

**AINSWORTH
WILLIAM
HARRISON**

BOSCOBEL: OR, THE
ROYAL OAK

William Ainsworth

Boscobel: or, the royal oak

«Public Domain»

Ainsworth W.

Boscobel: or, the royal oak / W. Ainsworth — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

PREFACE	6
Book the First.	9
CHAPTER I.	9
CHAPTER II.	15
CHAPTER III.	19
CHAPTER IV.	23
CHAPTER V.	26
CHAPTER VI.	30
CHAPTER VII.	33
CHAPTER VIII.	37
CHAPTER IX.	39
CHAPTER X.	42
CHAPTER XI.	45
CHAPTER XII.	47
CHAPTER XIII.	49
CHAPTER XIV.	51
CHAPTER XV.	54
CHAPTER XVI.	57
CHAPTER XVII.	59
CHAPTER XVIII.	62
CHAPTER XIX.	67
CHAPTER XX.	70
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	74

William Harrison Ainsworth

Boscobel: or, the royal oak

A tale of the year 1651

In that fair part where the rich Salop gains
An ample view o'er all the Western plains,
A grove appears which Boscobel they name,
Not known to maps; a grove of scanty fame.
And yet henceforth no celebrated shade
Of all the British groves shall be more glorious made.

Cowley's Sylva. Book VI.

PREFACE

In his letter to Mr. Hughes, the then Bishop of Llandaff describes King Charles the Second's Wanderings after the Battle of Worcester "as being by far the most romantic piece of English history we possess."

I have always entertained the same opinion, and after reading the "Boscobel Tracts," so admirably edited by Mr. Hughes, I resolved to write a story on the subject, which should comprehend the principal incidents described in the various narratives of the King's adventures; but not having at that time visited any of the hiding-places, I deferred my design, and possibly might never have executed it, had I not seen a series of Views depicting most graphically the actual state of the different places visited by Charles, and privately published by Mr. Frederick Manning, of Leamington.

Stimulated by these remarkable sketches, I at once commenced my long-delayed Tale.

An enthusiast on the subject, Mr. Manning has collected all the numerous editions of the "Boscobel Tracts," and has printed a list of them, which is exceedingly curious. The collection is probably unique. His nephew, Mr. John E. Anderdon, whose death occurred while this work was in the press, was also an enthusiastic collector of all matters relating to Boscobel and the King's escapes, and from both these gentlemen I have derived much valuable assistance¹.

I am under equal obligations to my excellent friend, Mr. Parke, of the Deanery, Wolverhampton, who has furnished me with many curious tracts, prints, plans, and privately printed books relating to Boscobel, Brewood, and Chillington. I shall always retain a most agreeable recollection of a visit paid to Chillington in company with Mr. Parke and the Hon. Charles Wrottesley, and of our hearty reception by the hospitable Squire.

Among the various works relating to Boscobel that have come under my notice is a charming little volume written by the Rev. George Dodd, Curate of Doddington, Salop, the village where Boscobel is situated, who has ascertained all the facts connected with the story.

Boscobel House, I rejoice to say, is in very good preservation, and I sincerely hope it may not be altered, or *improved*, as is the case with Trent – a most interesting old house. Moseley Hall is still extant; but, alas! Bentley House and Abbots Leigh are gone.

Finer figures do not appear in history than those of the devoted Jane Lane and the stalwart and loyal Penderel Brothers. "The simple rustic who serves his sovereign in time of need to the utmost extent of his ability, is as deserving of commendation as the victorious leader of thousands." So said King Charles the Second to Richard Penderel after the Restoration. It is pleasant to think that several descendants of the loyal family of Penderels are still in existence. With some of them I have been in correspondence.²

Good fortune seems to have attended those who aided the fugitive monarch. Many representatives of the old families who assisted him in his misfortunes are to be found – Mr. John Newton Lane, of King's Bromley Hall, near Lichfield, a lineal descendant of the Lanes; Mr. Tombs, of Long Marston; Mr. Whitgreave, of Moseley; the Giffards, of Chillington; and the ennobled family of Wyndham.

In describing the King's flight from Worcester to White Ladies on the night of the fatal 3rd of September, I have followed exactly the careful topographical description furnished by the Rev.

¹ Several of the Illustrations accompanying the Tale are engraved by Mr. J. H. Rimbault from Mr. Manning's Series of Views of the Places visited by Charles during his wanderings. The views of Old Powick Bridge, of the Site of Fort Royal, and the Room in the Commandery, were sketched on the spot by Captain J. H. L. Archer.

² Mrs. Jane Llewelyn, eldest daughter of Richard Penderel, of Pentwrch Ystradgynlais, great, great-grandson of John Penderel of Boscobel, died 19th of June, 1872, aged eighty, and was interred in the churchyard of Llangynwyd, Glamorganshire.

Edward Bradley, Rector of Stretton, Oakham, to *Notes and Queries*, June 13th, 1868. Mr. Bradley has been the first to trace out the King's route, and to him all credit is due.³

"I know of no part of our annals," remarks Mr. Hughes, "which continues to be so familiar a subject of conversation among the commonalty as that connected with 'King Charles and the Royal Oak.' In every village directly or indirectly marked by particular incidents of the King's escape, the honest rustics preserve their scattered legends in a shape more or less correct, and mixed and transposed as they must necessarily be in many cases; and it is pleasing to witness the yeomanly pride with which, like Catholics zealous for the honour of Our Lady of some particular shrine, they contend for the appropriation of some well-known incident, as connected with the good and loyal service performed by the companions of their forefathers. The interest is, in most cases, strengthened by the existence of the identical houses where the circumstances in question took place, and of the principal families whose names figure conspicuously in the Tale, as well as by the slightness of difference between our present domestic habits and those of a time commencing, as it were, the more familiar era of dates. And to all ranks, in fact, the occurrences in question are calculated to present one of those pleasing episodes in history, distinct from the wearying details of bloodshed and political intrigue, which we dwell on with unmixed satisfaction as reflecting honour on our national good faith, and as brought home to our fancy by those domestic *minutiae*, which form so great a charm in the Odyssey. The reality here presents all those features of romance which the imagination chiefly supplies in the *Partie de Chasse* d'Henri IV., or the incognitos of Haroun Alraschid."

It has been very pleasant to me to follow the King in his wanderings from place to place; and I have reason to believe that the story excited some interest in the different localities as it proceeded, when first published in a serial form.

In describing the old and faithful city of Worcester at the time of the Battle, I have received very great assistance from a distinguished local antiquary, which I have acknowledged in its place.

Never did Charles bear himself better than after the Battle. Though vanquished he was not overcome. Truthfully, though in somewhat high-flown strains, has Cowley sung of him:

Yet still great Charles's valour stood the test,
By fortune though forsaken and opprest.
Witness the purple-dyed Sabrina's stream,
And the Red Hill, not called so now in vain.
And Worcester, thou who didst the misery bear,
And saw'st the end of a long fatal war.

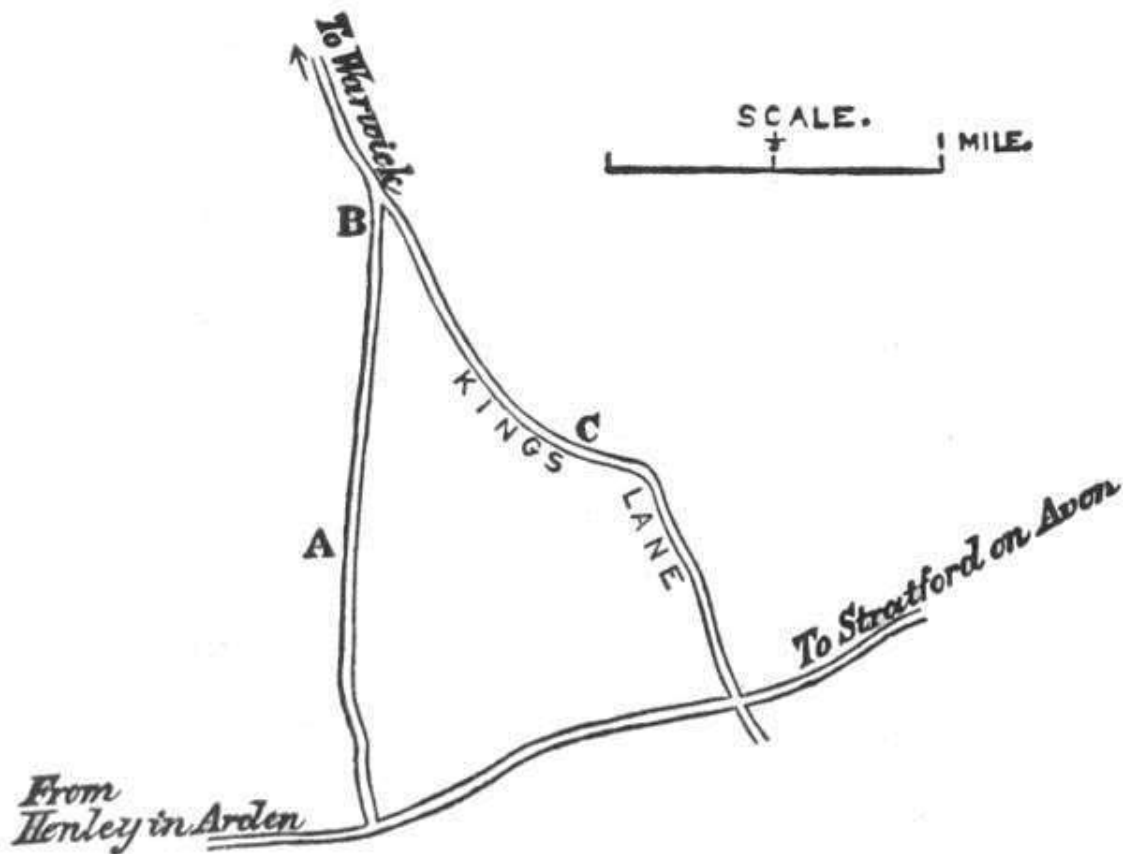
The Tale closes with the King's departure from Heale. How he journeyed from Salisbury to Brightelmstone, and embarked safely on board Captain Tattersall's bark at Shoreham, I have elsewhere related.

Hurstpierpoint, *October 9, 1872.*

³ Since the publication of the first edition of the work, Mr. Manning has pointed out an error which shall be rectified in his own words. The mistake is, perhaps, not important in a work of fiction, but it is desirable that the precise route taken by the royal fugitive should be ascertained, and Mr. Manning's description is very interesting as well as accurate. "You have kept strictly to the line of route pursued by the King and Jane Lane from Bentley House, except as regards their arrival at Stratford-on-Avon. They must have come across country until they touched the high road from Birmingham. When within a mile of Stratford they retraced their course, and, according to Mr. Wise's account, turned to the village of Wootton Wawen, seeking the higher ground, and getting to Stratford by a lane, now called the King's Lane. Henley is some miles to the right. One field from the lane just mentioned stood an oak belonging to a friend of mine called the King's Oak. On descending from this point, they would come to the bridge at Stratford, on the outskirts of the town; but we do not exactly know where they passed the river. At dry seasons the Avon could be forded about a mile above the bridge, but the water is generally deep in this part." *Suum cuique*. It is right to mention that the striking description of the seventh Earl of Derby (cited in Chap. xxii. Book I.) is from the pen of the late William Robert Whatton, Esq., F.S.A., who contributed the able Historical and Biographical Memoirs of illustrious Natives of Lancashire to Baines's History of the County. Mr. Whatton's masterly portraiture has been erroneously ascribed to Mr. Baines.

Note by Mr. Manning

When Charles arrived within a mile of Stratford, perceiving a body of troopers, he and his party proceeded, by the road marked A in the plan, as far as the junction B. They then returned by the road marked C, and at the end of the lane, went down the hill into Stratford between the two large estates of Clopton and Welcombe, and over the bridge to Marston.



Book the First.

THE BATTLE OF WORCESTER

CHAPTER I.

HOW CHARLES THE SECOND ARRIVED BEFORE WORCESTER, AND CAPTURED A FORT, WHICH HE NAMED "FORT ROYAL."

During the Civil Wars, the old and faithful city of Worcester suffered severely for its devotion to the royal cause. Twice was it besieged – twice sacked by the Parliamentarians. In 1642, the Earl of Essex marched with a large force against the place, stormed and pillaged it, and sent several of the wealthier citizens prisoners to London. Four years later – namely, in 1646 – the city again declared for the king, and being captured by the Roundheads, after an obstinate defence, underwent harder usage than before. Besides plundering the inhabitants, the soldiers of the Commonwealth, exasperated by the resistance they had encountered, did much damage to the public buildings, especially to the cathedral, the interior of which magnificent edifice was grievously injured. According to their custom, the troopers stabled their horses in the aisles, and converted the choir into a barrack, and the chapter-house into a guard-room. The organ was destroyed; the rich painted glass of the windows broken; many monuments mutilated; and the ancient records preserved in the library burnt. The exquisitely carved stone cross in the churchyard, from the pulpit of which Latimer and Whitgift had preached, was pulled down. Before this, John Prideaux, sometime Bishop of Worcester, had been deprived of his see, and the dean and prebends dismissed – Church of England divines having given place to Presbyterian ministers, Independents, and Anabaptists.

But notwithstanding their sufferings in the good cause, the loyalty of the Worcester Cavaliers remained unshaken. Heavy fines and imprisonment could not subdue their spirit. To the last they continued true to the unfortunate king, though any further attempt at rising was checked by the strong garrison left in charge of the city, and commanded by Colonel John James, one of the strictest of the Republican leaders.

After the terrible tragedy of Whitehall, the Cavaliers of Worcester transferred their allegiance to the eldest son of the royal martyr and heir to the crown. All the principal citizens put on mourning, and every countenance, except those of the soldiers of the garrison, wore a sorrowful aspect. A funeral sermon, the text being, "Judge, and avenge my cause, O Lord," was preached by Doctor Crosby, the deprived dean, to a few persons assembled secretly by night in the crypt of the cathedral, and prayers were offered up for the preservation of Prince Charles, and his speedy restoration to the throne. The service, however, was interrupted by a patrol of musketeers, and the dean was seized and lodged in Edgar's Tower, an old fortified gate-house at the entrance of the cathedral close. Never had Worcester been so gloomy and despondent as at this period.

Nor did the hopes of the loyal citizens revive till the middle of August, 1651, when intelligence was received that Charles, who had been recently crowned at Scone, had escaped Cromwell's vigilance, and crossing the border with a considerable army, had pursued the direct route to Lancaster. Thence he continued his rapid march through Preston to Warrington, where he forced the bridge over the Mersey, in spite of the efforts of Generals Lambert and Harrison to arrest his progress. The young king, it was said, was making his way to his faithful city of Worcester, where he meant to establish his head-quarters and recruit his forces before marching on London.

The news seemed too good to be true, yet it obtained ready credence, and it was evident Colonel James believed it, for he forthwith began to put the fortifications in order. The commandant, in fact, had received a despatch from General Lambert, informing him that he and General Harrison had failed in preventing the young King of Scots from passing the bridge over the Mersey at Warrington, and had been disappointed in their expectation that he would give them battle on Knutsford Heath, where they awaited him.

Favoured by night, the young king had continued his march unmolested, it being understood from prisoners they had taken, that he was making for Worcester. Charles Stuart's forces, Lambert said, had been greatly reduced by desertions since he entered England, and now amounted to no more than eight thousand infantry and three thousand horse, and he was only provided with sixteen leathern guns. As yet he had obtained few recruits, the country gentlemen holding aloof, or being prevented by the militia from joining his standard. But the Earl of Derby had undertaken to raise large levies in Lancashire and Cheshire, and had been left behind by the king for that purpose. It was to defeat the earl's design that the two Parliamentary generals deemed it expedient to remain where they were rather than pursue the royal army. Many malignants, Papists, and Presbyterians, ill affected towards the Commonwealth, would doubtless join Lord Derby, who, unless he were speedily discomfited, might become formidable. But discomfited he assuredly would be, and his forces scattered like chaff, since the Lord would fight on the side of his elect. This good work achieved, the two generals would hasten to the relief of Worcester. Speedy succour might also be expected from the Lord General Cromwell, who was in close pursuit of the Scots' king, at the head of twelve thousand cavalry and infantry. Colonel James was, therefore, exhorted to hold out.

General Lambert further stated in his despatch, that Charles was accompanied by the most experienced leaders in the Scottish army – by the crafty and cautious Colonel Lesley, who had so long baffled Cromwell himself – by Generals Montgomery, Middleton, Massey, and Dalyell, and by the valiant Colonel Pitscottie, with his Highland regiment. Besides these, there were several English and Scotch nobles, the Dukes of Buckingham and Hamilton, the Earls of Rothes, Lauderdale, Carnworth, and Cleveland; Lords Spyne, Sinclair, and Wilmot; Sir John Douglas, Sir Alexander Forbes, and others.

While scanning this imposing list, and reflecting that the royal forces numbered at least eleven thousand men, Colonel James asked himself how he could possibly hold out against them with a garrison of only five hundred? He was ill supplied with cannon and ammunition, and the fortifications were ruinous. Moreover, the citizens were hostile, and so far from lending him aid, were ready to rise in favour of the king. He should have to contend against foes within as well as enemies without. His position seemed desperate, and though as brave a man as need be, he was filled with misgiving.

Before proceeding, it may be proper to ascertain how far the old city was capable of defence. Five years previously it had stood a lengthened siege, but the circumstances then were wholly different, for the citizens were arrayed against the besiegers, and fought obstinately. The walls were much damaged at that time, and had only been partially repaired, consequently the towers and bastions were in a dilapidated state. Outside the walls, on the south-east, there was a strong detached fort of recent construction. The castle, which in days of yore rose proudly on the south side of the cathedral, completely commanding the navigation of the Severn, had long since been pulled down, the only vestiges of it left being some fragments of the donjon. The mound on which the mighty fabric once stood could have been easily fortified, if time had permitted, and would have formed an important work. The city, which was of great antiquity, had four gates, each flanked with towers. The strongest resembled a barbican, and commanded the quay and the ancient stone bridge across the river. On the north was the Foregate, "a fair piece of work," as it is described by old Leland, and not far from it was St. Martin's-gate. On the south was Sidbury-gate, giving access to the London-road. The Sidbury-gate was covered by the modern detached fort to which reference has already been made. Deep dykes, supplied by the Severn, strengthened the defences on the east and south-east, but the

suburbs constituted a danger, since the habitations would afford shelter to an enemy. Thus it will be seen that the city was not in a condition to stand a siege, and the commandant might well despair of holding out, even for a few days, against the royal forces.

No city can be more charmingly situated than Worcester on the banks of England's noblest river, in the midst of fair and fertile plains, abounding in orchards and hop-gardens, and in full view of the lovely Malvern Hills; but in the middle of the seventeenth century it was eminently picturesque, as well as beautiful. It was then full of ancient timber houses, with quaintly carved gables and open balconies, from the midst of which rose the massive roof and tower of the venerable cathedral, and the lofty spire of St. Andrew's Church. The old walls, grey and ruinous as they were, the fortified gates, the sculptured crosses, and the antique stone bridge, with its many-pointed arches, contributed to its beauty. The noble episcopal palace, the group of old buildings near the cathedral, and the ruins on the castle hill – all formed a striking picture when seen from St. John's on the opposite side of the river.

"The wealth of Worcester standeth most by drapery," quoth old Leland, who wrote in Henry VIII.'s time, and the place had long been noted for its broadcloths and gloves. But many of the wealthiest drapers, glovers, and hop-merchants had been ruined by the heavy fines inflicted upon them by the grasping Parliamentarians, and the city had scarcely yet regained its former prosperity.

Almost simultaneously with the arrival of General Lambert's despatch, a letter was brought by a secret messenger to Mr. Thomas Lysons, then mayor of Worcester, and an avowed Royalist. It came from Captain Fanshawe, the king's secretary, and gave a very different version of the affair at Warrington from that furnished by Lambert.

According to Fanshawe, his majesty had displayed great personal courage on the occasion. He found the enemy, consisting of about seven thousand men, united under Lambert and Harrison, in possession of the bridge across the Mersey, which they had partly broken down, and he immediately attacked them with his advanced troops. His impetuosity proved irresistible. A passage being forced, the whole army followed, and the enemy retreated in great disorder, and with heavy losses. During the night, upwards of three thousand of the "rebellious rogues," as Fanshawe styled them, disbanded. The Parliamentary generals did not venture to attack the king again, but allowed him to continue his march towards Worcester without further interruption. The faithful citizens might, therefore, prepare to welcome their sovereign, who would soon be with them.

The mayor immediately called a public meeting in the Guildhall, and read Captain Fanshawe's letter to the assemblage. Great was the enthusiasm excited by it. The hall resounded with cries of "Long live Charles II.!" The joyful intelligence quickly spread throughout the city, and crowds collected in the High-street, shouting "Down with the Commonwealth! Up with the Crown!" The concourse was dispersed by Colonel James and a troop of horse, but in the conflict several persons were wounded, and some killed. The mayor and the sheriff, Mr. James Bridges, were seized, and detained as hostages for the good behaviour of the citizens – the commandant threatening to hang them both if any further disturbance occurred. Luckily for the two gentlemen, the city remained tranquil throughout the night, for most assuredly the commandant would have been as good as his word.

Next day – Friday, the 22nd of August, 1651 – the scouts sent out by Colonel James reported that the first division of the royal army, commanded by the young king in person, was close upon Red Hill – already described as a woody eminence about a mile distant, on the south of the city.

Shortly afterwards, the enemy's cavalry skirmishers could be distinguished on Perry Wood. Then the advanced guard appeared – the helmets and corslets of the cuirassiers glittering in the sunbeams. Thousands of loyal citizens, who were forbidden to mount the fortifications, climbed to the roofs of the houses, and to the tops of the churches, to obtain a glimpse of the royal army, and could not restrain their enthusiastic feeling when they beheld it.

Colonel James, who had been actively employed throughout the whole night in making the best defensive preparations in his power, had seen that all the engineers on the ramparts were at their posts, and he now proceeded to the detached fort near the Sidbury-gate.

Mounting to the summit, which bristled with cannon, he turned his spy-glass towards the brow of the hill opposite to him, and presently beheld a company of richly accoutred officers ride out of the wood that clothed the eminence, and proceed to reconnoitre the fortifications from various points. That the foremost of the troop was the young king himself he had no doubt, as well from the splendour of his accoutrements and the white plume in his hat, as from the deference paid him by his attendants. Evidently his majesty's brilliant staff was composed of the general officers and nobles mentioned in General Lambert's despatch. That they were planning the attack of the city was clear.

While watching the young monarch's movements and gestures narrowly through his glass, Colonel James saw him sign to one of his aides-de-camps, a fine-looking young man, and remarkably well mounted, who instantly rode up at the summons.

Major Careless, the aide-de-camp in question, was as brave as he was handsome, though somewhat rash, and an especial favourite of the king. Having received his majesty's orders, he promptly obeyed them. Accompanied only by a trumpeter bearing a flag of truce, he galloped down the hill, shaping his course towards the Sidbury-gate, and, within fifty yards of it, he halted, and the trumpeter blew a blast so loud that the old walls rang again.

A shower of bullets from the battlements would have answered the summons, if Colonel James had not previously sent word that the flag of truce must be respected.

The men eyed the insolent Cavalier sternly, and one of them called out, "If thou hast any message for the commandant of the garrison, he will be found in yonder fort."

Thereupon Careless moved off, glancing haughtily and contemptuously at the artillerymen on the ramparts as he rode along.

On reaching the fort, he descried Colonel James stationed near the edge of the parapets, and leaning upon his sword. Half a dozen musketeers in their steel caps, buff coats, and bandileers, were standing behind him.

"Are you the commandant?" he called out.

"Ay," replied Colonel James. "What wouldst thou with me?"

"Thus much," said Careless, in a loud authoritative voice: "In the name of his majesty, King Charles II., who is on yonder hill with his army, I require you to deliver up this his city of Worcester, which you unlawfully hold as deputy of a presumptuous and rebellious parliament. His majesty is willing to extend his clemency towards you, and if you at once throw open the gates, and lay down your arms –"

"Hold!" interrupted the commandant, sternly. "I do not recognise the authority of him whom thou stylest king. The house of Jeroboam, who sinned, and who caused Israel to sin, has been cut off. I will not deny that the young man, Charles Stuart, hath been crowned in Scotland, but in England he hath no rule. His proclamation has been burnt by the common hangman in London, and a counter-proclamation published by the Parliament, declaring him, his aiders and abettors – of whom thou, thyself, art one – guilty of high treason against the State, and punishable by death. Shall I, an officer of the Commonwealth, and intrusted with the charge of this city, open its gates to a proclaimed traitor? Shall I command my men to lay down their arms to him? Not so. I utterly disregard thy king's summons, and though he be backed by the whole Scottish host, yet will I not yield the city to him, but placing my trust in the Lord, will maintain it against him."

"Provoke not the king by your obstinacy," said Careless, losing patience. "If you force us to storm the fortifications, you can expect no quarter. We will put you all to the sword."

Perfectly unmoved by the threat, Colonel James answered, in the religious jargon then habitually adopted by the Republican soldiers:

"The Lord of Hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. I doubt not we shall have timely succour."

"From whom?" demanded Careless, with a sneer.

"From the Lord General Cromwell, who is hastening hither with his legions."

"The city will be ours, and thou and thy rebel horde will be destroyed ere that arch-traitor and parricide can arrive," cried Careless, fiercely.

"Keep guard upon thy tongue, or I will not answer for thy safety," said the commandant, checking the musketeers behind him, who were preparing to give fire. "Take back my answer to the king, thy master. I have nothing to add to it."

"We will soon be with you," shouted Careless.

And, shaking his hand menacingly at the soldiers, he rode off with his attendant.

While this interview took place, Charles remained on Perry Wood with his generals. He was not in the least surprised to learn from Careless that his gracious offer had been rejected by the commandant.

"Let the attack be made at once," he cried. "I will lead it in person."

"I admire your majesty's spirit," observed General Dalyell. "But I pray you not to run so much risk."

"Risk, say you?" cried Charles, gaily. "Faith, Tom, you would have all the credit of the affair. But you shall not rob me of it. I mean to be first to enter yonder fort."

Generals Middleton and Montgomery likewise attempted to dissuade him from his purpose, but ineffectually.

The general officers then rode off to give the necessary orders for the attack. Trumpets were sounded, and shortly afterwards the sides of the hill were covered with troops in rapid movement. Ere they got half-way down, the guns of the fort opened upon them, but did not check their progress. Presently the artillery of the Royalists returned the fire of the Republicans, and the king, who was at the head of the advanced guard, saw the cannon pointed.

His majesty being recognised, the commandant directed the musketeers on the ramparts to make him their mark; but he really seemed to bear a charmed life, for though an officer close beside him was hit by a round shot, and his own horse was killed under him, he himself was uninjured.

The leathern guns of the Royalists were worked so well, that three of the fort guns were speedily silenced, and Charles then ordered instant preparations to be made for the assault.

Scaling-ladders were placed against the walls. Several men were struck down while executing this perilous task, but no sooner was it accomplished than Charles caused the trumpet to be sounded, and sword in hand, mounted the nearest ladder.

A soldier, armed with a pike, strove to hurl him from the ladder, but the man was shot by Careless, who followed the king closely.

Again, while springing over the parapets, Charles was opposed by a musketeer, but he cut him down, and next moment the heroic young monarch was joined by Careless, and instantly afterwards by a dozen of his body-guard, and their number was quickly augmented.

Charles was now master of the fort, for the Republican soldiers, after an ineffectual resistance, were put to the sword.

In the struggle, Colonel James discharged a pistol at the king, but missed his mark, and in his turn was attacked by Careless.

"I told you we would soon be with you," cried the Cavalier. "Yield, and I will spare thy life."

"I would not accept life at thy hands," rejoined the commandant. "Look to thyself!"

And beating down Careless's point with his heavy blade, he stepped quickly backwards and disappeared. He had, in fact, dashed down a narrow staircase communicating with the lower chambers of the fort, and secured his retreat by pulling a trap-door over the entrance.

Meanwhile, Charles had torn down the flag of the Commonwealth, and replaced it by the royal standard. As soon as this signal of victory could be distinguished by his forces loud cheers were raised. Possession was immediately taken of the fort, but no prisoners were made, for Colonel James, and the few of his men left alive, had evacuated the lower chambers. They had fled, it appeared, by a covered way, and had entered the city through a postern near the Sidbury-gate.

By-and-bye the general officers came to congratulate the king on his victory and express their admiration of his prowess, and it then became a question whether the siege should be continued – General Dalyell being of opinion that the city could be captured before night, if an immediate attack were made upon the fortifications; but Charles decided on waiting till the morrow.

"I have done enough for the day," he said. "Since I am master of this fort, the city is at my disposal, and I can occupy it at my leisure."

"Very true, my liege," observed Dalyell. "But the garrison will take advantage of your forbearance to escape."

"I will not molest them if they adopt that prudent course," said the king, laughing. "They have ceased firing from the walls."

"But the men are still at their posts."

"If they give us any further trouble, we can turn these guns upon them. Hark ye, gentlemen. Henceforth this fort shall be known as Fort Royal."

"A fitting designation, since your majesty has captured it," said Dalyell.

"Let the tents be pitched," said Charles. "The day's work is over. We can take our rest after our long march. To-morrow we will enter the city in triumph."

All happened precisely as Charles had foreseen. Not another shot was fired by the Republicans. The Royalists encamped quietly on the hill. But though no apprehensions were entertained of an attack, those within Fort Royal were kept on the alert throughout the night.

Colonel James, however, had other designs. Convinced by what had happened that the fortifications were no longer tenable, he decided on abandoning them. With the whole of his men, he quitted the city secretly at dead of night, taking the mayor and the sheriff with him as prisoners. Crossing the bridge over the Severn, he rode off in the direction of Gloucester.

The Royalists were aware of his retreat, but, in obedience to the king's injunctions, did not seek to interrupt him.

CHAPTER II.

SHOWING HOW THE MAYOR OF WORCESTER AND THE SHERIFF WERE TAKEN TO UPTON- ON-SEVERN, AND HOW THEY GOT BACK AGAIN

Fatigued by his long march of three hundred miles and upwards, Charles slept so soundly in his tent on Perry Wood, that neither the beating of the drum at daybreak, the challenging of the sentinels, nor any of the customary camp sounds, disturbed him. The men themselves answered very reluctantly to the reveillé. However, the fresh morning air soon revived them. A day of ease and enjoyment lay before them. No more toilsome marches, no more skirmishes, but rest – for that day, at least. Two-thirds of the infantry were without shoes, but being hardy Scots they did not count this an inconvenience. They all bemoaned the ragged and weather-stained condition of their uniforms, but they had heard that Worcester was famous for broadcloth, and the king had promised them better garments when they reached the city.

The morn was lovely, and gave promise of a splendid day. At that early hour, the view from the heights of the old and picturesque city, with the broad river flowing past it, was enchanting, and delighted even the rough soldiers who gazed at it. The fair Malvern Hills, however, chiefly called forth their admiration as reminding them of their native mountains, though they admitted that few of the Scottish valleys could compare with the fertile vale of the Severn.

While many a greedy eye was fixed on Worcester, and many a cunning tongue was talking of its wealth, and the plunder it would yield, if they were only allowed to pillage it, the attention of the soldiers was attracted to the walls, which had now become thronged with the citizens and their wives and daughters, while all the church bells – and no church in the old city lacked its proper complement of bells – began to ring forth joyous peals. It was clear that the city was now awake and astir, and the half-famished soldiers hoped that immediate preparations would be made for their refreshment, and on an extraordinary scale.

It was about this time that Major Careless, who had attired himself rather hurriedly, being excited by the prodigious clangour of the bells, entered the king's tent, and found the young monarch fast asleep – fast as a top.

"Zounds!" mentally ejaculated the aide-de-camp; "his majesty must sleep soundly, since this din does not disturb him – but no wonder. I'll give him another hour."

And he turned to depart, when Charles suddenly ceased breathing hard, and opened his eyes.

"What sound is that?" he cried, raising himself on his elbow and listening.

"The bells of Worcester ringing for your majesty's glorious victory – that's all," replied Careless.

"And enough too," cried the king, looking well pleased. "What has happened to the garrison?"

"Evacuated the fortifications – taken to flight."

"Just what I expected – just what I desired."

"But your majesty did not expect – nor, I presume, desire – that Colonel James would take the mayor of Worcester and the sheriff with him."

"Sdeath!" exclaimed the king. "Has he had the audacity to do so?"

"Even so, my liege. No doubt they were specially obnoxious to him on account of their loyalty, and he might wish to hold them for ransom. 'Tis lucky he didn't carry off others. There are several prisoners of note in Worcester – Lord Talbot, Sir John Pakington, and Colonel Mervin Touchet. But the rascal contented himself with the mayor and the sheriff. At what hour will it please your majesty to enter the city?"

"At noon," replied Charles.

"Not till noon! why, we have no rations," cried Careless, in dismay. "Your army has nothing to eat. Will your majesty keep the men fasting till noon? If you could only see how hungry they look, you would feel some pity for them."

"They shall all have a good breakfast in Worcester – that I promise them."

"There will be plenty of grumbling at the delay."

"Bah! they always grumble. I must give my loyal subjects time to decorate their houses and make all necessary preparations for my entrance, or I shall disappoint them of their anticipated spectacle."

"Your hungry soldiers will pray that twelve o'clock may come."

"Let them listen to the bells. How blithely they sound!"

"Excuse me, sire. When we are enduring the pangs of hunger the sweetest sounds become a mockery. Spare us this aggravated torture."

"Leave me; and let it be announced by sound of trumpet throughout the lines that we shall make our triumphal entrance into Worcester at noon."

As Careless went forth on his errand with a dissatisfied look Charles sprang from his couch, and with the aid of a groom of the chamber and a page, for he had brought a large retinue of servants with him on his march, proceeded to dress himself, bestowing infinitely more care on the decoration of his person than he had done since he left Scotland.

His tall, fine figure was well displayed in doublet and hose of crimson velvet and white satin; his yellow maroquin boots were deeply fringed with lace, and he wore point-lace at his wrists and around his throat. His shoulder-knot was enriched with diamonds, his sword-hilt glittered with gems, and his plumed hat was looped up by a large diamond brooch. His long black locks were worn in the true Cavalier fashion, and fell over his shoulders. All his princely ornaments were put on for the occasion, the Garter, the George of Diamonds, and the Blue Riband.

Charles was then in the heyday of his youth, being just twenty-one. Though his features were harsh – the nose being too large, and not well-shaped – and his complexion swarthy as that of a Spanish gipsy, his large black eyes, full of fire and spirit, gave wonderful expression to his countenance, and made him, at times, look almost handsome. His manner was singularly affable and agreeable, and very different from the cold, repelling stateliness of his ill-fated father.

The young king was adjusting his mantle before the little mirror hung up in the tent, preparatory to going forth, when a noise outside attracted his attention.

Next moment Major Careless entered the tent, his looks beaming with satisfaction.

"How now, Will!" cried the king. "Have you found a breakfast that you look so gay?"

"No, my liege, but I have found the mayor and the sheriff, and that is more to the purpose. They have escaped from the commandant, and have ridden up from Worcester to pay their homage to you, and relate their adventures."

"Are they without?"

"Just alighted, sire. They are in a sorry plight, but in their zeal to attend upon your majesty they would not tarry to change, and hope you will excuse them."

"Excuse them! marry will I! I shall be delighted to receive them. Bring them at once."

The two gentlemen were then introduced, and their habiliments undoubtedly bore traces of the hardships they had undergone. But Charles was better pleased to see them thus than if they had been in their robes of office, and said so.

Mr. Lysons, the mayor of Worcester, and a wealthy draper of the city, was a middle-aged man, but strong and active, and had a ruddy, pleasant countenance. Mr. Bridges, the sheriff, and by trade a glover, was a few years younger than the mayor, and not quite so stout. Both of them had looked exhausted when they arrived, but they brightened up wonderfully as they entered the king's presence.

Charles advanced to meet them, and gave them his hand to kiss in the most gracious manner possible. After congratulating them heartily on their escape, he inquired, with an air of much interest, how they had contrived it.

"Your majesty shall hear," replied the mayor. "It will always be a feather in our cap to have escaped from Colonel James. With what particular object he carried us off we know not, but it is certain he meant to take us to Gloucester. Shortly after midnight we were brought out of Edgar's Tower, where we had been imprisoned, and were strictly guarded by the troopers as we rode out of the city, but no attempt whatever at rescue was made by our fellow-citizens. Probably no one knew at the time that we were being carried off. Little did we dream as we rode across the bridge that we should be back so soon.

"A dreary ride we had, and our thoughts, which were not very pleasant, were disturbed by those psalm-singing Puritans. They did not speak very respectfully of your majesty. But we told them a day of reckoning was at hand, and that you would drive them all before you. 'Let him first set your worship free, and his honour the sheriff,' said one of the troopers – a snuffling rogue, whom his comrades called Ezra. 'Ay, let him follow us to Gloucester,' observed another, who was very appropriately named Madmannah. 'Be sure that he will follow, and force you to evacuate the city, as you have done Worcester,' I rejoined. In such pleasantries the time was passed.

"A halt was made at Upton-on-Severn. Now the Roundheads have no especial dislike to ale and cider, and do not hold it sinful to indulge in those liquors if good. Knowing the drink they delight in was to be had in perfection at the Red Lion, at Upton, they roused the house, and compelled the host and tapster to broach a cask of stout March ale and another of cider. The troopers then dismounted, and tied up their horses while they emptied their cans, leaving us to the care of Ezra and Madmannah.

"Apparently, no one suspected us of any attempt to escape; yet we were already meditating flight, if any favourable opportunity should occur. By the light of the lanterns we could see the men filling their cans. The temptation soon became too strong for Madmannah. He joined the others, but soon returned with a bottle of cider for Ezra. While they were enjoying the pleasant drink, we suddenly broke away and plunged into a hop-garden that adjoined the inn-yard. Both musketeers fired at us, but did us no harm. Fortunately the night was dark, and we were screened by the tall hop-poles.

"Alarmed by the firing, several other musketeers joined in the pursuit, but they got into each other's way, and created great confusion, in the midst of which we reached a wood, and being well acquainted with the locality, made our way for the meadows on the banks of the Severn. Then we were safe.

"After keeping in these meadows for two or three miles, we ventured on the high road, and galloped off at full speed for Worcester, without hearing anything more of the troopers or their commander. We caught sight of the old city just at daybreak. 'Here we are back again, after only a few hours' absence,' I remarked, as we passed through the barbican at the head of the old bridge. 'Who would have thought it!' 'Not I,' replied the sheriff. 'We are in ample time for the rejoicings on his majesty's glorious victory.' 'What if we ride up to the camp on Perry Wood, and seek an audience of him?' I remarked. 'Not in this plight,' said Mr. Bridges. 'His majesty will excuse us,' I replied."

"Ay, that I will, my good friends," cried Charles. "I am truly glad that you came to me at once. With such subjects as you I shall never stand upon ceremony. I have long known you both as two of the king my father's most faithful adherents."

"We are equally devoted to the king, your father's son, my liege," rejoined the mayor. "And now, having been honoured by this audience, we will return to the city and prepare for your majesty's reception."

"Before you take your departure, gentlemen," interposed Careless, "permit me to remark to you that the entire army is without provisions. The sooner, therefore, you can prepare for us the better."

"We will expedite matters as much as possible," said the mayor. "But I am afraid we shall require three or four hours."

"His majesty's forces number eleven thousand men, as I understand," said the sheriff. "It will be impossible to provide for so many without some little delay."

"Quite impossible," observed the king. "I will only beg you, as my loving subjects, to treat my Scottish soldiers hospitably, even if you make a great sacrifice."

"Your majesty shall have no ground of complaint," said both magistrates.

"There is a point on which I must address a caution to you," pursued Charles. "The greater part of my army, as you are doubtless aware, is composed of members of the Scottish Kirk. They are bitter sectarians, ever ready to dispute on religious questions, and to reprove those who differ from them. Prevent, if you can, all quarrels among them and your fellow-citizens."

"We have had plague enough already with those Anabaptists, Presbyterians, and Independents," said the sheriff. "I am happy to say there are very few left in faithful Worcester now we are rid of the garrison. We will not quarrel with the Scots, since they have come hither with your majesty. At noon all shall be ready for your reception."

Making a profound reverence to the king, the two gentlemen then withdrew, accompanied by Careless.

The king had lost his favourite charger at the attack on the fort on the previous day; but another steed, in no respect inferior, had been supplied him by the Duke of Buckingham, and mounted on his new acquisition, he now proceeded to make an inspection of the camp. He was attended by all his general officers, and by the nobles who had accompanied him in his march from Scotland.

The men had begun to strike the tents at Perry Wood; for it had been decided by his majesty, after consultation with Lesley, Middleton, and Massey, that the main body of the army should be moved lower down the hill, and not far from the Sidbury-gate, while Dalyell, with his brigade, should fix his quarters at St. John's, on the right bank of the river, and Middleton, with two thousand men, should encamp on the Pitchcroft, a large plain, extremely convenient for the purpose, on the north of the city, and on the left bank of the Severn.

Having completed his tour of inspection, Charles rode down with his staff to Fort Royal; and he was surveying the scene of his late brilliant exploit, and receiving fresh compliments from his attendants, when he was surprised to see Careless come forth.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

"Breakfast is served, sire," replied the aide-de-camp.

"Breakfast!" exclaimed Charles.

"By St. George! I am glad to hear it," cried the Duke of Buckingham, Lord Wilmot, and several others. "I hope there is enough for us all."

"Enough, and to spare," replied Careless.

Amid general exclamations of satisfaction the king and those with him then dismounted, and were conducted by Careless into a large chamber, where a plentiful repast awaited them.

CHAPTER III.

HOW CHARLES MADE HIS TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO WORCESTER; AND HOW HE WAS PROCLAIMED BY THE MAYOR AND SHERIFF OF THAT LOYAL CITY

Meanwhile, an almost indescribable scene of bustle and confusion was taking place within the city.

The pealing of bells, which, as we know, commenced at the earliest hour of morning, continued almost without intermission. Great fires were lighted on the Castle Hill, in the cathedral close, on the quays, and at Pitchcroft, at which huge joints of meat were roasted – barons of beef, entire mutttons, barbecued hogs. All loyal citizens were enjoined by the mayor to provide the best food they could, and in the greatest quantity, for the king's army. It would be a lasting disgrace to them, it was said, if any of their brave deliverers should be stinted.

While part of each household was busily dressing food, the others were engaged in decorating the habitations. The balconies were hung with tapestry, gaily-coloured cloths and carpets, and the crosses were adorned with flowers. The royal standard floated over the Sidbury-gate, as well as on the summit of Fort Royal, and flags were flying from all the steeples.

Such extraordinary zeal and activity were displayed, that, long before the appointed hour, all the preparations were completed, and the good folks began to be impatient for the coming of their sovereign.

The entire host was now gathered on the hill-side, and presented a magnificent spectacle, as viewed from the city walls, which were densely thronged. The Sidbury-gate was thrown wide open, a guard of halberdiers being drawn up on either side of the entrance; while the mayor, the sheriff, and the aldermen, in their full robes of office, were stationed beneath the archway.

At length the sound of martial music was heard, and a squadron of glittering cuirassiers was seen riding down the hill. Then came Charles, attended by his staff, and followed by Colonel Pitscottie's regiment of Highlanders. The strange, picturesque garb, and unusual weapons of these stalwart mountaineers – their claymores, dirks, and targets – filled the beholders with amazement. Nor were the citizens less astonished by the shrill, warlike notes of the bagpipes, which they heard for the first time.

As soon as it was perceived that the king had set out, a loud discharge of cannon took place from the walls; and this, if possible, heightened the general excitement. Regiment after regiment – cavalry and infantry – were now moving down the hill – colours flying, bands playing – the accoutrements of the cavalry flashing in the sunbeams like so many mirrors.

The splendour of the king's staff produced an immense effect – some of the nobles being singularly fine-looking men. Indeed, the Duke of Buckingham, who rode at the head of the brilliant cortége with the Duke of Hamilton, was accounted the handsomest and most accomplished Cavalier of his time. Lord Wilmot was also a noble-looking personage – tall and well-proportioned. Foremost among the military leaders rode General David Lesley, who commanded one division of the Scottish army. Thin and stern-looking, he had a thoughtful cast of countenance. With him was Major-General Montgomery, who had strongly-marked features and a keen eye, and looked like a thorough soldier. Then came Lieutenant-General Thomas Dalyell, who had served with distinction under Charles I., and in whom the young king placed much confidence. With Dalyell was Vandrose, a Dutch general. Generals Middleton and Massey brought up the list.

Despite the rich apparel of the nobles and the splendid accoutrements of the general officers, none of them pleased the beholders so much – especially the female portion of them – as Colonel Pitscottie, who, as he rode at the head of his Highlanders, looked the beau ideal of a Scottish chieftain.

He was strongly built, with a red beard, and light blue eyes of extraordinary power. Pitscottie was as brave as a lion, and as true as his own sword. Such were the distinguished persons on whom the spectators gazed from the city walls.

The whole space between the Sidbury-gate and the ancient Commandery was thronged, but a space was kept clear for the king, and for the passage of the troops, by halberdiers placed at frequent intervals.

Here Charles was detained for a few minutes by the enthusiastic demonstrations of the crowd, who would scarcely allow him to proceed. They shouted, stretched out their arms towards him, and hailed him as their rightful sovereign and their deliverer. He could not fail to be touched by such manifestations of loyalty. Though the sun was pouring down his fiercest radiance upon his jet-black locks, he remained uncovered all the time, and bowed around repeatedly with the grace peculiar to him.

As soon as he was able to move forward, the mayor, with the sheriff and aldermen, advanced from the gateway to meet him, and, bowing reverentially, bade him welcome to the city.

"The city of Worcester has ever been faithful to you, sire," said the mayor, "though constrained to yield to superior force. We now joyfully open our gates to you and your victorious army, and pray you to enter the city."

"I thank you heartily for your welcome, Mr. Mayor and gentlemen," replied Charles. "I never doubted your loyalty and devotion. The king, my father, always spoke of Worcester as his 'Faithful City.' I shall never speak of it otherwise. Again I thank you for the reception you accord me. It is precisely what I expected from you."

Loud acclamations followed these gracious words, which were delivered with admirable effect by the young monarch.

With the utmost despatch, the mayor and the civic authorities then mounted their steeds, which were in readiness for them, and preceded the king as he entered the city, the mayor carrying the sword of state before his majesty.

Trumpets were blown, drums beaten, and the bells, which had been silent during the ceremonial at the gate, began to peal joyfully again as the royal cortége moved up Sidbury-street, and shaped its course to the High-street, which it speedily reached. This long and handsome street, which runs through the centre of the city from the cathedral to the Foregate, is now totally changed in appearance, though it occupies pretty nearly the same ground as heretofore. The ancient street, however, being incomparably more picturesque and striking than the modern thoroughfare, its demolition cannot but be regretted. The houses, as already mentioned, were built of oak, painted black and white, in the charming fashion of the period, though not according to any uniform design, so as to avoid a monotonous effect. In many instances they were richly ornamented with curious and elaborate carvings. One peculiarity belonging to them, and constituting a great charm, was the possession of open balconies; and these were now, for the most part, filled with well-dressed dames and damsels, some of whom boasted considerable personal attractions. Worcester, it is well known, has been at all times famous for pretty women. The rails of the balconies were hung with tapestry, carpets, and rich stuffs, and these decorations gave the street a very lively appearance. The concourse on the footways contented themselves with cheering the king as he passed along, and did not attempt to press upon him, while the damsels waved their kerchiefs from above. Had Charles been the handsomest young prince in Christendom (which he certainly was not), he could not have captivated more hearts than he did as he rode along the High-street, and gazed at the well-filled balconies on the right and left. Each fair nymph on whom his eye rested for a moment fancied herself the special object of his admiration, while many a one – perhaps with some reason – believed she had been distinguished by a bow from his majesty.

In this manner Charles rode on – receiving fresh homage from all classes of his subjects as he proceeded – till he came to the Guildhall, where the civic authorities had already halted, and where he

himself alighted, in order to sign certain warrants. Like almost all the other edifices in the street, the Guildhall has been rebuilt, and though we have every respect for the modern fabric, we should have been better pleased if the ancient structure, with its recollections of the past, had been preserved. Allowing the mayor and his fellows to conduct his majesty into the great hall, we shall leave them there, having more to interest us outside.

Troops were now pouring into the city, and were marching in different directions; some regiments being taken by their officers to the Castle Hill, others to the cathedral close, and others to the quays – at all of which places good eatables and drinkables, and in the greatest abundance, were provided for them. On that day, in all parts of the city, thousands of hungry soldiers were feasted – every house being open to them. And to the credit of the Scots it must be stated, that they in no wise abused the hospitality shown them.

While his majesty was signing the warrants in the Guildhall, a halt took place in the High-street, and when thus seen from above, the various regiments of horse and foot, with their flags and banners; now forming an almost solid mass, presented a splendid spectacle. A good deal of animated conversation between the officers and the damsels in the balconies took place during this interval, and some amusing incidents occurred, one of which must be related.

Among the spectators collected nearly opposite the Guildhall were an elderly dame and an exceedingly pretty damsel – the old woman's grand-daughter, as it turned out. They evidently belonged to the middle classes. With them was a sallow, ill-favoured personage, whose closely-cropped black hair, steeple-crowned hat, plain Geneva band, and black cloak, proclaimed him a Puritan. It was certain that he was passionately enamoured of the damsel, whom he addressed by the name of Mary, for he watched her every look with jealous eyes; but it was by no means equally certain that she returned his passion. Rather the contrary, we should say.

Urso Gives, for so was pretty Mary's suitor named, was more than double her age, and far from well-favoured, but he was tolerably rich, and this was enough for Dame Rushout, Mary's grandmother.

Urso Gives was a tailor, and had prospered in his business. For a knight of the thimble, he was not devoid of mettle, and somewhat quarrelsome and vindictive. He was decidedly a Republican, and in religion an Independent. As may be imagined, this was a bitter day for him, and he would not have come forth upon it had it not been to watch over pretty Mary Rushout, who was determined to see the young king. So he was compelled to place Mary and her grand-dame in a good position opposite the Guildhall, and there they had an excellent view of the young monarch, and saw him dismount.

Mary Rushout was enchanted. Never had she beheld any one so graceful, so majestic as the king. How royally he bestrode his steed! How beauteous were his long black locks! – Urso must let his own hair grow long. And then how his majesty's diamonds sparkled! She could not help calling out "Long live the king!" Charles noticed her, and told her, with a smile, "She was the prettiest girl he had seen that day, and deserved a better lover." Was not this enough to turn her head? Was it not enough to madden the irritable and jealous Urso? The by-standers, who were staunch Royalists, laughed at him, and this exasperated Urso beyond all endurance. He broke out against the king, called him the chief of the malignants, and the favourer of heresy and profaneness, and would have gone on in the same strain if he had not been soundly buffeted on all sides.

Mary Rushout and her grand-dame screamed, and their cries attracted the attention of an aide-de-camp, who was waiting his majesty's return. It was Major Careless. Seeing a pretty girl in distress he pushed forward his steed, and quickly extricated her and the old dame, while Urso took advantage of his interference to escape.

A Cavalier so gallant as Careless we may be sure did not retire after such an introduction, and he found Mary Rushout very willing to flirt with him. He soon learned all about her and about Urso Gives, and that they both dwelt in the Trinity, and continued chatting with her till Charles came forth from the Guildhall.

The royal cortége was once more put in motion, and proceeded to the large open place near the Foregate, in the midst of which stood the antique sculptured cross previously mentioned. The place was now filled with people, but the assemblage was no farther disturbed than was necessary to allow the troops to form a square round it.

The mayor and the sheriff having made their way to the cross, trumpets were sounded, and, amid the silence that ensued, the mayor, in a sonorous voice, proclaimed Charles King of England, Scotland, France, and Ireland. Tremendous acclamations followed, and guns were fired from the top of the Foregate.

Even then the assemblage did not move, nor did the troops quit their position.

Trumpets being again sounded, a Manifesto was published in the king's name, declaring a general pardon to all the inhabitants of the city as should henceforward conform to his authority; and also announcing that warrants had just received the royal sign-manual in the Guildhall, whereby his majesty summoned, upon their allegiance, all the nobility, gentry, and others, of what degree and condition soever, of the county of Worcester, from sixteen to sixty, to appear in their persons, and with any horses, arms, and ammunition they had or could procure, at Pitchcroft, near the city, on Tuesday next, being the 26th of August, 1651, "where," pursued the king, "ourself will be present to dispose of such of them as we shall think fit for our service in the war, in defence of this City and County, and to add to our marching army."

On the king's return to the city, the mayor ceremoniously conducted him to his private residence, where a grand collation had been prepared, of which his majesty and his suite partook.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW CHARLES WAS LODGED IN THE EPISCOPAL PALACE; AND HOW DOCTOR CROSBY PREACHED BEFORE HIS MAJESTY IN THE CATHEDRAL

The ancient episcopal palace – which had been prepared, as well as circumstances would permit, for the reception of the king and his suite – was a large and stately pile, and, from its size, grandeur, and the number of apartments it contained, was well fitted to be the temporary residence of a monarch – even had that monarch been firmly settled on the throne – and, indeed, it was again occupied by royalty at a later date, when George III. and his queen visited Worcester in 1788. By far the most important mansion in the city, it occupied a commanding position on the left bank of the river, and from its fine bay windows presented a very imposing façade. The roof was lined with battlements, towers, and belfries, and on the highest of these towers the royal standard now floated, while sentries were stationed at the river gate, and at the upper gateway. The palace was surrounded by high embattled walls, within which was a garden laid out in the old formal style, and boasting a broad terrace. The garden had been utterly neglected by the Roundheads, and the terrace was covered with grass. Internally, the mansion, which was erected probably about the beginning of the sixteenth century, contained a noble hall, with a richly carved screen, an exquisite chapel, a carved oak staircase of great beauty, conducting to a long gallery, the deeply embayed windows of which, while they embellished the exterior, commanded fine views of the country, and the broad intermediate tract once known as Malvern Chase, but now a most fertile district, through which, as Dyer sings,

– the wide
Majestic wave of Severn slowly rolls.

Considerable damage had been done to the gallery and the rooms opening from it by the Roundheads, who had torn down the fine old tapestry once adorning the oak panels, and injured the carvings. Most of the old furniture, being of oak, had withstood a great deal of barbarous usage, and an immense ponderous bedstead, in which many a bishop had reposed, was prepared for his majesty. A good many other beds had to be provided for the king's suite, and for his large retinue of servants, but this was satisfactorily accomplished, and luckily there were rooms enough to accommodate all. Fortunately, also, the mansion possessed a vast kitchen, having no fewer than three large grates, whence hospitality had been dispensed by the worthy prelates in the olden time. At these three grates cooks had been at work, roasting and boiling, throughout the day.

The first persons presented to the king on his arrival at the palace were Lord Talbot, Sir John Pakington, and Colonel Mervin Touchet, who had been kept prisoners by the commandant of the garrison. Lord Talbot and Sir John said they had only waited to see his majesty, and were about to depart instantly to raise recruits for his service, but Charles would have them stay and dine with him. Another person whom the king was delighted to see was Doctor Crosby, the loyal divine, who had suffered imprisonment for his zeal in his majesty's behalf.

Dinner was served in the great hall, and what it wanted in ceremoniousness was more than compensated for by abundance of viands and excellence of wine. Not much form was observed. The mayor occupied a seat on his majesty's right, and the sheriff on the left. Grace was said by Doctor Crosby. We shall not particularise the dishes, but we must mention that a Severn salmon of prodigious weight – quite a regal fish, that had allowed itself obligingly to be captured for the occasion – was set before the king. Moreover, the stewed lampreys were an entirely new delicacy to his majesty, and pleased him greatly.

Charles was in high spirits, and laughed and jested in the most good-humoured manner with those near him. Of a very sanguine temperament, he had never doubted the success of his expedition, and the events – unimportant as they were – that had occurred since his arrival before Worcester heightened his confidence. For the first time he had been victorious, and had been warmly welcomed by his subjects. He had been assured that a great number of recruits could be raised in the county before the general Muster took place at Pitchcroft, and he felt certain Lord Derby would bring him large levies from Lancashire and Cheshire. He would then give battle to Cromwell, defeat him, and march on triumphantly to London. His confidence seemed to be shared by all the nobles and general officers present – even by the cold and cautious Lesley. While quaffing their claret and burgundy, they predicted the utter defeat of old Noll and the destruction of all rebels.

Next day, being Sunday, was comparatively calm after the great previous excitement. Not that the city had by any means resumed its ordinary aspect – that was clearly impossible with a large army encamped outside the walls, and many regiments quartered within them – but the Scottish soldiers, being strict observers of the Sabbath, conducted themselves in a very orderly and decorous manner. Much preaching was there in the camps at Red Hill and Pitchcroft, and officers might be heard reading the Bible and holding forth upon sacred texts to their men, who listened with the profoundest attention.

All the churches – and Worcester, as we know, abounded in churches – were filled with congregations in which the military element predominated; but the cathedral – as might be expected, since it was known that the king would attend divine service there – collected within it all the principal personages of the city, all the chief officers of the army, and as many regiments as the vast pile could contain. Never, perhaps, before or since, has the interior of this grand old edifice presented such a striking sight as it did on this memorable occasion. Its marble monuments and effigies, its chantry and lady-chapel, had been mutilated, as we have already told, by the Roundheads, but these injuries were now concealed from view by the throng collected within the aisles of the choir and the retro-choir. Owing likewise to the attention being directed to other objects, the loss of the splendid painted glass in the windows was scarcely noticed. The majestic pillars lining the broad nave rose up amid a mass of troops that not only occupied the body of the fane, but the aisles. Seen from the entrance of the choir, paved with steel caps, and bristling with pikes, muskets, and carabines – for the men all carried their arms – the nave presented an extraordinary coup-d'œil. Stationed within the south transept, Pitscottie's Highlanders contributed materially to the effect of the picture. All the nobles in attendance upon the king, with the general officers, occupied the stalls in the choir – Charles being seated in the bishop's throne.

As this was the first time on which the service of the Church of England had been performed within the cathedral since its desecration by the Parliamentarians, it may be conceived with what satisfaction the members of that religion were enabled to resume their own form of worship within it – and this satisfaction was heightened by the circumstances under which they came back. The organ was gone, but the military music substituted seemed not inappropriate to an occasion when hymns of triumph were sung. Certes, the drums, trumpets, and other martial instruments, resounding from the roof, produced an extraordinary effect.

The sermon was preached by Doctor Crosby, and was a most eloquent and fervid discourse. The pale countenance of the venerable dean flushed, and his eyes blazed as with fire, while he denounced the murderers of the martyr king, and declared that the vengeance so long delayed would speedily fall upon them. Rebellion, which had stalked unchecked through the land, would be crushed, and the monarchy restored. To Charles he attributed the highest spiritual authority, and spoke of him as "in all causes, and over all persons, next under God, supreme head and governor" – expressions at which his Presbyterian hearers took great offence. The earnestness, however, of his manner could not fail to impress them with a conviction of his sincerity.

A council of war was subsequently held within the palace, and it was decided that the fortifications should at once be thoroughly repaired, so as to enable the city to stand a siege, if necessary, though no tidings had yet been heard of Cromwell. After an early repast, Charles rode forth with his retinue into the city, and was surprised to find the High-street so empty, and almost all the houses shut up; but his surprise ceased when he reached the camp at Pitchcroft, and found that the vast plain was covered with people, and resembled a fair. The Scottish soldiers were quiet, and took no part in the profane recreations of the dissolute Cavaliers, who were everywhere swaggering about, and making love to all the pretty damsels.

Charles was enthusiastically received, but he did not stay long on Pitchcroft. After riding through the principal line of tents, he returned and crossed the river to St. John's, where Dalyell's brigade was placed to protect the approach to the bridge. Lower down, on the meadows on this side of the river, Pitscottie's Highlanders were encamped, and the king passed them on his way to Powick, which he desired to see. From the Highlanders' camp, which was almost opposite the episcopal palace and the cathedral, the finest view of old Worcester could be obtained, and he paused for some minutes, enraptured by the charming picture.

A delightful ride of a mile, or somewhat more, along this bank of the Severn brought the king and his attendants to the Teme at its point of junction with the larger river, and then following its deeply-ploughed channel, and watching its swift-flowing current through the fringing trees, they rode on to Powick.

Near Powick there was a woody island of some little extent, round which rushed the river – here, as elsewhere, too deep to be forded. The island was gained by a bridge from either bank, and the importance of the point was so obvious, that the king determined to place a battery upon it.

CHAPTER V.

HOW CHARLES RODE TO MADRESFIELD COURT; AND HOW MISTRESS JANE LANE AND HER BROTHER, WITH SIR CLEMENT FISHER, WERE PRESENTED TO HIS MAJESTY

Next morning another council of war was held at the palace. No tidings as yet of Cromwell – no despatches from the Earl of Derby. After an hour's deliberation the council broke up, and the king proceeded to the Castle Hill, which was being fortified under the superintendence of Lord Rothes and Sir William Hamilton.

The city walls, in the reparation of which hundreds of men had been employed since midnight, were next inspected by his majesty, who was well satisfied with the progress made. He then visited both camps, and while riding along the High-street with his escort, attended by Major Careless, was loudly cheered. Ever since the king's arrival at Worcester the weather had been splendid – a circumstance that contributed in no slight degree to the gay and festive air that prevailed within the city. The taverns were full of roystering Cavaliers, smoking, drinking, dicing, and singing bacchanalian songs.

On his return from the camp at Pitchcroft, Charles paid a visit to the mayor at his private residence, and had a long conference with him. Having given all the instructions he deemed necessary, and feeling that his presence was no longer required, Charles, anxious to escape from the ceaseless applications by which he was beset, crossed the river, and, still attended by his escort and Careless, rode in the direction of the Malvern Hills, his destination being Madresfield Court, an old fortified mansion, buried in the midst of thick woods of oak, beech, elm, and other trees, stretching almost from Malvern to the banks of the Severn.

The day, as we have said, was splendid, though excessively hot, but shaded by the trees, which sheltered him with their mighty arms from the oppressive summer heat, Charles found the ride through the forest enchanting. He seemed to breathe more freely now that he was away from the crowded city and the bustling camps.

A lovely sylvan scene, such as he had not for some time contemplated, was offered to his gaze. Madresfield Chase, which formed part of the old forest of Malvern, boasted some trees of great age and vast size. Generally the chase was flat, but occasionally a knoll could be discerned, crowned with timber. A long and beautiful glade of some miles in extent led towards the ancient mansion, which could not, however, be distinguished. Rising in front, above the trees, appeared the lovely Malvern Hills, and their summits, bathed in sunshine, looked so exquisite that Charles wished he could be transported to one of them.

"I never look at a mountain top," he remarked to Careless, "without desiring to ascend to it."

"'Tis a natural wish I think, my liege," replied the aide-de-camp. "At least, I have the same feeling. Those hills are not difficult of ascent, and command a magnificent view. The highest of them, and the nearest to Malvern, is the Worcestershire Beacon; the other is the Herefordshire Beacon. Both noble hills."

"Can we ride to the top of the Worcestershire Beacon?"

"Easily, sire."

"Have you ever made the ascent on horseback?"

"Never – either on horseback or on foot, sire."

"Then you know nothing about it. However, the difficulties, if there are any, won't deter me. I cannot resist the inclination to ride up to the beacon. We will make the ascent in the evening, when it grows cooler. 'Tis too sultry just now."

"Very true, sire. I should be loth to quit these trees for the bare hill-side."

They then rode on till they came in sight of the grey old structure, which was a very good specimen of a castellated mansion, being strongly built, embattled, flanked with towers, surrounded by a broad, deep moat, defended by a drawbridge, and approached by a grand embattled gateway.

During the Civil Wars, Madresfield Court had been alternately in the possession of the Royalists and the Roundheads. Strongly garrisoned by Charles I., taken by Colonel Fynes at the first siege of Worcester, retaken by the Royalists, and again captured in 1646, it had remained, until within the last few days, in the quiet possession of its owner, Colonel Lygon, who prudently acted with the Parliamentarians. On the arrival of Charles at Worcester, Colonel Lygon was driven forth, after an ineffectual attempt at resistance, and his mansion seized and garrisoned for the king. It was now in a condition to stand a siege, being already well victualled, and well provided with arms and ammunition. Falconets were placed on the gateway, and larger ordnance on the battlements.

Charles was well pleased to see the royal standard displayed from the roof of the old mansion, and to note the preparations for defence. Trumpets were sounded and drums beaten on his approach. The drawbridge was lowered, and the officers and men prepared to turn out and receive his majesty. Charles, however, halted beneath a spreading oak that grew on a wide lawn in front of the mansion, and was contemplating the ancient edifice with some pride in being once more its master, when Careless drew his attention to three persons on horseback, who had just issued from an avenue on the right. From their attire, and from their steeds, the equestrians looked like persons of distinction. One of the party, who specially attracted the king's attention, was a young lady, slight in figure, and extremely graceful. Even beheld at that distance, it might be safely asserted that she was lovely, and when she drew near, she more than realised any notions the king had formed of her beauty. Her companions were Cavaliers undoubtedly – both fine-looking young men, distinguished by their military bearing.

"Know you whom they are?" inquired the king of Careless.

"Unless I mistake not, sire, he in the black velvet doublet, slashed with white, is Colonel Lane of Bentley Hall, in Staffordshire – "

"The Lanes are staunch Royalists?" interrupted Charles.

"Staunchest of the staunch, sire. With the colonel is his sister, Mistress Jane Lane, one of the fairest damsels in the county, and devoted to your majesty. He on the roan horse, and in the green jerkin, laced with silver, is Sir Clement Fisher, of Packington Hall, in Warwickshire."

"Jane Lane's suitor, I'll be sworn!" cried Charles.

"Your majesty has hit it," replied Careless, with a smile.

While this brief colloquy took place, the party had stopped, as if awaiting permission to advance.

"Bring them to me, and present them," said Charles.

Careless, who was a *preux chevalier*, executed his task with infinite grace. It was a charming sight to witness Jane Lane's presentation to the young king. There was an ingenuousness in her manner that delighted Charles. She seemed to possess great spirit and force of character, and yet she had all the most agreeable feminine qualities. As to her beauty there could be no question. Brighter black eyes, features of greater delicacy and refinement, tresses more exquisite, Charles had never beheld. Though she coloured deeply when she first encountered the king's gaze, she manifested no embarrassment.

There was a certain likeness between Colonel Lane and his sister, though the colonel had strongly-marked traits, a firm mouth, and a bold, determined look. But he had dark eyes like Jane, and in them resided the expression that constituted the likeness. Sir Clement Fisher was an admirable

specimen of a Cavalier – handsome, brave, chivalrous, he seemed formed to win a fair lady's heart. Whether he had won that of Jane Lane will be seen.

"How is it I have not yet seen you at Worcester, gentlemen?" inquired Charles.

"We are on our way thither, sire," replied Colonel Lane. "You will see us at the Muster at Pitchcroft to-morrow. We have not been lukewarm in your majesty's cause."

"Even I have done something for you, sire," said Jane. "This morning I have secured your majesty forty horse; and I hope to render you still better service before the day is over."

"My sister is zealous, you perceive, sire," remarked Colonel Lane, with a smile.

"Were there a hundred like her I should soon have an army," observed Charles, highly pleased. "But what is the great service you hope to render me?"

"Nay, sire," she rejoined, playfully, "you must allow me to keep my secret. 'Twill be a surprise to you to-morrow."

"Then I will ask you no further questions, yet I would fain know why you came here. You could not have expected to find me at Madresfield."

"Pardon me, your majesty, I *did* expect to find you here."

"Oddsfish! you must be a witch," cried Charles, laughing.

"There is no sorcery in the matter, sire. Have you not sent a messenger to Mr. Thomas Hornyold, of Blackmore Park, commanding him to attend upon you at Madresfield this afternoon?"

"And you have seen the messenger?"

"I have, sire. I have read the message, and I told Tom Hornyold I would come in his stead, and make his excuses. The blame of his disobedience of your majesty's order must rest entirely with me. I have sent him to Sir Rowland Berkeley."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Charles.

"He will do more good with Sir Rowland than here. But that is not all. He has promised me to see Sir Walter Blount, Sir John Winford, and Mr. Ralph Sheldon of Beoly. Will you forgive now for my great presumption, sire?"

"Forgive you! I am beyond measure indebted to you."

"Sire!" she cried, with a look that bespoke her conviction of the truth of what she uttered, "I believe that I am destined to render you a signal service. My brother will confirm what I am about to say. It was foretold of me when I was a child, by a famous astrologer, that I should save a prince's life. The prophecy must refer to you."

"It may be so," said Charles, smiling at her enthusiasm. "At all events, I shall look upon you as my guardian angel."

"My heart beats only with loyalty, sire. I have no other feeling in my breast."

"No other feeling, fair mistress?" said the king, glancing towards Sir Clement.

"It is perfectly true, sire," observed the young baronet, with a somewhat despondent look. "Mistress Jane Lane vows she will never wed till your majesty is seated on the throne."

"And I will keep my vow," cried Jane.

"Then I trust ere long Sir Clement may be in a position to claim you, and that I may be present at your nuptials," said Charles. "But whither you go?" he added, seeing they were preparing to depart. "Will you not enter the house?"

"We must pray your majesty to excuse us," said Colonel Lane, bowing. "We have much to do. We are going to cross the hills into Herefordshire."

"Nay, then you must stay till the heat of the day is abated, and I myself will bear you company for part of your journey, for I design to ascend the Worcestershire Beacon. 'Tis not fit your sister should be exposed to this fierce sun."

"I am not one of those damsels that care for my complexion, sire," observed Jane, laughing. "The sun will not melt me."

"Nay, then I will not detain you," rejoined Charles. "I shall see you to-morrow at the Muster at Pitchcroft. You must not be absent, fair mistress."

"Be sure I will not, sire," she replied.

Bending reverentially to the king, she rode off with the others.

"A noble girl!" exclaimed Charles, gazing after her with admiration. "She is the incarnation of loyalty."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW CHARLES ASCENDED THE WORCESTERSHIRE BEACON; AND OF THE AMBUSCADE PREPARED FOR HIM AS HE CAME DOWN

After examining the preparations made for the defence of the old mansion, Charles sat down with Careless and the officer in command of the garrison to a repast prepared for him in the great hall. When he had finished it he ordered his horses. The officer asked if his majesty required his escort.

"No," replied Charles. "I am not about to return to Worcester. I am charmed with this place, and shall sleep here to-night. I mean to ride to Malvern. Major Careless will attend me."

So his majesty set forth, accompanied only by his aide-de-camp. A pleasant ride through the woods brought them to the foot of the giant hill, on a ridge of which stood the little secluded village of Malvern. Yes, the little secluded village of Malvern. Where terraces of well-built houses now spring above each other on the hill-side – where countless white villas peer from out the trees, contrasting charmingly with the foliage, and helping to form one of the prettiest towns in England – a town as healthful as pretty – nothing was then to be seen but a few small habitations, in the midst of which rose the old priory church, and the beautiful gateway adjoining it. The priory was pulled down at the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and with it the glory of Malvern had departed. Devotees were still attracted by the Holy Well, and marvellous cures were said to be wrought by its waters, but such pilgrims were rare, and Malvern remained an obscure, unfrequented village, until its beauties and salubrity were discovered in the early part of the present century.

Charles and his attendant halted on the ridge on which this charming town is now built, and surveyed the extensive prospect it commands. They were not aware that they were watched from behind a tree by a tall, ill-favoured man, in the garb of a Puritan. This eavesdropper, who had followed them cautiously for some minutes, ascertained their purpose, and as soon as they began to ascend the hill, he hurried down to the little inn near the priory gate.

All difficulties in the ascent of the lofty hill, known as the Worcestershire Beacon, have now been removed, and well-made paths enable even invalids to reach its summit almost without fatigue. But at the time when Charles and his attendant mounted it, it had a stern, solitary air, and its silence was unbroken by any sound except that of the sheep-bell, or the cry of a bird of prey. Sheep-tracks alone led up its rugged sides, and conducted the pedestrian through the broad patches of furze, or past huge protruding rocks, to the smooth turf above. Charles being a daring horseman, took the nearest road, and not unfrequently came to places where it was too steep to proceed with safety, and had to retrace his course and seek a less dangerous ascent. The only person in sight was a shepherd tending his flock, and he was far off. At length the king and his attendant gained the rounded summit of the hill, which was covered by turf smooth as velvet, and fragrant with thyme.

Hitherto, both Charles and Careless had been too much occupied by the difficulties of the ascent to pay much attention to the vast panorama opening upon them as they mounted the hill. But as they now gazed upon it, they were lost in admiration, and quite forgot the trouble they had experienced.

It boots not to describe the thoughts that passed through the king's breast, as his eye ranged over that astonishing prospect, which, comprehending as it does nine or ten counties, showed him a large portion of his kingdom, and that perhaps not the least beautiful portion. How many towns and villages – how many noble mansions – could he count in that wide-spread landscape! On the left, and almost as it seemed at his feet, lay the old and faithful city of Worcester, with his army encamped around it. Two other cathedral towns, with their church towers and steeples – Gloucester and Hereford – could likewise be distinguished. Charles sought the Severn for some time in vain. Owing to the height of its banks, it could only be here and there discerned.

He hung long upon this incomparable prospect, and then turned to the Herefordshire side of the hill, whence the view was almost equally fine, three distinct mountainous chains, of beautifully varied form, meeting his gaze.

On quitting the green sward the perils of the descent commenced, and they were obliged to proceed with caution, the ground being covered with loose stones and fragments of rock. They proceeded singly, Charles taking the lead, and were skirting a huge mass of granite that obstructed their course, when suddenly half a dozen men, armed with muskets, whose steel caps and buff coats showed they were Parliamentary soldiers, and who had evidently been lying in ambush behind the rocks, sprang forward, one of them seizing the king's bridle, and two others forcibly preventing him from using his arms. Careless was treated in precisely the same manner, and the capture was so quickly executed that it was perfectly successful.

At the same time two persons appeared on the top of the rock, which rose to some little height above them. In one of these Careless recognised Colonel James; the other, who kept back, was the spy we have previously mentioned.

"Release me, villains!" cried Charles, furiously, as he vainly attempted to free himself from the grasp of the soldiers who held him.

"Not so," said the leader of the ambuscade from above. "The Lord hath delivered thee into my hand, as He delivered Jabin, King of Canaan, into the hands of the children of Israel. I will not put thee to death, but will take thee and thine officer as prisoners to the Lord General, to deal with ye as he may see fit. With thy capture the invasion of the men of Moab is at an end."

Scarcely were the words uttered than a loud report was heard, and he dropped on the rock, apparently mortally wounded.

"The Amalekites are upon us!" shouted the spy. "Save yourselves!"

So saying, he jumped down on the other side of the rock and disappeared.

Supposing their commander killed, and not knowing what force might be upon them, the soldiers did not dare to carry off their prize, but sought safety in flight.

Next moment, from among the rocks beneath, issued Sir Clement Fisher, who had fired the shot, while close behind him appeared Colonel Lane and his sister.

"Heaven preserve your majesty!" shouted the two Cavaliers, raising their hats; while Jane, whose dark eyes flashed, and whose face was radiant with delight, echoed the loyal aspiration.

Charles heard them, and raised his hat in response.

"Haste thee to Madresfield Court," he said to Careless. "Bring a detachment of horse to scour these hills. I will have the villains who have dared to lay hands upon me."

"Your majesty – "

"Obey me. I shall have Colonel Lane and Sir Clement Fisher with me. Away! Spare not the spur."

Thus enjoined, Careless dashed down the rocks at the hazard of his neck.

Charles then descended to his preservers, who had moved to a less rugged spot, and thanked them heartily.

"The prophecy is fulfilled," he said to Jane. "You have saved my life."

"Nay, it was Sir Clement who delivered you, sire," she replied. "But I may, at least, claim the merit of having perceived your majesty's peril."

"You may claim more," remarked Sir Clement Fisher. "Had it not been for your coolness and self-possession, we could not have succeeded in effecting his majesty's deliverance."

"I said you are my guardian angel, and so you are," cried Charles. "But I must learn what took place. Let me have the description from your own lips."

"Since your majesty commands me, I must speak, though Sir Clement could better explain the matter," she rejoined, blushing. "Then, thus it was, sire. We had accomplished our errand, and were returning through yonder pass between the hills, when we observed your majesty and Major Careless

near the beacon. We could see you both quite distinctly, and our gaze never quitted you till you were about to commence your descent. I then begged my brother to quit the lower road, in order that we might meet you as you came down. Your course lay towards those rocks, and while gazing in that direction, I noticed some armed men moving stealthily about among them, and pointed them out to my brother and Sir Clement, who at once recognised them as rebel soldiers, and felt sure that an ambuscade had been placed there. What was to be done? Impossible to warn you. A plan occurred to me. I showed my companions how, by keeping among the rocks, we could approach the ambuscading party unperceived, and they followed my counsel, as it seemed the sole chance of saving your majesty. We got near enough to enable Sir Clement to bring down the leader of the troop."

"And luckily not another shot was needed," said Sir Clement.

"I know not whether you were my deliverer or Sir Clement," said Charles. "But I am equally indebted to you both. And now you must all accompany me to Madresfield Court. I shall need your escort, gentlemen."

CHAPTER VII.

HOW COLONEL LEGGE BROUGHT IMPORTANT NEWS TO THE KING, AND HOW HIS MAJESTY PAID A VISIT TO SEVERN END

Careless was able to execute the king's commands much more quickly than he expected. Encountering a small party of dragoons near Malvern, he ordered them to scour the lower part of the hill, while he himself re-ascended the heights. The Roundheads, however, had made good their retreat. They had hidden their horses, it appeared, in a deep chasm, on the hill-side, and after their unsuccessful attempt, had descended into the plain, where they were lost among the woods.

A singular discovery was made by Careless. On visiting the rock, on which the commandant had fallen, he found the spot stained with blood, but the body was gone. By whom had it been removed? Not by the Roundheads – that was certain. In all probability Colonel James had not been mortally wounded, as was at first supposed, but had recovered sufficient strength to crawl off. The search made for him proved ineffectual, and Careless was obliged to return to Madresfield Court without having effected a single capture. The king having by this time recovered his good-humour, laughed at his aide-de-camp's ill success.

"Oddsfish!" he exclaimed. "I had nearly lost my crown by that foolish ascent of the Worcestershire Beacon – rather too high a price to pay for a fine view."

His majesty was alone, Colonel Lane and those with him having proceeded to Worcester.

Next morn, Charles arose betimes, broke his fast lightly, and had just mounted his charger with the intention of setting off to Worcester, when his departure was stayed by the arrival of Colonel Legge, one of his most gallant and trusted officers, and familiarly called by his majesty "Honest Will."

Colonel Legge brought very important news. He had been with a reconnoitering party to Evesham, and had captured a couple of Roundhead scouts, from whom he had obtained information respecting the enemy's movements. Cromwell was approaching with a large army, having seventeen thousand horse and foot under his own command; while the regiments of Lord Grey of Groby, Fleetwood, Ingoldsby, Lambert, and Harrison, together with the militia that had recently joined the Parliamentary forces, swelled the amount to upwards of thirty thousand.

"Nearly treble my force," exclaimed Charles. "But were they forty thousand I should not fear them."

"'Tis well you are prepared, sire," remarked Legge.

"Much has yet to be done," replied the king. "The passes of the Severn and the Teme must be looked to. Upton, Powick, and Bransford Bridges must be broken down. Haste thee to Worcester, Will. Summon a council of war to meet me three hours hence. By that time I shall have visited Upton and Powick, and perhaps Bransford. Is Massey at Upton?"

"Massey's head-quarters are at Severn End, sire, the residence of Judge Lechmere. The judge sides with the Parliament, but I suspect he is a time-server, and will always support the party in power. If your majesty is victorious, he will throw himself at your feet. Severn End is a fine place, and Massey seems to like his quarters. Judge Lechmere's nearest neighbour is loyal Tom Hornyold, whom you will assuredly see at Pitchcroft to-day."

"Oddsfish! Judge Lechmere must be an astute fellow from thy account of him, Will," replied Charles, laughing. "I will go first to Severn End. Perchance I may see the judge. If so, I will have a word with him."

"Fine him heavily, sire, or imprison him, if he will not join you," said Legge.

"Humph! I like not to have recourse to harsh measures," rejoined Charles. "Still, an example ought to be made of such a man. Now, off with thee to Worcester, Will. Say to all that thou hast left me in good spirits."

"I can say so with truth, my liege," replied Legge.

Careless undertook to conduct his majesty to Severn End, being well acquainted with Judge Lechmere's residence. Their course lay through the loveliest part of the chase, but Charles was too much preoccupied to notice the beauties of the scene, and Careless did not venture to disturb the profound reverie into which his royal master had fallen, and which lasted till they came to the precincts of a large, well-timbered park, in the midst of which stood a fine old house embosomed in a grove of rook-haunted trees.

"Is this Severn End?" asked Charles.

"No, my liege; this is Blackmore Park, the abode of your staunch adherent, Captain Thomas Hornyold."

"And a charming place it is," observed the king; "I would all my staunch adherents were as well housed!"

After skirting the moss-grown park pales for a few minutes, they came upon a long and stately avenue, down which a troop of horse was riding, with their leader at their head.

"As I live that must be Tom Hornyold's troop!" cried Charles, halting, while Careless signed to the king's escort to stop.

Seeing Careless ride towards him, and comprehending the aide-de-camp's object, Captain Hornyold put his troop into a trot, and presently drew up before the king.

Tom Hornyold's manly bearing, open countenance, frank manner, and steady look prepossessed the king in his favour.

"I trust your majesty will pardon my inattention to your summons yesterday," said Hornyold, after making an obeisance. "Here are forty good men and true, who will fight well for you, and I have had barely time to get them together."

"Mistress Jane Lane explained all to me, Captain Hornyold," rejoined Charles, graciously. "You did quite right, and I thank you heartily. By my faith, you have brought me some famous recruits."

As he moved towards the troop, he was welcomed with a shout that startled the clamorous rooks overhead, and put to flight a herd of deer that had been couching beneath the trees.

Well pleased with the appearance of the recruits, many of whom were remarkably fine-looking young men, and all well accoutred and extremely well mounted, the king thus expressed his satisfaction:

"Good men – good horses – good weapons, and strong arms to wield them – those you have brought me, Captain Hornyold, and I thank you once more. Gentlemen," he added to the troops, "I cannot tarry longer with you now, though I fain would say something more, but I have much to do, as you are aware. I shall see you again at Pitchcroft. Au revoir!"

Bowing graciously to Captain Hornyold, he then rode off, attended by Careless and followed by his escort.

On quitting Blackmore Park, the king approached another equally well-wooded domain, which he did not need to be told belonged to Judge Lechmere.

It was, in sooth, Severn End, and their road towards the house led them for a short distance near the bank of the river. The grounds contained many noble trees, amongst which were several towering elms and broad-armed oaks that delighted Charles, as did a remarkably fine service-tree, which he pointed out to his attendant.

As they drew near the picturesque old mansion, it was easy to perceive that it was under military occupation – sentinels being placed at the entrance, while small parties of dragoons were gathered on the terrace, as if awaiting orders; and a troop of cavalry was drawn up on the lawn. A soldier was walking a powerful charger to and fro before the porch.

Drums would have been beaten, and trumpets sounded, but the king would not allow any announcement of his arrival to be made. Leaving his escort at the extremity of the lawn, he rode up to the portal with Careless. He then dismounted and marched up the steps, merely returning the salutes of the officers he encountered.

Loud and angry tones were audible as he crossed the hall, and guided him to the room in which General Massey could be found. The door being partly open, Charles pushed it aside and entered a large chamber with a somewhat low roof, panelled with black oak, ornamented with several full-length portraits.

This was the dining-room, and in the midst of it stood General Massey, booted and spurred, with his hat on, and his riding-whip in hand, evidently prepared to mount his charger.

A fine, tall, broad-shouldered man was the general, and well became his rich accoutrements. His back being towards the door he did not notice the king's entrance. Full of wrath, as we have intimated, he was pouring his fury on the head of a grave-looking personage in a black velvet gown, and having a black skull-cap on his head, who was standing calmly before him.

Perhaps this individual, whom Charles had no doubt was Judge Lechmere, recognised his majesty. If so, he gave no sign, but kept his keen grey eye steadily fixed on the irate general.

"Hark ye, judge," thundered Massey. "'Tis you, and such as you, supporters of this rebellious Parliament, who ought to suffer most, and by Heaven you *shall* suffer. You shall be forced to contribute largely to the expenses of the war you have compelled his majesty to undertake for the recovery of his throne. You are fined five thousand pounds."

"By whom am I fined that large sum?" demanded Lechmere, in a calm tone. "Not by the king, I am well assured. He would not commit such an injustice."

"You are fined by me – that is sufficient. I have his majesty's warrant for all I do."

"Not his written warrant," said the judge.

"I need it not," cried Massey. "What doth your Lord-General, as you style him? I do not desire to imitate his ruthless and robber-like proceedings. I do not intend, like him, to plunder churches, hospitals, and private dwellings. I do not mean to break open chests and carry off gold by the sack, and plate by the cart-load, as he did at Worcester, after the first siege. But I will imitate him in one thing. I will punish wealthy offenders like yourself by fines proportionate to their means. You have amassed money, I know, and, though a lawyer, I hope have come by it honestly. Had you been loyal you might have kept your money. But since you are a rebel, and a favourer of rebels, you shall disburse your gains for the king's use. You shall pay me the five thousand pounds I demand."

"And yet you affirm that you design not to plunder me," observed Judge Lechmere, still with perfect calmness. "What call you this but plunder on the greatest scale? Better strip my house of all it contains – better carry off my pictures and my plate – than fine me in a sum so large that I cannot pay it. Again I say, I am certain the king would not allow this demand to be made."

"His majesty will approve of what I do," rejoined Massey. "But I will not bandy words with you. You are now in my court, judge, and my decision holds good here. I will have the sum I have named – no less. Two thousand pounds – the first instalment – must be paid before noon on Thursday. That will give you two days to raise it. If you fail, I will have you shot in your own court-yard. You hear! No excuses will avail. Till then you are a prisoner in your own house."

"If I am a prisoner, how am I to raise the money, general?" asked the judge.

"That is your concern," rejoined Massey. "Have it I must – or you die!"

As he turned to quit the room, he perceived Charles standing behind him.

"Ah! sire," he exclaimed. "I did not know you were here."

"Am I indeed in the king's presence?" exclaimed Judge Lechmere, with well-feigned astonishment.

"You are in the presence of the sovereign to whom your allegiance is due, my lord judge," rejoined Charles, with dignity.

"Whatever my feelings may be towards your majesty," said Lechmere, "I cannot consistently – "

"You dare not declare yourself in my favour, eh, judge?" cried Charles. "Well, I will give you till Thursday for reflection. Naturally, you are included in the general pardon I have published, and if you then return to your allegiance, I shall be disposed to forget the past, and will remit the heavy fine imposed upon you by General Massey. Nay, I will do more; I will take you into my favour."

"I thank your majesty for your goodness. I will perpend the matter."

"Methinks it requires little consideration," observed Charles, somewhat sternly. "You have to choose between your lawful king and a usurper. You will best consult your own interests in serving me."

"I am inclined to believe so, sire – nay, I am certain – yet give me till Thursday."

"I have said it," rejoined Charles. "I now leave you in General Massey's hands."

With a grave bow to the judge, who had rushed forward as if to throw himself at his majesty's feet, but stopped suddenly, he quitted the room, followed by Massey.

As he crossed the hall he laughed heartily.

"Your judge will turn Royalist on Thursday, if nothing happens to-morrow," he said.

On quitting Severn End, Charles accompanied General Massey to Upton.

They rode through Hanley, where a stately pile belonging to the Earls of Gloucester once stood, and where Massey's troops were now encamped.

The general had with him a detachment of five hundred horse and a regiment of dragoons, and he assured the king that he felt confident of preventing the enemy's passage at Upton Bridge, come in what force he might.

Together they carefully examined the fine old bridge, which, like the bridges of Worcester and Powick, was somewhat narrow, but had deep angular recesses. It was strongly built of stone, and had several arches.

Charles advised its total destruction, but Massey was of opinion that it would suffice to break down the central arch; and the king giving his assent, a large body of men was at once set to work upon the task.

After witnessing the commencement of the operations, Charles took leave of Massey, urging him to be more than ever vigilant, as the safety of the army now depended on him, and rode on with his escort to Powick.

The security of this important pass seemed to be guaranteed by the presence of General Montgomery and Colonel Kirke, with two battalions of foot and a regiment of horse, and Charles, with a mind very much quieted, crossed the river to Worcester.

CHAPTER VIII. OF THE COUNSEL GIVEN BY COLONEL LESLEY TO THE KING

When Charles arrived at the palace, the war council was already assembled. Several general officers, however, were necessarily absent.

A long and anxious discussion ensued, and great diversity of opinion prevailed – jealousies having sprung up amongst the commanders. His grace of Buckingham hated the Duke of Hamilton, and derided his plans; but his own rash counsels were rejected.

Charles felt sure, he declared, that he should be largely reinforced by the levies which the Earl of Derby was bringing from Lancashire and Cheshire. But he cared not if his army should be inferior to that of the enemy in number.

"There is no fear of treachery," he said. "The loyalty of the citizens of Worcester is unquestionable. They will fight for me as bravely as they fought for the king, my father. No defeat will subdue them. But why do I talk of defeat? Let us speak of the victory, that is certain."

"The next battle must be decisive, sire," remarked the Duke of Hamilton. "We must conquer, or die."

"We will conquer," cried Charles, energetically.

"We will," cried several voices.

Having remarked that Lesley took no part in the conference, the king drew him aside and inquired the meaning of his sombre looks.

"Are you afraid of Cromwell?" he asked.

"I am afraid of my own men, sire," replied Lesley. "They are discontented, and do all I can, I am unable to remove their dissatisfaction."

"Of what grievance do they complain?" asked Charles.

"I need not remind your majesty, that nearly five thousand Scottish soldiers have returned to their own country since we crossed the Border –"

"Deserted, if you please, colonel," interrupted Charles.

"Well, deserted, sire. But they had this excuse. Being zealous Presbyterians, they had conscientious scruples against establishing the Episcopal government in England by force of arms; and like sentiments prevail, to a great extent, among the remainder of the troops. Since our arrival at Worcester their discontent has perceptibly increased. They do not like to fight with the Cavaliers. For this reason, they are not pleased with the Muster about to take place to-day, neither do they desire to be joined by the levies promised by the Earl of Derby."

"They fear that my devoted adherents may become too strong for them. Is it not so, colonel?" asked Charles, coldly.

"They deem that a preponderance of the royal party – strictly so called – though we are all Royalists – would be contrary to the true interests of Scotland, and to the welfare of the Kirk."

"Ah, I see!" exclaimed the king. "The Committee of the Kirk of Scotland have troubled their consciences – meddlesome fools that they are! But you *must* keep your men in good humour, Lesley. They *must* fight this battle. Assure them that I am a zealous partisan of the Covenant, and that when I ascend the throne I will ratify all the conditions imposed upon me."

"Humph!" exclaimed Lesley. "I may give them these assurances, but they will not believe me. So critical do I consider the position, that if I dared to offer your majesty a counsel, it would be to return to Scotland without hazarding an engagement."

"Return to Scotland! – never!" exclaimed Charles, indignantly. "How dare you make a proposition so dishonouring to me, Lesley. I have not advanced thus far into my kingdom to go back again without a blow."

"I knew my advice would be distasteful to your majesty, but I deemed it my duty to give it."

"No more!" cried the king. "Quell this mutinous spirit in your men, Lesley – quell it, by whatever means you can. Mark well what I say, and fail not to repeat it. When we have routed the rebels – and we *shall* rout them – those who have fought best for me shall receive the highest reward."

Before Lesley could make any reply, Pitscottie approached his majesty.

"Where are your Highlanders, colonel?" demanded Charles.

"Drawn up in the college green, sire. I await your orders to march them to the place of Muster."

"Have they heard that Cromwell is at hand?"

"Ay, sire; and they are eager to meet him."

"No discontent among them – ha?"

"Discontent! No, sire. They were never in better spirits. All they desire is to prove their zeal to your majesty, and use their broadswords against the foe."

"Brave fellows!" exclaimed Charles, glancing significantly at Lesley. "They shall serve as my body-guard to-day."

CHAPTER IX. OF THE GRAND MUSTER AT PITCHCROFT

Ever since the old city of Worcester was built and encircled by walls, Pitchcroft has afforded its inhabitants a delightful place for exercise and recreation. On this broad, flat plain, bounded on the west by the Severn, and completely overlooked by a natural terrace on the further bank of the river, many a grand tournament has been held in the days of our earlier monarchs. Magnificent pavilions and galleries have been reared upon the wide mead – splendid cavalcades have come forth from the city gates – nobles, knights, squires, jesters, and fair dames – and many a lance has been splintered at the royal jousts of Worcester. In 1225, these displays incurred the displeasure of the Church – a grand tournament being held on Pitchcroft in that year, when all the noble personages concerned in it were excommunicated by Bishop Blois. Sports and pastimes of all kinds have been familiar to the plain from time immemorial – games which, by a pretty figure of speech, have been described as Olympian, and which, we rejoice to say, are not altogether discontinued. Not only has Pitchcroft been the scene of many a knightly encounter and many a festive meeting, but when the loyal city was invested, it witnessed frequent conflicts between Cavaliers and Roundheads, and one well-fought action, in which the fiery Rupert took part.

On the morning appointed for the Muster, Pitchcroft was even more thronged than it had been on the previous Sunday, and presented a far gayer and more animated appearance. A great number of troops was assembled there, while the new levies were continually pouring into the plain through Foregate-street.

Before proceeding to the place of rendezvous, the recruits entered the city, and halted for a time in the area near the Cross, where their numbers were registered by the mayor and the sheriff, who acted as commissioners.

Among the principal names inscribed on the muster-roll were those of Lord Talbot, Sir John Pakington, Sir Walter Blount, Sir Ralph Clare, Sir Rowland Berkley, Sir John Winford, Mr. Ralph Sheldon of Beoley, Mr. John Washburn of Witchinford, and Mr. Thomas Hornyold.

Lord Talbot's troop, which was far more numerous than any other, was composed almost entirely of gentlemen, whose accoutrements and horses were far superior to those of ordinary cavalry. The regiment was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Mervin Touchet, and subsequently proved exceedingly efficient. Every Cavalier who came singly to Worcester was included in some troop or other.

These arrangements were made by Colonel Lane and Colonel Legge, assisted by Sir Clement Fisher. As quickly as one troop was filled up, it was sent off to the place of Muster. It was calculated that two thousand Worcestershire Cavaliers, including of course retainers and servants, answered the king's summons on that day.

The sight of so many recruits tended materially to dissipate the alarm not unnaturally excited by the rumours of Cromwell's near approach. Having begun to distrust the Scottish soldiers, the citizens were glad to have some defenders on whom they could confidently rely. For this reason, as well as for their gallant bearing and handsome equipments, the recruits were lustily cheered as they appeared on the plain.

A large concourse was collected in Foregate-street, and on the northern walls, to see the new troops come forth. The Scottish regiments of cavalry and infantry excited but little curiosity; the chief objects of interest being the numerous small bodies of horse, extending for a quarter of a mile on the left – each little troop with its officers in front.

The effect of this arrangement was extremely good, and delighted the spectators on the city walls and those on the west bank of the river.

The last troop had just got into its place, when the shrill notes of the pibroch were heard, and the Highlanders, with Colonel Pitscottie at their head, marched forth, and were received with cheers by the crowd assembled in Foregate-street.

Acclamations greeted the king. His majesty looked extremely well, and charmed the beholders, as he always did, by the extreme affability of his demeanour. On this occasion he was only attended by Careless and Colonel Blague. The recruits instantly attracted his attention – their numbers giving him manifest pleasure – and he expressed his satisfaction at beholding them audibly to his attendants.

He had not proceeded far, when the mayor and the sheriff advanced to meet him.

Opening a scroll which he held in his hand, the mayor in a loud voice recited the long list of loyal gentlemen of the county who had responded to his majesty's summons. The king looked highly gratified, and repeated each name as it was given out.

When the mayor had made an end, Charles rode towards Lord Talbot, who was nearest him on the left, and while surveying his splendid troop with admiration, called out, so that all might hear him:

"Why, my good lord, these are all gentlemen. Better mounted, better equipped Cavaliers, I would not desire to see."

"They are *all* loyal gentlemen," replied Lord Talbot, bowing; "and as such I am proud to present them to your majesty."

"Long live the king! Confusion to his enemies!" shouted the gallant band, brandishing their swords.

The shout was caught up by the next troop, which was commanded by Sir John Pakington, and was echoed far and wide.

After a few complimentary observations to Colonel Touchet, Charles moved on, inspecting in turn all the new-raised troops. Had loyalty been chilled in any breast, his majesty's gracious manner would have kindled it anew – but all were loyal. The king could not help noting that in almost every troop gentlemen had joined, and horses and accoutrements were generally so good that officers could scarcely be distinguished from privates.

Captain Hornyold's troop was stationed near the Scottish cavalry – Sir Clement Fisher acting as second captain. But the real commander, in the king's estimation, was Jane Lane, who was posted in front of her steed.

A glance of triumph lighted up her fine eyes as Charles addressed her:

"You only want arms to become a veritable Amazon."

"I will wear them if your majesty commands."

"No, you have brought me so many recruits that it is unnecessary. How many troops have you helped to fill up?"

"I have done my best, sire, but I have not brought you half so many as I could desire. The Worcestershire gentry are loyal, but irresolute and cautious – I will not use stronger epithets. They try to excuse their lukewarmness on the ground that they suffered so much from fines and sequestrations during the Civil Wars. But, as I tell them, that is no excuse. They ought to risk all – sacrifice all, if need be – for their sovereign. Many have come here to-day. But," she added, with a look of mingled grief and indignation, "some, on whom I fully counted, are absent."

"I scarcely miss them. When I have won a battle, they will hasten to rally round my standard, but I shall know how to distinguish between late comers, and those who have been true to me in the hour of peril."

"All here are true men, my liege. I would not say as much, for yon Scottish soldiers." Then lowering her voice so as only to be heard by the king, she added: "Do not trust Lesley, sire. He may play you false."

"Why do you entertain these suspicions?"

"From what I hear of the conduct of his men, and of his own discourse. Heaven grant my fears may prove groundless!"

"If Lesley proves a traitor I am undone, for he commands the third of my army, and his men will obey no other leader. But I will not believe him false."

"What news has your majesty of the Earl of Derby?" asked Jane, still in the same whispered accents. "Pardon the question. 'Tis prompted by the deep interest I feel –"

"No messenger from the earl has arrived as yet. But I have no apprehensions of a reverse. Doubtless, he is marching hither with the levies he has obtained, but has been compelled to turn aside from the direct route to avoid Cromwell."

"Would he were here now!" exclaimed Jane, earnestly.

"I would so too," responded Charles, with equal fervour. "But he will not fail me at the right moment, and will cut through any opposing force to join me."

"Is it not strange you have not heard from him, sire?"

"Not so strange – since the enemy is between us. Besides, if he has not effectually disposed of Lilburn, he may be harassed by him in his march. A few hours, I trust, will bring me tidings of the friend on whom I reckon most."

Banishing the gloom that had gathered on his brow during his converse with Jane, he turned to Captain Hornyold, and delighted that loyal gentleman by his praises.

Having completed his inspection of the new troops, Charles proceeded towards the centre of the plain, where Pitscottie and his Highlanders were drawn up. Here he stationed himself, and immediately afterwards it became evident, from the movement that took place, that the recruits were about to march past.

With as much promptitude and precision as if they had belonged to the regular cavalry, Captain Hornyold's troop came up. By the side of their leader rode Jane Lane, but she proceeded no further, being called upon by the king to take a place beside him.

Each little troop rode past in rapid succession – each being commended by the king in no measured terms – and they all deserved his praises, for a finer set of men were never got together.

Almost all of them were in the full vigour of manhood, and the ardour displayed in their looks and bearing, and in the shouts they could not repress, formed a striking contrast to the sullen visages and moody silence of the Scottish soldiers, who seemed to regard their new comrades with aversion.

But the coldness of the Scots was more than compensated for by the genuine enthusiasm of the citizens, who put no bounds to their rapturous delight, and shouted lustily as the new troops rode by. Every officer, and indeed almost every one in each company, being known, they were familiarly addressed by name, and cheered individually as well as collectively by the spectators.

After defiling past the king, the troops were formed into four regiments of five hundred each – respectively commanded by Colonel Mervin Touchet, Colonel Legge, Colonel Wogan, and Colonel Lane.

Attended by Lord Talbot, Sir John Pakington, Sir Walter Blount, Sir Ralph Clare, Sir Rowland Berkley, and Sir John Winford, the king rode slowly past them – ever and anon raising his hat – and manifesting by his looks the high gratification he felt.

Amid the loud and reiterated cheers of the concourse, his majesty then returned to the city – preceded by Colonel Pitscottie and his Highlanders, and attended by the gentlemen we have just mentioned.

CHAPTER X. THE BIVOUAC ON THE PLAIN

Shortly after the king's departure, two of the newly-raised regiments proceeded to the quarters temporarily assigned them in the city. Next day they encamped on the west side of the river. The regiments left behind remained where they were, and commenced their experience of military life by bivouacking on the plain. They did not undergo much hardship, since the night was fine and warm, and the moon being nearly at the full, every object was as distinctly visible as during daytime.

As far as eatables and drinkables were concerned, the newly-enrolled troops had no reason to complain. Plenty of provisions and an abundant supply of good liquor – ale, perry, cider, canary, sack, and other wines, were sent them by the mayor and sheriff. Though novices in the art of war, the new soldiers were adepts in drinking, and could empty their cups as well as the oldest campaigner. Every Cavalier was welcome to a share of their runlet of sack or claret – but they did not invite the Scottish soldiers.

Though the night was fine and warm, as we have described, they kept up their fires, and sat around them to a late hour. These groups, with arms piled, and horses picketed beside them, lent a very picturesque appearance to this part of the plain. Further on could be seen the tents of the Scottish soldiers, bathed in moonlight, but few were stirring near them except the sentinels. It would almost seem as if the Scots had retired to rest earlier than their wont to avoid hearing the songs and laughter of their roystering comrades. A great noise was undoubtedly made, for a dozen Cavalier ditties were chanted at the same time by different parties. At last, however, the recruits grew tired of singing, and began to talk of the war. Round each fire were collected individuals who had fought at both sieges of Worcester, and these now favoured their companions with their recollections of those stirring times.

"Nine years ago," said a burly-looking young man, who had been addressed as Martin Vosper, "I was just nineteen – so you will readily guess my age now – and I was then 'prentice to Mr. Lysons, the present worthy mayor of Worcester. The city, as you know, has always been loyal, and for that reason was regarded from the very first with especial disfavour by the rebellious Parliament. In 1642, our faithful Worcester, for I love to call it so, declared for the king, opened its gates to Sir John Biron and the three hundred Cavaliers he brought with him, and fortified its walls. The Roundheads did not leave us long alone. Lord Say and Colonel Fynes, with a large force, laid siege to the city; whereupon the king sent word from Oxford that he would bring fifteen hundred horse and twice as many foot to raise the siege. Our satisfaction at this agreeable intelligence was damped by hearing that Lord Essex was marching against us with fourteen thousand men; but just as we were beginning to despair, Prince Rupert, with his brother Maurice, threw themselves into the city with a large body of troops. Then we felt able to set Old Noll himself at defiance. Two successful stratagems were practised. But I must first describe an action that took place on this very plain. Determined to strike a decisive blow before Lord Essex could bring up his forces, Prince Rupert, on the morning after his arrival, with fifteen troops of horse, marched forth upon Pitchcroft, and, sounding his trumpets loudly, challenged the enemy to battle. A gallant sight his troops made, I can assure you, when drawn up on the plain, for I watched them from the northern walls. A word about the prince. Never did I behold a fiercer-looking man. His eye went through you like a rapier. But to proceed. At first the enemy appeared to decline the challenge, but they were ready enough to fight, as it turned out, only their forces were dispersed. Lord Say and Colonel Fynes were elsewhere, as I shall presently explain, but Colonel Sandys and Colonel Austine brought up their regiments, and the conflict began. 'Twas a splendid sight. What tremendous charges Prince Rupert made! How he mowed down the Roundheads! Still he could not break their ranks. The fight lasted for a couple of hours with varying success, but the advantage seemed to be with the prince, when a troop of horse was descried coming from the Blockhouse fields, and a cry arose that it was the Earl of Essex with his reinforcements. The alarm proved false, for the troops

were those of Colonel Fynes, but on seeing them, the prince ordered an instant retreat, and dashed precipitately into the city, whither he was followed so quickly by the Republicans, that the gate could not be shut, and a desperate fight ensued, which lasted till midnight, the streets resounding all the time with the rattle of musketry and the clash of steel. Many a Cavalier died that night, but not before his sword was reddened with the blood of his adversaries. The corn-market was full of wounded and dying. Prince Rupert might have succeeded in driving out the Republicans, if they had not been strongly reinforced by Lord Say. At length the prince was compelled to abandon the city, but he rode at the rear of his troops and drove back the Roundheads who sought to follow him across the bridge."

"Those confounded Parliamentarians *can* fight, it must be owned," remarked one of the listeners. "But what were the stratagems you spoke of just now, Vosper?"

"You shall hear, Simon Terret," replied the other. "But first give me a cup of sack to drink the king's health, and confusion to all rebels. From what I am about to relate you will perceive that the conflict on Pitchcroft was part of a cleverly-devised scheme, that ought to have succeeded better than it did. Prince Rupert having ascertained from his scouts that Lord Say had taken a detachment of a thousand men to Powick, while another equally large detachment had been taken by Colonel Fynes to Perry Wood – the object of the two Republican commanders being to surround the prince, as his highness perfectly understood – he endeavoured to out-manoeuvre them. With this design a clever spy was sent to Powick, who represented himself as a servant to the Earl of Essex, and stated, with an air of great plausibility, that Cromwell had entered Worcester – and that, if Lord Say advanced immediately, the retreat of the Royalists would infallibly be cut off. Duped by the man's apparent sincerity, Lord Say acted on the advice, and fell into an ambushade that cost him five-and-twenty men. Colonel Fynes was imposed on in much the same manner. A messenger galloped up to Perry Wood and informed him that Prince Rupert was advancing with ten thousand men, whereupon he fell back four miles. But he found out the stratagem rather too soon. It was his force that subsequently alarmed Prince Rupert and caused his highness to retreat into the city. Had not this discovery occurred, the prince would have beaten the enemy in detail."

"I think I have heard that those two clever spies were hanged," remarked Terret.

"Ay marry, were they," replied Vosper. "They were hanged with several other good citizens and staunch Royalists on a gallows as high as Haman's, which was set up in the market-place by Old Noll."

"Would Old Noll were hanged on a like gallows!" cried several voices.

"The *Jus Furcarum* was an enviable privilege," remarked one of the circle. "If I possessed the right, as did the old priors of St. Mary, I would hang every Roundhead rogue of them all."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the others.

"Ah! never shall I forget the barbarities practised by Essex's soldiers when they took the city," observed Vosper. "Heaven preserve us from a repetition of such dreadful usage. But all these severities did not check the loyal spirit of the citizens. You recollect the second siege in 1646, Trubshaw," he observed to another person near him, "when Worcester was invested by Sir William Brereton and Colonel Birch?"

"Ay, Colonel Henry Washington was governor at the time," replied Trubshaw – "as brave a man as ever drew sword, and as loyal.⁴ Several skirmishes occurred outside the walls, but there was an affair at St. John's in which I, myself, took part. The Parliamentary generals had blockaded the city on that side, lining the approaches to St. John's with musketeers, and quartering a large force behind the tower. Determined to dislodge them, Governor Washington sallied forth one night with a couple of hundred horse, of whom I myself was one, and five hundred foot. Tybridge-street, which you know leads to the bridge from St. John's, was strongly barricaded by the enemy, but we drove back their advanced guard to Cripplegate, where being reinforced by horse and foot, they made a stand, but they could not resist our brave commander, who attacked them with such vigour that he

⁴ An uncle of this brave Cavalier was an ancestor of the great General Washington, President of the United States.

quickly routed them, and would have put them all to the sword if they had not sought refuge in the church. We set fire to the houses in Cripplegate, so they could no longer find shelter there. In this sortie we killed a hundred of the enemy, and took ten prisoners. Our own loss was trifling. Governor Washington gained much credit by the achievement."

"Not more than he deserved," remarked another of the interlocutors named Barksdale. "Governor Washington was a man of undaunted resolution, as his answer shows, when he was summoned to surrender the city. 'It may be easy,' he wrote to General Fairfax, 'for your excellency to procure his majesty's commands for the disposal of this garrison. Till then I shall make good the trust reposed in me. As for conditions, if necessitated, I shall make the best I can. The worst I know, and fear not.'"

"A brave answer!" cried Vosper. "Did you know Captain Hodgkins? 'Wicked Will,' as he was called by the Roundheads?"

"Know him! ay," rejoined Barksdale. "Captain Hodgkins drank deeper, and fought harder, than any Cavalier of his day. One night, after he had emptied half a dozen flasks of claret, he crossed the bridge with a small band of boon companions, surprised the enemy's guard at Cripplegate, drove them back as far as the Bull Ring, which you know is close to St. John's, and put several of them to the sword. In returning, he fell from his horse in Tybridge-street, and not being able to walk, was tossed into a boat and rowed across the Severn. In another sally, being somewhat more sober, he brought back seven prisoners."

"Seven prisoners! ha! ha!" laughed the whole circle.

"'Tis a pity he did not die a soldier's death," observed Trubshaw. "His body was found in the Severn below the city, near Bunshill. Whether he was accidentally drowned, or thrown into the river, is uncertain."

"Wicked Will's death was a judgment," observed a deep voice behind them.

Trubshaw and some others turned at the remark, and perceived a tall, thin man, moving away in the direction of the river. Hitherto this person had eluded observation as he had been standing among the horses.

"A spy has been amongst us! – a Roundhead!" cried Vosper, springing to his feet.

"Seize the rogue and make him give an account of himself," cried Trubshaw, likewise starting up. "What ho! stand!" he shouted.

The spy paid no heed to the summons, but speeded towards the river. The Scottish sentries were too far off to challenge him, and did not fire.

Vosper and Trubshaw started in pursuit. But the spy reached the river before them, and jumped into a boat, which he had doubtless moored to the bank.

When his pursuers came up he was pulling vigorously across the stream. A pistol was fired at him by Vosper, but without effect.

With a mocking laugh he then altered his course, and rowing down the stream, soon disappeared beneath one of the narrow arches of the bridge.

CHAPTER XI.

COLONEL ROSCARROCK RELATES NOW THE EARL OF DERBY WAS ROUTED AT WIGAN

Ill news came to Charles on the morrow.

He was in his cabinet with his secretary, Captain Fanshaw, when Careless entered and informed him that Colonel Roscarrock was without.

"Roscarrock!" exclaimed the king, struck by Careless's looks. "What news brings he from the Earl of Derby?"

"Ask me not, I beseech you, my liege," rejoined Careless, sadly. "The colonel will tell his own tale. I grieve to say he is wounded."

Comprehending at once what had occurred, Charles merely said, "Bring in Colonel Roscarrock."

And as the aide-de-camp departed, he arose and paced the cabinet with anxious steps, trying to summon his firmness for the painful interview.

Presently Careless returned supporting the colonel, whose left arm was in a sling.

Roscarrock was a tall, soldier-like, handsome man, but loss of blood and excessive fatigue gave a haggard expression to his features. The dusty state of his apparel and boots showed that he had ridden far.

"Alas, sire, I bring you bad news!" he exclaimed, in dolorous accents.

"Be seated, colonel, and I will hear you," said Charles, aiding him to a chair. "We have sustained a defeat, I perceive, but ere you enter into details, relieve my anxiety respecting the Earl of Derby."

"His lordship is sore hurt," replied Roscarrock, "but he is in safety, and will be with your majesty ere many days."

"Thank Heaven for that!" exclaimed Charles, earnestly.

"You have lost many loyal subjects and brave soldiers, sire," pursued Roscarrock. "Lord Widdrington is mortally wounded, if not dead. Sir William Throckmorton cannot survive. Sir Thomas Tildesley, Colonel Boynton, Colonel Trollope, and Colonel Galliard are slain."

"Alas! brave Widdrington! Alas! brave Tildesley! have I lost you?" ejaculated Charles, mournfully. "Where did this dire disaster occur?"

"At Wigan, in Lancashire, my liege," returned Roscarrock. "At first, everything promised success. As your majesty's lieutenant, the Earl of Derby had issued his warrant commanding all your loyal subjects to meet him in arms at Preston, and he had collected six hundred horse and about nine hundred foot. With this force he marched to Wigan, with the design of proceeding to Manchester, where he not only hoped to surprise Cromwell's regiment of infantry but expected to obtain five hundred recruits. I need not tell your majesty that I was with his lordship. In a lane near the town we encountered Colonel Lilburn with a regiment of horse. Our men shouted loudly as we dashed upon the enemy, and fought so well that they drove Lilburn to the end of the lane. But a reserve of horse coming up changed the fortune of the day. What could our raw recruits do against Lilburn's veterans? Owing to the earl's reckless daring, he was wounded early in the conflict, which lasted upwards of an hour. How can I relate the disastrous issue? Suffice it, the rout was total. Our men were panic-stricken, and could not be rallied. Hundreds were slain in flight. Pursued by a party of horse, the earl dashed into Wigan, and turned into a narrow street. Observing an open door, he flung himself from his steed and entered the house. A woman recognised him, and barred the door, enabling him to escape through a garden at the back before the Roundheads could search the house. By a miracle almost the noble fugitive got out of the town, which was filled with Parliamentary soldiers, and shaped his course towards the south. I was proceeding slowly in the same direction, when Providence – for

I like not to call it chance – brought us together near Newport. At the house of a Royalist gentleman named Watson, we met another true man, Mr. Snead, who volunteered to conduct us to a lonely house called Boscobel, standing on the borders of two counties – Shropshire and Staffordshire – where we could remain safely hidden till our wounds were healed. We gladly accepted the offer. I rested one night at Boscobel, when feeling able to proceed to Worcester, I came on. Lord Derby was too weak to accompany me, but bade me say that your majesty may count on seeing him in a few days."

"I thought to see him with two thousand men at his back," exclaimed Charles, in a melancholy and somewhat despondent tone. "But the hope ought never to have been indulged. Treat it as we may, Roscarrock, this defeat at Wigan is a heavy blow to our cause. 'Twill encourage the enemy, and dishearten our own troops. Lilburn will join Cromwell."

"He has already joined him, sire, with his regiment of horse," remarked Roscarrock. "I should have been here before, had I not experienced much difficulty in getting nigh Worcester, owing to the enemy's numerous outposts. Would I had a sword like Widdrington's, and an arm like his to wield it!" he continued, with a grim smile. "Widdrington cut down half a dozen dragoons ere he was overpowered. In losing him your majesty has lost the tallest of your subjects, and the strongest."

"But not the bravest, while hardy Ned Roscarrock is left me," said Charles. "But you need refreshment and rest, colonel, and you must have both, or you will never be able to fight for me, and I may call upon you to attack Lilburn again before long."

"Your majesty will find me ready, call on me when you will," returned Roscarrock.

With Careless's assistance he then arose and withdrew, leaving the king alone with his secretary.

CHAPTER XII.

HOW URSO GIVES WAS WEDDED TO MARY RUSHOUT

Amid his manifold distractions, Careless had not forgotten pretty Mary Rushout. Twice had he seen her at her grandmother's dwelling in Angel-lane, but on the second occasion she prayed him with tears in her eyes never to come to the house again.

"We must part," she said; "and it would have been better if we had never met. Urso, you know, is exceedingly jealous, and keeps the strictest watch over me. He saw you enter the house last night, and waited outside till you departed."

"He must have waited long," remarked Careless, smiling.

"Ah! it's no laughing matter, I can assure you," cried Mary. "Urso is a terrible man. I won't tell you how bitterly he reviled you, but he said you had better look to yourself if you came to Angel-lane again. I shouldn't wonder if he is on the watch now. Ay, there he is of a surety," she added, stepping towards the little lattice window, and peeping out into the lane.

"Heed him not," cried Careless, drawing her back. "I was going – but, to punish him, I'll stay an hour longer."

"No, no – you mustn't – indeed you mustn't!" she exclaimed. "It will drive him frantic, and when he is in one of his rages, he is capable of killing me. You must go immediately."

"Impossible, sweetheart. I have much to say to you. Don't trouble yourself about this jealous Roundhead. Leave me to deal with him. I'll crop his ears still more closely to his head. Why don't you give him up?"

"Unluckily, I've plighted my troth to him, or I would."

"Never mind that, sweetheart. I'll liberate you from your pledge."

"You graceless Cavaliers will swear anything, and care not for breaking your vows – that's what Urso says."

"Truce to Urso. You will believe me, when I swear that I love you."

"No; because I find you do not regard an oath."

"Bah! promise to love me."

"No; because it would be sinful to make such a promise. Urso himself would say so."

"Urso again! – confound him! I must find means to free you from this tie – even if I sever it with my sword."

"That won't make me love you – rather hate you. But you must really go. Pray do not quarrel with Urso."

"If he stops me, I shall assuredly chastise him. Adieu, sweetheart! Expect me at the same hour to-morrow?"

"No, no – you must not come – indeed, you must not."

But she seemed so little in earnest, that Careless construed her prohibition in the opposite sense, and believed she wished him to come.

As he went forth, Angel-lane – a narrow street running nearly parallel with the walls on the north of the city, in the direction of All Hallows – appeared quite deserted, and he thought that Urso Gives was gone. But he had scarcely reached the church, when a tall figure stepped from behind a buttress and barred his path.

"Out of my way, fellow!" he cried, haughtily, feeling sure it was Urso.

"Not till I have spoken with you," rejoined the other, maintaining his ground.

The Independent then continued, in a stern, menacing voice, "On the peril of your life, I forbid you to re-enter the house you have just profaned by your presence. You have beguiled the damsel who dwells there by your false speeches, and have sought to corrupt her. You cannot feign ignorance that she is my affianced wife, for I myself heard her tell you so."

"Since you have been playing the spy, you might easily have learnt that I am coming again to-morrow night at the same hour," rejoined Careless, in a mocking tone.

"Think it not," rejoined Urso, fiercely. "Since you will not be deterred from your evil courses by the warning given you, look to yourself!"

And suddenly drawing forth the long tuck-sword which he held under his cloak, he placed its point at the other's breast.

Careless sprang back and so saved his life, and drawing his own sword, their blades were instantly crossed.

Notwithstanding his eminently peaceful vocation, Urso proved no contemptible swordsman, and Careless failed to disarm him as soon as he expected. The clash of steel roused the inmates of the houses, and some of them opened their doors, but when they perceived that an officer of rank was engaged with a Roundhead they did not interfere.

Mary Rushout, however, came forth, screaming with terror, and reached the combatants just as Careless, having knocked Urso's weapon from his grasp, seized him by the throat, and forced him down upon his knees, exclaiming:

"Sue for mercy, caitiff hound, or I will despatch thee!"

"Spare him, gentle sir! – spare him!" cried Mary, seizing the Cavalier's arm.

"He owes his worthless life to your intercession, sweet Mary," cried Careless, spurning Urso from him. "If he is not sufficiently grateful for the obligation, let me know, and I will sharpen his gratitude. Adieu, till to-morrow!"

And sheathing his sword, he strode away.

Quite crestfallen at his discomfiture, and eager to escape from the jeers of the neighbours who had come forth, Urso picked up his tuck-sword and hurried back to the house with Mary.

What passed between them need not be recounted. It will be sufficient to state the result.

Not till the second evening after the occurrence just described, did Careless return to Angel lane. His duties to the king had detained him in the interval.

After tapping softly at the door of Mary's dwelling, he raised the latch, but the door was fastened, and he was compelled to knock more loudly. Still, no answer to the summons. He listened intently, but not the slightest sound was to be heard within; neither was any light visible through the little lattice window.

While he was making another ineffectual attempt to obtain admittance, a glover, who lived next door, came forth and told him that Dame Rushout and Mary were gone.

"Gone! whither?" cried Careless.

"That is more than I am able to inform your honour," replied the glover; "but you are not likely to see Mary again, since Master Gives has taken her way."

"Sdeath! did she consent to go with him?"

"She could not very well refuse, seeing that she has become his wife," responded the glover.

"Amazement!" cried Careless. "I could not have believed she would wed him."

"No one expected it, though the marriage has been long talked of," said the glover. "But we think her grandam must have wrought upon Mary to consent – for she herself seemed wondrously reluctant. Be this as it may, and I cannot speak for certain, she and Urso were married by the Rev. Laban Foxe, an Independent minister, and soon after the ceremony – if ceremony it can be called – Urso and his bride, with the old dame, quitted Worcester."

Careless had heard enough, and strode away to hide his vexation.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHOWING HOW THE KING HAD FORTIFIED THE CITY

The fortifications of Worcester having now been completely repaired and considerably extended by Charles, it may be necessary to take another survey of them.⁵

On the south, the city was provided with a double enceinte – Sidbury-gate and the Commandery being completely enclosed by the newly raised lines. On the south-east, the outer fence extended from Fort Royal almost to Friars'-gate. On the other side, the new line of fortifications ran towards the Severn, covering the Moat, and the strong old wall behind it – a boundary wall built by a prior of the Convent of St. Mary early in the thirteenth century – and forming an outer defence to the Castle Mound, with which it was connected. The Castle Hill, as we have already had occasion to remark, was strongly fortified, and had become almost as formidable as Fort Royal itself, with which it was now linked by the new line of fortifications. These new fortifications were necessarily not very strong, but they answered their purpose. In the fields opposite Friar's-gate, and facing Perry Wood, stood an old blockhouse, which had more than once fallen into the hands of the former besiegers of the city. Dismantled by Colonel James, the Blockhouse had now been put into repair, and was garrisoned and provided with ammunition, its commander being Colonel Blague, on whose courage and fidelity Charles could perfectly rely. The district in which the old fortress stood is still known as the "Blockhouse Fields." Right and left of St. Martin's-gate, which looked towards King's Hill, as the acclivity was naturally enough designated after Charles's encampment upon it, a new bastion had been constructed. Two more bastions strengthened the northern ramparts, and at the north-west angle of the walls, not far from St. Clement's Church, removed in later times, stood a strong fort, the guns of which commanded the bridge. The tower in the centre of the bridge was well armed and well manned, as was the fort at the western extremity of the bridge. Proceeding along Tybridge-street to Cripplegate, the scene of many a former conflict in the days of Sir John Biron and Governor Washington, and of wild Will Hodgkins's mad exploits, we come to St. John's, where General Dalyell's brigade was quartered – all the approaches to this out-work being as strongly barricaded, as when the dangerous suburb formed a Leaguer for the Parliamentarians in 1646.

From the foregoing hasty survey, it will be seen that the city was now in a thorough state of defence, and was especially strong on the south and south-east. Owing to the active zeal and forethought of the mayor and the sheriff, it was abundantly provisioned and well stored with forage.

On the enemy's approach, as a precautionary measure, it was resolved by the council of war to burn all the suburbs on the north and east – a determination that inspired great terror, since Foregate-street contained a large number of inhabitants, and Lawrence-lane, leading from Friars'-gate to the Blockhouse was also a populous district.

Fort Royal now mounted some large ordnance, and was regarded by its defenders as impregnable. Including the fortifications, it contained upwards of fifteen hundred men, among whom were the most skilful engineers in the royal army. Fort Royal was commanded by Sir Alexander Forbes, an officer of great experience and resolution, and distinguished as the first knight made by Charles in Scotland. The Duke of Hamilton's head-quarters were at the Commandery – a hospital founded in the eleventh century by Bishop Wulstan, the saintly prelate who commenced the

⁵ Evidence of the wonders accomplished by the king in the short space of time allowed him is afforded by the very curious Diary of Judge Lechmere, some portions of which have been given by Mr. Richard Woof, F.S.A., in his "Personal Expenses of Charles II. in the City of Worcester in 1651." Thus writes Judge Lechmere (the personage whom we have introduced in a previous chapter) a few days before the Battle: "The Scots king having sodainly possessed himself of the city of Worcester, in a few daies *fortified it beyond imagination.*" From his position in Worcester, and from his antiquarian researches, no one is, perhaps, so intimately acquainted with the history of the faithful city at the period of this Tale as Mr. Woof, and the author seizes this opportunity of acknowledging the obligations he is under to him for much valuable information.

present cathedral. Two centuries later, the Master of the Hospital assumed the title of Preceptor, or Commander, whence the designation of the structure. The Commandery is one of the most picturesque old edifices in Worcester. Of its beautiful refectory, roofed with Irish oak, in which the king dined with the duke on the day before the battle, we shall have to speak hereafter.

The command of the fort on the Castle Mound had been intrusted to the Earl of Rothes, Sir William Hamilton, and Colonel Drummond, who had under them two brigades of Scottish infantry, with some artillery. Colonel Lesley's regiment of cavalry was encamped on the slopes of King's Hill. But the main body of the army, including the newly-raised troops, had now been moved to the western side of the river, where the camp extended for some miles towards Malvern. Pitscottie was stationed at Wick, midway between St. John's and Powick, near a cherry orchard, in which, nine years previously, the ambushade was successfully laid for Lord Say. Montgomery and Keith were at Powick. Scattered troops were encamped on the left bank of the Severn almost as far as Upton, where General Massey, as we know, was posted to defend the pass.

Such was the disposition of the royal forces – when it was found that Cromwell was pushing his outposts round the city on the south and south-east, and that the main body of the Parliamentary army was between Stoulton and White Lady Aston, which latter place the Lord-General himself had made his head-quarters.

Charles was not much disquieted by the intelligence. His spirit rose with the difficulties he had to encounter, and his cheerfulness and gaiety inspired confidence in all with whom he conversed. But he had not overcome his suspicions of Lesley, and these suspicions were almost confirmed by the conduct of the Scottish leader, who persisted in maintaining his post on King's Hill, whence secret communication with the enemy might most easily be held.

Jane Lane still remained in Worcester. Charles entreated her to quit the city before hostilities commenced, but she refused.

"I shall not go unless your majesty commands," she said. "Then I must perforce obey. But I beseech you to let me remain. I may be of some use; and my brother will take care of me."

Naturally, there was much speculation amongst the Royalist leaders as to where the attack would begin, some mentioning one place, some another; but Jane ventured to remark to the king that the first blow would be struck at Upton-on-Severn. She had ridden thither with her brother and Sir Clement Fisher, and while they were examining the broken bridge with General Massey, her quick eye detected a small reconnoitring party of the enemy in an orchard on the opposite side of the river. The Parliamentarians were quickly put to flight by a few musket-shots from Massey's dragoons, but Jane declared they would return, and in much greater force. And she was right.

CHAPTER XIV. BY WHAT MEANS GENERAL LAMBERT GAINED THE PASS AT UPTON BRIDGE

Early next morning – August 28th – Major-General Lambert, who had crossed the Avon at Pershore on the previous day, and passed the night at Strensham, advanced with a regiment of horse and three troops of dragoons towards Upton Bridge, with the condition of which he had been made acquainted by the reconnoitring party he had sent on. No information of his movements reached Massey, and as he approached the river he was sheltered by the orchard previously described. On examination he found that, although the central arch of the bridge was destroyed, a plank had been most incautiously laid across the piers for the convenience of foot-passengers. Moreover, not more than three or four dragoons were on guard at the time. How so important a passage, on the security of which the royal army mainly depended, chanced to be so slenderly guarded, seemed inexplicable to him. Nevertheless, he greatly rejoiced, and firmly believed that Providence had favoured him.

At the very time when they ought to have been on the look-out, watching for their active and daring foe, Massey's troops were scattered about the single street, which formed the quiet little town, as careless and unconcerned as if no surprise were to be apprehended, and the fate of a great kingdom did not depend upon their vigilance. General Massey himself was at breakfast at the little hostel, and not a single officer was on duty. It is true they were close at hand, since the street led direct to the bridge, but not near enough, as the event showed.

General Lambert could not have chosen a more opportune moment for his approach. He had taken the Royalists completely unawares, and they certainly betrayed unpardonable negligence. Even the few dragoons on guard seemed half asleep, and were reclining drowsily against the parapets of the bridge.

Nothing could be more peaceful – nothing more lovely than the scene – and yet how soon, how terribly, was its calmness to be disturbed! – its beauty destroyed! Round the tower of the grey old church the swallows were wheeling; some sounds arose from the quiet little town, but they were not unpleasant to the ear; a few barks were moored to the bank below the town, but their owners seemed infected by the general indolence, as did some other persons who were fishing lower down the stream. The smooth, broad river flowed calmly on, save where its current encountered the remains of the broken arch of the bridge, against which it split and struggled. Partly destroyed as it was, the old stone bridge somewhat marred the peaceful character of the scene, yet it did not detract from its effect. Lambert was struck with the beauty of the view as he gazed at it, yet he hesitated not to play the part of a destroyer.

"Look yonder, Corporal Lightbound," he cried to a sour-visaged soldier near him. "Behold how these malignants keep guard. When they should be watchful, they are eating and drinking, or slumbering on their posts. They have broken their bridge to hinder us, yet have they foolishly laid down a plank whereby we may pass over and destroy them. Of a truth this is the Lord's doing. He has delivered them into our hands. Thou, corporal, art chosen for the work. Take with thee a score of musketeers on whom thou canst best rely. Cross over the plank as quickly as thou mayest, and possess thyself of the church. Thou canst easily maintain the post till I come to thine aid. The river must be fordable yonder," he added, pointing to a place below the bridge, where the current was rushing swiftly over a pebbly bed, and where a man who had reached a large stone, almost in the mid-stream, was fishing. The Severn, we may incidentally remark, had not then been dammed up at intervals, as is now the case, to preserve a constant depth of water for trading navigation.

"Truly, a fording party might well cross yonder, general," remarked Lightbound.

"The position yon man has attained proves it. He must have waded to that stone. There I will cross with the whole of my force."

"You will find me within the church with my men, general."

"I nothing doubt it," rejoined Lambert. "Fear not. The Lord is with thee, and will enable thee to surprise the enemy. And now about the work."

A man of great resolution, and appalled by no danger, Corporal Lightbound instantly obeyed. Selecting twenty musketeers, each as stalwart and fearless as himself, and bidding them follow him, he left the orchard.

So unlooked-for was the attempt, that the attacking party reached the bridge, and indeed were only a few yards from the broken arch, before they were discovered by the drowsy guard.

"Let me go first, corporal," said a soldier. "Thy life is more precious than mine."

"Nay, Zachariah; the command belongs of right unto me," cried Lightbound, sternly and authoritatively. "I may not yield it – and I will not."

But Zachariah pressed forward, and went on to his death.

So offended was Corporal Lightbound at this act of insubordination, that he allowed all the others to pass on before him, whereby his own life was preserved.

Meantime the Royalist guard, aroused at last to a sense of danger, shouted loudly, "Arms! arms!" and sprang forward to dispute the passage.

The foremost of them discharged his musket at Zachariah, who was now crossing the plank, sword in hand. The shot took effect. Zachariah tottered, and fell upon the huge stones lying beneath him, scarce covered by water.

Another shot was instantly fired, and did execution upon the second soldier, who likewise dropped into the river.

The Royalists shouted, but their triumph was short-lived, for the bullets of the musketeers killed them both, and their comrades took to their heels.

By this time the call to arms having been loudly beaten, troopers and dragoons came rushing from the street to the scene of action. But they were not quick enough to prevent the assailing party from gaining possession of the church, the door of which, fortunately for them, chanced to be left open.

Everything favoured them, and they might well think, as their leader affirmed, that Heaven had declared itself on their side.

No sooner had they entered than the church door was closed and barred. Musketeers were placed at each window – with others behind them – and every possible precaution for the defence of the place was taken by Corporal Lightbound. Churches constantly served as fortresses in those days – and very good fortresses they made, as we see.

Cursing his own imprudence, General Massey rushed from the little hostel, sprang on his charger, and galloped to the bridge, followed by a small body of cavalry.

His first aim was to dislodge the detachment that had gained possession of the church, but when he rode into the churchyard with his troopers for this purpose, they were received by a well-directed volley from within, that killed several men and horses, and threw the rest of the troop into confusion. Massey himself was wounded in the hand.

Nothing daunted, the Royalists rode close up to the windows, fired their pistols into the church, and tried to reach their enemies, with their swords, but did them little hurt. The Parliamentarians, on the contrary, returned the fire with deadly effect, being able to aim deliberately at their opponents.

With the second volley, the churchyard was strewn with horses and wounded and dying men. Attempts were made by the Royalists to force an entrance to the church, but the windows were secured by bars, and the door being fashioned of stout oak and clamped with iron, their efforts were futile, and only excited the derision of the enemy.

By this time a regiment of cavalry had come up, and all seemed over with the brave men in the church. Massey ordered the door to be blown open; but ere a petard could be fixed to it, a fresh alarm was given.

The main body of the enemy was at hand.

While the attack on the church was taking place, Lambert had succeeded in fording the river at the place he had indicated, without any loss whatever, and was now hastening with his whole force to support the small detachment previously sent over.

Massey prepared to meet him, but his troops were utterly unable to resist the overwhelming force brought against them. Their ranks were broken on the first charge, and they made a headlong retreat into Upton, all Massey's efforts to check them being vain.

On gaining the street, which, as we have said, led to the bridge, they were reinforced, and faced the foe; but the conflict was of short duration, and ended in the complete rout of the Royalists, numbers of whom were slain.

Massey performed desperate acts of valour, needlessly exposing his life.

Surrounded by a party of dragoons, he extricated himself; and although wounded in the attack on the church, and subsequently hit in several places – two horses being shot under him – he managed to conduct his shattered troops safely to Worcester.

Pursuit was not continued far by Lambert, who was more intent on securing the pass he had gained than anxious to destroy the enemy. He knew the immense importance attached by Cromwell to the possession of Upton Bridge, and he also knew the effect its loss would inevitably have on the young king's fortunes.

Master of the all-important pass, he ordered the bridge to be repaired with all possible despatch.

CHAPTER XV. HOW CROMWELL RECONNOITRED THE CITY FROM RED HILL

No attempt was made by either of the Royalist commanders stationed on the western side of the Severn to repair Massey's disastrous defeat at Upton. The first tidings received of the conflict by Dalyell were from the wounded general himself, and it was then too late to act. Montgomery did not dare to quit his post at Powick, nor to detach Keith with any troops. Early next day, Upton Bridge having been sufficiently repaired to allow them to pass over it, Lambert was joined by Fleetwood, Ingoldsby, and Harrison, with their regiments of horse and foot; so there were now ten thousand Parliamentary soldiers at Upton. The Royalist troops encamped at Old Hills, on Newland-green, and at Lewthorn, drew closer to Worcester, and a new camp was formed between Upper Wick and Pitmarston.

No one profited more by Lambert's victory than Judge Lechmere. Not only did he escape payment of the fine imposed upon him by Massey, which became due on the very day when that general was worsted, but he got rid of his obnoxious guests, and avoided all further pains and penalties, for if Massey had not been compelled to beat a hasty retreat, he would assuredly have carried him off as a prisoner. As soon as he could venture forth with safety, the judge rode over to Upton to congratulate Lambert on his victory. At the same time, he begged him to make Severn End his headquarters. The Parliamentary general willingly accepted the offer, and was installed that night in the room which his adversary had quitted in the morning, with the full intention of returning to it.

Next day, the other generals who had just crossed the river were established at Severn End, and treated by the judge with the greatest hospitality. Whatever personal annoyance he had endured, Judge Lechmere could not complain that his house had been damaged or plundered by the Cavaliers; and this was more than could be said of Captain Hornyold's residence – Blackmore Park – which was stripped by the rapacious Republicans, Colonels Goff and Gibbons. Madresfield Court was summoned by Fleetwood to surrender, but the commander of the garrison refused, and the siege was postponed.

Lambert's victory was in the highest degree satisfactory to Cromwell. The seizure of the pass at Upton Bridge was part of the Lord General's plan, but it had been accomplished more expeditiously than he had anticipated. Though some miles off on the south of the city with the main body of his army, he was in constant communication with his generals, and directed all their movements. On the 28th of August, as we have previously mentioned, he made White Lady Aston, distant about five miles from Worcester, his head-quarters; and on that evening he was joined by Colonel Lilburn, who had arrived with his victorious troops from Wigan, in Lancashire.

The old manor-house of White Lady Aston, which originally belonged to a nunnery of the Benedictine order, situated in the northern suburbs of Worcester, was now occupied by Mr. Symonds, and by this gentleman, a thorough-going Republican, Cromwell was heartily welcomed. Almost midway between this place and Red Hill, until quite recently, had stood another fine old manor-house, belonging to Sir Robert Berkeley, and it was in this large mansion, the position of which perfectly suited him, that the Lord General meant to fix his quarters; but he learnt from his friend Mr. Symonds that the mansion no longer existed – it having been burnt down only three days previously by the Scottish Presbyterians, because Sir Robert Berkeley, its owner, when one of the Justices of the King's Bench in the time of the late king, had given his opinion for ship money.

Judge Berkeley, we may remark, had been very hardly used. Impeached for high treason, he was fined twenty thousand pounds, deprived of his office, and imprisoned in the Tower. His house had been plundered by the Parliamentarians in the first siege of Worcester, and now it was burnt down

by the soldiers of the sovereign, whose cause he warmly supported. Nevertheless, his loyalty was unimpaired. It is to this high-minded and charitable man that Worcester owes the Berkeley Hospital.

As Cromwell rode through Spetchley Park, on his way to Red Hill, early next morning, he stopped to look at the blackened ruins of the fine old mansion, with which he had been well acquainted, and though not easily moved, he was touched by its melancholy aspect. A pleasant spot it had been, but it was now an utter ruin – nothing being left standing except the stables.

"These Scots," he remarked to Dighton, an inferior officer of his life guards, who was in constant attendance upon him, "have done worse than the men of Ephraim did, when they threatened to burn down Jephtha's house upon him with fire. 'Tis a mean and dastardly revenge, and they will pay for it. Those stables are large," he said, observing them carefully; "and the rooms connected with them must be commodious. I will pass the night here. Hold thy peace, Dighton. I know what thou wouldst say – but I care not if the rooms have been occupied by grooms."

Dighton gave the necessary orders while the Lord General rode slowly along the noble avenue of elm-trees that led to the place where the old mansion once stood. Within Spetchley Park, which was charmingly wooded, and contained a fine sheet of water, the main body of the Parliamentary army was encamped. Next came Lord Grey of Groby's brigade, and the camp continued, at intervals, to Red Hill, where Lilburn's regiment was now stationed.

As Cromwell approached Red Hill, he heard the sound of cannon, and, quickening his pace, soon learnt that the guns of Fort Royal had opened upon Lilburn's troops while they were taking up a position on the heights.

As no damage was done, Colonel Lilburn did not return the fire. "Let them waste their ammunition if they will," he said to his engineers. "They have not too much to spare."

Cromwell was of the same opinion.

"It would be useless to cannonade them from these heights," he said to Lilburn. "But I will soon get near enough to reach them."

Accompanied by a regiment of musketeers and a train of artillery, he then rode on to Perry Wood, which, as we know, faced Fort Royal, and, in order that the movement might not be discovered by the Royalists, he shaped his course through the Nunnery Wood, so designated because it had once belonged to the old convent we have alluded to in describing White Lady Aston, and entered Perry Wood, where his men could be hidden. He then gave orders that during the night a strong breastwork should be raised on the south of the hill, and a battery of heavy guns mounted, which would command Fort Royal.

This done, he returned as he came, attended only by a small escort; but he halted for a short time at the Nunnery Farm to see what the enemy were about. The engineers on Fort Royal had not made any discovery of the troops concealed in Perry Wood, and were still firing away uselessly at Lilburn's camp on Red Hill.

Throughout the day the Lord General remained with Lilburn, and together they reconnoitred the enemy from various points of Red Hill, examining the new lines of fortifications, which surprised them by their extent, and being much struck by the formidable appearance of the Castle Mount. But they had troops as well as fortifications to examine – the main body of the king's army being now posted on this side of the city.

This was what they beheld. From Friars'-gate on the east to the south-west angle of the fortifications near the river, the city was surrounded by troops. Lesley's brigade had descended from King's Hill, and now occupied the Blockhouse fields. This Scottish cavalry seemed to give Cromwell little uneasiness, and he smiled as he pointed them out to Lilburn, but he did not regard with equal indifference the large force under the Duke of Hamilton, which occupied the London-road, and commanded the approach to the Sidbury-gate. Nor did either of them think lightly of the regiments respectively commanded by the Duke of Buckingham, Lord Wilmot, Colonel Legge, and Colonel

Lane. Lilburn thought General Middleton's brigade likely to give him trouble. Middleton's troops were posted near the river, on the spot where Diglis's Bowling-green was subsequently laid out.

Such was the disposition of the royal forces on the south and south-east sides of Worcester when the two Parliamentary leaders examined them from Red Hill. Cromwell looked upon the troops as already scattered and consumed. But Lilburn was struck by their gallant appearance, and did not refuse them the tribute of a soldier's admiration.

CHAPTER XVI. IN WHICH MASSEY PROPOSES A NIGHT ATTACK ON THE ENEMY

The greatest consternation reigned within the city. Massey's defeat at Upton had been felt as a heavy blow, and the boldest amongst the Cavaliers were much discouraged by it. The appearance of the enemy on the southern heights increased the alarm of the citizens, and some of the most timorous began to think of flight. For the credit of the loyal city, and its brave inhabitants, we are happy to record that these were very few in number. A proclamation was made that all who desired to depart might do so, but none availed themselves of the permission. The excitement caused by the movement of the troops, and the cannonade from Fort Royal, soon roused the spirits of the citizens, and enabled them to shake off their depression. Charles showed no symptoms of misgiving; but on the contrary, seemed full of energy and resolution. He paid an early visit to Massey, whose wounds had detained him at St. John's, but did not reproach the unfortunate general. Massey, however, could not sufficiently deplore his error.

"I have committed a great fault," he said. "Your majesty may forgive me; but I can never forgive myself. Here I am, stretched on this couch, when I ought to be with my regiment! Oh! that Heaven would grant me sufficient strength to meet the enemy."

"Make yourself easy, general," replied Charles, kindly. "You will soon be able to serve me again."

"I trust so, sire," groaned Massey. "I shall die if I am kept here long. Cromwell, I am told, has appeared on Red Hill."

"Lilburn's regiment is on the brow of the hill. Cromwell is at Spetchley," replied Charles.

"And I am here, and cannot face them," cried the wounded man, in a tone of anguish.

"Be patient," said Charles.

"I cannot be patient, sire, when I think what might be done. Were I able to move, I would attack Cromwell in his head-quarters this very night, and either slay him, or sell my life in the attempt. But I cannot do it – I cannot do it," he added, sinking back with a groan.

"A night attack might be made upon Lilburn – or upon an outpost," observed Charles.

"That is not enough, sire," rejoined Massey, raising himself, and speaking with such earnestness that for the moment he forgot his wounds; "Cromwell himself must be reached. I would give twenty lives, if I had them, to win you the crown."

"I feel your devotion," said Charles. "The attempt might be successful, but it is so desperate that none but yourself would make it."

"Yes, sire, there are others – many others – who would not shrink from the task, but the bravest, the most determined, the most trustworthy of your generals, is Middleton. Let him take my place."

"Will he take it, think you?"

"Joyfully, sire. I will answer for him as I would for myself. He will need fifteen hundred of the best horse and foot. Let him take with him Sir William Keith and Colonel Legge. Both can be relied on. Let the word be 'Death to the Regicide!' But they must not return until their work is accomplished."

"I will summon a council forthwith, and lay the matter before them," said Charles.

"I pray you do not, sire," rejoined Massey, earnestly. "If the enterprise is to succeed, it must be kept secret. Confide it only to those you can trust, as the Duke of Hamilton, Colonel Drummond, and Sir Alexander Forbes. Above all, let not Lesley hear of it. One word more, sire, and I have done. The camisade must take place to-night – an hour after midnight – when the rebels are lulled to repose."

Then Middleton must dash through Lilburn's camp, and cut his way through all other obstacles to Spetchley."

"I am half inclined to lead the attack myself," said the king.

"It must not be, sire. You would throw away your life. The chances are a thousand to one against Middleton's return. But, that matters little if he can accomplish his object. Should the enterprise succeed you will forgive me the loss of Upton Bridge."

"I have already forgiven you," replied Charles. "I will see Middleton forthwith."

And, bidding Massey a kindly farewell, he took his departure.

The king had intended to visit the camp just formed at Wick, but his plans being now changed, he crossed the bridge, and sent on Careless with a message to Middleton, who was posted outside the city, opposite Frog Gate, with his regiment, bidding the general attend him without delay at the Commandery, and bring with him Sir William Keith and Colonel Legge. We have already mentioned that the Duke of Hamilton was quartered at the Commandery, and on the king's arrival at the ancient hospital, he found the duke in the refectory – a large and beautifully proportioned hall, with an open roof of richly ornamented woodwork, a minstrel's gallery, and lofty windows, filled with exquisitely painted glass. With the duke was Sir Alexander Forbes, the commander of Fort Royal, and the king remained in converse with them until Careless appeared with General Middleton and the others.

The whole party then adjourned to an inner room, better adapted than the refectory, for secret discussion, and Careless was stationed at the door to prevent all chance of interruption.

The apartment looked on a small garden, and the day being extremely warm, one of the windows was unluckily left open – unluckily, we say, for a personage outside, apparently a gardener, contrived to place himself so near it, that he overheard all that passed within. The conference did not last long. General Middleton, as Massey had foreseen, at once undertook the daring enterprise, and both his companions were eager to share the danger with him.

When all had been discussed and settled, General Middleton said to the king:

"Your majesty need not fear that the design will be betrayed. Not till the latest moment shall the men know on what enterprise they are to be employed, and even then they shall not be aware of our precise aim. Before dawn your majesty shall hear that the blow has been struck, and if I cannot come myself, some one more fortunate will bring you the glad tidings."

With this, he took his departure with his companions.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOW THE SUBURBS OF THE CITY WERE BURNT

Every moment of that eventful day had its employment for the king, who had now a most painful duty to perform. Most reluctantly had he given his assent to the execution of the stern decree of the council of war, which enjoined that all persons dwelling without the walls should remove their goods forthwith, and take refuge within the city, since it was necessary that their habitations should be burnt down, in order that they might not afford shelter to the foe. Now, the suburbs of Worcester, as we have already explained, were extremely populous, and consequently great numbers of houses – indeed, several small streets – were thus doomed to destruction. The greater part of the luckless occupants obeyed the mandate without a murmur, though it deprived them of a home. The mayor, the aldermen, and the sheriff rendered every assistance in their power, and the goods of the poor folks thus ousted, were temporarily placed in the churches. The king expressed his profound sympathy for the sufferers, and promised them compensation for their losses. Alas! it was but a promise.

The occasion called forth the active zeal of Jane Lane, and never had it been more energetically displayed. Accompanied by Sir Clement Fisher and her brother, she rode through all the districts destined to destruction, and wherever she found a little crowd assembled, or heard murmurs, she halted and earnestly exhorted submission to the decree.

"Blame not the king," she said, "for this severe measure, but blame the great rebel and regicide, who has rendered it necessary. It is Cromwell, the murderer of your martyred sovereign, who comes hither to ravage your city, and slay your rightful king, that he may set himself up in his place, who thus drives you from your homes. Charles, your king, loves you, and would save you from this ruthless general and his fierce and fanatical soldiery, who will put you all to the sword if they obtain the victory. Resist, therefore, to the uttermost. Better that your houses should be burnt down than that they should afford shelter to such an enemy. Better your wives should be driven forth than exposed to the insults of Cromwell's soldiery. Quit your homes without hesitation and without murmuring, but with the deep determination to be avenged upon the foe. 'Tis a sacrifice you are called upon to make for your king – but we all make sacrifices for him. Right, justice, truth are on our side: treason of the darkest dye, rebellion and oppression, are on the other. Fight for your lawful king. Place your trust in Heaven, and you will triumph over these bloodthirsty rebels."

While uttering these stirring words, which produced an extraordinary impression upon those who heard them, she looked as if inspired. Her beautiful features assumed a very different expression from that which they ordinarily wore. For the moment they had lost all their softness, and when speaking of Cromwell, her eyes flashed as with lightning, her proud nostrils distended, and her delicate lips curled fiercely. Her beauty, her energetic language, and fiery looks produced, as we have said, the strongest effect upon her auditors, and roused within them a burning desire of vengeance. No longer they thought it a hardship to quit their homes, but were eager to fight for the king, and, if need be, lay down their lives for him. All feelings of discontent were subdued, and the greatest enthusiasm for the royal cause was awakened. Even the women who listened to her were almost as much roused as their husbands. Nor when she had departed did the effect of her eloquence subside. Wrath against Cromwell had now taken possession of every breast. Old Noll was the real author of the cruel decree. Old Noll had driven them from their homes. Old Noll would burn down the city itself, and massacre them all, men, women, and children, if he could. But the king would prevent it. Long live the king! – Down with the Republic!

Night had come on before all the necessary preparations were completed. Combustibles having been placed in most of the houses, and bands of men employed to set fire to them at a given signal, the conflagration began almost simultaneously on every side, and in a surprisingly short space of time the city was encompassed by a semicircle of fire. The spires and towers of the churches caught the

red reflection of the flames, and a ruddy glow illumined the massive roof and tower of the cathedral. All the principal buildings were lighted up.

Viewed from the heights, it seemed as if the fire, which burnt with great fierceness, was gaining upon the walls and gates; but this was not so, all needful precautions having been taken to prevent its too near approach. Luckily the night was almost calm. A gentle breeze from the south carried the flames from the city. Overhead hung a cloud of smoke. The spectacle was magnificent; the soldiers could be seen on the gates and walls, the engineers on the summit of Fort Royal and the Blockhouse, while all the troops outside the city were clearly distinguishable.

The conflagration did the Royalists an unexpected service by revealing the engineers engaged in raising the breastwork in front of Perry Wood. The operations of these men were quickly stopped by the guns of Fort Royal, to which they offered an excellent mark. Two artillerymen and a matross were killed, and the rest dispersed.

The defenders of the fort, having thus learnt that a detachment of the enemy was hidden in Perry Wood, continued their cannonade briskly, and sent shot into different parts of the thicket in the hope of dislodging the Parliamentarians. Little did they think that among those whom they had driven off was the Lord General himself, who chanced at the time to be superintending the construction of the breastwork. One of the artillerymen was killed close beside him.

With the utmost calmness, Cromwell gave orders to the engineers to suspend their work till the fire had burnt out, and then deliberately withdrew to a place of safety, whence he watched the progress of the conflagration, the cause of which he had comprehended from the first. Several shots passed over his head and shattered the trees beyond him, as he stood behind a hedge bank with his constant attendant Dighton. His curiosity was excited, for the fortifications were more completely revealed by this fierce glare than by daylight. He could count the large guns on Fort Royal, and the sakers, demi-cannons, culverins, and falcons on the Blockhouse.

"Ha!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Methinks I see the young man, Charles Stuart, on the summit of yon blustering fort, which he took from Colonel James, and which I shall soon retake from him. Were he wise, he would stop this furious and senseless cannonading. But the noise pleases him. Dost note what he has done, Dighton?"

"He has fortified the city strongly, according to my opinion, your excellency."

"Ay, he has fenced it – doubly fenced it with high walls and bulwarks – he has armed his forts better than I thought he could have done, chiefly yon new fort on the Castle Hill, for this Blockhouse hath no real ordnance – and he hath placed his troops with some judgment; but neither troops nor defences will avail him. There will soon be a breaking down of the walls, and then woe to those within the city that has upheld him. I shall not spare them. England must never again be invaded by a Stuart."

"This pretender to the throne must die on the same scaffold as his father at Whitehall," observed Dighton.

"'Twere better he should die here at Worcester," rejoined Cromwell, sternly. "Then these bigoted fools cannot make a martyr of him. In any case, he must not escape to give me further trouble. I mean not that he troubles me, but the state."

"I quite understand your excellency."

"Mark well what I say to thee, Dighton," pursued Cromwell. "On the 3rd of last September, as thou knowest well, a great victory was wrought at Dunbar; but on the anniversary of that day, now close at hand, a still greater victory will be achieved here at Worcester. The false light that has deluded so many will then be as utterly extinguished as yon fire will be ere long, and nothing more will be heard of Charles Stuart and his pretensions to the throne. But the power of the army must then be recognised, and – " He paused, as if unwilling to complete the sentence.

But Dighton finished it for him, by adding:

"And the ruler of the country can be no other than the Lord General Cromwell."

"I do not desire to rule, Dighton; but I would have my country well governed and wisely."

"And no one could govern it so wisely and so well as your excellency – of that I am assured."

"Thou flatterest me," said Cromwell, not displeased. "But this is idle talk. The decisive battle has yet to be fought."

"I look upon it as already won," rejoined Dighton. "As the Lord instructed Joshua how to take Ai, so will he instruct a greater general than Joshua how to take this rebellious city."

"That the great work will be perfected I nothing doubt," said Cromwell. "But I have seen enough of yon burning houses, and will tarry here no longer. I must visit all the outposts, in case a sally should be made; though, judging from appearances, I do not think aught will be attempted to-night."

He then made his way through the wood, closely followed by Dighton, and ere many minutes reached a sheltered spot where his escort awaited him. Mounting his charger he next proceeded to the camp at Red Hill, where he found Colonel Lilburn and Lord Grey on horseback and attended by several officers. They had been watching the conflagration which was now almost extinguished. Cromwell and Lilburn visited all the outposts, after which the Lord General rode through the park to Spetchley.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW URSO GIVES HAD AN INTERVIEW WITH THE LORD GENERAL IN THE STABLE OF SPETCHLEY MANOR-HOUSE

Viewed by torchlight, as Cromwell beheld it on his arrival there, the large stable-yard of Spetchley manor-house presented a very curious sight – being full of musketeers, cuirassiers, lancers, and dragoons, with their horses. Closely adjoining the stable-yard, and forming not the least interesting part of the striking scene, were the blackened walls of the ancient mansion, now silvered by the rays of the moon.

As Cromwell rode into the yard, attended by Colonel Lindsey and Dighton, he remarked an elderly personage, guarded by two musketeers.

"Ah! you have a prisoner yonder I see, Cornet Hardiman?" he observed to the officer who came up to him. "Where was he taken? – and who is he?"

"He was found in a summer-house in the garden, your excellency, and refuses to give his name," replied the cornet. "As he may be a spy, I have detained him till your return."

"You have done right," said the Lord General. "Bring him to me."

"Advance, prisoner!" cried the officer.

And as the prisoner was brought forward, Cromwell was struck by his grave looks and deportment.

"This man cannot be a spy," he thought, after a moment's scrutiny. "Who art thou? And what dost thou here?" he demanded.

"Truly it would appear that I am an intruder," replied the prisoner, somewhat haughtily. "Yet I once was master of this mansion."

"If so, you are Sir Robert Berkeley," rejoined Cromwell, surprised.

"Your excellency has said it," rejoined the other. "I am that unfortunate man."

"Had you declared as much from the first, you would have been set at liberty," observed the Lord General.

"I am not so sure of that," replied Sir Robert. "I do not think my word would have been taken. But be that as it may, I cared not to answer questions rudely put to me by your soldiers. Mistake me not – I make no complaint of ill-treatment. Such explanation as I have to offer your excellency I give readily. My habitation having been burnt down, my stables occupied, I had no place of refuge except my summer-house, where I sought shelter for the night. There I was found, as hath just been stated."

"You have only yourself to thank for the detention, Sir Robert," rejoined Cromwell. "Though your nephew, Sir Rowland Berkeley of Cotheridge, is an avowed malignant, and you yourself are known as an active partisan of Charles Stuart, I will not discredit what you tell me. You are free; and, furthermore, are free to speak of all you have seen or heard. You shall be conducted to the nearest outpost, or, if you desire it, shall be taken to White Lady Aston."

"I will rather sleep beneath a tree than under Mr. Symonds's roof," replied the old judge. "If I might ask a favour of your excellency it would be to be allowed to pass the night in my summer-house."

"You seem to like the spot," remarked Cromwell, somewhat suspiciously.

"'Tis all that is left me of the old place," replied the judge.

"Well, I will consider of it," said Cromwell. "Have you supped, Sir Robert?"

"Neither dined nor supped."

"You have fasted too long for a man of your years. You shall sup with me."

This was said in a more cordial tone than the Lord General had hitherto adopted.

Dismounting, he gave his horse to a soldier, and ordered Cornet Hardiman to show him the rooms prepared for him in the stables.

"Come with me, Sir Robert," he added to the old judge, who, of course, complied with a request amounting to a command.

The stables being full of horses, it seemed at first that there could be but little accommodation for the Lord General, but the cornet mounted up a ladder-like flight of stairs, that brought them to a room which might have been a hay-loft, but which was now furnished with a table and a few old-fashioned chairs saved from the wreck of the ruined mansion. On the table were placed cold viands and a couple of flasks of wine. Covers were laid for four, in case the Lord General should invite any of his officers to sup with him, as was occasionally his wont. A lamp set on the table scarcely illumined the loft, but its glimmer showed the cobwebbed rafters overhead.

"Let Dighton wait below," said Cromwell. "I shall require no attendance."

As the cornet withdrew, he took off his casque and gauntlets, and pronounced, with considerable unction, a very long grace, during which he kept Sir Robert standing. Grace ended at last, he bade him sit down and fall to – setting him the example. Though the old judge had fasted so long, he ate little in comparison with his host, and drank only a single glass of wine. Cromwell, however, partook with right good appetite of the plain fare set before him, and emptied a large flagon of sack. While thus employed, he scarcely spoke a word, but he afforded his guest an excellent opportunity of studying his remarkable countenance.

With Cromwell's coarse features, disfigured by a large, ill-formed red nose, against which the Cavaliers never ceased to direct their scurril jests; with his stout, ungainly figure, utterly devoid of dignity and grace, the reader must be familiar. Yet with all these drawbacks, which have not been in the slightest degree exaggerated, the Lord General's physiognomy was very striking. Chiefly so, on account of its determined and formidable expression. His eye possessed extraordinary power, and few could brook its glances when he was angered, or when his suspicions were aroused. His habitual expression was that of bluff sternness, and he looked like a surly bull-dog, whom no one who valued a whole skin would care to offend, and yet he could put off this morose and repelling look when he pleased, and exchange it for one of rough good-humour. But even when he unbent, he inspired fear. His character has been too much darkened by some writers, and virtues have been ascribed to him by others which he certainly did not possess. Courageous, crafty, ambitious, hypocritical, almost a fatalist, cruel, unjust, and unrestrained by any moral principle, by the sole force of his indomitable will, he overcame every obstacle, and reached the goal at which he aimed. His ambition being boundless, nothing less than sovereign power would satisfy him, though he affected to disdain the title of king, being perfectly aware that the Royalists would never accept a regicide as king. Of marvellous sagacity and penetration, he was rarely deceived in his judgment of men, and always used them, where he could, as instruments in furthering his designs. A profound dissembler, and fully capable of using religion as a mask, had it been needful to do so, it can scarcely be doubted that he was really religious; though few entirely believed in the sincerity of his religious professions. Cromwell's character is full of striking contrasts. Abhorred by his enemies, he had multitudes of devoted friends. For a time his memory was execrated. In latter days somewhat more than justice has been done him. The great crime he committed has never been pardoned – will never be pardoned. The stain of blood cannot be washed out. As to his high military genius all are agreed. Among great commanders he stands foremost. And he would rank among the greatest of men, if his crimes did not overshadow his virtues.

The accoutrements of the Lord General differed very little from those of an officer of his own body-guard, except that they were somewhat more ornamented, being filigrained with gold. They consisted of an open casque and a very large gorget. But he had neither breast-plate, nor cuisses – the stout buff coat with long skirts which he wore affording sufficient protection to the lower part of his person. A scarf was tied round his waist. His strong buff boots were drawn far up the thigh, and from his broad embroidered shoulder-belt hung a large basket-hilted sword.

He was not unconscious that he was the object of his guest's covert scrutiny, but the circumstance did not trouble him – perhaps rather gratified him. It may be that he designed to win over the old Royalist judge, or at least to produce a favourable impression upon him, for as soon as he had finished supper, he almost compelled Sir Robert to take more wine, and then began a very friendly discourse with him, professing great regret that Spetchley manor-house had been destroyed by the Scottish soldiers, and expressing a hope that it might soon be rebuilt.

Their conversation, however, was interrupted by the entrance of Dighton, who informed the Lord General that a man was without who stated that he had matter of the utmost importance to communicate to his excellency.

"What manner of man is he?" demanded Cromwell.

"I have reason to believe he is a spy from the city," replied Dighton. "He delivered himself up to the vedettes on Red Hill, conjuring them to bring him speedily before your excellency. Accordingly, he hath been sent on from the first outpost. He is the bearer of this letter, which he affirms is from Colonel James, sometime commandant of the garrison of Worcester."

Cromwell took the missive, and after glancing at its contents, said, "The man hath spoken truly. His business is important. I will see him."

"With your excellency's permission I will retire," said the old judge, rising.

"I am sorry to lose your company," said Cromwell; "but this is a matter that cannot be postponed. A bed must be found for Sir Robert Berkeley," he added to Dighton.

"I know not where to find one, unless his worship is content to sleep on straw," was the half-grumbling response.

"If I am allowed to occupy my old summer-house, I shall be perfectly satisfied," replied the judge.

"Be it so, Sir Robert," said Cromwell. "I wish you sounder repose than I myself am likely to enjoy. To-morrow's news may surprise you."

The old judge did not venture to question him, but, bowing deeply, departed with Dighton, and Cromwell was left for a few moments alone.

"What says Colonel James?" he muttered. "'The bearer of this may be trusted. He hath preserved my life, and, with Heaven's grace, may be the happy means of preserving a life in comparison with which mine is as naught.' The import of the message is plain. The life to be preserved is mine own. 'Cursed is the man that trusteth in man,' saith the prophet. Yet in whom can I trust, if not in those who serve me? If there be a plot against me, it were better for him who hath hatched it that he had never been born."

Steps were now heard on the staircase, and the next moment a tall, thin man, whose aspect was that of a Puritan, while his habiliments were those of a Cavalier, was ushered into the presence of the Lord General by Dighton. Behind them came a couple of musketeers, but the guard advanced no further than the head of the steps.

Cromwell fixed a long and searching glance upon the personage thus introduced, who bore the scrutiny firmly.

Apparently satisfied, the Lord General signed to Dighton to withdraw, bidding him, however, wait outside.

"Now, fellow, thy name?" demanded Cromwell of the man, as soon as they were alone.

"Urso Gives, of Worcester, by trade a tailor," was the reply.

"An honest trade. I have naught to say against it," rejoined the Lord General. "Men must be clothed, though it were better they were clothed in sackcloth than in purple and fine linen. Better still they were clothed in the garments of salvation. But enough. Hath thy trade aught to do with what thou hast to declare to me?"

"Nothing. I mentioned it for a reason which I will presently explain to your excellency. I have come hither at the hazard of my life to bring you timely intelligence of a daring and well-conceived

design, which, if it were successfully executed, would snatch from you the victory and give it to Charles Stuart. What am I to claim as a reward if I shall prove what I assert?"

"Go to. Bargain not with me. Thy reward shall be proportioned to the importance of thy disclosure."

"But I may not live to receive it," rejoined Urso. "The risk I run is great. When I depart hence I must return to Rabbah, and I may fall into the hands of the Ammonites, who will show me little mercy. What then becomes of the recompense promised me?"

"Hast thou a wife?"

"Yea, verily," replied Urso; "a fair young wife, whom I have just espoused. If I perish in my efforts to save Israel, shall she have the reward?"

"Content thyself – she shall. I promise it to thee," rejoined Cromwell. "Thou hast great faith in the constancy of women, I perceive, and it is well."

"I cannot with truth affirm that I have great faith in the constancy of her whom I have wedded," replied Urso. "But I love her better than life."

"And she, I trust, will honour thy memory, as it deserves to be honoured," remarked Cromwell, in a slightly contemptuous tone. "But having made thy conditions beforehand, let me hear what thou hast to tell. Be brief."

"'Tis not my wont to waste words," rejoined Urso. "But first let me inquire the hour?"

"The hour! Thou shouldst know it as well as I. 'Tis past eleven."

"Then in less than two hours' time General Middleton will sally forth from the Sidbury-gate with fifteen hundred picked men, all well mounted and well armed, wearing their shirts above their breastplates for distinction. The malignant general has vowed to take your excellency, dead or alive, and thus end the war, and he will make every effort to fulfil his vow. Expecting to find Colonel Lilburn wholly unprepared, he will pass through the camp without attacking it, and cut his way through any other opposing force further on, his aim being Spetchley, where he hopes to find your excellency. Should he arrive, no quarter is to be given."

"Thou art sure of this?" remarked Cromwell, with forced calmness.

"I heard the project discussed and settled this very morning at the Commandery between Charles Stuart, the Duke of Hamilton, General Middleton, and some others. As I have said, Middleton has vowed to accomplish your excellency's destruction, or to perish in the attempt."

"And those engaged in the camisade are to sally forth an hour after midnight, thou sayst?" observed Cromwell, calmly.

"That is the hour appointed. I would have given your excellency earlier warning, had I been able to quit the city. But I could not obtain an order, and only succeeded in getting out during the burning of the suburbs."

"Thou hast arrived in time. The design can be easily frustrated. Thy intelligence merits a good reward, and thou shalt not be disappointed of it. If aught befalls thee, thy wife shall have the reward. Moreover, I promise thee ample vengeance."

Cromwell, who did not seem at all disturbed by the alarming intelligence he had received, but maintained the most perfect composure, put several questions to Gives, and then said:

"Do not suppose that I doubt the truth of thy statement, but I cannot allow thee to return to Worcester till the affair is over."

"The danger to me will be far greater, if I return not before daybreak," pleaded Gives.

"Why shouldst thou return? But like a doting fool, thou canst not, I suppose, leave thy young wife."

He then called out for Dighton, who instantly answered the summons, and said to him, "This man will remain here till I return, or until I send an order for his release. Sit down at the table, friend," he added to Gives. "Eat and drink and make glad thine heart. Thou wilt see thy wife again ere long."

While thus speaking he had donned his casque and gauntlets, and he then quitted the chamber, and proceeded to the stable-yard, where he found Colonel Lindsey, the commander of his life guards, and telling him he was about to proceed to Colonel Lilburn's camp, bade him follow with three hundred men.

"The whole regiment must remain under arms throughout the night," he added. "An attack may be expected."

Without a word more he mounted his charger, which was ready for him, and attended by Dighton and a small party of musketeers, rode at a brisk pace through the woods to Colonel Lilburn's camp.

CHAPTER XIX. THE CAMISADE

Good watch was kept – the sentinels were at their posts – but the quietude of the camp proved that no apprehensions of attack were entertained.

"Kerioth would have been surprised and taken had I not received this warning," mentally ejaculated Cromwell, as he rode up to the commander's tent.

Lilburn had thrown himself on a couch, but hearing Cromwell's approach he sprang to his feet, and met him at the entrance of the tent.

After a brief consultation between the generals, it was decided that neither drums should be beaten nor trumpets blown, lest the sounds should be heard by the enemy, but that the slumbering soldiers should be quietly roused to arms; and this was done by Lilburn in person.

Meanwhile, Colonel Lindsey had arrived with the life guards from Spetchley, and putting himself at their head, Cromwell rode to the outpost nearest the city.

This outpost was about three hundred yards from the camp, on the slope of the hill, not far from the London-road, and was stationed in a field bordered on the north and north-east by high-banked hedges.

The night can scarcely be described as dark, though the sky was covered with lazily-moving clouds, but through these the moon burst occasionally. The old city, with its towers, steeples, and fortifications, could be distinguished through the gloom; but no lights were visible within it, and no sounds from it arose. So profound was the stillness, that it might have been supposed that the inhabitants and their defenders were alike buried in slumber, and that no attacking party could be waiting to sally forth.

As Cromwell, with the life guards, cautiously descended the hill, keeping under cover of the hedges, three-quarters past midnight was struck by the cathedral clock – proclaiming that the hour was close at hand.

The outpost reached by Cromwell was guarded by two hundred and fifty foot and two hundred horse, but three hundred of the best troopers in his army being now added, he deemed this force quite sufficient to repel the attack.

Little time was left, but luckily those on guard at the outpost were on the alert. Having placed his troops with the quickness and skill peculiar to him, the Lord General stationed himself on a small woody mound in the centre of the field, whence he commanded the approach to the Sidbury-gate, and awaited the sortie with some impatience, but without the slightest anxiety. Close behind him were Dighton and a couple of cuirassiers.

He had not to wait long. While the single stroke of the cathedral bell yet vibrated through the air, and was echoed by the clocks of the other churches, the gate yawned wide, and a troop of sheeted spectres – for such they seemed in the gloom – issued forth. The ghostly band formed three regiments – the first being commanded by General Middleton, the second by Sir William Keith, the third by Colonel Legge.

The troops came forth from the Sidbury-gate and formed in silence. If any orders were given they did not reach Cromwell's ears, though he was listening intently; and the ghostly appearance of the horsemen was fully preserved until Middleton dashed off with the greatest rapidity, when the clatter of hoofs and the jingling of arms proved that the phantoms were substantial soldiers. The second regiment followed instantly, galloping along the London-road as swiftly as the first; but a momentary interval occurred before Colonel Legge started. The cause of this brief delay was perfectly intelligible to Cromwell, and he gave some orders to Dighton, who rode off at once to Colonel Lindsey.

Meanwhile, the two foremost regiments came on at full speed, and dashed past the field in which the outpost was stationed, making it evident that their point of attack was Lilburn's camp on the brow of the hill, and showing that the outpost would be dealt with by the regiment that followed.

In obedience to Cromwell's orders not a shot had been fired, and Colonel Legge came on uncertain as to how he would be received by the enemy. Easy access to the field could be obtained at several points known to the Royalists, and small parties of men entered at these places, but the main body, led by Colonel Legge, broke through the hedge skirting the London-road, and were received by ranks of pikemen three deep, the front rank kneeling, the centre stooping, and the rear standing upright, and forming an almost impassable barrier. On the flanks, right and left, were posted musketeers, who poured a terrible volley upon the enemy as they gained the field.

Several saddles were emptied. Nevertheless, Colonel Legge, shouting to his men to follow, charged the pikemen with the greatest intrepidity, but it was impossible to cut through their ranks. Many horses were killed in the charge, and others so desperately hurt that they bore back their riders in spite of all efforts to force them on. Colonel Legge's charger, though badly hurt, had still strength enough left to sustain its rider, but would not again face the deadly pikes.

Caught as in a trap, it seemed as if the unfortunate Royalists must all be slaughtered, but turning from the pikemen, Colonel Legge charged the musketeers with a fury that proved irresistible. Having gained the open field with such of his men as had been able to follow him, he was joined by the others, who having entered at different points had hitherto taken no part in the conflict. But before they could form they were charged by Colonel Lindsey, at the head of the life guards, and so shattered, that they could not recover, but fled from the field in the greatest disorder, hurrying towards the Sidbury-gate faster than they had quitted it. Many were shot while jumping the hedges, or pressing through the gates. Colonel Legge was the last to retreat. His horse carried him out of reach of the foe, and then dropped.

Cromwell watched the conflict from the mound on which he had taken his stand, and did not quit his position during the short time occupied by the conflict.

"It is the Lord God that fighteth for us. He it is that hath enabled us to scatter them thus quickly," he exclaimed, as the Royalists fled in disorder. "Pursue them not, but prepare to cut off the retreat of those pestilent malignants who have gone on to attack the camp above – lest, peradventure, they escape the snare laid for them."

It happened as Cromwell had foreseen. Instead of finding Lilburn unprepared, when General Middleton and Sir William Keith reached the camp on the hill, they quickly discovered that their design had been betrayed. Duped by stratagems which they ought to have suspected, they entered the camp, but had scarcely done so, when they were completely surrounded by a force more than trebling their own.

Thus entrapped it would seem that nothing was left to Middleton but to surrender. But the brave general was undismayed by numbers, and when summoned to surrender, answered by a charge so fierce and impetuous that the ranks of the enemy opened, and, ere they could close again, he and his two regiments had passed safely through.

Down the hill they dashed at a headlong pace, and, though hotly pursued by Lilburn, very few of them were captured. Luckily for the fugitives, Cromwell was not able to get his life guards out of the field in time to intercept them, or their utter destruction would have been inevitable. As it was, they escaped with very little loss, considering the terrible hazard they had encountered.

On reaching the nearest outpost of the royal army, Middleton found Colonel Legge, and learnt the disaster that had befallen him.

"I cannot carry this bad news to his majesty," said Legge. "Tell him what has happened."

"The king will not reproach you," said Middleton. "You have done your best. We have been betrayed."

"That is certain," said Sir William Keith. "Lilburn was prepared for us."

"And Cromwell himself was with the outpost when I attacked it," said Colonel Legge. "I knew it not till too late."

"Would I had known it!" cried Middleton, furiously. "He should not have lived to boast of this triumph. One of his spies has served him well on this occasion. I will not rest till I have discovered the traitor."

"Lesley may help you to find him," said Legge.

"No; Lesley knew nothing of this," rejoined Middleton. "But come with me to the king, and get it over. A word will explain all. We have been betrayed."

CHAPTER XX. HOW URSO GIVES WAS ARRESTED

About the same time that the interview took place in the stable at Spetchley between Cromwell and Urso Gives, Major Careless, who had been upon the eastern walls to satisfy himself that the fires in the suburbs were completely extinguished, descended from the ramparts at Friars'-gate. This was one of the smaller gates, and derived its appellation from a convent of Franciscan friars that stood hard by – the old religious house having been subsequently converted into a prison.

On quitting the ramparts, as just stated, Careless proceeded to the old hostelry of the Grey Friars, where he knew that several officers about to take part in the camisade would be assembled. The old inn – an ancient timber-built house, with quaint gables, and a projecting upper story – is still standing in Friars'-street.

In the principal room of the old hostel he found, as he expected, a party of Cavaliers smoking, singing, and quaffing sack and claret, as if they had no serious business in hand. They were thus making merry to the last, since among them were Major Knox and some others, who, two hours later, were killed in the attack on the outpost. They were all fully armed with steel caps, gorgets, cuirasses, pauldrons, and taches, but had divested themselves of their swords and pistols. Beside each sword lay a small roll of linen. This was the shirt which its owner meant to wear over his armour, and which, in some cases, proved a winding-sheet.

All the Cavaliers rose on Careless's appearance, and gave him a hearty welcome. He could not help being struck by the enthusiasm they displayed. Not one of them but seemed proud of being included in the dangerous enterprise. Not one but was ready to lay down his life for the king. Careless never afterwards recalled that meeting without heaving a sigh for the brave men who perished in the camisade. However, at the moment, he thought little of the hazard of the attack, and would gladly have joined in it if the king would have allowed him. Sitting down, he emptied the flagon of claret filled for him by Major Knox. Shortly afterwards Colonel Legge entered the room, but left again almost immediately, saying, as he departed, to Major Knox:

"Half an hour hence you must all be at the place of rendezvous."

Shortly afterwards Careless took leave of the company, and was proceeding along Friars'-street in the direction of the Sidbury-gate, when he heard his name pronounced in a familiar voice, that instantly awakened tender recollections, and turning, he perceived that he had been followed from the hostel by a young woman whose features were muffled in a hood.

Not doubting who it was, he exclaimed:

"Ah! is it you, Mary? I never expected to see you again."

"And you would not see me now, I can assure you, if I had not something of importance to say," she rejoined, partially removing her hood.

"Whatever has procured me the happiness of beholding you once more, sweet Mary, I feel grateful for it," he rejoined.

"Speak not thus lightly," she said. "'Tis a grave matter."

"Before you mention it, then, let me ask now you came to throw yourself away upon that detestable Roundhead? You must be heartily sick of him already."

"If you persist in talking thus you will frighten me away, and I shall leave unsaid what I have to tell you – and it is very important."

"Nay, by all that is bewitching, I swear you shall not go," he cried, catching her hand.

"Be serious, if you can, for a single instant, and listen to me."

"Tell me you are resolved to abandon Urso, and I will be as serious as you please."

"You put everything out of my head by your trifling talk. How very different you are from Urso, to be sure! He is always grave."

"Yes, I warrant me you rarely catch a smile on his sour visage. But I hope there are few points of resemblance between him and me. Again I ask, how could you marry such a man?"

"'Twas all my grandam's doing," she sighed.

"And you have bitterly repented of the foolish step ever since, I'll be sworn. Confess, and I'll forgive you, though, I own, the effort will be difficult."

"Then pray don't make it. Unless you listen to my warning, you will fall into a snare that has been privily laid for you."

"Privily laid for me by Urso, eh? The Roundhead rogue had better take care of himself, or you will speedily become a widow."

"It is not of Urso I would warn you. Do not take part in the camisade to-night."

"The camisade!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "How do you know there is to be a camisade? Who has told you of it? Answer me that."

All his levity had vanished. As she did not answer, he repeated the question still more peremptorily.

"No matter who told me," she rejoined. "If you value your life you will not go. I have warned you. Do as you please. Farewell!"

"Stay! we must not part thus. You spoke of a snare being privily laid for me. What was your meaning?"

"I will tell you nothing more," she rejoined.

And breaking from him, she flew towards the inn.

Just as she reached the door the Cavaliers came forth in a body. Some of them tried to stop her, but she pushed them aside and got into the house.

Careless thought of following her and insisting on an explanation, but after a moment's reflection he concluded that, since she was lodging at the inn, she must have overheard the loud and indiscreet talk of the Cavaliers, and so have ascertained the nature of the enterprise on which they were engaged. As to the "privily-laid snare" of which he had been warned, the expression savoured strongly of Urso, and probably meant nothing in particular.

Having arrived at this conclusion he marched off, with the fixed determination of paying another visit to the old hostel on the morrow.

But before the morrow came he was undeceived, and he then bitterly regretted that he had neglected the warning given him.

So well was the secret kept, that only the troops actually engaged in the camisade were aware of its object. Many heard of the enterprise and of its failure at the same time. When the attacking party was driven back, a call to arms was instantly made by the Duke of Hamilton and all the commanders stationed on the south and south-east, lest Cromwell should follow up his success by an immediate assault on the city. But it soon became apparent that he had no such design, and though the Royalists remained on the alert, they were not disturbed during the remainder of the night.

To Charles, who had made certain of success, the failure of the enterprise was a terrible disappointment. But he bore it manfully, as he bore all his reverses. He had remained at the Commandery in order that he might receive the earliest intelligence of the victory he so confidently anticipated, and was seated in the refectory, trying to while away the time in light chat with Careless, when General Middleton, followed by Sir William Keith and Colonel Legge entered the hall. Charles read what had happened in their downcast looks, and for a moment forbore to question them.

"Fortune has played me another sorry trick, I perceive," he exclaimed, at length. "I thought the fickle goddess would this time have befriended me."

"All would have gone well, sire, if our plan had not been betrayed," replied Middleton. "The enemy was prepared. We found the whole of Colonel Lilburn's force under arms, and were surrounded, but succeeded in cutting our way through them."

"I have a further proof of treachery, sire," said Colonel Legge. "Cromwell himself, with his body-guard of Ironsides, was with the outpost when I attacked it."

Charles could not repress an exclamation of rage.

"That we have been bought and sold is certain," he exclaimed. "But who can have betrayed us?"

"I think I can give a shrewd guess as to the villain who has thus traitorously discovered the design," said Careless, "and if I am right he shall not escape chastisement."

"Whoever the traitor may be," observed the king, "he must have obtained early information, and have acted with the greatest promptitude, or the enemy could not have been prepared at all points for the attack. Cromwell must have clever and active spies in the city."

"True, sire," replied Middleton. "And I now recollect that, during our conference in the adjoining chamber, a man in the garden approached somewhat near to the open window. At the time I did not suspect his motive, but I now believe he was a spy."

"It may be so," observed Charles.

"Whether General Middleton is right or wrong in his suspicion, I am certain I can discover the traitor, sire," said Careless. "I have a clue to his hiding-place, and before many hours I engage to produce him."

"It will be some satisfaction to hang the villain," observed Charles.

"Your majesty may rely upon having that gratification," replied Careless. "With your permission, I will set about his capture at once. Nor will I rest till I have effected it."

And bowing to the king he quitted the hall.

In the court-yard of the Commandery was the king's ordinary guard. Taking two of the men with him, Careless proceeded to the Sidbury-gate, passed through the wicket with his attendants, and in another minute was in Friars'-street.

So dark was the narrow street, owing to the projecting stories of the ancient timber houses lining it on either side, that Careless was unable to discern any object unless close at hand. A heavy, measured tread, however, informed him of the approach of the rounds, and the next moment the patrol came up.

Captain Woolfe, who was with the guard, immediately recognised his superior officer, and on learning Careless's business, proffered his aid. They proceeded together to the old inn, followed by the whole party.

It would seem that all the inmates had retired to rest, but the knocking of a halbert staff against the door soon caused it to be opened by Master Kilvert, the host, who had hastily huddled on his apparel, and in a trembling voice inquired the meaning of this nocturnal visitation.

No explanation was vouchsafed him. Ordering the guard to post themselves secretly on the other side of the street and be ready to answer any summons, Careless and Captain Woolfe entered the house, shutting the street door after them.

The terrified host conducted them to the principal room, and setting down the light with which he was provided, humbly waited their pleasure to address him.

"Answer truly the questions I shall put, and you have nought to fear," said Careless. "You have a lodger named Urso Gives?"

"Your honour has been rightly informed," replied Kilvert. "Master Gives, the tailor, with his wife and his wife's grandmother, are lodging in my house. Master Gives is a worthy and God-fearing man, or I would not have him as a guest."

"Your description of him is altogether inaccurate. He is a traitor and a spy. Lead us to his chamber instantly, and call him forth," said Careless, drawing his sword.

"I will lead your honour to his chamber," replied Kilvert, now still more alarmed. "But it will be useless to call him, seeing he is not there."

"I must be assured of this," said Careless. "Lead us to the room."

"I shall not need to do so, for here comes his wife, who will confirm what I have just declared to your honour."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.