."

"And you've been dodging at sea ever since," said I severely.

"If you'd only seen that boy!" protested Mr. Jope.

"I'll call with you and see him as soon as ever we reach Plymouth," I said; "but you passed your word, and your word you must keep."

"You're sure 'twill be safe for you at Plymouth?" he asked, and (as I thought) a trifle mischievously. "How about that Jew?"

"Oh, that's all cleared up!"

He sighed. "Some folks has luck. To be sure, he may be dead," he added, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

"The Jew?"

"No, the boy."

I could hold out no hope of this, and he consoled himself with anticipating the time we would spend together at Symonds's. "For if you're invalided home, they'll discharge you on leave as soon as we reach port."

"Unless they keep me in hospital," said I.

"Then you'll have to make a cure of it on the voyage."

"I feel like that, already. But the mischief is I've no home to go to."

"There's Symonds's."

"I might give that as an address, to be sure."

"Damme!" cried Ben, as a bright thought struck him, "why couldn't I adopt you?"

"The lady might find that an inducement," said I modestly.

"I wasn't exactly seeing it in that light," he confessed. "But, with a boy apiece, she and I might start fair. You could punch his head, brother like."

The *Cumberland* weighed anchor on the 2nd of May, and dropped it again under Staddon Heights on the 29th of that month. To my delight, the garrison surgeon at Plymouth pronounced me fit to travel: my foot only needed rest, he said; and he asked me where my home lay.

I had anticipated this, and answered that a letter addressed to me under care Miss Amelia Plinlimmon, at the Genevan Foundling Hospital, would certainly find me. And so I was granted two months' leave of absence to recover from my wound.

"But you don't mean to tell me," said Mr. Jope as we strolled down Union Street together, "that you haven't a home or relations in this world?"

"Neither one nor the other," said I; "but I have picked up a few friends."

As he drew westward I noticed that he sensibly retarded his pace: but he had forsworn visiting Symonds's until, as he put it, we knew the worst; and I marched him relentlessly up to the door of doom with its immaculate brass knocker. And when, facing it, he shut his eyes, I put out a hand and knocked for him.

But it was I who shrank back when the door opened: for the person who opened it was—Mr. George!—in pigtail and wooden leg unchanged, but in demeanour (so far as agitation allowed me to remark it) more saturnine than ever.

"Do the Widow Babbage live here?" stammered Mr. Jope.

"She do not," answered Mr. George slowly, and added, "worse luck!"

"Is—is she dead?"

"No, she ain't," answered Mr. George, and pulled himself up.

"Then what's the matter with her?"

"There ain't nothing the matter with *her*, as I know by," answered Mr. George once more, in a non-committal tone. "But I'm her 'usband."

"You—Mr. George?" I gasped.

Thereupon he recognised me, and his eyes grew round, yet expressed no immoderate surprise.

"A nice dance *you've* led everybody!" he said slowly: "but I was never hopeful about you, I'm thankful to say."

"Where is Miss Plinlimmon living?" I asked. "Has she left the Hospital too?"

"She didn't leave it," he answered. "It left her. The Hospital's scat."

"Eh?"

"Bust—sold up—come to an end. Scougall's retired on the donations. He feathered *his* nest. And Miss Plinlimmon's gone down into Cornwall to live with a Major Brooks—a kind of relation of hers, so far as I can make out. They tell me she've come into money."

I had a question on my lips, but Mr. Jope interrupted.

"I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, sir," he began politely, addressing Mr. George, "and by the look of 'ee, you must date from before my time. But speakin' as one man to another, how do you get along with that boy?"

The door was slammed in our faces.

Mr. Jope and I regarded one another. "Ben," said I, "it's urgent, or I wouldn't leave you. I must start at once for Minden Cottage."

His face fell. "And I was planning a little kick-up at Symonds's," he said ruefully; "a fiddle or two—to celebrate the occasion; nothing out o' the way. The first time you dropped on us, if you remember, we was not quite ourselves, owing to poor dear Bill: and I'd ha' liked you to form a cheerfuller idea of the place. But if 'tis duty, my lad, England expec's and I'm not gainsaying. Duty, is it?"

"Duty it is," said I. "You walked up to yours nobly, and I must walk on to mine."

So we shook hands, and I turned my face westward for the ferry.

I had over-calculated my strength, and limped sorely the last mile or two before reaching Minden Cottage. Miss Plinlimmon opened the door to me, and I forgot my pain for an instant and ran into her arms. But behind her lay an empty house.

"The Major is in the garden," she said. "You will find him greatly changed, I expect. Even since my coming I have noticed the alteration."

I walked through to the summer-house. The Major was fingering his Virgil, but laid it down and shook hands gravely. I had much to tell him, and he seemed to listen; but I do not think that he heard.

Miss Plinlimmon—dear soul, unknowingly—had prepared for me the very room to which Isabel had led me on the night of my first arrival, and in which she had knelt beside me. Miss Plinlimmon had scarcely known Isabel, and I found her cheerfulness almost distressing when she came to wish me good night.

"And I have composed a stanza upon you," she whispered, "if you care for such things any longer. But you must understand that it has been, so to speak, improvised, and—what with the supper and one thing and another—I have had no time to polish it."

I said sleepily that, unpolished though it were, I wished to hear it thus; and here it is:

"Wounded hero, you were shattered
In the ankle—do not start!
Much, much more it would have mattered
In the immediate neighbourhood of the heart.
The bullet sped comparatively wide;
And you survive, to be Old England's pride."