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KENILWORTH

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# Walter Scott

## Kenilworth

### INTRODUCTION

A certain degree of success, real or supposed, in the delineation of Queen Mary, naturally induced the author to attempt something similar respecting “her sister and her foe,” the celebrated Elizabeth. He will not, however, pretend to have approached the task with the same feelings; for the candid Robertson himself confesses having felt the prejudices with which a Scottishman is tempted to regard the subject; and what so liberal a historian avows, a poor romance-writer dares not disown. But he hopes the influence of a prejudice, almost as natural to him as his native air, will not be found to have greatly affected the sketch he has attempted of England’s Elizabeth. I have endeavoured to describe her as at once a high-minded sovereign, and a female of passionate feelings, hesitating betwixt the sense of her rank and the duty she owed her subjects on the one hand, and on the other her attachment to a nobleman, who, in external qualifications at least, amply merited her favour. The interest of the story is thrown upon that period when the sudden death of the first Countess of Leicester seemed to open to the ambition of her husband the opportunity of sharing the crown of his sovereign.

It is possible that slander, which very seldom favours the memories of persons in exalted stations, may have blackened the character of Leicester with darker shades than really belonged to it. But the almost general voice of the times attached the most foul suspicions to the death of the unfortunate Countess, more especially as it took place so very opportunely for the indulgence of her lover’s ambition. If we can trust Ashmole’s Antiquities of Berkshire, there was but too much ground for the traditions which charge Leicester with the murder of his wife. In the following extract of the passage, the reader will find the authority I had for the story of the romance: —

“At the west end of the church are the ruins of a manor, anciently belonging (as a cell, or place of removal, as some report) to the monks of Abington. At the Dissolution, the said manor, or lordship, was conveyed to one – Owen (I believe), the possessor of Godstow then.

“In the hall, over the chimney, I find Abington arms cut in stone – namely, a patonee between four martlets; and also another escutcheon – namely, a lion rampant, and several mitres cut in stone about the house. There is also in the said house a chamber called Dudley’s chamber, where the Earl of Leicester’s wife was murdered, of which this is the story following: —

“Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, a very goodly personage, and singularly well featured, being a great favourite to Queen Elizabeth, it was thought, and commonly reported, that had he been a bachelor or widower, the Queen would have made him her husband; to this end, to free himself of all obstacles, he commands, or perhaps, with fair flattering entreaties, desires his wife to repose herself here at his servant Anthony Forster’s house, who then lived in the aforesaid manor-house; and also prescribes to Sir Richard Varney (a prompter to this design), at his coming hither, that he should first attempt to poison her, and if that did not take effect, then by any other way whatsoever to dispatch her. This, it seems, was proved by the report of Dr. Walter Bayly, sometime fellow of New College, then living in Oxford, and professor of physic in that university; whom, because he would not consent to take away her life by poison, the Earl endeavoured to displace him the court. This man, it seems, reported for most certain that there was a practice in Cumnor among the conspirators, to have poisoned this poor innocent lady, a little before she was killed, which was attempted after this manner: – They seeing the good lady sad and heavy (as one that well knew, by her other handling, that her death was not far off), began to persuade her that her present disease was abundance of melancholy and other humours, etc., and therefore would needs counsel her to take some potion,

which she absolutely refusing to do, as still suspecting the worst; whereupon they sent a messenger on a day (unawares to her) for Dr. Bayly, and entreated him to persuade her to take some little potion by his direction, and they would fetch the same at Oxford; meaning to have added something of their own for her comfort, as the doctor upon just cause and consideration did suspect, seeing their great importunity, and the small need the lady had of physic, and therefore he peremptorily denied their request; misdoubting (as he afterwards reported) lest, if they had poisoned her under the name of his potion, he might after have been hanged for a colour of their sin, and the doctor remained still well assured that this way taking no effect, she would not long escape their violence, which afterwards happened thus. For Sir Richard Varney abovesaid (the chief projector in this design), who, by the Earl's order, remained that day of her death alone with her, with one man only and Forster, who had that day forcibly sent away all her servants from her to Abington market, about three miles distant from this place; they (I say, whether first stifling her, or else strangling her) afterwards flung her down a pair of stairs and broke her neck, using much violence upon her; but, however, though it was vulgarly reported that she by chance fell downstairs (but still without hurting her hood that was upon her head), yet the inhabitants will tell you there that she was conveyed from her usual chamber where she lay, to another where the bed's head of the chamber stood close to a privy postern door, where they in the night came and stifled her in her bed, bruised her head very much broke her neck, and at length flung her down stairs, thereby believing the world would have thought it a mischance, and so have blinded their villainy. But behold the mercy and justice of God in revenging and discovering this lady's murder; for one of the persons that was a coadjutor in this murder was afterwards taken for a felony in the marches of Wales, and offering to publish the manner of the aforesaid murder, was privately made away in the prison by the Earl's appointment; and Sir Richard Varney the other, dying about the same time in London, cried miserably, and blasphemed God, and said to a person of note (who hath related the same to others since), not long before his death, that all the devils in hell did tear him in pieces. Forster, likewise, after this fact, being a man formerly addicted to hospitality, company, mirth, and music, was afterwards observed to forsake all this, and with much melancholy and pensiveness (some say with madness) pined and drooped away. The wife also of Bald Butter, kinsman to the Earl, gave out the whole fact a little before her death. Neither are these following passages to be forgotten, that as soon as ever she was murdered, they made great haste to bury her before the coroner had given in his inquest (which the Earl himself condemned as not done advisedly), which her father, or Sir John Robertsett (as I suppose), hearing of, came with all speed hither, caused her corpse to be taken up, the coroner to sit upon her, and further inquiry to be made concerning this business to the full; but it was generally thought that the Earl stopped his mouth, and made up the business betwixt them; and the good Earl, to make plain to the world the great love he bare to her while alive, and what a grief the loss of so virtuous a lady was to his tender heart, caused (though the thing, by these and other means, was beaten into the heads of the principal men of the University of Oxford) her body to be reburied in St. Mary's Church in Oxford, with great pomp and solemnity. It is remarkable, when Dr. Babington, the Earl's chaplain, did preach the funeral sermon, he tript once or twice in his speech, by recommending to their memories that virtuous lady so pitifully murdered, instead of saying pitifully slain. This Earl, after all his murders and poisonings, was himself poisoned by that which was prepared for others (some say by his wife at Cornbury Lodge before mentioned), though Baker in his Chronicle would have it at Killingworth; anno 1588." [Ashmole's Antiquities of Berkshire, vol.i., p.149. The tradition as to Leicester's death was thus communicated by Ben Jonson to Drummond of Hawthornden: – "The Earl of Leicester gave a bottle of liquor to his Lady, which he willed her to use in any faintness, which she, after his returne from court, not knowing it was poison, gave him, and so he died." – BEN JONSON'S INFORMATION TO DRUMMOND OF HAWTHORNDEN, MS., SIR ROBERT SIBBALD'S COPY.]

The same accusation has been adopted and circulated by the author of Leicester's Commonwealth, a satire written directly against the Earl of Leicester, which loaded him with the most

horrid crimes, and, among the rest, with the murder of his first wife. It was alluded to in the Yorkshire Tragedy, a play erroneously ascribed to Shakespeare, where a baker, who determines to destroy all his family, throws his wife downstairs, with this allusion to the supposed murder of Leicester's lady, —

“The only way to charm a woman's tongue  
Is, break her neck – a politician did it.”

The reader will find I have borrowed several incidents as well as names from Ashmole, and the more early authorities; but my first acquaintance with the history was through the more pleasing medium of verse. There is a period in youth when the mere power of numbers has a more strong effect on ear and imagination than in more advanced life. At this season of immature taste, the author was greatly delighted with the poems of Mickle and Langhorne, poets who, though by no means deficient in the higher branches of their art, were eminent for their powers of verbal melody above most who have practised this department of poetry. One of those pieces of Mickle, which the author was particularly pleased with, is a ballad, or rather a species of elegy, on the subject of Cumnor Hall, which, with others by the same author, was to be found in Evans's Ancient Ballads (vol. iv., page 130), to which work Mickle made liberal contributions. The first stanza especially had a peculiar species of enchantment for the youthful ear of the author, the force of which is not even now entirely spent; some others are sufficiently prosaic.

### CUMNOR HALL

The dews of summer night did fall;  
The moon, sweet regent of the sky,  
Silver'd the walls of Cumnor Hall,  
And many an oak that grew thereby,

Now nought was heard beneath the skies,  
The sounds of busy life were still,  
Save an unhappy lady's sighs,  
That issued from that lonely pile.

“Leicester,” she cried, “is this thy love  
That thou so oft hast sworn to me,  
To leave me in this lonely grove,  
Immured in shameful privy?”

“No more thou com'st with lover's speed,  
Thy once beloved bride to see;  
But be she alive, or be she dead,  
I fear, stern Earl, 's the same to thee.

“Not so the usage I received  
When happy in my father's hall;  
No faithless husband then me grieved,  
No chilling fears did me appal.

“I rose up with the cheerful morn,  
No lark more blithe, no flower more gay;

And like the bird that haunts the thorn,  
So merrily sung the livelong day.

“If that my beauty is but small,  
Among court ladies all despised,  
Why didst thou rend it from that hall,  
Where, scornful Earl, it well was prized?”

“And when you first to me made suit,  
How fair I was you oft would say!  
And proud of conquest, pluck’d the fruit,  
Then left the blossom to decay.

“Yes! now neglected and despised,  
The rose is pale, the lily’s dead;  
But he that once their charms so prized,  
Is sure the cause those charms are fled.

“For know, when sick’ning grief doth prey,  
And tender love’s repaid with scorn,  
The sweetest beauty will decay, —  
What floweret can endure the storm?”

“At court, I’m told, is beauty’s throne,  
Where every lady’s passing rare,  
That Eastern flowers, that shame the sun,  
Are not so glowing, not so fair.

“Then, Earl, why didst thou leave the beds  
Where roses and where lilies vie,  
To seek a primrose, whose pale shades  
Must sicken when those gauds are by?”

“Among rural beauties I was one,  
Among the fields wild flowers are fair;  
Some country swain might me have won,  
And thought my beauty passing rare.

“But, Leicester (or I much am wrong),  
Or ‘tis not beauty lures thy vows;  
Rather ambition’s gilded crown  
Makes thee forget thy humble spouse.

“Then, Leicester, why, again I plead  
(The injured surely may repine) —  
Why didst thou wed a country maid,  
When some fair princess might be thine?”

“Why didst thou praise my hum’ble charms,

And, oh! then leave them to decay?  
Why didst thou win me to thy arms,  
Then leave to mourn the livelong day?

“The village maidens of the plain  
Salute me lowly as they go;  
Envious they mark my silken train,  
Nor think a Countess can have woe.

“The simple nymphs! they little know  
How far more happy’s their estate;  
To smile for joy, than sigh for woe —  
To be content, than to be great.

“How far less blest am I than them?  
Daily to pine and waste with care!  
Like the poor plant that, from its stem  
Divided, feels the chilling air.

“Nor, cruel Earl! can I enjoy  
The humble charms of solitude;  
Your minions proud my peace destroy,  
By sullen frowns or pratings rude.

“Last night, as sad I chanced to stray,  
The village death-bell smote my ear;  
They wink’d aside, and seemed to say,  
‘Countess, prepare, thy end is near!’

“And now, while happy peasants sleep,  
Here I sit lonely and forlorn;  
No one to soothe me as I weep,  
Save Philomel on yonder thorn.

“My spirits flag – my hopes decay —  
Still that dread death-bell smites my ear;  
And many a boding seems to say,  
‘Countess, prepare, thy end is near!’”

Thus sore and sad that lady grieved,  
In Cumnor Hall, so lone and drear;  
And many a heartfelt sigh she heaved,  
And let fall many a bitter tear.

And ere the dawn of day appear’d,  
In Cumnor Hall, so lone and drear,  
Full many a piercing scream was heard,  
And many a cry of mortal fear.

The death-bell thrice was heard to ring,  
An aerial voice was heard to call,  
And thrice the raven flapp'd its wing  
Around the towers of Cumnor Hall.

The mastiff howl'd at village door,  
The oaks were shatter'd on the green;  
Woe was the hour – for never more  
That hapless Countess e'er was seen!

And in that Manor now no more  
Is cheerful feast and sprightly ball;  
For ever since that dreary hour  
Have spirits haunted Cumnor Hall.

The village maids, with fearful glance,  
Avoid the ancient moss-grown wall;  
Nor ever lead the merry dance,  
Among the groves of Cumnor Hall.

Full many a traveller oft hath sigh'd,  
And pensive wept the Countess' fall,  
As wand'ring onward they've espied  
The haunted towers of Cumnor Hall.

ARBOTSFORD, 1st March 1831.

## CHAPTER I

I am an innkeeper, and know my grounds,  
And study them; Brain o' man, I study them.  
I must have jovial guests to drive my ploughs,  
And whistling boys to bring my harvests home,  
Or I shall hear no flails thwack.

### *THE NEW INN.*

It is the privilege of tale-tellers to open their story in an inn, the free rendezvous of all travellers, and where the humour of each displays itself without ceremony or restraint. This is specially suitable when the scene is laid during the old days of merry England, when the guests were in some sort not merely the inmates, but the messmates and temporary companions of mine Host, who was usually a personage of privileged freedom, comely presence, and good-humour. Patronized by him the characters of the company were placed in ready contrast; and they seldom failed, during the emptying of a six-hooped pot, to throw off reserve, and present themselves to each other, and to their landlord, with the freedom of old acquaintance.

The village of Cumnor, within three or four miles of Oxford, boasted, during the eighteenth of Queen Elizabeth, an excellent inn of the old stamp, conducted, or rather ruled, by Giles Gosling, a man of a goodly person, and of somewhat round belly; fifty years of age and upwards, moderate in his reckonings, prompt in his payments, having a cellar of sound liquor, a ready wit, and a pretty daughter. Since the days of old Harry Baillie of the Tabard in Southwark, no one had excelled Giles Gosling in the power of pleasing his guests of every description; and so great was his fame, that to have been in Cumnor without wetting a cup at the bonny Black Bear, would have been to avouch one's-self utterly indifferent to reputation as a traveller. A country fellow might as well return from London without looking in the face of majesty. The men of Cumnor were proud of their Host, and their Host was proud of his house, his liquor, his daughter, and himself.

It was in the courtyard of the inn which called this honest fellow landlord, that a traveller alighted in the close of the evening, gave his horse, which seemed to have made a long journey, to the hostler, and made some inquiry, which produced the following dialogue betwixt the myrmidons of the bonny Black Bear.

“What, ho! John Tapster.”

“At hand, Will Hostler,” replied the man of the spigot, showing himself in his costume of loose jacket, linen breeches, and green apron, half within and half without a door, which appeared to descend to an outer cellar.

“Here is a gentleman asks if you draw good ale,” continued the hostler.

“Beshrew my heart else,” answered the tapster, “since there are but four miles betwixt us and Oxford. Marry, if my ale did not convince the heads of the scholars, they would soon convince my pate with the pewter flagon.”

“Call you that Oxford logic?” said the stranger, who had now quitted the rein of his horse, and was advancing towards the inn-door, when he was encountered by the goodly form of Giles Gosling himself.

“Is it logic you talk of, Sir Guest?” said the host; “why, then, have at you with a downright consequence —

‘The horse to the rack,  
And to fire with the sack.’”

“Amen! with all my heart, my good host,” said the stranger; “let it be a quart of your best Canaries, and give me your good help to drink it.”

“Nay, you are but in your accident yet, Sir Traveller, if you call on your host for help for such a sipping matter as a quart of sack; Were it a gallon, you might lack some neighbouring aid at my hand, and yet call yourself a toper.”

“Fear me not.” said the guest, “I will do my devoir as becomes a man who finds himself within five miles of Oxford; for I am not come from the field of Mars to discredit myself amongst the followers of Minerva.”

As he spoke thus, the landlord, with much semblance of hearty welcome, ushered his guest into a large, low chamber, where several persons were seated together in different parties – some drinking, some playing at cards, some conversing, and some, whose business called them to be early risers on the morrow, concluding their evening meal, and conferring with the chamberlain about their night’s quarters.

The entrance of a stranger procured him that general and careless sort of attention which is usually paid on such occasions, from which the following results were deduced: – The guest was one of those who, with a well-made person, and features not in themselves unpleasing, are nevertheless so far from handsome that, whether from the expression of their features, or the tone of their voice, or from their gait and manner, there arises, on the whole, a disinclination to their society. The stranger’s address was bold, without being frank, and seemed eagerly and hastily to claim for him a degree of attention and deference which he feared would be refused, if not instantly vindicated as his right. His attire was a riding-cloak, which, when open, displayed a handsome jerkin overlaid with lace, and belted with a buff girdle, which sustained a broadsword and a pair of pistols.

“You ride well provided, sir,” said the host, looking at the weapons as he placed on the table the mulled sack which the traveller had ordered.

“Yes, mine host; I have found the use on’t in dangerous times, and I do not, like your modern grandees, turn off my followers the instant they are useless.”

“Ay, sir?” said Giles Gosling; “then you are from the Low Countries, the land of pike and caliver?”

“I have been high and low, my friend, broad and wide, far and near. But here is to thee in a cup of thy sack; fill thyself another to pledge me, and, if it is less than superlative, e’en drink as you have brewed.”

“Less than superlative?” said Giles Gosling, drinking off the cup, and smacking his lips with an air of ineffable relish, – “I know nothing of superlative, nor is there such a wine at the Three Cranes, in the Vintry, to my knowledge; but if you find better sack than that in the Sheres, or in the Canaries either, I would I may never touch either pot or penny more. Why, hold it up betwixt you and the light, you shall see the little motes dance in the golden liquor like dust in the sunbeam. But I would rather draw wine for ten clowns than one traveller. – I trust your honour likes the wine?”

“It is neat and comfortable, mine host; but to know good liquor, you should drink where the vine grows. Trust me, your Spaniard is too wise a man to send you the very soul of the grape. Why, this now, which you account so choice, were counted but as a cup of bastard at the Groyne, or at Port St. Mary’s. You should travel, mine host, if you would be deep in the mysteries of the butt and pottle-pot.”

“In troth, Signior Guest,” said Giles Gosling, “if I were to travel only that I might be discontented with that which I can get at home, methinks I should go but on a fool’s errand. Besides, I warrant you, there is many a fool can turn his nose up at good drink without ever having been out of the smoke of Old England; and so ever gramercy mine own fireside.”

“This is but a mean mind of yours, mine host,” said the stranger; “I warrant me, all your town’s folk do not think so basely. You have gallants among you, I dare undertake, that have made the

Virginia voyage, or taken a turn in the Low Countries at least. Come, cudgel your memory. Have you no friends in foreign parts that you would gladly have tidings of?"

"Troth, sir, not I," answered the host, "since ranting Robin of Drysandford was shot at the siege of the Brill. The devil take the caliver that fired the ball, for a blither lad never filled a cup at midnight! But he is dead and gone, and I know not a soldier, or a traveller, who is a soldier's mate, that I would give a peeled codling for."

"By the Mass, that is strange. What! so many of our brave English hearts are abroad, and you, who seem to be a man of mark, have no friend, no kinsman among them?"

"Nay, if you speak of kinsmen," answered Gosling, "I have one wild slip of a kinsman, who left us in the last year of Queen Mary; but he is better lost than found."

"Do not say so, friend, unless you have heard ill of him lately. Many a wild colt has turned out a noble steed. – His name, I pray you?"

"Michael Lambourne," answered the landlord of the Black Bear; "a son of my sister's – there is little pleasure in recollecting either the name or the connection."

"Michael Lambourne!" said the stranger, as if endeavouring to recollect himself – "what, no relation to Michael Lambourne, the gallant cavalier who behaved so bravely at the siege of Venlo that Grave Maurice thanked him at the head of the army? Men said he was an English cavalier, and of no high extraction."

"It could scarcely be my nephew," said Giles Gosling, "for he had not the courage of a hen-partridge for aught but mischief."

"Oh, many a man finds courage in the wars," replied the stranger.

"It may be," said the landlord; "but I would have thought our Mike more likely to lose the little he had."

"The Michael Lambourne whom I knew," continued the traveller, "was a likely fellow – went always gay and well attired, and had a hawk's eye after a pretty wench."

"Our Michael," replied the host, "had the look of a dog with a bottle at its tail, and wore a coat, every rag of which was bidding good-day to the rest."

"Oh, men pick up good apparel in the wars," replied the guest.

"Our Mike," answered the landlord, "was more like to pick it up in a frippery warehouse, while the broker was looking another way; and, for the hawk's eye you talk of, his was always after my stray spoons. He was tapster's boy here in this blessed house for a quarter of a year; and between misreckonings, miscarriages, mistakes, and misdemeanours, had he dwelt with me for three months longer, I might have pulled down sign, shut up house, and given the devil the key to keep."

"You would be sorry, after all," continued the traveller, "were I to tell you poor Mike Lambourne was shot at the head of his regiment at the taking of a sconce near Maestricht?"

"Sorry! – it would be the blithest news I ever heard of him, since it would ensure me he was not hanged. But let him pass – I doubt his end will never do such credit to his friends. Were it so, I should say" – (taking another cup of sack) – "Here's God rest him, with all my heart."

"Tush, man," replied the traveller, "never fear but you will have credit by your nephew yet, especially if he be the Michael Lambourne whom I knew, and loved very nearly, or altogether, as well as myself. Can you tell me no mark by which I could judge whether they be the same?"

"Faith, none that I can think of," answered Giles Gosling, "unless that our Mike had the gallows branded on his left shoulder for stealing a silver caudle-cup from Dame Snort of Hogsditch."

"Nay, there you lie like a knave, uncle," said the stranger, slipping aside his ruff; and turning down the sleeve of his doublet from his neck and shoulder; "by this good day, my shoulder is as unscarred as thine own."

"What, Mike, boy – Mike!" exclaimed the host; – "and is it thou, in good earnest? Nay, I have judged so for this half-hour; for I knew no other person would have ta'en half the interest in thee."

But, Mike, an thy shoulder be unscathed as thou sayest, thou must own that Goodman Thong, the hangman, was merciful in his office, and stamped thee with a cold iron.”

“Tush, uncle – truce with your jests. Keep them to season your sour ale, and let us see what hearty welcome thou wilt give a kinsman who has rolled the world around for eighteen years; who has seen the sun set where it rises, and has travelled till the west has become the east.”

“Thou hast brought back one traveller’s gift with thee, Mike, as I well see; and that was what thou least didst: need to travel for. I remember well, among thine other qualities, there was no crediting a word which came from thy mouth.”

“Here’s an unbelieving pagan for you, gentlemen!” said Michael Lambourne, turning to those who witnessed this strange interview betwixt uncle and nephew, some of whom, being natives of the village, were no strangers to his juvenile wildness. “This may be called slaying a Cumnor fatted calf for me with a vengeance. – But, uncle, I come not from the husks and the swine-trough, and I care not for thy welcome or no welcome; I carry that with me will make me welcome, wend where I will.”

So saying, he pulled out a purse of gold indifferently well filled, the sight of which produced a visible effect upon the company. Some shook their heads and whispered to each other, while one or two of the less scrupulous speedily began to recollect him as a school-companion, a townsman, or so forth. On the other hand, two or three grave, sedate-looking persons shook their heads, and left the inn, hinting that, if Giles Gosling wished to continue to thrive, he should turn his thriftless, godless nephew adrift again, as soon as he could. Gosling demeaned himself as if he were much of the same opinion, for even the sight of the gold made less impression on the honest gentleman than it usually doth upon one of his calling.

“Kinsman Michael,” he said, “put up thy purse. My sister’s son shall be called to no reckoning in my house for supper or lodging; and I reckon thou wilt hardly wish to stay longer where thou art e’en but too well known.”

“For that matter, uncle,” replied the traveller, “I shall consult my own needs and conveniences. Meantime I wish to give the supper and sleeping cup to those good townsmen who are not too proud to remember Mike Lambourne, the tapster’s boy. If you will let me have entertainment for my money, so; if not, it is but a short two minutes’ walk to the Hare and Tabor, and I trust our neighbours will not grudge going thus far with me.”

“Nay, Mike,” replied his uncle, “as eighteen years have gone over thy head, and I trust thou art somewhat amended in thy conditions, thou shalt not leave my house at this hour, and shalt e’en have whatever in reason you list to call for. But I would I knew that that purse of thine, which thou vapourest of, were as well come by as it seems well filled.”

“Here is an infidel for you, my good neighbours!” said Lambourne, again appealing to the audience. “Here’s a fellow will rip up his kinsman’s follies of a good score of years’ standing. And for the gold, why, sirs, I have been where it grew, and was to be had for the gathering. In the New World have I been, man – in the Eldorado, where urchins play at cherry-pit with diamonds, and country wenches thread rubies for necklaces, instead of rowan-tree berries; where the pantiles are made of pure gold, and the paving-stones of virgin silver.”

“By my credit, friend Mike,” said young Laurence Goldthred, the cutting mercer of Abingdon, “that were a likely coast to trade to. And what may lawns, cypruses, and ribands fetch, where gold is so plenty?”

“Oh, the profit were unutterable,” replied Lambourne, “especially when a handsome young merchant bears the pack himself; for the ladies of that clime are bona-robas, and being themselves somewhat sunburnt, they catch fire like tinder at a fresh complexion like thine, with a head of hair inclining to be red.”

“I would I might trade thither,” said the mercer, chuckling.

“Why, and so thou mayest,” said Michael – “that is, if thou art the same brisk boy who was partner with me at robbing the Abbot’s orchard. ‘Tis but a little touch of alchemy to decoct thy house

and land into ready money, and that ready money into a tall ship, with sails, anchors, cordage, and all things conforming; then clap thy warehouse of goods under hatches, put fifty good fellows on deck, with myself to command them, and so hoist topsails, and hey for the New World!”

“Thou hast taught him a secret, kinsman,” said Giles Gosling, “to decoct, an that be the word, his pound into a penny and his webs into a thread. – Take a fool’s advice, neighbour Goldthred. Tempt not the sea, for she is a devourer. Let cards and cockatrices do their worst, thy father’s bales may bide a banging for a year or two ere thou comest to the Spital; but the sea hath a bottomless appetite, – she would swallow the wealth of Lombard Street in a morning, as easily as I would a poached egg and a cup of clary. And for my kinsman’s Eldorado, never trust me if I do not believe he has found it in the pouches of some such gulls as thyself. – But take no snuff in the nose about it; fall to and welcome, for here comes the supper, and I heartily bestow it on all that will take share, in honour of my hopeful nephew’s return, always trusting that he has come home another man. – In faith, kinsman, thou art as like my poor sister as ever was son to mother.”

“Not quite so like old Benedict Lambourne, her husband, though,” said the mercer, nodding and winking. “Dost thou remember, Mike, what thou saidst when the schoolmaster’s ferule was over thee for striking up thy father’s crutches? – it is a wise child, saidst thou, that knows its own father. Dr. Bircham laughed till he cried again, and his crying saved yours.”

“Well, he made it up to me many a day after,” said Lambourne; “and how is the worthy pedagogue?”

“Dead,” said Giles Gosling, “this many a day since.”

“That he is,” said the clerk of the parish; “I sat by his bed the whilst. He passed away in a blessed frame. ‘MORIOR – MORTUUS SUM VEL FUI – MORI’ – these were his latest words; and he just added, ‘my last verb is conjugated.’”

“Well, peace be with him,” said Mike, “he owes me nothing.”

“No, truly,” replied Goldthred; “and every lash which he laid on thee, he always was wont to say, he spared the hangman a labour.”

“One would have thought he left him little to do then,” said the clerk; “and yet Goodman Thong had no sinecure of it with our friend, after all.”

“VOTO A DIOS!” exclaimed Lambourne, his patience appearing to fail him, as he snatched his broad, slouched hat from the table and placed it on his head, so that the shadow gave the sinister expression of a Spanish brave to eyes and features which naturally boded nothing pleasant. “Hark’ee, my masters – all is fair among friends, and under the rose; and I have already permitted my worthy uncle here, and all of you, to use your pleasure with the frolics of my nonage. But I carry sword and dagger, my good friends, and can use them lightly too upon occasion. I have learned to be dangerous upon points of honour ever since I served the Spaniard, and I would not have you provoke me to the degree of falling foul.”

“Why, what would you do?” said the clerk.

“Ay, sir, what would you do?” said the mercer, bustling up on the other side of the table.

“Slit your throat, and spoil your Sunday’s quavering, Sir Clerk,” said Lambourne fiercely; “cudgel you, my worshipful dealer in flimsy sarsenets, into one of your own bales.”

“Come, come,” said the host, interposing, “I will have no swaggering here. – Nephew, it will become you best to show no haste to take offence; and you, gentlemen, will do well to remember, that if you are in an inn, still you are the inn-keeper’s guests, and should spare the honour of his family. – I protest your silly broils make me as oblivious as yourself; for yonder sits my silent guest as I call him, who hath been my two days’ inmate, and hath never spoken a word, save to ask for his food and his reckoning – gives no more trouble than a very peasant – pays his shot like a prince royal – looks but at the sum total of the reckoning, and does not know what day he shall go away. Oh, ‘tis a jewel of a guest! and yet, hang-dog that I am, I have suffered him to sit by himself like a castaway in yonder

obscure nook, without so much as asking him to take bite or sup along with us. It were but the right guerdon of my incivility were he to set off to the Hare and Tabor before the night grows older.”

With his white napkin gracefully arranged over his left arm, his velvet cap laid aside for the moment, and his best silver flagon in his right hand, mine host walked up to the solitary guest whom he mentioned, and thereby turned upon him the eyes of the assembled company.

He was a man aged betwixt twenty-five and thirty, rather above the middle size, dressed with plainness and decency, yet bearing an air of ease which almost amounted to dignity, and which seemed to infer that his habit was rather beneath his rank. His countenance was reserved and thoughtful, with dark hair and dark eyes; the last, upon any momentary excitement, sparkled with uncommon lustre, but on other occasions had the same meditative and tranquil cast which was exhibited by his features. The busy curiosity of the little village had been employed to discover his name and quality, as well as his business at Cumnor; but nothing had transpired on either subject which could lead to its gratification. Giles Gosling, head-borough of the place, and a steady friend to Queen Elizabeth and the Protestant religion, was at one time inclined to suspect his guest of being a Jesuit, or seminary priest, of whom Rome and Spain sent at this time so many to grace the gallows in England. But it was scarce possible to retain such a prepossession against a guest who gave so little trouble, paid his reckoning so regularly, and who proposed, as it seemed, to make a considerable stay at the bonny Black Bear.

“Papists,” argued Giles Gosling, “are a pinching, close-fisted race, and this man would have found a lodging with the wealthy squire at Bessellsey, or with the old Knight at Wootton, or in some other of their Roman dens, instead of living in a house of public entertainment, as every honest man and good Christian should. Besides, on Friday he stuck by the salt beef and carrot, though there were as good spitch-cooked eels on the board as ever were ta’en out of the Isis.”

Honest Giles, therefore, satisfied himself that his guest was no Roman, and with all comely courtesy besought the stranger to pledge him in a draught of the cool tankard, and honour with his attention a small collation which he was giving to his nephew, in honour of his return, and, as he verily hoped, of his reformation. The stranger at first shook his head, as if declining the courtesy; but mine host proceeded to urge him with arguments founded on the credit of his house, and the construction which the good people of Cumnor might put upon such an unsocial humour.

“By my faith, sir,” he said, “it touches my reputation that men should be merry in my house; and we have ill tongues amongst us at Cumnor (as where be there not?), who put an evil mark on men who pull their hat over their brows, as if they were looking back to the days that are gone, instead of enjoying the blithe sunshiny weather which God has sent us in the sweet looks of our sovereign mistress, Queen Elizabeth, whom Heaven long bless and preserve!”

“Why, mine host,” answered the stranger, “there is no treason, sure, in a man’s enjoying his own thoughts, under the shadow of his own bonnet? You have lived in the world twice as long as I have, and you must know there are thoughts that will haunt us in spite of ourselves, and to which it is in vain to say, Begone, and let me be merry.”

“By my sooth,” answered Giles Gosling, “if such troublesome thoughts haunt your mind, and will not get them gone for plain English, we will have one of Father Bacon’s pupils from Oxford, to conjure them away with logic and with Hebrew – or, what say you to laying them in a glorious red sea of claret, my noble guest? Come, sir, excuse my freedom. I am an old host, and must have my talk. This peevish humour of melancholy sits ill upon you; it suits not with a sleek boot, a hat of trim block, a fresh cloak, and a full purse. A pize on it! send it off to those who have their legs swathed with a hay-wisp, their heads thatched with a felt bonnet, their jerkin as thin as a cobweb, and their pouch without ever a cross to keep the fiend Melancholy from dancing in it. Cheer up, sir! or, by this good liquor, we shall banish thee from the joys of blithesome company, into the mists of melancholy and the land of little-ease. Here be a set of good fellows willing to be merry; do not scowl on them like the devil looking over Lincoln.”

“You say well, my worthy host,” said the guest, with a melancholy smile, which, melancholy as it was, gave a very pleasant: expression to his countenance – “you say well, my jovial friend; and they that are moody like myself should not disturb the mirth of those who are happy. I will drink a round with your guests with all my heart, rather than be termed a mar-feast.”

So saying, he arose and joined the company, who, encouraged by the precept and example of Michael Lambourne, and consisting chiefly of persons much disposed to profit by the opportunity of a merry meal at the expense of their landlord, had already made some inroads upon the limits of temperance, as was evident from the tone in which Michael inquired after his old acquaintances in the town, and the bursts of laughter with which each answer was received. Giles Gosling himself was somewhat scandalized at the obstreperous nature of their mirth, especially as he involuntarily felt some respect for his unknown guest. He paused, therefore, at some distance from the table occupied by these noisy revellers, and began to make a sort of apology for their license.

“You would think,” he said, “to hear these fellows talk, that there was not one of them who had not been bred to live by Stand and Deliver; and yet tomorrow you will find them a set of as painstaking mechanics, and so forth, as ever cut an inch short of measure, or paid a letter of change in light crowns over a counter. The mercer there wears his hat awry, over a shaggy head of hair, that looks like a curly water-dog’s back, goes unbraced, wears his cloak on one side, and affects a ruffianly vapouring humour: when in his shop at Abingdon, he is, from his flat cap to his glistening shoes, as precise in his apparel as if he was named for mayor. He talks of breaking parks, and taking the highway, in such fashion that you would think he haunted every night betwixt Hounslow and London; when in fact he may be found sound asleep on his feather-bed, with a candle placed beside him on one side, and a Bible on the other, to fright away the goblins.”

“And your nephew, mine host, this same Michael Lambourne, who is lord of the feast – is he, too, such a would-be ruffler as the rest of them?”

“Why, there you push me hard,” said the host; “my nephew is my nephew, and though he was a desperate Dick of yore, yet Mike may have mended like other folks, you wot. And I would not have you think all I said of him, even now, was strict gospel; I knew the wag all the while, and wished to pluck his plumes from him. And now, sir, by what name shall I present my worshipful guest to these gallants?”

“Marry, mine host,” replied the stranger, “you may call me Tressilian.”

“Tressilian?” answered mine host of the Bear. “A worthy name, and, as I think, of Cornish lineage; for what says the south proverb —

‘By Pol, Tre, and Pen,  
You may know the Cornish men.’

Shall I say the worthy Master Tressilian of Cornwall?”

“Say no more than I have given you warrant for, mine host, and so shall you be sure you speak no more than is true. A man may have one of those honourable prefixes to his name, yet be born far from Saint Michael’s Mount.”

Mine host pushed his curiosity no further, but presented Master Tressilian to his nephew’s company, who, after exchange of salutations, and drinking to the health of their new companion, pursued the conversation in which he found them engaged, seasoning it with many an intervening pledge.

## CHAPTER II

Talk you of young Master Lancelot? – MERCHANT OF VENICE.

After some brief interval, Master Goldthred, at the earnest instigation of mine host, and the joyous concurrence of his guest, indulged the company with, the following morsel of melody: —

“Of all the birds on bush or tree,  
Commend me to the owl,  
Since he may best ensample be  
To those the cup that trowl.  
For when the sun hath left the west,  
He chooses the tree that he loves the best,  
And he whoops out his song, and he laughs at his jest;  
Then, though hours be late and weather foul,  
We’ll drink to the health of the bonny, bonny owl.

“The lark is but a bumpkin fowl,  
He sleeps in his nest till morn;  
But my blessing upon the jolly owl,  
That all night blows his horn.  
Then up with your cup till you stagger in speech,  
And match me this catch till you swagger and screech,  
And drink till you wink, my merry men each;  
For, though hours be late and weather be foul,  
We’ll drink to the health of the bonny, bonny owl.”

“There is savour in this, my hearts,” said Michael, when the mercer had finished his song, “and some goodness seems left among you yet; but what a bead-roll you have read me of old comrades, and to every man’s name tacked some ill-omened motto! And so Swashing Will of Wallingford hath bid us good-night?”

“He died the death of a fat buck,” said one of the party, “being shot with a crossbow bolt, by old Thatcham, the Duke’s stout park-keeper at Donnington Castle.”

“Ay, ay, he always loved venison well,” replied Michael, “and a cup of claret to boot – and so here’s one to his memory. Do me right, my masters.”

When the memory of this departed worthy had been duly honoured, Lambourne proceeded to inquire after Prance of Padworth.

“Pranced off – made immortal ten years since,” said the mercer; “marry, sir, Oxford Castle and Goodman Thong, and a tenpenny-worth of cord, best know how.”

“What, so they hung poor Prance high and dry? so much for loving to walk by moonlight. A cup to his memory, my masters-all merry fellows like moonlight. What has become of Hal with the Plume – he who lived near Yattenden, and wore the long feather? – I forget his name.”

“What, Hal Hempseed?” replied the mercer. “Why, you may remember he was a sort of a gentleman, and would meddle in state matters, and so he got into the mire about the Duke of Norfolk’s affair these two or three years since, fled the country with a pursuivant’s warrant at his heels, and has never since been heard of.”

“Nay, after these baulks,” said Michael Lambourne, “I need hardly inquire after Tony Foster; for when ropes, and crossbow shafts, and pursuivant’s warrants, and such-like gear, were so rife, Tony could hardly ‘scape them.”

“Which Tony Foster mean you?” said the innkeeper.

“Why, him they called Tony Fire-the-Fagot, because he brought a light to kindle the pile round Latimer and Ridley, when the wind blew out Jack Thong’s torch, and no man else would give him light for love or money.”

“Tony Foster lives and thrives,” said the host. “But, kinsman, I would not have you call him Tony Fire-the-Fagot, if you would not brook the stab.”

“How! is he grown ashamed on’t?” said Lambourne, “Why, he was wont to boast of it, and say he liked as well to see a roasted heretic as a roasted ox.”

“Ay, but, kinsman, that was in Mary’s time,” replied the landlord, “when Tony’s father was reeve here to the Abbot of Abingdon. But since that, Tony married a pure precisian, and is as good a Protestant, I warrant you, as the best.”

“And looks grave, and holds his head high, and scorns his old companions,” said the mercer.

“Then he hath prospered, I warrant him,” said Lambourne; “for ever when a man hath got nobles of his own, he keeps out of the way of those whose exchequers lie in other men’s purchase.”

“Prospered, quotha!” said the mercer; “why, you remember Cumnor Place, the old mansion-house beside the churchyard?”

“By the same token, I robbed the orchard three times – what of that? It was the old abbot’s residence when there was plague or sickness at Abingdon.”

“Ay,” said the host, “but that has been long over; and Anthony Foster hath a right in it, and lives there by some grant from a great courtier, who had the church-lands from the crown. And there he dwells, and has as little to do with any poor wight in Cumnor, as if he were himself a belted knight.”

“Nay,” said the mercer, “it is not altogether pride in Tony neither; there is a fair lady in the case, and Tony will scarce let the light of day look on her.”

“How!” said Tressilian, who now for the first time interfered in their conversation; “did ye not say this Foster was married, and to a precisian?”

“Married he was, and to as bitter a precisian as ever ate flesh in Lent; and a cat-and-dog life she led with Tony, as men said. But she is dead, rest be with her! and Tony hath but a slip of a daughter; so it is thought he means to wed this stranger, that men keep such a coil about.”

“And why so? – I mean, why do they keep a coil about her?” said Tressilian.

“Why, I wot not,” answered the host, “except that men say she is as beautiful as an angel, and no one knows whence she comes, and every one wishes to know why she is kept so closely mewed up. For my part, I never saw her – you have, I think, Master Goldthred?”

“That I have, old boy,” said the mercer. “Look you, I was riding hither from Abingdon. I passed under the east oriel window of the old mansion, where all the old saints and histories and such-like are painted. It was not the common path I took, but one through the Park; for the postern door was upon the latch, and I thought I might take the privilege of an old comrade to ride across through the trees, both for shading, as the day was somewhat hot, and for avoiding of dust, because I had on my peach-coloured doublet, pinked out with cloth of gold.”

“Which garment,” said Michael Lambourne, “thou wouldst willingly make twinkle in the eyes of a fair dame. Ah! villain, thou wilt never leave thy old tricks.”

“Not so-not so,” said the mercer, with a smirking laugh – “not altogether so – but curiosity, thou knowest, and a strain of compassion withal; for the poor young lady sees nothing from morn to even but Tony Foster, with his scowling black brows, his bull’s head, and his bandy legs.”

“And thou wouldst willingly show her a dapper body, in a silken jerkin – a limb like a short-legged hen’s, in a cordovan boot – and a round, simpering, what-d’ye-lack sort of a countenance, set off with a velvet bonnet, a Turkey feather, and a gilded brooch? Ah! jolly mercer, they who have

good wares are fond to show them! – Come, gentles, let not the cup stand – here’s to long spurs, short boots, full bonnets, and empty skulls!”

“Nay, now, you are jealous of me, Mike,” said Goldthred; “and yet my luck was but what might have happened to thee, or any man.”

“Marry confound thine impudence,” retorted Lambourne; “thou wouldst not compare thy pudding face, and sarsenet manners, to a gentleman, and a soldier?”

“Nay, my good sir,” said Tressilian, “let me beseech you will not interrupt the gallant citizen; methinks he tells his tale so well, I could hearken to him till midnight.”

“It’s more of your favour than of my desert,” answered Master Goldthred; “but since I give you pleasure, worthy Master Tressilian, I shall proceed, maugre all the gibes and quips of this valiant soldier, who, peradventure, hath had more cuffs than crowns in the Low Countries. And so, sir, as I passed under the great painted window, leaving my rein loose on my ambling palfrey’s neck, partly for mine ease, and partly that I might have the more leisure to peer about, I hears me the lattice open; and never credit me, sir, if there did not stand there the person of as fair a woman as ever crossed mine eyes; and I think I have looked on as many pretty wenches, and with as much judgment, as other folks.”

“May I ask her appearance, sir?” said Tressilian.

“Oh, sir,” replied Master Goldthred, “I promise you, she was in gentlewoman’s attire – a very quaint and pleasing dress, that might have served the Queen herself; for she had a forepart with body and sleeves, of ginger-coloured satin, which, in my judgment, must have cost by the yard some thirty shillings, lined with murrey taffeta, and laid down and guarded with two broad laces of gold and silver. And her hat, sir, was truly the best fashioned thing that I have seen in these parts, being of tawny taffeta, embroidered with scorpions of Venice gold, and having a border garnished with gold fringe – I promise you, sir, an absolute and all-surpassing device. Touching her skirts, they were in the old pass-devant fashion.”

“I did not ask you of her attire, sir,” said Tressilian, who had shown some impatience during this conversation, “but of her complexion – the colour of her hair, her features.”

“Touching her complexion,” answered the mercer, “I am not so special certain, but I marked that her fan had an ivory handle, curiously inlaid. And then again, as to the colour of her hair, why, I can warrant, be its hue what it might, that she wore above it a net of green silk, parcel twisted with gold.”

“A most mercer-like memory!” said Lambourne. “The gentleman asks him of the lady’s beauty, and he talks of her fine clothes!”

“I tell thee,” said the mercer, somewhat disconcerted, “I had little time to look at her; for just as I was about to give her the good time of day, and for that purpose had puckered my features with a smile – ”

“Like those of a jackanape simpering at a chestnut,” said Michael Lambourne.

“Up started of a sudden,” continued Goldthred, without heeding the interruption, “Tony Foster himself, with a cudgel in his hand – ”

“And broke thy head across, I hope, for thine impertinence,” said his entertainer.

“That were more easily said than done,” answered Goldthred indignantly; “no, no – there was no breaking of heads. It’s true, he advanced his cudgel, and spoke of laying on, and asked why I did not keep the public road, and such like; and I would have knocked him over the pate handsomely for his pains, only for the lady’s presence, who might have swooned, for what I know.”

“Now, out upon thee for a faint-spirited slave!” said Lambourne; “what adventurous knight ever thought of the lady’s terror, when he went to thwack giant, dragon, or magician, in her presence, and for her deliverance? But why talk to thee of dragons, who would be driven back by a dragon-fly. There thou hast missed the rarest opportunity!”

“Take it thyself, then, bully Mike,” answered Goldthred. “Yonder is the enchanted manor, and the dragon, and the lady, all at thy service, if thou darrest venture on them.”

“Why, so I would for a quartern of sack,” said the soldier – “or stay: I am foully out of linen – wilt thou bet a piece of Hollands against these five angels, that I go not up to the Hall to-morrow and force Tony Foster to introduce me to his fair guest?”

“I accept your wager,” said the mercer; “and I think, though thou hadst even the impudence of the devil, I shall gain on thee this bout. Our landlord here shall hold stakes, and I will stake down gold till I send the linen.”

“I will hold stakes on no such matter,” said Gosling. “Good now, my kinsman, drink your wine in quiet, and let such ventures alone. I promise you, Master Foster hath interest enough to lay you up in lavender in the Castle at Oxford, or to get your legs made acquainted with the town-stocks.”

“That would be but renewing an old intimacy, for Mike’s shins and the town’s wooden pinfold have been well known to each other ere now,” said the mercer; “but he shall not budge from his wager, unless he means to pay forfeit.”

“Forfeit?” said Lambourne; “I scorn it. I value Tony Foster’s wrath no more than a shelled peacock; and I will visit his Lindabrides, by Saint George, be he willing or no!”

“I would gladly pay your halves of the risk, sir,” said Tressilian, “to be permitted to accompany you on the adventure.”

“In what would that advantage you, sir?” answered Lambourne.

“In nothing, sir,” said Tressilian, “unless to mark the skill and valour with which you conduct yourself. I am a traveller who seeks for strange rencounters and uncommon passages, as the knights of yore did after adventures and feats of arms.”

“Nay, if it pleasures you to see a trout tickled,” answered Lambourne, “I care not how many witness my skill. And so here I drink success to my enterprise; and he that will not pledge me on his knees is a rascal, and I will cut his legs off by the garters!”

The draught which Michael Lambourne took upon this occasion had been preceded by so many others, that reason tottered on her throne. He swore one or two incoherent oaths at the mercer, who refused, reasonably enough, to pledge him to a sentiment which inferred the loss of his own wager.

“Wilt thou chop logic with me,” said Lambourne, “thou knave, with no more brains than are in a skein of ravelled silk? By Heaven, I will cut thee into fifty yards of galloon lace!”

But as he attempted to draw his sword for this doughty purpose, Michael Lambourne was seized upon by the tapster and the chamberlain, and conveyed to his own apartment, there to sleep himself sober at his leisure.

The party then broke up, and the guests took their leave; much more to the contentment of mine host than of some of the company, who were unwilling to quit good liquor, when it was to be had for free cost, so long as they were able to sit by it. They were, however, compelled to remove; and go at length they did, leaving Gosling and Tressilian in the empty apartment.

“By my faith,” said the former, “I wonder where our great folks find pleasure, when they spend their means in entertainments, and in playing mine host without sending in a reckoning. It is what I but rarely practise; and whenever I do, by Saint Julian, it grieves me beyond measure. Each of these empty stoups now, which my nephew and his drunken comrades have swilled off, should have been a matter of profit to one in my line, and I must set them down a dead loss. I cannot, for my heart, conceive the pleasure of noise, and nonsense, and drunken freaks, and drunken quarrels, and smut, and blasphemy, and so forth, when a man loses money instead of gaining by it. And yet many a fair estate is lost in upholding such a useless course, and that greatly contributes to the decay of publicans; for who the devil do you think would pay for drink at the Black Bear, when he can have it for nothing at my Lord’s or the Squire’s?”

Tressilian perceived that the wine had made some impression even on the seasoned brain of mine host, which was chiefly to be inferred from his declaiming against drunkenness. As he himself

had carefully avoided the bowl, he would have availed himself of the frankness of the moment to extract from Gosling some further information upon the subject of Anthony Foster, and the lady whom the mercer had seen in his mansion-house; but his inquiries only set the host upon a new theme of declamation against the wiles of the fair sex, in which he brought, at full length, the whole wisdom of Solomon to reinforce his own. Finally, he turned his admonitions, mixed with much objurgation, upon his tapsters and drawers, who were employed in removing the relics of the entertainment, and restoring order to the apartment; and at length, joining example to precept, though with no good success, he demolished a salver with half a score of glasses, in attempting to show how such service was done at the Three Cranes in the Vintry, then the most topping tavern in London. This last accident so far recalled him to his better self, that he retired to his bed, slept sound, and awoke a new man in the morning.

## CHAPTER III

Nay, I'll hold touch – the game shall be play'd out;  
It ne'er shall stop for me, this merry wager:  
That which I say when gamesome, I'll avouch  
In my most sober mood, ne'er trust me else.

### *THE HAZARD TABLE.*

“And how doth your kinsman, good mine host?” said Tressilian, when Giles Gosling first appeared in the public room, on the morning following the revel which we described in the last chapter. “Is he well, and will he abide by his wager?”

“For well, sir, he started two hours since, and has visited I know not what purlieus of his old companions; hath but now returned, and is at this instant breakfasting on new-laid eggs and muscadine. And for his wager, I caution you as a friend to have little to do with that, or indeed with aught that Mike proposes. Wherefore, I counsel you to a warm breakfast upon a culiss, which shall restore the tone of the stomach; and let my nephew and Master Goldthred swagger about their wager as they list.”

“It seems to me, mine host,” said Tressilian, “that you know not well what to say about this kinsman of yours, and that you can neither blame nor commend him without some twinge of conscience.”

“You have spoken truly, Master Tressilian,” replied Giles Gosling. “There is Natural Affection whimpering into one ear, ‘Giles, Giles, why wilt thou take away the good name of thy own nephew? Wilt thou defame thy sister’s son, Giles Gosling? wilt thou defoul thine own nest, dishonour thine own blood?’ And then, again, comes Justice, and says, ‘Here is a worthy guest as ever came to the bonny Black Bear; one who never challenged a reckoning’ (as I say to your face you never did, Master Tressilian – not that you have had cause), ‘one who knows not why he came, so far as I can see, or when he is going away; and wilt thou, being a publican, having paid scot and lot these thirty years in the town of Cumnor, and being at this instant head-borough, wilt thou suffer this guest of guests, this man of men, this six-hooped pot (as I may say) of a traveller, to fall into the meshes of thy nephew, who is known for a swasher and a desperate Dick, a carder and a dicer, a professor of the seven damnable sciences, if ever man took degrees in them?’ No, by Heaven! I might wink, and let him catch such a small butterfly as Goldthred; but thou, my guest, shall be forewarned, forearmed, so thou wilt but listen to thy trusty host.”

“Why, mine host, thy counsel shall not be cast away,” replied Tressilian; “however, I must uphold my share in this wager, having once passed my word to that effect. But lend me, I pray, some of thy counsel. This Foster, who or what is he, and why makes he such mystery of his female inmate?”

“Troth,” replied Gosling, “I can add but little to what you heard last night. He was one of Queen Mary’s Papists, and now he is one of Queen Elizabeth’s Protestants; he was an onhanger of the Abbot of Abingdon; and now he lives as master of the Manor-house. Above all, he was poor, and is rich. Folk talk of private apartments in his old waste mansion-house, bedizened fine enough to serve the Queen, God bless her! Some men think he found a treasure in the orchard, some that he sold himself to the devil for treasure, and some say that he cheated the abbot out of the church plate, which was hidden in the old Manor-house at the Reformation. Rich, however, he is, and God and his conscience, with the devil perhaps besides, only know how he came by it. He has sulky ways too – breaking off intercourse with all that are of the place, as if he had either some strange secret to keep, or held himself to be made of another clay than we are. I think it likely my kinsman and he will quarrel, if

Mike thrust his acquaintance on him; and I am sorry that you, my worthy Master Tressilian, will still think of going in my nephew's company."

Tressilian again answered him, that he would proceed with great caution, and that he should have no fears on his account; in short, he bestowed on him all the customary assurances with which those who are determined on a rash action are wont to parry the advice of their friends.

Meantime, the traveller accepted the landlord's invitation, and had just finished the excellent breakfast, which was served to him and Gosling by pretty Cicely, the beauty of the bar, when the hero of the preceding night, Michael Lambourne, entered the apartment. His toilet had apparently cost him some labour, for his clothes, which differed from those he wore on his journey, were of the newest fashion, and put on with great attention to the display of his person.

"By my faith, uncle," said the gallant, "you made a wet night of it, and I feel it followed by a dry morning. I will pledge you willingly in a cup of bastard. – How, my pretty coz Cicely! why, I left you but a child in the cradle, and there thou stand'st in thy velvet waistcoat, as tight a girl as England's sun shines on. Know thy friends and kindred, Cicely, and come hither, child, that I may kiss thee, and give thee my blessing."

"Concern not yourself about Cicely, kinsman," said Giles Gosling, "but e'en let her go her way, a' God's name; for although your mother were her father's sister, yet that shall not make you and her cater-cousins."

"Why, uncle," replied Lambourne, "think'st thou I am an infidel, and would harm those of mine own house?"

"It is for no harm that I speak, Mike," answered his uncle, "but a simple humour of precaution which I have. True, thou art as well gilded as a snake when he casts his old slough in the spring time; but for all that, thou creepst not into my Eden. I will look after mine Eve, Mike, and so content thee. – But how brave thou be'st, lad! To look on thee now, and compare thee with Master Tressilian here, in his sad-coloured riding-suit, who would not say that thou wert the real gentleman and he the tapster's boy?"

"Troth, uncle," replied Lambourne, "no one would say so but one of your country-breeding, that knows no better. I will say, and I care not who hears me, there is something about the real gentry that few men come up to that are not born and bred to the mystery. I wot not where the trick lies; but although I can enter an ordinary with as much audacity, rebuke the waiters and drawers as loudly, drink as deep a health, swear as round an oath, and fling my gold as freely about as any of the jingling spurs and white feathers that are around me, yet, hang me if I can ever catch the true grace of it, though I have practised an hundred times. The man of the house sets me lowest at the board, and carves to me the last; and the drawer says, 'Coming, friend,' without any more reverence or regardful addition. But, hang it, let it pass; care killed a cat. I have gentry enough to pass the trick on Tony Fire-the-Faggot, and that will do for the matter in hand."

"You hold your purpose, then, of visiting your old acquaintance?" said Tressilian to the adventurer.

"Ay, sir," replied Lambourne; "when stakes are made, the game must be played; that is gamester's law, all over the world. You, sir, unless my memory fails me (for I did steep it somewhat too deeply in the sack-butt), took some share in my hazard?"

"I propose to accompany you in your adventure," said Tressilian, "if you will do me so much grace as to permit me; and I have staked my share of the forfeit in the hands of our worthy host."

"That he hath," answered Giles Gosling, "in as fair Harry-nobles as ever were melted into sack by a good fellow. So, luck to your enterprise, since you will needs venture on Tony Foster; but, by my credit, you had better take another draught before you depart, for your welcome at the Hall yonder will be somewhat of the driest. And if you do get into peril, beware of taking to cold steel; but send for me, Giles Gosling, the head-borough, and I may be able to make something out of Tony yet, for as proud as he is."

The nephew dutifully obeyed his uncle's hint, by taking a second powerful pull at the tankard, observing that his wit never served him so well as when he had washed his temples with a deep morning's draught; and they set forth together for the habitation of Anthony Foster.

The village of Cumnor is pleasantly built on a hill, and in a wooded park closely adjacent was situated the ancient mansion occupied at this time by Anthony Foster, of which the ruins may be still extant. The park was then full of large trees, and in particular of ancient and mighty oaks, which stretched their giant arms over the high wall surrounding the demesne, thus giving it a melancholy, secluded, and monastic appearance. The entrance to the park lay through an old-fashioned gateway in the outer wall, the door of which was formed of two huge oaken leaves thickly studded with nails, like the gate of an old town.

"We shall be finely helped up here," said Michael Lambourne, looking at the gateway and gate, "if this fellow's suspicious humour should refuse us admission altogether, as it is like he may, in case this linsey-wolsey fellow of a mercer's visit to his premises has disquieted him. But, no," he added, pushing the huge gate, which gave way, "the door stands invitingly open; and here we are within the forbidden ground, without other impediment than the passive resistance of a heavy oak door moving on rusty hinges."

They stood now in an avenue overshadowed by such old trees as we have described, and which had been bordered at one time by high hedges of yew and holly. But these, having been untrimmed for many years, had run up into great bushes, or rather dwarf-trees, and now encroached, with their dark and melancholy boughs, upon the road which they once had screened. The avenue itself was grown up with grass, and, in one or two places, interrupted by piles of withered brushwood, which had been lopped from the trees cut down in the neighbouring park, and was here stacked for drying. Formal walks and avenues, which, at different points, crossed this principal approach, were, in like manner, choked up and interrupted by piles of brushwood and billets, and in other places by underwood and brambles. Besides the general effect of desolation which is so strongly impressed whenever we behold the contrivances of man wasted and obliterated by neglect, and witness the marks of social life effaced gradually by the influence of vegetation, the size of the trees and the outspreading extent of their boughs diffused a gloom over the scene, even when the sun was at the highest, and made a proportional impression on the mind of those who visited it. This was felt even by Michael Lambourne, however alien his habits were to receiving any impressions, excepting from things which addressed themselves immediately to his passions.

"This wood is as dark as a wolf's mouth," said he to Tressilian, as they walked together slowly along the solitary and broken approach, and had just come in sight of the monastic front of the old mansion, with its shafted windows, brick walls overgrown with ivy and creeping shrubs, and twisted stalks of chimneys of heavy stone-work. "And yet," continued Lambourne, "it is fairly done on the part of Foster too for since he chooses not visitors, it is right to keep his place in a fashion that will invite few to trespass upon his privacy. But had he been the Anthony I once knew him, these sturdy oaks had long since become the property of some honest woodmonger, and the manor-close here had looked lighter at midnight than it now does at noon, while Foster played fast and loose with the price, in some cunning corner in the purlieu of Whitefriars."

"Was he then such an unthrift?" asked Tressilian.

"He was," answered Lambourne, "like the rest of us, no saint, and no saver. But what I liked worst of Tony was, that he loved to take his pleasure by himself, and grudged, as men say, every drop of water that went past his own mill. I have known him deal with such measures of wine when he was alone, as I would not have ventured on with aid of the best toper in Berkshire; – that, and some sway towards superstition, which he had by temperament, rendered him unworthy the company of a good fellow. And now he has earthed himself here, in a den just befitting such a sly fox as himself."

"May I ask you, Master Lambourne," said Tressilian, "since your old companion's humour jumps so little with your own, wherefore you are so desirous to renew acquaintance with him?"

“And may I ask you, in return, Master Tressilian,” answered Lambourne, “wherefore you have shown yourself so desirous to accompany me on this party?”

“I told you my motive,” said Tressilian, “when I took share in your wager – it was simple curiosity.”

“La you there now!” answered Lambourne. “See how you civil and discreet gentlemen think to use us who live by the free exercise of our wits! Had I answered your question by saying that it was simple curiosity which led me to visit my old comrade Anthony Foster, I warrant you had set it down for an evasion, and a turn of my trade. But any answer, I suppose, must serve my turn.”

“And wherefore should not bare curiosity,” said Tressilian, “be a sufficient reason for my taking this walk with you?”

“Oh, content yourself, sir,” replied Lambourne; “you cannot put the change on me so easy as you think, for I have lived among the quick-stirring spirits of the age too long to swallow chaff for grain. You are a gentleman of birth and breeding – your bearing makes it good; of civil habits and fair reputation – your manners declare it, and my uncle avouches it; and yet you associate yourself with a sort of scant-of-grace, as men call me, and, knowing me to be such, you make yourself my companion in a visit to a man whom you are a stranger to – and all out of mere curiosity, forsooth! The excuse, if curiously balanced, would be found to want some scruples of just weight, or so.”

“If your suspicions were just,” said Tressilian, “you have shown no confidence in me to invite or deserve mine.”

“Oh, if that be all,” said Lambourne, “my motives lie above water. While this gold of mine lasts” – taking out his purse, chucking it into the air, and catching it as it fell – “I will make it buy pleasure; and when it is out I must have more. Now, if this mysterious Lady of the Manor – this fair Lindabrides of Tony Fire-the-Fagot – be so admirable a piece as men say, why, there is a chance that she may aid me to melt my nobles into groats; and, again, if Anthony be so wealthy a chuff as report speaks him, he may prove the philosopher’s stone to me, and convert my greats into fair rose-nobles again.”

“A comfortable proposal truly,” said Tressilian; “but I see not what chance there is of accomplishing it.”

“Not to-day, or perchance to-morrow,” answered Lambourne; “I expect not to catch the old jack till. I have disposed my ground-baits handsomely. But I know something more of his affairs this morning than I did last night, and I will so use my knowledge that he shall think it more perfect than it is. Nay, without expecting either pleasure or profit, or both, I had not stepped a stride within this manor, I can tell you; for I promise you I hold our visit not altogether without risk. – But here we are, and we must make the best on’t.”

While he thus spoke, they had entered a large orchard which surrounded the house on two sides, though the trees, abandoned by the care of man, were overgrown and messy, and seemed to bear little fruit. Those which had been formerly trained as espaliers had now resumed their natural mode of growing, and exhibited grotesque forms, partaking of the original training which they had received. The greater part of the ground, which had once been parterres and flower-gardens, was suffered in like manner to run to waste, excepting a few patches which had been dug up and planted with ordinary pot herbs. Some statues, which had ornamented the garden in its days of splendour, were now thrown down from their pedestals and broken in pieces; and a large summer-house, having a heavy stone front, decorated with carving representing the life and actions of Samson, was in the same dilapidated condition.

They had just traversed this garden of the sluggard, and were within a few steps of the door of the mansion, when Lambourne had ceased speaking; a circumstance very agreeable to Tressilian, as it saved him the embarrassment of either commenting upon or replying to the frank avowal which his companion had just made of the sentiments and views which induced him to come hither. Lambourne knocked roundly and boldly at the huge door of the mansion, observing, at the same time, he had

seen a less strong one upon a county jail. It was not until they had knocked more than once that an aged, sour-visaged domestic reconnoitred them through a small square hole in the door, well secured with bars of iron, and demanded what they wanted.

“To speak with Master Foster instantly, on pressing business of the state,” was the ready reply of Michael Lambourne.

“Methinks you will find difficulty to make that good,” said Tressilian in a whisper to his companion, while the servant went to carry the message to his master.

“Tush,” replied the adventurer; “no soldier would go on were he always to consider when and how he should come off. Let us once obtain entrance, and all will go well enough.”

In a short time the servant returned, and drawing with a careful hand both bolt and bar, opened the gate, which admitted them through an archway into a square court, surrounded by buildings. Opposite to the arch was another door, which the serving-man in like manner unlocked, and thus introduced them into a stone-paved parlour, where there was but little furniture, and that of the rudest and most ancient fashion. The windows were tall and ample, reaching almost to the roof of the room, which was composed of black oak; those opening to the quadrangle were obscured by the height of the surrounding buildings, and, as they were traversed with massive shafts of solid stone-work, and thickly painted with religious devices, and scenes taken from Scripture history, by no means admitted light in proportion to their size, and what did penetrate through them partook of the dark and gloomy tinge of the stained glass.

Tressilian and his guide had time enough to observe all these particulars, for they waited some space in the apartment ere the present master of the mansion at length made his appearance. Prepared as he was to see an inauspicious and ill-looking person, the ugliness of Anthony Foster considerably exceeded what Tressilian had anticipated. He was of middle stature, built strongly, but so clumsily as to border on deformity, and to give all his motions the ungainly awkwardness of a left-legged and left-handed man. His hair, in arranging which men at that time, as at present, were very nice and curious, instead of being carefully cleaned and disposed into short curls, or else set up on end, as is represented in old paintings, in a manner resembling that used by fine gentlemen of our own day, escaped in sable negligence from under a furred bonnet, and hung in elf-locks, which seemed strangers to the comb, over his rugged brows, and around his very singular and unprepossessing countenance. His keen, dark eyes were deep set beneath broad and shaggy eyebrows, and as they were usually bent on the ground, seemed as if they were themselves ashamed of the expression natural to them, and were desirous to conceal it from the observation of men. At times, however, when, more intent on observing others, he suddenly raised them, and fixed them keenly on those with whom he conversed, they seemed to express both the fiercer passions, and the power of mind which could at will suppress or disguise the intensity of inward feeling. The features which corresponded with these eyes and this form were irregular, and marked so as to be indelibly fixed on the mind of him who had once seen them. Upon the whole, as Tressilian could not help acknowledging to himself, the Anthony Foster who now stood before them was the last person, judging from personal appearance, upon whom one would have chosen to intrude an unexpected and undesired visit. His attire was a doublet of russet leather, like those worn by the better sort of country folk, girt with a buff belt, in which was stuck on the right side a long knife, or dudgeon dagger, and on the other a cutlass. He raised his eyes as he entered the room, and fixed a keenly penetrating glance upon his two visitors; then cast them down as if counting his steps, while he advanced slowly into the middle of the room, and said, in a low and smothered tone of voice, “Let me pray you, gentlemen, to tell me the cause of this visit.”

He looked as if he expected the answer from Tressilian, so true was Lambourne’s observation that the superior air of breeding and dignity shone through the disguise of an inferior dress. But it was Michael who replied to him, with the easy familiarity of an old friend, and a tone which seemed unembarrassed by any doubt of the most cordial reception.

“Ha! my dear friend and ingle, Tony Foster!” he exclaimed, seizing upon the unwilling hand, and shaking it with such emphasis as almost to stagger the sturdy frame of the person whom he addressed, “how fares it with you for many a long year? What! have you altogether forgotten your friend, gossip, and playfellow, Michael Lambourne?”

“Michael Lambourne!” said Foster, looking at him a moment; then dropping his eyes, and with little ceremony extricating his hand from the friendly grasp of the person by whom he was addressed, “are you Michael Lambourne?”

“Ay; sure as you are Anthony Foster,” replied Lambourne.

“‘Tis well,” answered his sullen host. “And what may Michael Lambourne expect from his visit hither?”

“VOTO A DIOS,” answered Lambourne, “I expected a better welcome than I am like to meet, I think.”

“Why, thou gallows-bird – thou jail-rat – thou friend of the hangman and his customers!” replied Foster, “hast thou the assurance to expect countenance from any one whose neck is beyond the compass of a Tyburn tippet?”

“It may be with me as you say,” replied Lambourne; “and suppose I grant it to be so for argument’s sake, I were still good enough society for mine ancient friend Anthony Fire-the-Fagot, though he be, for the present, by some indescribable title, the master of Cumnor Place.”

“Hark you, Michael Lambourne,” said Foster; “you are a gambler now, and live by the counting of chances – compute me the odds that I do not, on this instant, throw you out of that window into the ditch there.”

“Twenty to one that you do not,” answered the sturdy visitor.

“And wherefore, I pray you?” demanded Anthony Foster, setting his teeth and compressing his lips, like one who endeavours to suppress some violent internal emotion.

“Because,” said Lambourne coolly, “you dare not for your life lay a finger on me. I am younger and stronger than you, and have in me a double portion of the fighting devil, though not, it may be, quite so much of the undermining fiend, that finds an underground way to his purpose – who hides halters under folk’s pillows, and who puts rats-bane into their porridge, as the stage-play says.”

Foster looked at him earnestly, then turned away, and paced the room twice with the same steady and considerate pace with which he had entered it; then suddenly came back, and extended his hand to Michael Lambourne, saying, “Be not wroth with me, good Mike; I did but try whether thou hadst parted with aught of thine old and honourable frankness, which your enviers and backbiters called saucy impudence.”

“Let them call it what they will,” said Michael Lambourne, “it is the commodity we must carry through the world with us. – Uds daggers! I tell thee, man, mine own stock of assurance was too small to trade upon. I was fain to take in a ton or two more of brass at every port where I touched in the voyage of life; and I started overboard what modesty and scruples I had remaining, in order to make room for the stowage.”

“Nay, nay,” replied Foster, “touching scruples and modesty, you sailed hence in ballast. But who is this gallant, honest Mike? – is he a Corinthian – a cutter like thyself?”

“I prithee, know Master Tressilian, bully Foster,” replied Lambourne, presenting his friend in answer to his friend’s question, “know him and honour him, for he is a gentleman of many admirable qualities; and though he traffics not in my line of business, at least so far as I know, he has, nevertheless, a just respect and admiration for artists of our class. He will come to in time, as seldom fails; but as yet he is only a neophyte, only a proselyte, and frequents the company of cocks of the game, as a puny fencer does the schools of the masters, to see how a foil is handled by the teachers of defence.”

“If such be his quality, I will pray your company in another chamber, honest Mike, for what I have to say to thee is for thy private ear. – Meanwhile, I pray you, sir, to abide us in this apartment, and without leaving it; there be those in this house who would be alarmed by the sight of a stranger.”

Tressilian acquiesced, and the two worthies left the apartment together, in which he remained alone to await their return. [See Note 1. Foster, Lambourne, and the Black Bear.]

## CHAPTER IV

Not serve two masters? – Here's a youth will try it —  
Would fain serve God, yet give the devil his due;  
Says grace before he doth a deed of villainy,  
And returns his thanks devoutly when 'tis acted,

– *OLD PLAY.*

The room into which the Master of Cumnor Place conducted his worthy visitant was of greater extent than that in which they had at first conversed, and had yet more the appearance of dilapidation. Large oaken presses, filled with shelves of the same wood, surrounded the room, and had, at one time, served for the arrangement of a numerous collection of books, many of which yet remained, but torn and defaced, covered with dust, deprived of their costly clasps and bindings, and tossed together in heaps upon the shelves, as things altogether disregarded, and abandoned to the pleasure of every spoiler. The very presses themselves seemed to have incurred the hostility of those enemies of learning who had destroyed the volumes with which they had been heretofore filled. They were, in several places, dismantled of their shelves, and otherwise broken and damaged, and were, moreover, mantled with cobwebs and covered with dust.

“The men who wrote these books,” said Lambourne, looking round him, “little thought whose keeping they were to fall into.”

“Nor what yeoman's service they were to do me,” quoth Anthony Foster; “the cook hath used them for scouring his pewter, and the groom hath had nought else to clean my boots with, this many a month past.”

“And yet,” said Lambourne, “I have been in cities where such learned commodities would have been deemed too good for such offices.”

“Pshaw, pshaw,” answered Foster, “they are Popish trash, every one of them – private studies of the mumping old Abbot of Abingdon. The nineteenthly of a pure gospel sermon were worth a cartload of such rakings of the kennel of Rome.”

“Gad-a-mercy, Master Tony Fire-the-Fagot!” said Lambourne, by way of reply.

Foster scowled darkly at him, as he replied, “Hark ye, friend Mike; forget that name, and the passage which it relates to, if you would not have our newly-revived comradeship die a sudden and a violent death.”

“Why,” said Michael Lambourne, “you were wont to glory in the share you had in the death of the two old heretical bishops.”

“That,” said his comrade, “was while I was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, and applies not to my walk or my ways now that I am called forth into the lists. Mr. Melchisedek Maultext compared my misfortune in that matter to that of the Apostle Paul, who kept the clothes of the witnesses who stoned Saint Stephen. He held forth on the matter three Sabbaths past, and illustrated the same by the conduct of an honourable person present, meaning me.”

“I prithee peace, Foster,” said Lambourne, “for I know not how it is, I have a sort of creeping comes over my skin when I hear the devil quote Scripture; and besides, man, how couldst thou have the heart to quit that convenient old religion, which you could slip off or on as easily as your glove? Do I not remember how you were wont to carry your conscience to confession, as duly as the month came round? and when thou hadst it scoured, and burnished, and whitewashed by the priest, thou wert ever ready for the worst villainy which could be devised, like a child who is always readiest to rush into the mire when he has got his Sunday's clean jerkin on.”

“Trouble not thyself about my conscience,” said Foster; “it is a thing thou canst not understand, having never had one of thine own. But let us rather to the point, and say to me, in one word, what is thy business with me, and what hopes have drawn thee hither?”

“The hope of bettering myself, to be sure,” answered Lambourne, “as the old woman said when she leapt over the bridge at Kingston. Look you, this purse has all that is left of as round a sum as a man would wish to carry in his slop-pouch. You are here well established, it would seem, and, as I think, well befriended, for men talk of thy being under some special protection – nay, stare not like a pig that is stuck, mon; thou canst not dance in a net and they not see thee. Now I know such protection is not purchased for nought; you must have services to render for it, and in these I propose to help thee.”

“But how if I lack no assistance from thee, Mike? I think thy modesty might suppose that were a case possible.”

“That is to say,” retorted Lambourne, “that you would engross the whole work, rather than divide the reward. But be not over-greedy, Anthony – covetousness bursts the sack and spills the grain. Look you, when the huntsman goes to kill a stag, he takes with him more dogs than one. He has the stanch lyme-hound to track the wounded buck over hill and dale, but he hath also the fleet gaze-hound to kill him at view. Thou art the lyme-hound, I am the gaze-hound; and thy patron will need the aid of both, and can well afford to requite it. Thou hast deep sagacity – an unrelenting purpose – a steady, long-breathed malignity of nature, that surpasses mine. But then, I am the bolder, the quicker, the more ready, both at action and expedient. Separate, our properties are not so perfect; but unite them, and we drive the world before us. How sayest thou – shall we hunt in couples?”

“It is a currish proposal – thus to thrust thyself upon my private matters,” replied Foster; “but thou wert ever an ill-nurtured whelp.”

“You shall have no cause to say so, unless you spurn my courtesy,” said Michael Lambourne; “but if so, keep thee well from me, Sir Knight, as the romance has it. I will either share your counsels or traverse them; for I have come here to be busy, either with thee or against thee.”

“Well,” said Anthony Foster, “since thou dost leave me so fair a choice, I will rather be thy friend than thine enemy. Thou art right; I CAN prefer thee to the service of a patron who has enough of means to make us both, and an hundred more. And, to say truth, thou art well qualified for his service. Boldness and dexterity he demands – the justice-books bear witness in thy favour; no starting at scruples in his service why, who ever suspected thee of a conscience? an assurance he must have who would follow a courtier – and thy brow is as impenetrable as a Milan visor. There is but one thing I would fain see amended in thee.”

“And what is that, my most precious friend Anthony?” replied Lambourne; “for I swear by the pillow of the Seven Sleepers I will not be slothful in amending it.”

“Why, you gave a sample of it even now,” said Foster. “Your speech twangs too much of the old stamp, and you garnish it ever and anon with singular oaths, that savour of Papistrie. Besides, your exterior man is altogether too deboshed and irregular to become one of his lordship’s followers, since he has a reputation to keep up in the eye of the world. You must somewhat reform your dress, upon a more grave and composed fashion; wear your cloak on both shoulders, and your falling band unrumpled and well starched. You must enlarge the brim of your beaver, and diminish the superfluity of your trunk-hose; go to church, or, which will be better, to meeting, at least once a month; protest only upon your faith and conscience; lay aside your swashing look, and never touch the hilt of your sword but when you would draw the carnal weapon in good earnest.”

“By this light, Anthony, thou art mad,” answered Lambourne, “and hast described rather the gentleman-usher to a puritan’s wife, than the follower of an ambitious courtier! Yes, such a thing as thou wouldst make of me should wear a book at his girdle instead of a poniard, and might just be suspected of manhood enough to squire a proud dame-citizen to the lecture at Saint Antonlin’s, and

quarrel in her cause with any flat-capped threadmaker that would take the wall of her. He must ruffle it in another sort that would walk to court in a nobleman's train."

"Oh, content you, sir," replied Foster, "there is a change since you knew the English world; and there are those who can hold their way through the boldest courses, and the most secret, and yet never a swaggering word, or an oath, or a profane word in their conversation."

"That is to say," replied Lambourne, "they are in a trading copartnery, to do the devil's business without mentioning his name in the firm? Well, I will do my best to counterfeit, rather than lose ground in this new world, since thou sayest it is grown so precise. But, Anthony, what is the name of this nobleman, in whose service I am to turn hypocrite?"

"Aha! Master Michael, are you there with your bears?" said Foster, with a grim smile; "and is this the knowledge you pretend of my concernments? How know you now there is such a person IN RERUM NATURA, and that I have not been putting a jape upon you all this time?"

"Thou put a jape on me, thou sodden-brained gull?" answered Lambourne, nothing daunted. "Why, dark and muddy as thou think'st thyself, I would engage in a day's space to see as clear through thee and thy concernments, as thou callest them, as through the filthy horn of an old stable lantern."

At this moment their conversation was interrupted by a scream from the next apartment.

"By the holy Cross of Abingdon," exclaimed Anthony Foster, forgetting his Protestantism in his alarm, "I am a ruined man!"

So saying, he rushed into the apartment whence the scream issued, followed by Michael Lambourne. But to account for the sounds which interrupted their conversation, it is necessary to recede a little way in our narrative.

It has been already observed, that when Lambourne accompanied Foster into the library, they left Tressilian alone in the ancient parlour. His dark eye followed them forth of the apartment with a glance of contempt, a part of which his mind instantly transferred to himself, for having stooped to be even for a moment their familiar companion. "These are the associates, Amy" – it was thus he communed with himself – "to which thy cruel levity – thine unthinking and most unmerited falsehood, has condemned him of whom his friends once hoped far other things, and who now scorns himself, as he will be scorned by others, for the baseness he stoops to for the love of thee! But I will not leave the pursuit of thee, once the object of my purest and most devoted affection, though to me thou canst henceforth be nothing but a thing to weep over. I will save thee from thy betrayer, and from thyself; I will restore thee to thy parent – to thy God. I cannot bid the bright star again sparkle in the sphere it has shot from, but –"

A slight noise in the apartment interrupted his reverie. He looked round, and in the beautiful and richly-attired female who entered at that instant by a side-door he recognized the object of his search. The first impulse arising from this discovery urged him to conceal his face with the collar of his cloak, until he should find a favourable moment of making himself known. But his purpose was disconcerted by the young lady (she was not above eighteen years old), who ran joyfully towards him, and, pulling him by the cloak, said playfully, "Nay, my sweet friend, after I have waited for you so long, you come not to my bower to play the masquer. You are arraigned of treason to true love and fond affection, and you must stand up at the bar and answer it with face uncovered – how say you, guilty or not?"

"Alas, Amy!" said Tressilian, in a low and melancholy tone, as he suffered her to draw the mantle from his face. The sound of his voice, and still more the unexpected sight of his face, changed in an instant the lady's playful mood. She staggered back, turned as pale as death, and put her hands before her face. Tressilian was himself for a moment much overcome, but seeming suddenly to remember the necessity of using an opportunity which might not again occur, he said in a low tone, "Amy, fear me not."

“Why should I fear you?” said the lady, withdrawing her hands from her beautiful face, which was now covered with crimson, – “Why should I fear you, Master Tressilian? – or wherefore have you intruded yourself into my dwelling, uninvited, sir, and unwished for?”

“Your dwelling, Amy!” said Tressilian. “Alas! is a prison your dwelling? – a prison guarded by one of the most sordid of men, but not a greater wretch than his employer!”

“This house is mine,” said Amy – “mine while I choose to inhabit it. If it is my pleasure to live in seclusion, who shall gainsay me?”

“Your father, maiden,” answered Tressilian, “your broken-hearted father, who dispatched me in quest of you with that authority which he cannot exert in person. Here is his letter, written while he blessed his pain of body which somewhat stunned the agony of his mind.”

“The pain! Is my father then ill?” said the lady.

“So ill,” answered Tressilian, “that even your utmost haste may not restore him to health; but all shall be instantly prepared for your departure, the instant you yourself will give consent.”

“Tressilian,” answered the lady, “I cannot, I must not, I dare not leave this place. Go back to my father – tell him I will obtain leave to see him within twelve hours from hence. Go back, Tressilian – tell him I am well, I am happy – happy could I think he was so; tell him not to fear that I will come, and in such a manner that all the grief Amy has given him shall be forgotten – the poor Amy is now greater than she dare name. Go, good Tressilian – I have injured thee too, but believe me I have power to heal the wounds I have caused. I robbed you of a childish heart, which was not worthy of you, and I can repay the loss with honours and advancement.”

“Do you say this to me, Amy? – do you offer me pageants of idle ambition, for the quiet peace you have robbed me of! – But be it so I came not to upbraid, but to serve and to free you. You cannot disguise it from me – you are a prisoner. Otherwise your kind heart – for it was once a kind heart – would have been already at your father’s bedside. – Come, poor, deceived, unhappy maiden! – all shall be forgot – all shall be forgiven. Fear not my importunity for what regarded our contract – it was a dream, and I have awaked. But come – your father yet lives – come, and one word of affection, one tear of penitence, will efface the memory of all that has passed.”

“Have I not already said, Tressilian,” replied she, “that I will surely come to my father, and that without further delay than is necessary to discharge other and equally binding duties? – Go, carry him the news; I come as sure as there is light in heaven – that is, when I obtain permission.”

“Permission! – permission to visit your father on his sick-bed, perhaps on his death-bed!” repeated Tressilian, impatiently; “and permission from whom? From the villain, who, under disguise of friendship, abused every duty of hospitality, and stole thee from thy father’s roof!”

“Do him no slander, Tressilian! He whom thou speakest of wears a sword as sharp as thine – sharper, vain man; for the best deeds thou hast ever done in peace or war were as unworthy to be named with his, as thy obscure rank to match itself with the sphere he moves in. – Leave me! Go, do mine errand to my father; and when he next sends to me, let him choose a more welcome messenger.”

“Amy,” replied Tressilian calmly, “thou canst not move me by thy reproaches. Tell me one thing, that I may bear at least one ray of comfort to my aged friend: – this rank of his which thou dost boast – dost thou share it with him, Amy? – does he claim a husband’s right to control thy motions?”

“Stop thy base, unmannered tongue!” said the lady; “to no question that derogates from my honour do I deign an answer.”

“You have said enough in refusing to reply,” answered Tressilian; “and mark me, unhappy as thou art, I am armed with thy father’s full authority to command thy obedience, and I will save thee from the slavery of sin and of sorrow, even despite of thyself, Amy.”

“Menace no violence here!” exclaimed the lady, drawing back from him, and alarmed at the determination expressed in his look and manner; “threaten me not, Tressilian, for I have means to repel force.”

“But not, I trust, the wish to use them in so evil a cause?” said Tressilian. “With thy will – thine uninfluenced, free, and natural will, Amy, thou canst not choose this state of slavery and dishonour. Thou hast been bound by some spell – entrapped by some deceit – art now detained by some compelled vow. But thus I break the charm – Amy, in the name of thine excellent, thy broken-hearted father, I command thee to follow me!”

As he spoke he advanced and extended his arm, as with the purpose of laying hold upon her. But she shrunk back from his grasp, and uttered the scream which, as we before noticed, brought into the apartment Lambourne and Foster.

The latter exclaimed, as soon as he entered, “Fire and fagot! what have we here?” Then addressing the lady, in a tone betwixt entreaty and command, he added, “Uds precious! madam, what make you here out of bounds? Retire – retire – there is life and death in this matter. – And you, friend, whoever you may be, leave this house – out with you, before my dagger’s hilt and your costard become acquainted. – Draw, Mike, and rid us of the knave!”

“Not I, on my soul,” replied Lambourne; “he came hither in my company, and he is safe from me by cutter’s law, at least till we meet again. – But hark ye, my Cornish comrade, you have brought a Cornish flaw of wind with you hither, a hurricanoe as they call it in the Indies. Make yourself scarce – depart – vanish – or we’ll have you summoned before the Mayor of Halgaver, and that before Dudman and Ramhead meet.” [Two headlands on the Cornish coast. The expressions are proverbial.]

“Away, base groom!” said Tressilian. – “And you, madam, fare you well – what life lingers in your father’s bosom will leave him at the news I have to tell.”

He departed, the lady saying faintly as he left the room, “Tressilian, be not rash – say no scandal of me.”

“Here is proper gear,” said Foster. “I pray you go to your chamber, my lady, and let us consider how this is to be answered – nay, tarry not.”

“I move not at your command, sir,” answered the lady.

“Nay, but you must, fair lady,” replied Foster; “excuse my freedom, but, by blood and nails, this is no time to strain courtesies – you MUST go to your chamber. – Mike, follow that meddling coxcomb, and, as you desire to thrive, see him safely clear of the premises, while I bring this headstrong lady to reason. Draw thy tool, man, and after him.”

“I’ll follow him,” said Michael Lambourne, “and see him fairly out of Flanders; but for hurting a man I have drunk my morning’s draught withal, ‘tis clean against my conscience.” So saying, he left the apartment.

Tressilian, meanwhile, with hasty steps, pursued the first path which promised to conduct him through the wild and overgrown park in which the mansion of Foster was situated. Haste and distress of mind led his steps astray, and instead of taking the avenue which led towards the village, he chose another, which, after he had pursued it for some time with a hasty and reckless step, conducted him to the other side of the demesne, where a postern door opened through the wall, and led into the open country.

Tressilian paused an instant. It was indifferent to him by what road he left a spot now so odious to his recollections; but it was probable that the postern door was locked, and his retreat by that pass rendered impossible.

“I must make the attempt, however,” he said to himself; “the only means of reclaiming this lost – this miserable – this still most lovely and most unhappy girl, must rest in her father’s appeal to the broken laws of his country. I must haste to apprise him of this heartrending intelligence.”

As Tressilian, thus conversing with himself, approached to try some means of opening the door, or climbing over it, he perceived there was a key put into the lock from the outside. It turned round, the bolt revolved, and a cavalier, who entered, muffled in his riding-cloak, and wearing a slouched hat with a drooping feather, stood at once within four yards of him who was desirous of going out. They exclaimed at once, in tones of resentment and surprise, the one “Varney!” the other “Tressilian!”

“What make you here?” was the stern question put by the stranger to Tressilian, when the moment of surprise was past – “what make you here, where your presence is neither expected nor desired?”

“Nay, Varney,” replied Tressilian, “what make you here? Are you come to triumph over the innocence you have destroyed, as the vulture or carrion-crow comes to batten on the lamb whose eyes it has first plucked out? Or are you come to encounter the merited vengeance of an honest man? Draw, dog, and defend thyself!”

Tressilian drew his sword as he spoke, but Varney only laid his hand on the hilt of his own, as he replied, “Thou art mad, Tressilian. I own appearances are against me; but by every oath a priest can make or a man can swear, Mistress Amy Robsart hath had no injury from me. And in truth I were somewhat loath to hurt you in this cause – thou knowest I can fight.”

“I have heard thee say so, Varney,” replied Tressilian; “but now, methinks, I would fain have some better evidence than thine own word.”

“That shall not be lacking, if blade and hilt be but true to me,” answered Varney; and drawing his sword with the right hand, he threw his cloak around his left, and attacked Tressilian with a vigour which, for a moment, seemed to give him the advantage of the combat. But this advantage lasted not long. Tressilian added to a spirit determined on revenge a hand and eye admirably well adapted to the use of the rapier; so that Varney, finding himself hard pressed in his turn, endeavoured to avail himself of his superior strength by closing with his adversary. For this purpose, he hazarded the receiving one of Tressilian’s passes in his cloak, wrapped as it was around his arm, and ere his adversary could, extricate his rapier thus entangled, he closed with him, shortening his own sword at the same time, with the purpose of dispatching him. But Tressilian was on his guard, and unsheathing his poniard, parried with the blade of that weapon the home-thrust which would otherwise have finished the combat, and, in the struggle which followed, displayed so much address, as might have confirmed, the opinion that he drew his origin from Cornwall whose natives are such masters in the art of wrestling, as, were the games of antiquity revived, might enable them to challenge all Europe to the ring. Varney, in his ill-advised attempt, received a fall so sudden and violent that his sword flew several paces from his hand and ere he could recover his feet, that of his antagonist was; pointed to his throat.

“Give me the instant means of relieving the victim of thy treachery,” said Tressilian, “or take the last look of your Creator’s blessed sun!”

And while Varney, too confused or too sullen to reply, made a sudden effort to arise, his adversary drew back his arm, and would have executed his threat, but that the blow was arrested by the grasp of Michael Lambourne, who, directed by the clashing of swords had come up just in time to save the life of Varney.

“Come, come, comrade;” said Lambourne, “here is enough done and more than enough; put up your fox and let us be jogging. The Black Bear growls for us.”

“Off, abject!” said Tressilian, striking himself free of Lambourne’s grasp; “darest thou come betwixt me and mine enemy?”

“Abject! abject!” repeated Lambourne; “that shall be answered with cold steel whenever a bowl of sack has washed out memory of the morning’s draught that we had together. In the meanwhile, do you see, shog – tramp – begone – we are two to one.”

He spoke truth, for Varney had taken the opportunity to regain his weapon, and Tressilian perceived it was madness to press the quarrel further against such odds. He took his purse from his side, and taking out two gold nobles, flung them to Lambourne. “There, caitiff, is thy morning wage; thou shalt not say thou hast been my guide unhired. – Varney, farewell! we shall meet where there are none to come betwixt us.” So saying, he turned round and departed through the postern door.

Varney seemed to want the inclination, or perhaps the power (for his fall had been a severe one), to follow his retreating enemy. But he glared darkly as he disappeared, and then addressed Lambourne. "Art thou a comrade of Foster's, good fellow?"

"Sworn friends, as the haft is to the knife," replied Michael Lambourne.

"Here is a broad piece for thee. Follow yonder fellow, and see where he takes earth, and bring me word up to the mansion-house here. Cautious and silent, thou knave, as thou valuest thy throat."

"Enough said," replied Lambourne; "I can draw on a scent as well as a sleuth-hound."

"Begone, then," said Varney, sheathing his rapier; and, turning his back on Michael Lambourne, he walked slowly towards the house. Lambourne stopped but an instant to gather the nobles which his late companion had flung towards him so unceremoniously, and muttered to himself, while he put them upon his purse along with the gratuity of Varney, "I spoke to yonder gulls of Eldorado. By Saint Anthony, there is no Eldorado for men of our stamp equal to bonny Old England! It rains nobles, by Heaven – they lie on the grass as thick as dewdrops – you may have them for gathering. And if I have not my share of such glittering dewdrops, may my sword melt like an icicle!"

## CHAPTER V

He was a man  
Versed in the world as pilot in his compass.  
The needle pointed ever to that interest  
Which was his loadstar, and he spread his sails  
With vantage to the gale of others' passion.

– *THE DECEIVER, A TRAGEDY.*

Antony Foster was still engaged in debate with his fair guest, who treated with scorn every entreaty and request that she would retire to her own apartment, when a whistle was heard at the entrance-door of the mansion.

“We are fairly sped now,” said Foster; “yonder is thy lord’s signal, and what to say about the disorder which has happened in this household, by my conscience, I know not. Some evil fortune dogs the heels of that unchanged rogue Lambourne, and he has ‘scaped the gallows against every chance, to come back and be the ruin of me!”

“Peace, sir,” said the lady, “and undo the gate to your master. – My lord! my dear lord!” she then exclaimed, hastening to the entrance of the apartment; then added, with a voice expressive of disappointment, “Pooh! it is but Richard Varney.”

“Ay, madam,” said Varney, entering and saluting the lady with a respectful obeisance, which she returned with a careless mixture of negligence and of displeasure, “it is but Richard Varney; but even the first grey cloud should be acceptable, when it lightens in the east, because it announces the approach of the blessed sun.”

“How! comes my lord hither to-night?” said the lady, in joyful yet startled agitation; and Anthony Foster caught up the word, and echoed the question. Varney replied to the lady, that his lord purposed to attend her; and would have proceeded with some compliment, when, running to the door of the parlour, she called aloud, “Janet – Janet! come to my tiring-room instantly.” Then returning to Varney, she asked if her lord sent any further commendations to her.

“This letter, honoured madam,” said he, taking from his bosom a small parcel wrapped in scarlet silk, “and with it a token to the Queen of his Affections.” With eager speed the lady hastened to undo the silken string which surrounded the little packet, and failing to unloose readily the knot with which it was secured, she again called loudly on Janet, “Bring me a knife – scissors – aught that may undo this envious knot!”

“May not my poor poniard serve, honoured madam?” said Varney, presenting a small dagger of exquisite workmanship, which hung in his Turkey-leather sword-belt.

“No, sir,” replied the lady, rejecting the instrument which he offered – “steel poniard shall cut no true-love knot of mine.”

“It has cut many, however,” said Anthony Foster, half aside, and looking at Varney. By this time the knot was disentangled without any other help than the neat and nimble fingers of Janet, a simply-attired pretty maiden, the daughter of Anthony Foster, who came running at the repeated call of her mistress. A necklace of orient pearl, the companion of a perfumed billet, was now hastily produced from the packet. The lady gave the one, after a slight glance, to the charge of her attendant, while she read, or rather devoured, the contents of the other.

“Surely, lady,” said Janet, gazing with admiration at the neck-string of pearls, “the daughters of Tyre wore no fairer neck-jewels than these. And then the posy, ‘For a neck that is fairer’ – each pearl is worth a freehold.”

“Each word in this dear paper is worth the whole string, my girl. But come to my tiring-room, girl; we must be brave, my lord comes hither to-night. – He bids me grace you, Master Varney, and to me his wish is a law. I bid you to a collation in my bower this afternoon; and you, too, Master Foster. Give orders that all is fitting, and that suitable preparations be made for my lord’s reception to-night.” With these words she left the apartment.

“She takes state on her already,” said Varney, “and distributes the favour of her presence, as if she were already the partner of his dignity. Well, it is wise to practise beforehand the part which fortune prepares us to play – the young eagle must gaze at the sun ere he soars on strong wing to meet it.”

“If holding her head aloft,” said Foster, “will keep her eyes from dazzling, I warrant you the dame will not stoop her crest. She will presently soar beyond reach of my whistle, Master Varney. I promise you, she holds me already in slight regard.”

“It is thine own fault, thou sullen, uninventive companion,” answered Varney, “who knowest no mode of control save downright brute force. Canst thou not make home pleasant to her, with music and toys? Canst thou not make the out-of-doors frightful to her, with tales of goblins? Thou livest here by the churchyard, and hast not even wit enough to raise a ghost, to scare thy females into good discipline.”

“Speak not thus, Master Varney,” said Foster; “the living I fear not, but I trifle not nor toy with my dead neighbours of the churchyard. I promise you, it requires a good heart to live so near it. Worthy Master Holdforth, the afternoon’s lecturer of Saint Antonlin’s, had a sore fright there the last time he came to visit me.”

“Hold thy superstitious tongue,” answered Varney; “and while thou talkest of visiting, answer me, thou paltering knave, how came Tressilian to be at the postern door?”

“Tressilian!” answered Foster, “what know I of Tressilian? I never heard his name.”

“Why, villain, it was the very Cornish chough to whom old Sir Hugh Robsart destined his pretty Amy; and hither the hot-brained fool has come to look after his fair runaway. There must be some order taken with him, for he thinks he hath wrong, and is not the mean hind that will sit down with it. Luckily he knows nought of my lord, but thinks he has only me to deal with. But how, in the fiend’s name, came he hither?”

“Why, with Mike Lambourne, an you must know,” answered Foster.

“And who is Mike Lambourne?” demanded Varney. “By Heaven! thou wert best set up a bush over thy door, and invite every stroller who passes by to see what thou shouldst keep secret even from the sun and air.”

“Ay! ay! this is a courtlike requital of my service to you, Master Richard Varney,” replied Foster. “Didst thou not charge me to seek out for thee a fellow who had a good sword and an unscrupulous conscience? and was I not busying myself to find a fit man – for, thank Heaven, my acquaintance lies not amongst such companions – when, as Heaven would have it, this tall fellow, who is in all his qualities the very flashing knave thou didst wish, came hither to fix acquaintance upon me in the plenitude of his impudence; and I admitted his claim, thinking to do you a pleasure. And now see what thanks I get for disgracing myself by converse with him!”

“And did he,” said Varney, “being such a fellow as thyself, only lacking, I suppose, thy present humour of hypocrisy, which lies as thin over thy hard, ruffianly heart as gold lacquer upon rusty iron – did he, I say, bring the saintly, sighing Tressilian in his train?”

“They came together, by Heaven!” said Foster; “and Tressilian – to speak Heaven’s truth – obtained a moment’s interview with our pretty moppet, while I was talking apart with Lambourne.”

“Improvident villain! we are both undone,” said Varney. “She has of late been casting many a backward look to her father’s halls, whenever her lordly lover leaves her alone. Should this preaching fool whistle her back to her old perch, we were but lost men.”

“No fear of that, my master,” replied Anthony Foster; “she is in no mood to stoop to his lure, for she yelled out on seeing him as if an adder had stung her.”

“That is good. Canst thou not get from thy daughter an inkling of what passed between them, good Foster?”

“I tell you plain, Master Varney,” said Foster, “my daughter shall not enter our purposes or walk in our paths. They may suit me well enough, who know how to repent of my misdoings; but I will not have my child’s soul committed to peril either for your pleasure or my lord’s. I may walk among snares and pitfalls myself, because I have discretion, but I will not trust the poor lamb among them.”

“Why, thou suspicious fool, I were as averse as thou art that thy baby-faced girl should enter into my plans, or walk to hell at her father’s elbow. But indirectly thou mightst gain some intelligence of her?”

“And so I did, Master Varney,” answered Foster; “and she said her lady called out upon the sickness of her father.”

“Good!” replied Varney; “that is a hint worth catching, and I will work upon it. But the country must be rid of this Tressilian. I would have cumbered no man about the matter, for I hate him like strong poison – his presence is hemlock to me – and this day I had been rid of him, but that my foot slipped, when, to speak truth, had not thy comrade yonder come to my aid, and held his hand, I should have known by this time whether you and I have been treading the path to heaven or hell.”

“And you can speak thus of such a risk!” said Foster. “You keep a stout heart, Master Varney. For me, if I did not hope to live many years, and to have time for the great work of repentance, I would not go forward with you.”

“Oh! thou shalt live as long as Methuselah,” said Varney, “and amass as much wealth as Solomon; and thou shalt repent so devoutly, that thy repentance shall be more famous than thy villainy – and that is a bold word. But for all this, Tressilian must be looked after. Thy ruffian yonder is gone to dog him. It concerns our fortunes, Anthony.”

“Ay, ay,” said Foster sullenly, “this it is to be leagued with one who knows not even so much of Scripture, as that the labourer is worthy of his hire. I must, as usual, take all the trouble and risk.”

“Risk! and what is the mighty risk, I pray you?” answered Varney. “This fellow will come prowling again about your demesne or into your house, and if you take him for a house-breaker or a park-breaker, is it not most natural you should welcome him with cold steel or hot lead? Even a mastiff will pull down those who come near his kennel; and who shall blame him?”

“Ay, I have a mastiff’s work and a mastiff’s wage among you,” said Foster. “Here have you, Master Varney, secured a good freehold estate out of this old superstitious foundation; and I have but a poor lease of this mansion under you, voidable at your honour’s pleasure.”

“Ay, and thou wouldst fain convert thy leasehold into a copyhold – the thing may chance to happen, Anthony Foster, if thou dost good service for it. But softly, good Anthony – it is not the lending a room or two of this old house for keeping my lord’s pretty paroquet – nay, it is not the shutting thy doors and windows to keep her from flying off that may deserve it. Remember, the manor and tithes are rated at the clear annual value of seventy-nine pounds five shillings and fivepence halfpenny, besides the value of the wood. Come, come, thou must be conscionable; great and secret service may deserve both this and a better thing. And now let thy knave come and pluck off my boots. Get us some dinner, and a cup of thy best wine. I must visit this mavis, brave in apparel, unruffled in aspect, and gay in temper.”

They parted and at the hour of noon, which was then that of dinner, they again met at their meal, Varney gaily dressed like a courtier of the time, and even Anthony Foster improved in appearance, as far as dress could amend an exterior so unfavourable.

This alteration did not escape Varney. Then the meal was finished, the cloth removed, and they were left to their private discourse – “Thou art gay as a goldfinch, Anthony,” said Varney, looking at his host; “methinks, thou wilt whistle a jig anon. But I crave your pardon, that would secure your

ejection from the congregation of the zealous butchers, the pure-hearted weavers, and the sanctified bakers of Abingdon, who let their ovens cool while their brains get heated.”

“To answer you in the spirit, Master Varney,” said Foster, “were – excuse the parable – to fling sacred and precious things before swine. So I will speak to thee in the language of the world, which he who is king of the world, hath taught thee, to understand, and to profit by in no common measure.”

“Say what thou wilt, honest Tony,” replied Varney; “for be it according to thine absurd faith, or according to thy most villainous practice, it cannot choose but be rare matter to qualify this cup of Alicant. Thy conversation is relishing and poignant, and beats caviare, dried neat’s-tongue, and all other provocatives that give savour to good liquor.”

“Well, then, tell me,” said Anthony Foster, “is not our good lord and master’s turn better served, and his antechamber more suitably filled, with decent, God-fearing men, who will work his will and their own profit quietly, and without worldly scandal, than that he should be manned, and attended, and followed by such open debauchers and ruffianly swordsmen as Tidesly, Killigrew, this fellow Lambourne, whom you have put me to seek out for you, and other such, who bear the gallows in their face and murder in their right hand – who are a terror to peaceable men, and a scandal to my lord’s service?”

“Oh, content you, good Master Anthony Foster,” answered Varney; “he that flies at all manner of game must keep all kinds of hawks, both short and long-winged. The course my lord holds is no easy one, and he must stand provided at all points with trusty retainers to meet each sort of service. He must have his gay courtier, like myself, to ruffle it in the presence-chamber, and to lay hand on hilt when any speaks in disparagement of my lord’s honour – ”

“Ay,” said Foster, “and to whisper a word for him into a fair lady’s ear, when he may not approach her himself.”

“Then,” said Varney, going on without appearing to notice the interruption, “he must have his lawyers – deep, subtle pioneers – to draw his contracts, his pre-contracts, and his post-contracts, and to find the way to make the most of grants of church-lands, and commons, and licenses for monopoly. And he must have physicians who can spice a cup or a caudle. And he must have his cabalists, like Dec and Allan, for conjuring up the devil. And he must have ruffling swordsmen, who would fight the devil when he is raised and at the wildest. And above all, without prejudice to others, he must have such godly, innocent, puritanic souls as thou, honest Anthony, who defy Satan, and do his work at the same time.”

“You would not say, Master Varney,” said Foster, “that our good lord and master, whom I hold to be fulfilled in all nobleness, would use such base and sinful means to rise, as thy speech points at?”

“Tush, man,” said Varney, “never look at me with so sad a brow. You trap me not – nor am I in your power, as your weak brain may imagine, because I name to you freely the engines, the springs, the screws, the tackle, and braces, by which great men rise in stirring times. Sayest thou our good lord is fulfilled of all nobleness? Amen, and so be it – he has the more need to have those about him who are unscrupulous in his service, and who, because they know that his fall will overwhelm and crush them, must wager both blood and brain, soul and body, in order to keep him aloft; and this I tell thee, because I care not who knows it.”

“You speak truth, Master Varney,” said Anthony Foster. “He that is head of a party is but a boat on a wave, that raises not itself, but is moved upward by the billow which it floats upon.”

“Thou art metaphorical, honest Anthony,” replied Varney; “that velvet doublet hath made an oracle of thee. We will have thee to Oxford to take the degrees in the arts. And, in the meantime, hast thou arranged all the matters which were sent from London, and put the western chambers into such fashion as may answer my lord’s humour?”

“They may serve a king on his bridal-day,” said Anthony; “and I promise you that Dame Amy sits in them yonder as proud and gay as if she were the Queen of Sheba.”

“’Tis the better, good Anthony,” answered Varney; “we must found our future fortunes on her good liking.”

“We build on sand then,” said Anthony Foster; “for supposing that she sails away to court in all her lord’s dignity and authority, how is she to look back upon me, who am her jailor as it were, to detain her here against her will, keeping her a caterpillar on an old wall, when she would fain be a painted butterfly in a court garden?”

“Fear not her displeasure, man,” said Varney. “I will show her all thou hast done in this matter was good service, both to my lord and her; and when she chips the egg-shell and walks alone, she shall own we have hatched her greatness.”

“Look to yourself, Master Varney,” said Foster, “you may misreckon foully in this matter. She gave you but a frosty reception this morning, and, I think, looks on you, as well as me, with an evil eye.”

“You mistake her, Foster – you mistake her utterly. To me she is bound by all the ties which can secure her to one who has been the means of gratifying both her love and ambition. Who was it that took the obscure Amy Robsart, the daughter of an impoverished and dotard knight – the destined bride of a moonstruck, moping enthusiast, like Edmund Tressilian, from her lowly fates, and held out to her in prospect the brightest fortune in England, or perchance in Europe? Why, man, it was I – as I have often told thee – that found opportunity for their secret meetings. It was I who watched the wood while he beat for the deer. It was I who, to this day, am blamed by her family as the companion of her flight; and were I in their neighbourhood, would be fain to wear a shirt of better stuff than Holland linen, lest my ribs should be acquainted with Spanish steel. Who carried their letters? – I. Who amused the old knight and Tressilian? – I. Who planned her escape? – it was I. It was I, in short, Dick Varney, who pulled this pretty little daisy from its lowly nook, and placed it in the proudest bonnet in Britain.”

“Ay, Master Varney,” said Foster; “but it may be she thinks that had the matter remained with you, the flower had been stuck so slightly into the cap, that the first breath of a changeable breeze of passion had blown the poor daisy to the common.”

“She should consider,” said Varney, smiling, “the true faith I owed my lord and master prevented me at first from counselling marriage; and yet I did counsel marriage when I saw she would not be satisfied without the – the sacrament, or the ceremony – which callest thou it, Anthony?”

“Still she has you at feud on another score,” said Foster; “and I tell it you that you may look to yourself in time. She would not hide her splendour in this dark lantern of an old monastic house, but would fain shine a countess amongst countesses.”

“Very natural, very right,” answered Varney; “but what have I to do with that? – she may shine through horn or through crystal at my lord’s pleasure, I have nought to say against it.”

“She deems that you have an oar upon that side of the boat, Master Varney,” replied Foster, “and that you can pull it or no, at your good pleasure. In a word, she ascribes the secrecy and obscurity in which she is kept to your secret counsel to my lord, and to my strict agency; and so she loves us both as a sentenced man loves his judge and his jailor.”

“She must love us better ere she leave this place, Anthony,” answered Varney. “If I have counselled for weighty reasons that she remain here for a season, I can also advise her being brought forth in the full blow of her dignity. But I were mad to do so, holding so near a place to my lord’s person, were she mine enemy. Bear this truth in upon her as occasion offers, Anthony, and let me alone for extolling you in her ear, and exalting you in her opinion – KA ME, KA THEE – it is a proverb all over the world. The lady must know her friends, and be made to judge of the power they have of being her enemies; meanwhile, watch her strictly, but with all the outward observance that thy rough nature will permit. ’Tis an excellent thing that sullen look and bull-dog humour of thine; thou shouldst thank God for it, and so should my lord, for when there is aught harsh or hard-natured to be done, thou dost it as if it flowed from thine own natural doggedness, and not from orders, and

so my lord escapes the scandal. – But, hark – some one knocks at the gate. Look out at the window – let no one enter – this were an ill night to be interrupted.”

“It is he whom we spoke of before dinner,” said Foster, as he looked through the casement; “it is Michael Lambourne.”

“Oh, admit him, by all means,” said the courtier; “he comes to give some account of his guest; it imports us much to know the movements of Edmund Tressilian. – Admit him, I say, but bring him not hither; I will come to you presently in the Abbot’s library.”

Foster left the room, and the courtier, who remained behind, paced the parlour more than once in deep thought, his arms folded on his bosom, until at length he gave vent to his meditations in broken words, which we have somewhat enlarged and connected, that his soliloquy may be intelligible to the reader.

“‘Tis true,” he said, suddenly stopping, and resting his right hand on the table at which they had been sitting, “this base churl hath fathomed the very depth of my fear, and I have been unable to disguise it from him. She loves me not – I would it were as true that I loved not her! Idiot that I was, to move her in my own behalf, when wisdom bade me be a true broker to my lord! And this fatal error has placed me more at her discretion than a wise man would willingly be at that of the best piece of painted Eve’s flesh of them all. Since the hour that my policy made so perilous a slip, I cannot look at her without fear, and hate, and fondness, so strangely mingled, that I know not whether, were it at my choice, I would rather possess or ruin her. But she must not leave this retreat until I am assured on what terms we are to stand. My lord’s interest – and so far it is mine own, for if he sinks I fall in his train – demands concealment of this obscure marriage; and besides, I will not lend her my arm to climb to her chair of state, that she may set her foot on my neck when she is fairly seated. I must work an interest in her, either through love or through fear; and who knows but I may yet reap the sweetest and best revenge for her former scorn? – that were indeed a masterpiece of courtlike art! Let me but once be her counsel-keeper – let her confide to me a secret, did it but concern the robbery of a linnet’s nest, and, fair Countess, thou art mine own!” He again paced the room in silence, stopped, filled and drank a cup of wine, as if to compose the agitation of his mind, and muttering, “Now for a close heart and an open and unruffled brow,” he left the apartment.

## CHAPTER VI

The dews of summer night did fall,  
The moon, sweet regent of the sky,  
Silver'd the walls of Cumnor Hall,  
And many an oak that grew thereby.

– *MICKLE.*

[This verse is the commencement of the ballad already quoted, as what suggested the novel.]

Four apartments; which, occupied the western side of the old quadrangle at Cumnor Place, had been fitted up with extraordinary splendour. This had been the work of several days prior to that on which our story opened. Workmen sent from London, and not permitted to leave the premises until the work was finished, had converted the apartments in that side of the building from the dilapidated appearance of a dissolved monastic house into the semblance of a royal palace. A mystery was observed in all these arrangements: the workmen came thither and returned by night, and all measures were taken to prevent the prying curiosity of the villagers from observing or speculating upon the changes which were taking place in the mansion of their once indigent but now wealthy neighbour, Anthony Foster. Accordingly, the secrecy desired was so far preserved, that nothing got abroad but vague and uncertain reports, which were received and repeated, but without much credit being attached to them.

On the evening of which we treat, the new and highly-decorated suite of rooms were, for the first time, illuminated, and that with a brilliancy which might have been visible half-a-dozen miles off, had not oaken shutters, carefully secured with bolt and padlock, and mantled with long curtains of silk and of velvet, deeply fringed with gold, prevented the slightest gleam of radiance from being seen without.

The principal apartments, as we have seen, were four in number, each opening into the other. Access was given to them by a large scale staircase, as they were then called, of unusual length and height, which had its landing-place at the door of an antechamber, shaped somewhat like a gallery. This apartment the abbot had used as an occasional council-room, but it was now beautifully wainscoted with dark, foreign wood of a brown colour, and bearing a high polish, said to have been brought from the Western Indies, and to have been wrought in London with infinite difficulty and much damage to the tools of the workmen. The dark colour of this finishing was relieved by the number of lights in silver sconces which hung against the walls, and by six large and richly-framed pictures, by the first masters of the age. A massy oaken table, placed at the lower end of the apartment, served to accommodate such as chose to play at the then fashionable game of shovel-board; and there was at the other end an elevated gallery for the musicians or minstrels, who might be summoned to increase the festivity of the evening.

From this antechamber opened a banqueting-room of moderate size, but brilliant enough to dazzle the eyes of the spectator with the richness of its furniture. The walls, lately so bare and ghastly, were now clothed with hangings of sky-blue velvet and silver; the chairs were of ebony, richly carved, with cushions corresponding to the hangings; and the place of the silver sconces which enlightened the ante-chamber was supplied by a huge chandelier of the same precious metal. The floor was covered with a Spanish foot-cloth, or carpet, on which flowers and fruits were represented in such glowing and natural colours, that you hesitated to place the foot on such exquisite workmanship. The table, of old English oak, stood ready covered with the finest linen; and a large portable court-cupboard was placed

with the leaves of its embossed folding-doors displayed, showing the shelves within, decorated with a full display of plate and porcelain. In the midst of the table stood a salt-cellar of Italian workmanship – a beautiful and splendid piece of plate about two feet high, moulded into a representation of the giant Briareus, whose hundred hands of silver presented to the guests various sorts of spices, or condiments, to season their food withal.

The third apartment was called the withdrawing-room. It was hung with the finest tapestry, representing the fall of Phaeton; for the looms of Flanders were now much occupied on classical subjects. The principal seat of this apartment was a chair of state, raised a step or two from the floor, and large enough to contain two persons. It was surmounted by a canopy, which, as well as the cushions, side-curtains, and the very footcloth, was composed of crimson velvet, embroidered with seed-pearl. On the top of the canopy were two coronets, resembling those of an earl and countess. Stools covered with velvet, and some cushions disposed in the Moorish fashion, and ornamented with Arabesque needle-work, supplied the place of chairs in this apartment, which contained musical instruments, embroidery frames, and other articles for ladies' pastime. Besides lesser lights, the withdrawing-room was illuminated by four tall torches of virgin wax, each of which was placed in the grasp of a statue, representing an armed Moor, who held in his left arm a round buckler of silver, highly polished, interposed betwixt his breast and the light, which was thus brilliantly reflected as from a crystal mirror.

The sleeping chamber belonging to this splendid suite of apartments was decorated in a taste less showy, but not less rich, than had been displayed in the others. Two silver lamps, fed with perfumed oil, diffused at once a delicious odour and a trembling twilight-seeming shimmer through the quiet apartment. It was carpeted so thick that the heaviest step could not have been heard, and the bed, richly heaped with down, was spread with an ample coverlet of silk and gold; from under which peeped forth cambric sheets and blankets as white as the lambs which yielded the fleece that made them. The curtains were of blue velvet, lined with crimson silk, deeply festooned with gold, and embroidered with the loves of Cupid and Psyche. On the toilet was a beautiful Venetian mirror, in a frame of silver filigree, and beside it stood a gold posset-dish to contain the night-draught. A pair of pistols and a dagger, mounted with gold, were displayed near the head of the bed, being the arms for the night, which were presented to honoured guests, rather, it may be supposed, in the way of ceremony than from any apprehension of danger. We must not omit to mention, what was more to the credit of the manners of the time, that in a small recess, illuminated by a taper, were disposed two hassocks of velvet and gold, corresponding with the bed furniture, before a desk of carved ebony. This recess had formerly been the private oratory of the abbot; but the crucifix was removed, and instead there were placed on the desk, two Books of Common Prayer, richly bound, and embossed with silver. With this enviable sleeping apartment, which was so far removed from every sound save that of the wind sighing among the oaks of the park, that Morpheus might have coveted it for his own proper repose, corresponded two wardrobes, or dressing-rooms as they are now termed, suitably furnished, and in a style of the same magnificence which we have already described. It ought to be added, that a part of the building in the adjoining wing was occupied by the kitchen and its offices, and served to accommodate the personal attendants of the great and wealthy nobleman, for whose use these magnificent preparations had been made.

The divinity for whose sake this temple had been decorated was well worthy the cost and pains which had been bestowed. She was seated in the withdrawing-room which we have described, surveying with the pleased eye of natural and innocent vanity the splendour which had been so suddenly created, as it were, in her honour. For, as her own residence at Cumnor Place formed the cause of the mystery observed in all the preparations for opening these apartments, it was sedulously arranged that, until she took possession of them, she should have no means of knowing what was going forward in that part of the ancient building, or of exposing herself to be seen by the workmen engaged in the decorations. She had been, therefore, introduced on that evening to a part of the

mansion which she had never yet seen, so different from all the rest that it appeared, in comparison, like an enchanted palace. And when she first examined and occupied these splendid rooms, it was with the wild and unrestrained joy of a rustic beauty who finds herself suddenly invested with a splendour which her most extravagant wishes had never imagined, and at the same time with the keen feeling of an affectionate heart, which knows that all the enchantment that surrounds her is the work of the great magician Love.

The Countess Amy, therefore – for to that rank she was exalted by her private but solemn union with England’s proudest Earl – had for a time flitted hastily from room to room, admiring each new proof of her lover and her bridegroom’s taste, and feeling that admiration enhanced as she recollected that all she gazed upon was one continued proof of his ardent and devoted affection. “How beautiful are these hangings! How natural these paintings, which seem to contend with life! How richly wrought is that plate, which looks as if all the galleons of Spain had been intercepted on the broad seas to furnish it forth! And oh, Janet!” she exclaimed repeatedly to the daughter of Anthony Foster, the close attendant, who, with equal curiosity, but somewhat less ecstatic joy, followed on her mistress’s footsteps – “oh, Janet! how much more delightful to think that all these fair things have been assembled by his love, for the love of me! and that this evening – this very evening, which grows darker every instant, I shall thank him more for the love that has created such an unimaginable paradise, than for all the wonders it contains.”

“The Lord is to be thanked first,” said the pretty Puritan, “who gave thee, lady, the kind and courteous husband whose love has done so much for thee. I, too, have done my poor share. But if you thus run wildly from room to room, the toil of my crimping and my curling pins will vanish like the frost-work on the window when the sun is high.”

“Thou sayest true, Janet,” said the young and beautiful Countess, stopping suddenly from her tripping race of enraptured delight, and looking at herself from head to foot in a large mirror, such as she had never before seen, and which, indeed, had few to match it even in the Queen’s palace – “thou sayest true, Janet!” she answered, as she saw, with pardonable self-applause, the noble mirror reflect such charms as were seldom presented to its fair and polished surface; “I have more of the milk-maid than the countess, with these cheeks flushed with haste, and all these brown curls, which you laboured to bring to order, straying as wild as the tendrils of an unpruned vine. My falling ruff is chafed too, and shows the neck and bosom more than is modest and seemly. Come, Janet; we will practise state – we will go to the withdrawing-room, my good girl, and thou shalt put these rebel locks in order, and imprison within lace and cambric the bosom that beats too high.”

They went to the withdrawing apartment accordingly, where the Countess playfully stretched herself upon the pile of Moorish cushions, half sitting, half reclining, half wrapt in her own thoughts, half listening to the prattle of her attendant.

While she was in this attitude, and with a corresponding expression betwixt listlessness and expectation on her fine and intelligent features, you might have searched sea and land without finding anything half so expressive or half so lovely. The wreath of brilliants which mixed with her dark-brown hair did not match in lustre the hazel eye which a light-brown eyebrow, pencilled with exquisite delicacy, and long eyelashes of the same colour, relieved and shaded. The exercise she had just taken, her excited expectation and gratified vanity, spread a glow over her fine features, which had been sometimes censured (as beauty as well as art has her minute critics) for being rather too pale. The milk-white pearls of the necklace which she wore, the same which she had just received as a true-love token from her husband, were excelled in purity by her teeth, and by the colour of her skin, saving where the blush of pleasure and self-satisfaction had somewhat stained the neck with a shade of light crimson. – “Now, have done with these busy fingers, Janet,” she said to her handmaiden, who was still officiously employed in bringing her hair and her dress into order – “have done, I say. I must see your father ere my lord arrives, and also Master Richard Varney, whom my lord has highly in his esteem – but I could tell that of him would lose him favour.”

“Oh, do not do so, good my lady!” replied Janet; “leave him to God, who punishes the wicked in His own time; but do not you cross Varney’s path, for so thoroughly hath he my lord’s ear, that few have thriven who have thwarted his courses.”

“And from whom had you this, my most righteous Janet?” said the Countess; “or why should I keep terms with so mean a gentleman as Varney, being as I am, wife to his master and patron?”

“Nay, madam,” replied Janet Foster, “your ladyship knows better than I; but I have heard my father say he would rather cross a hungry wolf than thwart Richard Varney in his projects. And he has often charged me to have a care of holding commerce with him.”

“Thy father said well, girl, for thee,” replied the lady, “and I dare swear meant well. It is a pity, though, his face and manner do little match his true purpose – for I think his purpose may be true.”

“Doubt it not, my lady,” answered Janet – “doubt not that my father purposes well, though he is a plain man, and his blunt looks may belie his heart.”

“I will not doubt it, girl, were it only for thy sake; and yet he has one of those faces which men tremble when they look on. I think even thy mother, Janet – nay, have done with that poking-iron – could hardly look upon him without quaking.”

“If it were so, madam,” answered Janet Foster, “my mother had those who could keep her in honourable countenance. Why, even you, my lady, both trembled and blushed when Varney brought the letter from my lord.”

“You are bold, damsel,” said the Countess, rising from the cushions on which she sat half reclined in the arms of her attendant. “Know that there are causes of trembling which have nothing to do with fear. – But, Janet,” she added, immediately relapsing into the good-natured and familiar tone which was natural to her, “believe me, I will do what credit I can to your father, and the rather that you, sweetheart, are his child. Alas! alas!” she added, a sudden sadness passing over her fine features, and her eyes filling with tears, “I ought the rather to hold sympathy with thy kind heart, that my own poor father is uncertain of my fate, and they say lies sick and sorrowful for my worthless sake! But I will soon cheer him – the news of my happiness and advancement will make him young again. And that I may cheer him the sooner” – she wiped her eyes as she spoke – “I must be cheerful myself. My lord must not find me insensible to his kindness, or sorrowful, when he snatches a visit to his recluse, after so long an absence. Be merry, Janet; the night wears on, and my lord must soon arrive. Call thy father hither, and call Varney also. I cherish resentment against neither; and though I may have some room to be displeased with both, it shall be their own fault if ever a complaint against them reaches the Earl through my means. Call them hither, Janet.”

Janet Foster obeyed her mistress; and in a few minutes after, Varney entered the withdrawing-room with the graceful ease and unclouded front of an accomplished courtier, skilled, under the veil of external politeness, to disguise his own feelings and to penetrate those of others. Anthony Foster plodded into the apartment after him, his natural gloomy vulgarity of aspect seeming to become yet more remarkable, from his clumsy attempt to conceal the mixture of anxiety and dislike with which he looked on her, over whom he had hitherto exercised so severe a control, now so splendidly attired, and decked with so many pledges of the interest which she possessed in her husband’s affections. The blundering reverence which he made, rather AT than TO the Countess, had confession in it. It was like the reverence which the criminal makes to the judge, when he at once owns his guilt and implores mercy – which is at the same time an impudent and embarrassed attempt at defence or extenuation, a confession of a fault, and an entreaty for lenity.

Varney, who, in right of his gentle blood, had pressed into the room before Anthony Foster, knew better what to say than he, and said it with more assurance and a better grace.

The Countess greeted him indeed with an appearance of cordiality, which seemed a complete amnesty for whatever she might have to complain of. She rose from her seat, and advanced two steps towards him, holding forth her hand as she said, “Master Richard Varney, you brought me this

morning such welcome tidings, that I fear surprise and joy made me neglect my lord and husband's charge to receive you with distinction. We offer you our hand, sir, in reconciliation."

"I am unworthy to touch it," said Varney, dropping on one knee, "save as a subject honours that of a prince."

He touched with his lips those fair and slender fingers, so richly loaded with rings and jewels; then rising, with graceful gallantry, was about to hand her to the chair of state, when she said, "No, good Master Richard Varney, I take not my place there until my lord himself conducts me. I am for the present but a disguised Countess, and will not take dignity on me until authorized by him whom I derive it from."

"I trust, my lady," said Foster, "that in doing the commands of my lord your husband, in your restraint and so forth, I have not incurred your displeasure, seeing that I did but my duty towards your lord and mine; for Heaven, as holy writ saith, hath given the husband supremacy and dominion over the wife – I think it runs so, or something like it."

"I receive at this moment so pleasant a surprise, Master Foster," answered the Countess, "that I cannot but excuse the rigid fidelity which secluded me from these apartments, until they had assumed an appearance so new and so splendid."

"Ay lady," said Foster, "it hath cost many a fair crown; and that more need not be wasted than is absolutely necessary, I leave you till my lord's arrival with good Master Richard Varney, who, as I think, hath somewhat to say to you from your most noble lord and husband. – Janet, follow me, to see that all be in order."

"No, Master Foster," said the Countess, "we will your daughter remains here in our apartment – out of ear-shot, however, in case Varney hath ought to say to me from my lord."

Foster made his clumsy reverence, and departed, with an aspect which seemed to grudge the profuse expense which had been wasted upon changing his house from a bare and ruinous grange to an Asiatic palace. When he was gone, his daughter took her embroidery frame, and went to establish herself at the bottom of the apartment; while Richard Varney, with a profoundly humble courtesy, took the lowest stool he could find, and placing it by the side of the pile of cushions on which the Countess had now again seated herself, sat with his eyes for a time fixed on the ground, and in profound silence.

"I thought, Master Varney," said the Countess, when she saw he was not likely to open the conversation, "that you had something to communicate from my lord and husband; so at least I understood Master Foster, and therefore I removed my waiting-maid. If I am mistaken, I will recall her to my side; for her needle is not so absolutely perfect in tent and cross-stitch, but that my superintendence is advisable."

"Lady," said Varney, "Foster was partly mistaken in my purpose. It was not FROM but OF your noble husband, and my approved and most noble patron, that I am led, and indeed bound, to speak."

"The theme is most welcome, sir," said the Countess, "whether it be of or from my noble husband. But be brief, for I expect his hasty approach."

"Briefly then, madam," replied Varney, "and boldly, for my argument requires both haste and courage – you have this day seen Tressilian?"

"I have, sir and what of that?" answered the lady somewhat sharply.

"Nothing that concerns me, lady," Varney replied with humility. "But, think you, honoured madam, that your lord will hear it with equal equanimity?"

"And wherefore should he not? To me alone was Tressilian's visit embarrassing and painful, for he brought news of my good father's illness."

"Of your father's illness, madam!" answered Varney. "It must have been sudden then – very sudden; for the messenger whom I dispatched, at my lord's instance, found the good knight on the hunting field, cheering his beagles with his wonted jovial field-cry. I trust Tressilian has but forged this news. He hath his reasons, madam, as you well know, for disquieting your present happiness."

“You do him injustice, Master Varney,” replied the Countess, with animation – “you do him much injustice. He is the freest, the most open, the most gentle heart that breathes. My honourable lord ever excepted, I know not one to whom falsehood is more odious than to Tressilian.”

“I crave your pardon, madam,” said Varney, “I meant the gentleman no injustice – I knew not how nearly his cause affected you. A man may, in some circumstances, disguise the truth for fair and honest purpose; for were it to be always spoken, and upon all occasions, this were no world to live in.”

“You have a courtly conscience, Master Varney,” said the Countess, “and your veracity will not, I think, interrupt your preferment in the world, such as it is. But touching Tressilian – I must do him justice, for I have done him wrong, as none knows better than thou. Tressilian’s conscience is of other mould – the world thou speakest of has not that which could bribe him from the way of truth and honour; and for living in it with a soiled fame, the ermine would as soon seek to lodge in the den of the foul polecat. For this my father loved him; for this I would have loved him – if I could. And yet in this case he had what seemed to him, unknowing alike of my marriage and to whom I was united, such powerful reasons to withdraw me from this place, that I well trust he exaggerated much of my father’s indisposition, and that thy better news may be the truer.”

“Believe me they are, madam,” answered Varney. “I pretend not to be a champion of that same naked virtue called truth, to the very outrance. I can consent that her charms be hidden with a veil, were it but for decency’s sake. But you must think lower of my head and heart than is due to one whom my noble lord deigns to call his friend, if you suppose I could wilfully and unnecessarily palm upon your ladyship a falsehood, so soon to be detected, in a matter which concerns your happiness.”

“Master Varney,” said the Countess, “I know that my lord esteems you, and holds you a faithful and a good pilot in those seas in which he has spread so high and so venturous a sail. Do not suppose, therefore, I meant hardly by you, when I spoke the truth in Tressilian’s vindication. I am as you well know, country-bred, and like plain rustic truth better than courtly compliment; but I must change my fashions with my sphere, I presume.”

“True, madam,” said Varney, smiling; “and though you speak now in jest, it will not be amiss that in earnest your present speech had some connection with your real purpose. A court-dame – take the most noble, the most virtuous, the most unimpeachable that stands around our Queen’s throne – would, for example, have shunned to speak the truth, or what she thought such, in praise of a discarded suitor, before the dependant and confidant of her noble husband.”

“And wherefore,” said the Countess, colouring impatiently, “should I not do justice to Tressilian’s worth, before my husband’s friend – before my husband himself – before the whole world?”

“And with the same openness,” said Varney, “your ladyship will this night tell my noble lord your husband that Tressilian has discovered your place of residence, so anxiously concealed from the world, and that he has had an interview with you?”

“Unquestionably,” said the Countess. “It will be the first thing I tell him, together with every word that Tressilian said and that I answered. I shall speak my own shame in this, for Tressilian’s reproaches, less just than he esteemed them, were not altogether unmerited. I will speak, therefore, with pain, but I will speak, and speak all.”

“Your ladyship will do your pleasure,” answered Varney; “but methinks it were as well, since nothing calls for so frank a disclosure, to spare yourself this pain, and my noble lord the disquiet, and Master Tressilian, since belike he must be thought of in the matter, the danger which is like to ensue.”

“I can see nought of all these terrible consequences,” said the lady composedly, “unless by imputing to my noble lord unworthy thoughts, which I am sure never harboured in his generous heart.”

“Far be it from me to do so,” said Varney. And then, after a moment’s silence, he added, with a real or affected plainness of manner, very different from his usual smooth courtesy, “Come, madam, I will show you that a courtier dare speak truth as well as another, when it concerns the weal of those whom he honours and regards, ay, and although it may infer his own danger.” He waited as if to

receive commands, or at least permission, to go on; but as the lady remained silent, he proceeded, but obviously with caution. "Look around you," he said, "noble lady, and observe the barriers with which this place is surrounded, the studious mystery with which the brightest jewel that England possesses is secluded from the admiring gaze. See with what rigour your walks are circumscribed, and your movement restrained at the beck of yonder churlish Foster. Consider all this, and judge for yourself what can be the cause.

"My lord's pleasure," answered the Countess; "and I am bound to seek no other motive."

"His pleasure it is indeed," said Varney; "and his pleasure arises out of a love worthy of the object which inspires it. But he who possesses a treasure, and who values it, is oft anxious, in proportion to the value he puts upon it, to secure it from the depredations of others."

"What needs all this talk, Master Varney?" said the lady, in reply. "You would have me believe that my noble lord is jealous. Suppose it true, I know a cure for jealousy."

"Indeed, madam?" said Varney.

"It is," replied the lady, "to speak the truth to my lord at all times – to hold up my mind and my thoughts before him as pure as that polished mirror – so that when he looks into my heart, he shall only see his own features reflected there."

"I am mute, madam," answered Varney; "and as I have no reason to grieve for Tressilian, who would have my heart's blood were he able, I shall reconcile myself easily to what may befall the gentleman in consequence of your frank disclosure of his having presumed to intrude upon your solitude. You, who know my lord so much better than I, will judge if he be likely to bear the insult unavenged."

"Nay, if I could think myself the cause of Tressilian's ruin," said the Countess, "I who have already occasioned him so much distress, I might be brought to be silent. And yet what will it avail, since he was seen by Foster, and I think by some one else? No, no, Varney, urge it no more. I will tell the whole matter to my lord; and with such pleading for Tressilian's folly, as shall dispose my lord's generous heart rather to serve than to punish him."

"Your judgment, madam," said Varney, "is far superior to mine, especially as you may, if you will, prove the ice before you step on it, by mentioning Tressilian's name to my lord, and observing how he endures it. For Foster and his attendant, they know not Tressilian by sight, and I can easily give them some reasonable excuse for the appearance of an unknown stranger."

The lady paused for an instant, and then replied, "If, Varney, it be indeed true that Foster knows not as yet that the man he saw was Tressilian, I own I were unwilling he should learn what nowise concerns him. He bears himself already with austerity enough, and I wish him not to be judge or privy-councillor in my affairs."

"Tush," said Varney, "what has the surly groom to do with your ladyship's concerns? – no more, surely, than the ban-dog which watches his courtyard. If he is in aught distasteful to your ladyship, I have interest enough to have him exchanged for a seneschal that shall be more agreeable to you."

"Master Varney," said the Countess, "let us drop this theme. When I complain of the attendants whom my lord has placed around me, it must be to my lord himself. – Hark! I hear the trampling of horse. He comes! he comes!" she exclaimed, jumping up in ecstasy.

"I cannot think it is he," said Varney; "or that you can hear the tread of his horse through the closely-mantled casements."

"Stop me not, Varney – my ears are keener than thine. It is he!"

"But, madam! – but, madam!" exclaimed Varney anxiously, and still placing himself in her way, "I trust that what I have spoken in humble duty and service will not be turned to my ruin? I hope that my faithful advice will not be betrayed to my prejudice? I implore that –"

"Content thee, man – content thee!" said the Countess, "and quit my skirt – you are too bold to detain me. Content thyself, I think not of thee."

At this moment the folding-doors flew wide open, and a man of majestic mien, muffled in the folds of a long dark riding-cloak, entered the apartment.

## CHAPTER VII

“This is he  
Who rides on the court-gale; controls its tides;  
Knows all their secret shoals and fatal eddies;  
Whose frown abases, and whose smile exalts.  
He shines like any rainbow – and, perchance,  
His colours are as transient.”

– *OLD PLAY.*

There was some little displeasure and confusion on the Countess's brow, owing to her struggle with Varney's pertinacity; but it was exchanged for an expression of the purest joy and affection, as she threw herself into the arms of the noble stranger who entered, and clasping him to her bosom, exclaimed, “At length – at length thou art come!”

Varney discreetly withdrew as his lord entered, and Janet was about to do the same, when her mistress signed to her to remain. She took her place at the farther end of the apartment, and continued standing, as if ready for attendance.

Meanwhile the Earl, for he was of no inferior rank, returned his lady's caress with the most affectionate ardour, but affected to resist when she strove to take his cloak from him.

“Nay,” she said, “but I will unmantle you. I must see if you have kept your word to me, and come as the great Earl men call thee, and not as heretofore like a private cavalier.”

“Thou art like the rest of the world, Amy,” said the Earl, suffering her to prevail in the playful contest; “the jewels, and feathers, and silk are more to them than the man whom they adorn – many a poor blade looks gay in a velvet scabbard.”

“But so cannot men say of thee, thou noble Earl,” said his lady, as the cloak dropped on the floor, and showed him dressed as princes when they ride abroad; “thou art the good and well-trying steel, whose inly worth deserves, yet disdains, its outward ornaments. Do not think Amy can love thee better in this glorious garb than she did when she gave her heart to him who wore the russet-brown cloak in the woods of Devon.”

“And thou too,” said the Earl, as gracefully and majestically he led his beautiful Countess towards the chair of state which was prepared for them both – “thou too, my love, hast donned a dress which becomes thy rank, though it cannot improve thy beauty. What think'st thou of our court taste?”

The lady cast a sidelong glance upon the great mirror as they passed it by, and then said, “I know not how it is, but I think not of my own person while I look at the reflection of thine. Sit thou there,” she said, as they approached the chair of state, “like a thing for men to worship and to wonder at.”

“Ay, love,” said the Earl, “if thou wilt share my state with me.”

“Not so,” said the Countess; “I will sit on this footstool at thy feet, that I may spell over thy splendour, and learn, for the first time, how princes are attired.”

And with a childish wonder, which her youth and rustic education rendered not only excusable but becoming, mixed as it was with a delicate show of the most tender conjugal affection, she examined and admired from head to foot the noble form and princely attire of him who formed the proudest ornament of the court of England's Maiden Queen, renowned as it was for splendid courtiers, as well as for wise counsellors. Regarding affectionately his lovely bride, and gratified by her unrepressed admiration, the dark eye and noble features of the Earl expressed passions more gentle than the commanding and aspiring look which usually sat upon his broad forehead, and in the piercing brilliancy of his dark eye; and he smiled at the simplicity which dictated the questions she put to him concerning the various ornaments with which he was decorated.

“The embroidered strap, as thou callest it, around my knee,” he said, “is the English Garter, an ornament which kings are proud to wear. See, here is the star which belongs to it, and here the Diamond George, the jewel of the order. You have heard how King Edward and the Countess of Salisbury – ”

“Oh, I know all that tale,” said the Countess, slightly blushing, “and how a lady’s garter became the proudest badge of English chivalry.”

“Even so,” said the Earl; “and this most honourable Order I had the good hap to receive at the same time with three most noble associates, the Duke of Norfolk, the Marquis of Northampton, and the Earl of Rutland. I was the lowest of the four in rank – but what then? he that climbs a ladder must begin at the first round.”

“But this other fair collar, so richly wrought, with some jewel like a sheep hung by the middle attached to it, what,” said the young Countess, “does that emblem signify?”

“This collar,” said the Earl, “with its double fusilles interchanged with these knobs, which are supposed to present flint-stones sparkling with fire, and sustaining the jewel you inquire about, is the badge of the noble Order of the Golden Fleece, once appertaining to the House of Burgundy it hath high privileges, my Amy, belonging to it, this most noble Order; for even the King of Spain himself, who hath now succeeded to the honours and demesnes of Burgundy, may not sit in judgment upon a knight of the Golden Fleece, unless by assistance and consent of the Great Chapter of the Order.”

“And is this an Order belonging to the cruel King of Spain?” said the Countess. “Alas! my noble lord, that you will defile your noble English breast by bearing such an emblem! Bethink you of the most unhappy Queen Mary’s days, when this same Philip held sway with her in England, and of the piles which were built for our noblest, and our wisest, and our most truly sanctified prelates and divines – and will you, whom men call the standard-bearer of the true Protestant faith, be contented to wear the emblem and mark of such a Romish tyrant as he of Spain?”

“Oh, content you, my love,” answered the Earl; “we who spread our sails to gales of court favour cannot always display the ensigns we love the best, or at all times refuse sailing under colours which we like not. Believe me, I am not the less good Protestant, that for policy I must accept the honour offered me by Spain, in admitting me to this his highest order of knighthood. Besides, it belongs properly to Flanders; and Egmont, Orange, and others have pride in seeing it displayed on an English bosom.”

“Nay, my lord, you know your own path best,” replied the Countess. “And this other collar, to what country does this fair jewel belong?”

“To a very poor one, my love,” replied the Earl; “this is the Order of Saint Andrew, revived by the last James of Scotland. It was bestowed on me when it was thought the young widow of France and Scotland would gladly have wedded an English baron; but a free coronet of England is worth a crown matrimonial held at the humour of a woman, and owning only the poor rocks and bogs of the north.”

The Countess paused, as if what the Earl last said had excited some painful but interesting train of thought; and, as she still remained silent, her husband proceeded: —

“And now, loveliest, your wish is gratified, and you have seen your vassal in such of his trim array as accords with riding vestments; for robes of state and coronets are only for princely halls.”

“Well, then,” said the Countess, “my gratified wish has, as usual, given rise to a new one.”

“And what is it thou canst ask that I can deny?” said the fond husband.

“I wished to see my Earl visit this obscure and secret bower,” said the Countess, “in all his princely array; and now, methinks I long to sit in one of his princely halls, and see him enter dressed in sober russet, as when he won poor Amy Robsart’s heart.”

“That is a wish easily granted,” said the Earl – “the sober russet shall be donned to-morrow, if you will.”

“But shall I,” said the lady, “go with you to one of your castles, to see how the richness of your dwelling will correspond with your peasant habit?”

“Why, Amy,” said the Earl, looking around, “are not these apartments decorated with sufficient splendour? I gave the most unbounded order, and, methinks, it has been indifferently well obeyed; but if thou canst tell me aught which remains to be done, I will instantly give direction.”

“Nay, my lord, now you mock me,” replied the Countess; “the gaiety of this rich lodging exceeds my imagination as much as it does my desert. But shall not your wife, my love – at least one day soon – be surrounded with the honour which arises neither from the toils of the mechanic who decks her apartment, nor from the silks and jewels with which your generosity adorns her, but which is attached to her place among the matronage, as the avowed wife of England’s noblest Earl?”

“One day?” said her husband. “Yes, Amy, my love, one day this shall surely happen; and, believe me, thou canst not wish for that day more fondly than I. With what rapture could I retire from labours of state, and cares and toils of ambition, to spend my life in dignity and honour on my own broad domains, with thee, my lovely Amy, for my friend and companion! But, Amy, this cannot yet be; and these dear but stolen interviews are all I can give to the loveliest and the best beloved of her sex.”

“But WHY can it not be?” urged the Countess, in the softest tones of persuasion – “why can it not immediately take place – this more perfect, this uninterrupted union, for which you say you wish, and which the laws of God and man alike command? Ah! did you but desire it half as much as you say, mighty and favoured as you are, who or what should bar your attaining your wish?”

The Earl’s brow was overcast.

“Amy,” he said, “you speak of what you understand not. We that toil in courts are like those who climb a mountain of loose sand – we dare make no halt until some projecting rock affords us a secure footing and resting-place. If we pause sooner, we slide down by our own weight, an object of universal derision. I stand high, but I stand not secure enough to follow my own inclination. To declare my marriage were to be the artificer of my own ruin. But, believe me, I will reach a point, and that speedily, when I can do justice to thee and to myself. Meantime, poison not the bliss of the present moment, by desiring that which cannot at present be. Let me rather know whether all here is managed to thy liking. How does Foster bear himself to you? – in all things respectful, I trust, else the fellow shall dearly rue it.”

“He reminds me sometimes of the necessity of this privacy,” answered the lady, with a sigh; “but that is reminding me of your wishes, and therefore I am rather bound to him than disposed to blame him for it.”

“I have told you the stern necessity which is upon us,” replied the Earl. “Foster is, I note, somewhat sullen of mood; but Varney warrants to me his fidelity and devotion to my service. If thou hast aught, however, to complain of the mode in which he discharges his duty, he shall abye it.”

“Oh, I have nought to complain of,” answered the lady, “so he discharges his task with fidelity to you; and his daughter Janet is the kindest and best companion of my solitude – her little air of precision sits so well upon her!”

“Is she indeed?” said the Earl. “She who gives you pleasure must not pass unrewarded. – Come hither, damsel.”

“Janet,” said the lady, “come hither to my lord.”

Janet, who, as we already noticed, had discreetly retired to some distance, that her presence might be no check upon the private conversation of her lord and lady, now came forward; and as she made her reverential curtsy, the Earl could not help smiling at the contrast which the extreme simplicity of her dress, and the prim demureness of her looks, made with a very pretty countenance and a pair of black eyes, that laughed in spite of their mistress’s desire to look grave.

“I am bound to you, pretty damsel,” said the Earl, “for the contentment which your service hath given to this lady.” As he said this, he took from his finger a ring of some price, and offered it to Janet Foster, adding, “Wear this, for her sake and for mine.”

“I am well pleased, my lord,” answered Janet demurely, “that my poor service hath gratified my lady, whom no one can draw nigh to without desiring to please; but we of the precious Master

Holdforth's congregation seek not, like the gay daughters of this world, to twine gold around our fingers, or wear stones upon our necks, like the vain women of Tyre and of Sidon."

"Oh, what! you are a grave professor of the precise sisterhood, pretty Mistress Janet," said the Earl, "and I think your father is of the same congregation in sincerity? I like you both the better for it; for I have been prayed for, and wished well to, in your congregations. And you may the better afford the lack of ornament, Mistress Janet, because your fingers are slender, and your neck white. But here is what neither Papist nor Puritan, latitudinarian nor precisian, ever boggles or makes mouths at. E'en take it, my girl, and employ it as you list."

So saying, he put into her hand five broad gold pieces of Philip and Mary.

"I would not accept this gold either," said Janet, "but that I hope to find a use for it which will bring a blessing on us all."

"Even please thyself, pretty Janet," said the Earl, "and I shall be well satisfied. And I prithee let them hasten the evening collation."

"I have bidden Master Varney and Master Foster to sup with us, my lord," said the Countess, as Janet retired to obey the Earl's commands; "has it your approbation?"

"What you do ever must have so, my sweet Amy," replied her husband; "and I am the better pleased thou hast done them this grace, because Richard Varney is my sworn man, and a close brother of my secret council; and for the present, I must needs repose much trust in this Anthony Foster."

"I had a boon to beg of thee, and a secret to tell thee, my dear lord," said the Countess, with a faltering accent.

"Let both be for to-morrow, my love," replied the Earl. "I see they open the folding-doors into the banqueting-parlour, and as I have ridden far and fast, a cup of wine will not be unacceptable."

So saying he led his lovely wife into the next apartment, where Varney and Foster received them with the deepest reverences, which the first paid after the fashion of the court, and the second after that of the congregation. The Earl returned their salutation with the negligent courtesy of one long used to such homage; while the Countess repaid it with a punctilious solicitude, which showed it was not quite so familiar to her.

The banquet at which the company seated themselves corresponded in magnificence with the splendour of the apartment in which it was served up, but no domestic gave his attendance. Janet alone stood ready to wait upon the company; and, indeed, the board was so well supplied with all that could be desired, that little or no assistance was necessary. The Earl and his lady occupied the upper end of the table, and Varney and Foster sat beneath the salt, as was the custom with inferiors. The latter, overawed perhaps by society to which he was altogether unused, did not utter a single syllable during the repast; while Varney, with great tact and discernment, sustained just so much of the conversation as, without the appearance of intrusion on his part, prevented it from languishing, and maintained the good-humour of the Earl at the highest pitch. This man was indeed highly qualified by nature to discharge the part in which he found himself placed, being discreet and cautious on the one hand, and, on the other, quick, keen-witted, and imaginative; so that even the Countess, prejudiced as she was against him on many accounts, felt and enjoyed his powers of conversation, and was more disposed than she had ever hitherto found herself to join in the praises which the Earl lavished on his favourite. The hour of rest at length arrived, the Earl and Countess retired to their apartment, and all was silent in the castle for the rest of the night.

Early on the ensuing morning, Varney acted as the Earl's chamberlain as well as his master of horse, though the latter was his proper office in that magnificent household, where knights and gentlemen of good descent were well contented to hold such menial situations, as nobles themselves held in that of the sovereign. The duties of each of these charges were familiar to Varney, who, sprung from an ancient but somewhat decayed family, was the Earl's page during his earlier and more obscure fortunes, and, faithful to him in adversity, had afterwards contrived to render himself no less useful

to him in his rapid and splendid advance to fortune; thus establishing in him an interest resting both on present and past services, which rendered him an almost indispensable sharer of his confidence.

“Help me to do on a plainer riding-suit, Varney,” said the Earl, as he laid aside his morning-gown, flowered with silk and lined with sables, “and put these chains and fetters there” (pointing to the collars of the various Orders which lay on the table) “into their place of security – my neck last night was well-nigh broke with the weight of them. I am half of the mind that they shall gall me no more. They are bonds which knaves have invented to fetter fools. How thinkest thou, Varney?”

“Faith, my good lord,” said his attendant, “I think fetters of gold are like no other fetters – they are ever the weightier the welcomer.”

“For all that, Varney,” replied his master, “I am well-nigh resolved they shall bind me to the court no longer. What can further service and higher favour give me, beyond the high rank and large estate which I have already secured? What brought my father to the block, but that he could not bound his wishes within right and reason? I have, you know, had mine own ventures and mine own escapes. I am well-nigh resolved to tempt the sea no further, but sit me down in quiet on the shore.”

“And gather cockle-shells, with Dan Cupid to aid you,” said Varney.

“How mean you by that, Varney?” said the Earl somewhat hastily.

“Nay, my lord,” said Varney, “be not angry with me. If your lordship is happy in a lady so rarely lovely that, in order to enjoy her company with somewhat more freedom, you are willing to part with all you have hitherto lived for, some of your poor servants may be sufferers; but your bounty hath placed me so high, that I shall ever have enough to maintain a poor gentleman in the rank befitting the high office he has held in your lordship’s family.”

“Yet you seem discontented when I propose throwing up a dangerous game, which may end in the ruin of both of us.”

“I, my lord?” said Varney; “surely I have no cause to regret your lordship’s retreat! It will not be Richard Varney who will incur the displeasure of majesty, and the ridicule of the court, when the stateliest fabric that ever was founded upon a prince’s favour melts away like a morning frost-work. I would only have you yourself to be assured, my lord, ere you take a step which cannot be retracted, that you consult your fame and happiness in the course you propose.”

“Speak on, then, Varney,” said the Earl; “I tell thee I have determined nothing, and will weigh all considerations on either side.”

“Well, then, my lord,” replied Varney, “we will suppose the step taken, the frown frowned, the laugh laughed, and the moan moaned. You have retired, we will say, to some one of your most distant castles, so far from court that you hear neither the sorrow of your friends nor the glee of your enemies, We will suppose, too, that your successful rival will be satisfied (a thing greatly to be doubted) with abridging and cutting away the branches of the great tree which so long kept the sun from him, and that he does not insist upon tearing you up by the roots. Well; the late prime favourite of England, who wielded her general’s staff and controlled her parliaments, is now a rural baron, hunting, hawking, drinking fat ale with country esquires, and mustering his men at the command of the high sheriff – ”

“Varney, forbear!” said the Earl.

“Nay, my lord, you must give me leave to conclude my picture. – Sussex governs England – the Queen’s health fails – the succession is to be settled – a road is opened to ambition more splendid than ambition ever dreamed of. You hear all this as you sit by the hob, under the shade of your hall-chimney. You then begin to think what hopes you have fallen from, and what insignificance you have embraced; and all that you might look babies in the eyes of your fair wife oftener than once a fortnight.”

“I say, Varney,” said the Earl, “no more of this. I said not that the step, which my own ease and comfort would urge me to, was to be taken hastily, or without due consideration to the public safety. Bear witness to me, Varney; I subdue my wishes of retirement, not because I am moved by the call of private ambition, but that I may preserve the position in which I may best serve my country

at the hour of need. – Order our horses presently; I will wear, as formerly, one of the livery cloaks, and ride before the portmante. Thou shalt be master for the day, Varney – neglect nothing that can blind suspicion. We will to horse ere men are stirring. I will but take leave of my lady, and be ready. I impose a restraint on my own poor heart, and wound one yet more dear to me; but the patriot must subdue the husband.”

Having said this in a melancholy but firm accent, he left the dressing apartment.

“I am glad thou art gone,” thought Varney, “or, practised as I am in the follies of mankind, I had laughed in the very face of thee! Thou mayest tire as thou wilt of thy new bauble, thy pretty piece of painted Eve’s flesh there, I will not be thy hindrance. But of thine old bauble, ambition, thou shalt not tire; for as you climb the hill, my lord, you must drag Richard Varney up with you, and if he can urge you to the ascent he means to profit by, believe me he will spare neither whip nor spur, and for you, my pretty lady, that would be Countess outright, you were best not thwart my courses, lest you are called to an old reckoning on a new score. ‘Thou shalt be master,’ did he say? By my faith, he may find that he spoke truer than he is aware of; and thus he who, in the estimation of so many wise-judging men, can match Burleigh and Walsingham in policy, and Sussex in war, becomes pupil to his own menial – and all for a hazel eye and a little cunning red and white, and so falls ambition. And yet if the charms of mortal woman could excuse a man’s politic pate for becoming bewildered, my lord had the excuse at his right hand on this blessed evening that has last passed over us. Well – let things roll as they may, he shall make me great, or I will make myself happy; and for that softer piece of creation, if she speak not out her interview with Tressilian, as well I think she dare not, she also must traffic with me for concealment and mutual support, in spite of all this scorn. I must to the stables. Well, my lord, I order your retinue now; the time may soon come that my master of the horse shall order mine own. What was Thomas Cromwell but a smith’s son? and he died my lord – on a scaffold, doubtless, but that, too, was in character. And what was Ralph Sadler but the clerk of Cromwell? and he has gazed eighteen fair lordships – VIA! I know my steerage as well as they.”

So saying, he left the apartment.

In the meanwhile the Earl had re-entered the bedchamber, bent on taking a hasty farewell of the lovely Countess, and scarce daring to trust himself in private with her, to hear requests again urged which he found it difficult to parry, yet which his recent conversation with his master of horse had determined him not to grant.

He found her in a white cymar of silk lined with furs, her little feet unstockinged and hastily thrust into slippers; her unbraided hair escaping from under her midnight coif, with little array but her own loveliness, rather augmented than diminished by the grief which she felt at the approaching moment of separation.

“Now, God be with thee, my dearest and loveliest!” said the Earl, scarce tearing himself from her embrace, yet again returning to fold her again and again in his arms, and again bidding farewell, and again returning to kiss and bid adieu once more. “The sun is on the verge of the blue horizon – I dare not stay. Ere this I should have been ten miles from hence.”

Such were the words with which at length he strove to cut short their parting interview. “You will not grant my request, then?” said the Countess. “Ah, false knight! did ever lady, with bare foot in slipper, seek boon of a brave knight, yet return with denial?”

“Anything, Amy, anything thou canst ask I will grant,” answered the Earl – “always excepting,” he said, “that which might ruin us both.”

“Nay,” said the Countess, “I urge not my wish to be acknowledged in the character which would make me the envy of England – as the wife, that is, of my brave and noble lord, the first as the most fondly beloved of English nobles. Let me but share the secret with my dear father! Let me but end his misery on my unworthy account – they say he is ill, the good old kind-hearted man!”

“They say?” asked the Earl hastily; “who says? Did not Varney convey to Sir Hugh all we dare at present tell him concerning your happiness and welfare? and has he not told you that the good old

knight was following, with good heart and health, his favourite and wonted exercise. Who has dared put other thoughts into your head?"

"Oh, no one, my lord, no one," said the Countess, something alarmed at the tone, in which the question was put; "but yet, my lord, I would fain be assured by mine own eyesight that my father is well."

"Be contented, Amy; thou canst not now have communication with thy father or his house. Were it not a deep course of policy to commit no secret unnecessarily to the custody of more than must needs be, it were sufficient reason for secrecy that yonder Cornish man, yonder Trevanion, or Tressilian, or whatever his name is, haunts the old knight's house, and must necessarily know whatever is communicated there."

"My lord," answered the Countess, "I do not think it so. My father has been long noted a worthy and honourable man; and for Tressilian, if we can pardon ourselves the ill we have wrought him, I will wager the coronet I am to share with you one day that he is incapable of returning injury for injury."

"I will not trust him, however, Amy," said her husband – "by my honour, I will not trust him, I would rather the foul fiend intermingle in our secret than this Tressilian!"

"And why, my lord?" said the Countess, though she shuddered slightly at the tone of determination in which he spoke; "let me but know why you think thus hardly of Tressilian?"

"Madam," replied the Earl, "my will ought to be a sufficient reason. If you desire more, consider how this Tressilian is leagued, and with whom. He stands high in the opinion of this Radcliffe, this Sussex, against whom I am barely able to maintain my ground in the opinion of our suspicious mistress; and if he had me at such advantage, Amy, as to become acquainted with the tale of our marriage, before Elizabeth were fitly prepared, I were an outcast from her grace for ever – a bankrupt at once in favour and in fortune, perhaps, for she hath in her a touch of her father Henry – a victim, and it may be a bloody one, to her offended and jealous resentment."

"But why, my lord," again urged his lady, "should you deem thus injuriously of a man of whom you know so little? What you do know of Tressilian is through me, and it is I who assure you that in no circumstances will he betray your secret. If I did him wrong in your behalf, my lord, I am now the more concerned you should do him justice. You are offended at my speaking of him, what would you say had I actually myself seen him?"

"If you had," replied the Earl, "you would do well to keep that interview as secret as that which is spoken in a confessional. I seek no one's ruin; but he who thrusts himself on my secret privacy were better look well to his future walk. The bear [The Leicester cognizance was the ancient device adopted by his father, when Earl of Warwick, the bear and ragged staff.] brooks no one to cross his awful path."

"Awful, indeed!" said the Countess, turning very pale.

"You are ill, my love," said the Earl, supporting her in his arms. "Stretch yourself on your couch again; it is but an early day for you to leave it. Have you aught else, involving less than my fame, my fortune, and my life, to ask of me?"

"Nothing, my lord and love," answered the Countess faintly; "something there was that I would have told you, but your anger has driven it from my recollection."

"Reserve it till our next meeting, my love," said the Earl fondly, and again embracing her; "and barring only those requests which I cannot and dare not grant, thy wish must be more than England and all its dependencies can fulfil, if it is not gratified to the letter."

Thus saying, he at length took farewell. At the bottom of the staircase he received from Varney an ample livery cloak and slouched hat, in which he wrapped himself so as to disguise his person and completely conceal his features. Horses were ready in the courtyard for himself and Varney; for one or two of his train, intrusted with the secret so far as to know or guess that the Earl intrigued with a beautiful lady at that mansion, though her name and quality were unknown to them, had already been dismissed over-night.

Anthony Foster himself had in hand the rein of the Earl's palfrey, a stout and able nag for the road; while his old serving-man held the bridle of the more showy and gallant steed which Richard Varney was to occupy in the character of master.

As the Earl approached, however, Varney advanced to hold his master's bridle, and to prevent Foster from paying that duty to the Earl which he probably considered as belonging to his own office. Foster scowled at an interference which seemed intended to prevent his paying his court to his patron, but gave place to Varney; and the Earl, mounting without further observation, and forgetting that his assumed character of a domestic threw him into the rear of his supposed master, rode pensively out of the quadrangle, not without waving his hand repeatedly in answer to the signals which were made by the Countess with her kerchief from the windows of her apartment.

While his stately form vanished under the dark archway which led out of the quadrangle, Varney muttered, "There goes fine policy – the servant before the master!" then as he disappeared, seized the moment to speak a word with Foster. "Thou look'st dark on me, Anthony," he said, "as if I had deprived thee of a parting nod of my lord; but I have moved him to leave thee a better remembrance for thy faithful service. See here! a purse of as good gold as ever chinked under a miser's thumb and fore-finger. Ay, count them, lad," said he, as Foster received the gold with a grim smile, "and add to them the goodly remembrance he gave last night to Janet."

"How's this? how's this?" said Anthony Foster hastily; "gave he gold to Janet?"

"Ay, man, wherefore not? – does not her service to his fair lady require guerdon?"

"She shall have none on't," said Foster; "she shall return it. I know his dotage on one face is as brief as it is deep. His affections are as fickle as the moon."

"Why, Foster, thou art mad – thou dost not hope for such good fortune as that my lord should cast an eye on Janet? Who, in the fiend's name, would listen to the thrush while the nightingale is singing?"

"Thrush or nightingale, all is one to the fowler; and, Master Varney, you can sound the quail-pipe most daintily to wile wantons into his nets. I desire no such devil's preferment for Janet as you have brought many a poor maiden to. Dost thou laugh? I will keep one limb of my family, at least, from Satan's clutches, that thou mayest rely on. She shall restore the gold."

"Ay, or give it to thy keeping, Tony, which will serve as well," answered Varney; "but I have that to say which is more serious. Our lord is returning to court in an evil humour for us."

"How meanest thou?" said Foster. "Is he tired already of his pretty toy – his plaything yonder? He has purchased her at a monarch's ransom, and I warrant me he rues his bargain."

"Not a whit, Tony," answered the master of the horse; "he dotes on her, and will forsake the court for her. Then down go hopes, possessions, and safety – church-lands are resumed, Tony, and well if the holders be not called to account in Exchequer."

"That were ruin," said Foster, his brow darkening with apprehensions; "and all this for a woman! Had it been for his soul's sake, it were something; and I sometimes wish I myself could fling away the world that cleaves to me, and be as one of the poorest of our church."

"Thou art like enough to be so, Tony," answered Varney; "but I think the devil will give thee little credit for thy compelled poverty, and so thou lovest on all hands. But follow my counsel, and Cumnor Place shall be thy copyhold yet. Say nothing of this Tressilian's visit – not a word until I give thee notice."

"And wherefore, I pray you?" asked Foster, suspiciously.

"Dull beast!" replied Varney. "In my lord's present humour it were the ready way to confirm him in his resolution of retirement, should he know that his lady was haunted with such a spectre in his absence. He would be for playing the dragon himself over his golden fruit, and then, Tony, thy occupation is ended. A word to the wise. Farewell! I must follow him."

He turned his horse, struck him with the spurs, and rode off under the archway in pursuit of his lord.

“Would thy occupation were ended, or thy neck broken, damned pander!” said Anthony Foster. “But I must follow his beck, for his interest and mine are the same, and he can wind the proud Earl to his will. Janet shall give me those pieces though; they shall be laid out in some way for God’s service, and I will keep them separate in my strong chest, till I can fall upon a fitting employment for them. No contagious vapour shall breathe on Janet – she shall remain pure as a blessed spirit, were it but to pray God for her father. I need her prayers, for I am at a hard pass. Strange reports are abroad concerning my way of life. The congregation look cold on me, and when Master Holdforth spoke of hypocrites being like a whited sepulchre, which within was full of dead men’s bones, methought he looked full at me. The Romish was a comfortable faith; Lambourne spoke true in that. A man had but to follow his thrift by such ways as offered – tell his beads, hear a mass, confess, and be absolved. These Puritans tread a harder and a rougher path; but I will try – I will read my Bible for an hour ere I again open mine iron chest.”

Varney, meantime, spurred after his lord, whom he found waiting for him at the postern gate of the park.

“You waste time, Varney,” said the Earl, “and it presses. I must be at Woodstock before I can safely lay aside my disguise, and till then I journey in some peril.”

“It is but two hours’ brisk riding, my lord,” said Varney. “For me, I only stopped to enforce your commands of care and secrecy on yonder Foster, and to inquire about the abode of the gentleman whom I would promote to your lordship’s train, in the room of Trevors.”

“Is he fit for the meridian of the antechamber, think’st thou?” said the Earl.

“He promises well, my lord,” replied Varney; “but if your lordship were pleased to ride on, I could go back to Cumnor, and bring him to your lordship at Woodstock before you are out of bed.”

“Why, I am asleep there, thou knowest, at this moment,” said the Earl; “and I pray you not to spare horse-flesh, that you may be with me at my levee.”

So saying, he gave his horse the spur, and proceeded on his journey, while Varney rode back to Cumnor by the public road, avoiding the park. The latter alighted at the door of the bonny Black Bear, and desired to speak with Master Michael Lambourne, That respectable character was not long of appearing before his new patron, but it was with downcast looks.

“Thou hast lost the scent,” said Varney, “of thy comrade Tressilian. I know it by thy hang-dog visage. Is this thy alacrity, thou impudent knave?”

“Cogswounds!” said Lambourne, “there was never a trail so finely hunted. I saw him to earth at mine uncle’s here – stuck to him like bees’-wax – saw him at supper – watched him to his chamber, and, presto! he is gone next morning, the very hostler knows not where.”

“This sounds like practice upon me, sir,” replied Varney; “and if it proves so, by my soul you shall repent it!”

“Sir, the best hound will be sometimes at fault,” answered Lambourne; “how should it serve me that this fellow should have thus vanished? You may ask mine host, Giles Gosling – ask the tapster and hostler – ask Cicely, and the whole household, how I kept eyes on Tressilian while he was on foot. On my soul, I could not be expected to watch him like a sick nurse, when I had seen him fairly a-bed in his chamber. That will be allowed me, surely.”

Varney did, in fact, make some inquiry among the household, which confirmed the truth of Lambourne’s statement. Tressilian, it was unanimously agreed, had departed suddenly and unexpectedly, betwixt night and morning.

“But I will wrong no one,” said mine host; “he left on the table in his lodging the full value of his reckoning, with some allowance to the servants of the house, which was the less necessary that he saddled his own gelding, as it seems, without the hostler’s assistance.”

Thus satisfied of the rectitude of Lambourne’s conduct, Varney began to talk to him upon his future prospects, and the mode in which he meant to bestow himself, intimating that he understood from Foster he was not disinclined to enter into the household of a nobleman.

“Have you,” said he, “ever been at court?”

“No,” replied Lambourne; “but ever since I was ten years old, I have dreamt once a week that I was there, and made my fortune.”

“It may be your own fault if your dream comes not true,” said Varney. “Are you needy?”

“Um!” replied Lambourne; “I love pleasure.”

“That is a sufficient answer, and an honest one,” said Varney. “Know you aught of the requisites expected from the retainer of a rising courtier?”

“I have imagined them to myself, sir,” answered Lambourne; “as, for example, a quick eye, a close mouth, a ready and bold hand, a sharp wit, and a blunt conscience.”

“And thine, I suppose,” said Varney, “has had its edge blunted long since?”

“I cannot remember, sir, that its edge was ever over-keen,” replied Lambourne. “When I was a youth, I had some few whimsies; but I rubbed them partly out of my recollection on the rough grindstone of the wars, and what remained I washed out in the broad waves of the Atlantic.”

“Thou hast served, then, in the Indies?”

“In both East and West,” answered the candidate for court service, “by both sea and land. I have served both the Portugal and the Spaniard, both the Dutchman and the Frenchman, and have made war on our own account with a crew of jolly fellows, who held there was no peace beyond the Line.” [Sir Francis Drake, Morgan, and many a bold buccaneer of those days, were, in fact, little better than pirates.]

“Thou mayest do me, and my lord, and thyself, good service,” said Varney, after a pause. “But observe, I know the world – and answer me truly, canst thou be faithful?”

“Did you not know the world,” answered Lambourne, “it were my duty to say ay, without further circumstance, and to swear to it with life and honour, and so forth. But as it seems to me that your worship is one who desires rather honest truth than politic falsehood, I reply to you, that I can be faithful to the gallows’ foot, ay, to the loop that dangles from it, if I am well used and well recompensed – not otherwise.”

“To thy other virtues thou canst add, no doubt,” said Varney, in a jeering tone, “the knack of seeming serious and religious, when the moment demands it?”

“It would cost me nothing,” said Lambourne, “to say yes; but, to speak on the square, I must needs say no. If you want a hypocrite, you may take Anthony Foster, who, from his childhood, had some sort of phantom haunting him, which he called religion, though it was that sort of godliness which always ended in being great gain. But I have no such knack of it.”

“Well,” replied Varney, “if thou hast no hypocrisy, hast thou not a nag here in the stable?”

“Ay, sir,” said Lambourne, “that shall take hedge and ditch with my Lord Duke’s best hunters. Then I made a little mistake on Shooter’s Hill, and stopped an ancient grazier whose pouches were better lined than his brain-pan, the bonny bay nag carried me sheer off in spite of the whole hue and cry.”

“Saddle him then instantly, and attend me,” said Varney. “Leave thy clothes and baggage under charge of mine host; and I will conduct thee to a service, in which, if thou do not better thyself, the fault shall not be fortune’s, but thine own.”

“Brave and hearty!” said Lambourne, “and I am mounted in an instant. – Knave, hostler, saddle my nag without the loss of one second, as thou dost value the safety of thy noddle. – Pretty Cicely, take half this purse to comfort thee for my sudden departure.”

“Gogsnows!” replied the father, “Cicely wants no such token from thee. Go away, Mike, and gather grace if thou canst, though I think thou goest not to the land where it grows.”

“Let me look at this Cicely of thine, mine host,” said Varney; “I have heard much talk of her beauty.”

“It is a sunburnt beauty,” said mine host, “well qualified to stand out rain and wind, but little calculated to please such critical gallants as yourself. She keeps her chamber, and cannot encounter the glance of such sunny-day courtiers as my noble guest.”

“Well, peace be with her, my good host,” answered Varney; “our horses are impatient – we bid you good day.”

“Does my nephew go with you, so please you?” said Gosling.

“Ay, such is his purpose,” answered Richard Varney.

“You are right – fully right,” replied mine host – “you are, I say, fully right, my kinsman. Thou hast got a gay horse; see thou light not unaware upon a halter – or, if thou wilt needs be made immortal by means of a rope, which thy purpose of following this gentleman renders not unlikely, I charge thee to find a gallows as far from Cumnor as thou conveniently mayest. And so I commend you to your saddle.”

The master of the horse and his new retainer mounted accordingly, leaving the landlord to conclude his ill-omened farewell, to himself and at leisure; and set off together at a rapid pace, which prevented conversation until the ascent of a steep sandy hill permitted them to resume it.

“You are contented, then,” said Varney to his companion, “to take court service?”

“Ay, worshipful sir, if you like my terms as well as I like yours.”

“And what are your terms?” demanded Varney.

“If I am to have a quick eye for my patron’s interest, he must have a dull one towards my faults,” said Lambourne.

“Ay,” said Varney, “so they lie not so grossly open that he must needs break his shins over them.”

“Agreed,” said Lambourne. “Next, if I run down game, I must have the picking of the bones.”

“That is but reason,” replied Varney, “so that your betters are served before you.”

“Good,” said Lambourne; “and it only remains to be said, that if the law and I quarrel, my patron must bear me out, for that is a chief point.”

“Reason again,” said Varney, “if the quarrel hath happened in your master’s service.”

“For the wage and so forth, I say nothing,” proceeded Lambourne; “it is the secret guerdon that I must live by.”

“Never fear,” said Varney; “thou shalt have clothes and spending money to ruffle it with the best of thy degree, for thou goest to a household where you have gold, as they say, by the eye.”

“That jumps all with my humour,” replied Michael Lambourne; “and it only remains that you tell me my master’s name.”

“My name is Master Richard Varney,” answered his companion.

“But I mean,” said Lambourne, “the name of the noble lord to whose service you are to prefer me.”

“How, knave, art thou too good to call me master?” said Varney hastily; “I would have thee bold to others, but not saucy to me.”

“I crave your worship’s pardon,” said Lambourne, “but you seemed familiar with Anthony Foster; now I am familiar with Anthony myself.”

“Thou art a shrewd knave, I see,” replied Varney. “Mark me – I do indeed propose to introduce thee into a nobleman’s household; but it is upon my person thou wilt chiefly wait, and upon my countenance that thou wilt depend. I am his master of horse. Thou wilt soon know his name – it is one that shakes the council and wields the state.”

“By this light, a brave spell to conjure with,” said Lambourne, “if a man would discover hidden treasures!”

“Used with discretion, it may prove so,” replied Varney; “but mark – if thou conjure with it at thine own hand, it may raise a devil who will tear thee in fragments.”

“Enough said,” replied Lambourne; “I will not exceed my limits.”

The travellers then resumed the rapid rate of travelling which their discourse had interrupted, and soon arrived at the Royal Park of Woodstock. This ancient possession of the crown of England was then very different from what it had been when it was the residence of the fair Rosamond, and the scene of Henry the Second's secret and illicit amours; and yet more unlike to the scene which it exhibits in the present day, when Blenheim House commemorates the victory of Marlborough, and no less the genius of Vanbrugh, though decried in his own time by persons of taste far inferior to his own. It was, in Elizabeth's time, an ancient mansion in bad repair, which had long ceased to be honoured with the royal residence, to the great impoverishment of the adjacent village. The inhabitants, however, had made several petitions to the Queen to have the favour of the sovereign's countenance occasionally bestowed upon them; and upon this very business, ostensibly at least, was the noble lord, whom we have already introduced to our readers, a visitor at Woodstock.

Varney and Lambourne galloped without ceremony into the courtyard of the ancient and dilapidated mansion, which presented on that morning a scene of bustle which it had not exhibited for two reigns. Officers of the Earl's household, liverymen and retainers, went and came with all the insolent fracas which attaches to their profession. The neigh of horses and the baying of hounds were heard; for my lord, in his occupation of inspecting and surveying the manor and demesne, was of course provided with the means of following his pleasure in the chase or park, said to have been the earliest that was enclosed in England, and which was well stocked with deer that had long roamed there unmolested. Several of the inhabitants of the village, in anxious hope of a favourable result from this unwonted visit, loitered about the courtyard, and awaited the great man's coming forth. Their attention was excited by the hasty arrival of Varney, and a murmur ran amongst them, "The Earl's master of the horse!" while they hurried to bespeak favour by hastily unbonneting, and proffering to hold the bridle and stirrup of the favoured retainer and his attendant.

"Stand somewhat aloof, my masters!" said Varney haughtily, "and let the domestics do their office."

The mortified citizens and peasants fell back at the signal; while Lambourne, who had his eye upon his superior's deportment, repelled the services of those who offered to assist him, with yet more discourtesy – "Stand back, Jack peasant, with a murrain to you, and let these knave footmen do their duty!"

While they gave their nags to the attendants of the household, and walked into the mansion with an air of superiority which long practice and consciousness of birth rendered natural to Varney, and which Lambourne endeavoured to imitate as well as he could, the poor inhabitants of Woodstock whispered to each other, "Well-a-day! God save us from all such misproud princexes! An the master be like the men, why, the fiend may take all, and yet have no more than his due."

"Silence, good neighbours!" said the bailiff, "keep tongue betwixt teeth; we shall know more by-and-by. But never will a lord come to Woodstock so welcome as bluff old King Harry! He would horsewhip a fellow one day with his own royal hand, and then fling him an handful of silver groats, with his own broad face on them, to 'noint the sore withal."

"Ay, rest be with him!" echoed the auditors; "it will be long ere this Lady Elizabeth horsewhip any of us."

"There is no saying," answered the bailiff. "Meanwhile, patience, good neighbours, and let us comfort ourselves by thinking that we deserve such notice at her Grace's hands."

Meanwhile, Varney, closely followed by his new dependant, made his way to the hall, where men of more note and consequence than those left in the courtyard awaited the appearance of the Earl, who as yet kept his chamber. All paid court to Varney, with more or less deference, as suited their own rank, or the urgency of the business which brought them to his lord's levee. To the general question of, "When comes my lord forth, Master Varney?" he gave brief answers, as, "See you not my boots? I am but just returned from Oxford, and know nothing of it," and the like, until the same query was put in a higher tone by a personage of more importance. "I will inquire of the chamberlain,

Sir Thomas Copely,” was the reply. The chamberlain, distinguished by his silver key, answered that the Earl only awaited Master Varney’s return to come down, but that he would first speak with him in his private chamber. Varney, therefore, bowed to the company, and took leave, to enter his lord’s apartment.

There was a murmur of expectation which lasted a few minutes, and was at length hushed by the opening of the folding-doors at the upper end of the apartment, through which the Earl made his entrance, marshalled by his chamberlain and the steward of his family, and followed by Richard Varney. In his noble mien and princely features, men read nothing of that insolence which was practised by his dependants. His courtesies were, indeed, measured by the rank of those to whom they were addressed, but even the meanest person present had a share of his gracious notice. The inquiries which he made respecting the condition of the manor, of the Queen’s rights there, and of the advantages and disadvantages which might attend her occasional residence at the royal seat of Woodstock, seemed to show that he had most earnestly investigated the matter of the petition of the inhabitants, and with a desire to forward the interest of the place.

“Now the Lord love his noble countenance!” said the bailiff, who had thrust himself into the presence-chamber; “he looks somewhat pale. I warrant him he hath spent the whole night in perusing our memorial. Master Toughyarn, who took six months to draw it up, said it would take a week to understand it; and see if the Earl hath not knocked the marrow out of it in twenty-four hours!”

The Earl then acquainted them that he should move their sovereign to honour Woodstock occasionally with her residence during her royal progresses, that the town and its vicinity might derive, from her countenance and favour, the same advantages as from those of her predecessors. Meanwhile, he rejoiced to be the expounder of her gracious pleasure, in assuring them that, for the increase of trade and encouragement of the worthy burgesses of Woodstock, her Majesty was minded to erect the town into a Staple for wool.

This joyful intelligence was received with the acclamations not only of the better sort who were admitted to the audience-chamber, but of the commons who awaited without.

The freedom of the corporation was presented to the Earl upon knee by the magistrates of the place, together with a purse of gold pieces, which the Earl handed to Varney, who, on his part, gave a share to Lambourne, as the most acceptable earnest of his new service.

The Earl and his retinue took horse soon after to return to court, accompanied by the shouts of the inhabitants of Woodstock, who made the old oaks ring with re-echoing, “Long live Queen Elizabeth, and the noble Earl of Leicester!” The urbanity and courtesy of the Earl even threw a gleam of popularity over his attendants, as their haughty deportment had formerly obscured that of their master; and men shouted, “Long life to the Earl, and to his gallant followers!” as Varney and Lambourne, each in his rank, rode proudly through the streets of Woodstock.

## CHAPTER VIII

HOST. I will hear you, Master Fenton; and I will, at the least, keep your counsel. – MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

It becomes necessary to return to the detail of those circumstances which accompanied, and indeed occasioned, the sudden disappearance of Tressilian from the sign of the Black Bear at Cumnor. It will be recollected that this gentleman, after his rencounter with Varney, had returned to Giles Gosling's caravansary, where he shut himself up in his own chamber, demanded pen, ink, and paper, and announced his purpose to remain private for the day. In the evening he appeared again in the public room, where Michael Lambourne, who had been on the watch for him, agreeably to his engagement to Varney, endeavoured to renew his acquaintance with him, and hoped he retained no unfriendly recollection of the part he had taken in the morning's scuffle.

But Tressilian repelled his advances firmly, though with civility. "Master Lambourne," said he, "I trust I have recompensed to your pleasure the time you have wasted on me. Under the show of wild bluntness which you exhibit, I know you have sense enough to understand me, when I say frankly that the object of our temporary acquaintance having been accomplished, we must be strangers to each other in future."

"VOTO!" said Lambourne, twirling his whiskers with one hand, and grasping the hilt of his weapon with the other; "if I thought that this usage was meant to insult me – "

"You would bear it with discretion, doubtless," interrupted Tressilian, "as you must do at any rate. You know too well the distance that is betwixt us, to require me to explain myself further. Good evening."

So saying, he turned his back upon his former companion, and entered into discourse with the landlord. Michael Lambourne felt strongly disposed to bully; but his wrath died away in a few incoherent oaths and ejaculations, and he sank unresistingly under the ascendancy which superior spirits possess over persons of his habits and description. He remained moody and silent in a corner of the apartment, paying the most marked attention to every motion of his late companion, against whom he began now to nourish a quarrel on his own account, which he trusted to avenge by the execution of his new master Varney's directions. The hour of supper arrived, and was followed by that of repose, when Tressilian, like others, retired to his sleeping apartment.

He had not been in bed long, when the train of sad reveries, which supplied the place of rest in his disturbed mind, was suddenly interrupted by the jar of a door on its hinges, and a light was seen to glimmer in the apartment. Tressilian, who was as brave as steel, sprang from his bed at this alarm, and had laid hand upon his sword, when he was prevented from drawing it by a voice which said, "Be not too rash with your rapier, Master Tressilian. It is I, your host, Giles Gosling."

At the same time, unshrouding the dark lantern, which had hitherto only emitted an indistinct glimmer, the goodly aspect and figure of the landlord of the Black Bear was visibly presented to his astonished guest.

"What mummery is this, mine host?" said Tressilian. "Have you supped as jollily as last night, and so mistaken your chamber? or is midnight a time for masquerading it in your guest's lodging?"

"Master Tressilian," replied mine host, "I know my place and my time as well as e'er a merry landlord in England. But here has been my hang-dog kinsman watching you as close as ever cat watched a mouse; and here have you, on the other hand, quarrelled and fought, either with him or with some other person, and I fear that danger will come of it."

"Go to, thou art but a fool, man," said Tressilian. "Thy kinsman is beneath my resentment; and besides, why shouldst thou think I had quarrelled with any one whomsoever?"

"Oh, sir," replied the innkeeper, "there was a red spot on thy very cheek-bone, which boded of a late brawl, as sure as the conjunction of Mars and Saturn threatens misfortune; and when you

returned, the buckles of your girdle were brought forward, and your step was quick and hasty, and all things showed your hand and your hilt had been lately acquainted.”

“Well, good mine host, if I have been obliged to draw my sword,” said Tressilian, “why should such a circumstance fetch thee out of thy warm bed at this time of night? Thou seest the mischief is all over.”

“Under favour, that is what I doubt. Anthony Foster is a dangerous man, defended by strong court patronage, which hath borne him out in matters of very deep concernment. And, then, my kinsman – why, I have told you what he is; and if these two old cronies have made up their old acquaintance, I would not, my worshipful guest, that it should be at thy cost. I promise you, Mike Lambourne has been making very particular inquiries at my hostler when and which way you ride. Now, I would have you think whether you may not have done or said something for which you may be waylaid, and taken at disadvantage.”

“Thou art an honest man, mine host,” said Tressilian, after a moment’s consideration, “and I will deal frankly with thee. If these men’s malice is directed against me – as I deny not but it may – it is because they are the agents of a more powerful villain than themselves.”

“You mean Master Richard Varney, do you not?” said the landlord; “he was at Cumnor Place yesterday, and came not thither so private but what he was espied by one who told me.”

“I mean the same, mine host.”

“Then, for God’s sake, worshipful Master Tressilian,” said honest Gosling, “look well to yourself. This Varney is the protector and patron of Anthony Foster, who holds under him, and by his favour, some lease of yonder mansion and the park. Varney got a large grant of the lands of the Abbacy of Abingdon, and Cumnor Place amongst others, from his master, the Earl of Leicester. Men say he can do everything with him, though I hold the Earl too good a nobleman to employ him as some men talk of. And then the Earl can do anything (that is, anything right or fitting) with the Queen, God bless her! So you see what an enemy you have made to yourself.”

“Well – it is done, and I cannot help it,” answered Tressilian.

“Uds precious, but it must be helped in some manner,” said the host. “Richard Varney – why, what between his influence with my lord, and his pretending to so many old and vexatious claims in right of the abbot here, men fear almost to mention his name, much more to set themselves against his practices. You may judge by our discourses the last night. Men said their pleasure of Tony Foster, but not a word of Richard Varney, though all men judge him to be at the bottom of yonder mystery about the pretty wench. But perhaps you know more of that matter than I do; for women, though they wear not swords, are occasion for many a blade’s exchanging a sheath of neat’s leather for one of flesh and blood.”

“I do indeed know more of that poor unfortunate lady than thou dost, my friendly host; and so bankrupt am I, at this moment, of friends and advice, that I will willingly make a counsellor of thee, and tell thee the whole history, the rather that I have a favour to ask when my tale is ended.”

“Good Master Tressilian,” said the landlord, “I am but a poor innkeeper, little able to adjust or counsel such a guest as yourself. But as sure as I have risen decently above the world, by giving good measure and reasonable charges, I am an honest man; and as such, if I may not be able to assist you, I am, at least, not capable to abuse your confidence. Say away therefore, as confidently as if you spoke to your father; and thus far at least be certain, that my curiosity – for I will not deny that which belongs to my calling – is joined to a reasonable degree of discretion.”

“I doubt it not, mine host,” answered Tressilian; and while his auditor remained in anxious expectation, he meditated for an instant how he should commence his narrative. “My tale,” he at length said, “to be quite intelligible, must begin at some distance back. You have heard of the battle of Stoke, my good host, and perhaps of old Sir Roger Robsart, who, in that battle, valiantly took part with Henry VII., the Queen’s grandfather, and routed the Earl of Lincoln, Lord Geraldin and

his wild Irish, and the Flemings whom the Duchess of Burgundy had sent over, in the quarrel of Lambert Simnel?"

"I remember both one and the other," said Giles Gosling; "it is sung of a dozen times a week on my ale-bench below. Sir Roger Robsart of Devon – oh, ay, 'tis him of whom minstrels sing to this hour, —

'He was the flower of Stoke's red field,  
When Martin Swart on ground lay slain;  
In raging rout he never reel'd,  
But like a rock did firm remain.'

[This verse, or something similar, occurs in a long ballad, or poem, on Flodden Field, reprinted by the late Henry Weber.]

"Ay, and then there was Martin Swart I have heard my grandfather talk of, and of the jolly Almans whom he commanded, with their slashed doublets and quaint hose, all frounced with ribands above the nether-stocks. Here's a song goes of Martin Swart, too, an I had but memory for it: —

'Martin Swart and his men,  
Saddle them, saddle them,  
Martin Swart and his men;  
Saddle them well.'"

[This verse of an old song actually occurs in an old play where the singer boasts,

"Courteously I can both counter and knock  
Of Martin Swart and all his merry men."]

"True, good mine host – the day was long talked of; but if you sing so loud, you will awake more listeners than I care to commit my confidence unto."

"I crave pardon, my worshipful guest," said mine host, "I was oblivious. When an old song comes across us merry old knights of the spigot, it runs away with our discretion."

"Well, mine host, my grandfather, like some other Cornishmen, kept a warm affection to the House of York, and espoused the quarrel of this Simnel, assuming the title of Earl of Warwick, as the county afterwards, in great numbers, countenanced the cause of Perkin Warbeck, calling himself the Duke of York. My grandsire joined Simnel's standard, and was taken fighting desperately at Stoke, where most of the leaders of that unhappy army were slain in their harness. The good knight to whom he rendered himself, Sir Roger Robsart, protected him from the immediate vengeance of the king, and dismissed him without ransom. But he was unable to guard him from other penalties of his rashness, being the heavy fines by which he was impoverished, according to Henry's mode of weakening his enemies. The good knight did what he might to mitigate the distresses of my ancestor; and their friendship became so strict, that my father was bred up as the sworn brother and intimate of the present Sir Hugh Robsart, the only son of Sir Roger, and the heir of his honest, and generous, and hospitable temper, though not equal to him in martial achievements."

"I have heard of good Sir Hugh Robsart," interrupted the host, "many a time and oft; his huntsman and sworn servant, Will Badger, hath spoken of him an hundred times in this very house. A jovial knight he is, and hath loved hospitality and open housekeeping more than the present fashion, which lays as much gold lace on the seams of a doublet as would feed a dozen of tall fellows with

beef and ale for a twelvemonth, and let them have their evening at the alehouse once a week, to do good to the publican.”

“If you have seen Will Badger, mine host,” said Tressilian, “you have heard enough of Sir Hugh Robsart; and therefore I will but say, that the hospitality you boast of hath proved somewhat detrimental to the estate of his family, which is perhaps of the less consequence, as he has but one daughter to whom to bequeath it. And here begins my share in the tale. Upon my father’s death, now several years since, the good Sir Hugh would willingly have made me his constant companion. There was a time, however, at which I felt the kind knight’s excessive love for field-sports detained me from studies, by which I might have profited more; but I ceased to regret the leisure which gratitude and hereditary friendship compelled me to bestow on these rural avocations. The exquisite beauty of Mistress Amy Robsart, as she grew up from childhood to woman, could not escape one whom circumstances obliged to be so constantly in her company – I loved her, in short, mine host, and her father saw it.”

“And crossed your true loves, no doubt?” said mine host. “It is the way in all such cases; and I judge it must have been so in your instance, from the heavy sigh you uttered even now.”

“The case was different, mine host. My suit was highly approved by the generous Sir Hugh Robsart; it was his daughter who was cold to my passion.”

“She was the more dangerous enemy of the two,” said the innkeeper. “I fear me your suit proved a cold one.”

“She yielded me her esteem,” said Tressilian, “and seemed not unwilling that I should hope it might ripen into a warmer passion. There was a contract of future marriage executed betwixt us, upon her father’s intercession; but to comply with her anxious request, the execution was deferred for a twelvemonth. During this period, Richard Varney appeared in the country, and, availing himself of some distant family connection with Sir Hugh Robsart, spent much of his time in his company, until, at length, he almost lived in the family.”

“That could bode no good to the place he honoured with his residence,” said Gosling.

“No, by the rood!” replied Tressilian. “Misunderstanding and misery followed his presence, yet so strangely that I am at this moment at a loss to trace the gradations of their encroachment upon a family which had, till then, been so happy. For a time Amy Robsart received the attentions of this man Varney with the indifference attached to common courtesies; then followed a period in which she seemed to regard him with dislike, and even with disgust; and then an extraordinary species of connection appeared to grow up betwixt them. Varney dropped those airs of pretension and gallantry which had marked his former approaches; and Amy, on the other hand, seemed to renounce the ill-disguised disgust with which she had regarded them. They seemed to have more of privacy and confidence together than I fully liked, and I suspected that they met in private, where there was less restraint than in our presence. Many circumstances, which I noticed but little at the time – for I deemed her heart as open as her angelic countenance – have since arisen on my memory, to convince me of their private understanding. But I need not detail them – the fact speaks for itself. She vanished from her father’s house; Varney disappeared at the same time; and this very day I have seen her in the character of his paramour, living in the house of his sordid dependant Foster, and visited by him, muffled, and by a secret entrance.”

“And this, then, is the cause of your quarrel? Methinks, you should have been sure that the fair lady either desired or deserved your interference.”

“Mine host,” answered Tressilian, “my father – such I must ever consider Sir Hugh Robsart – sits at home struggling with his grief, or, if so far recovered, vainly attempting to drown, in the practice of his field-sports, the recollection that he had once a daughter – a recollection which ever and anon breaks from him under circumstances the most pathetic. I could not brook the idea that he should live in misery, and Amy in guilt; and I endeavoured to seek her out, with the hope of inducing

her to return to her family. I have found her, and when I have either succeeded in my attempt, or have found it altogether unavailing, it is my purpose to embark for the Virginia voyage.”

“Be not so rash, good sir,” replied Giles Gosling, “and cast not yourself away because a woman – to be brief – IS a woman, and changes her lovers like her suit of ribands, with no better reason than mere fantasy. And ere we probe this matter further, let me ask you what circumstances of suspicion directed you so truly to this lady’s residence, or rather to her place of concealment?”

“The last is the better chosen word, mine host,” answered Tressilian; “and touching your question, the knowledge that Varney held large grants of the demesnes formerly belonging to the monks of Abingdon directed me to this neighbourhood; and your nephew’s visit to his old comrade Foster gave me the means of conviction on the subject.”

“And what is now your purpose, worthy sir? – excuse my freedom in asking the question so broadly.”

“I purpose, mine host,” said Tressilian, “to renew my visit to the place of her residence to-morrow, and to seek a more detailed communication with her than I have had to-day. She must indeed be widely changed from what she once was, if my words make no impression upon her.”

“Under your favour, Master Tressilian,” said the landlord, “you can follow no such course. The lady, if I understand you, has already rejected your interference in the matter.”

“It is but too true,” said Tressilian; “I cannot deny it.”

“Then, marry, by what right or interest do you process a compulsory interference with her inclination, disgraceful as it may be to herself and to her parents? Unless my judgment gulls me, those under whose protection she has thrown herself would have small hesitation to reject your interference, even if it were that of a father or brother; but as a discarded lover, you expose yourself to be repelled with the strong hand, as well as with scorn. You can apply to no magistrate for aid or countenance; and you are hunting, therefore, a shadow in water, and will only (excuse my plainness) come by ducking and danger in attempting to catch it.”

“I will appeal to the Earl of Leicester,” said Tressilian, “against the infamy of his favourite. He courts the severe and strict sect of Puritans. He dare not, for the sake of his own character, refuse my appeal, even although he were destitute of the principles of honour and nobleness with which fame invests him. Or I will appeal to the Queen herself.”

“Should Leicester,” said the landlord, “be disposed to protect his dependant (as indeed he is said to be very confidential with Varney), the appeal to the Queen may bring them both to reason. Her Majesty is strict in such matters, and (if it be not treason to speak it) will rather, it is said, pardon a dozen courtiers for falling in love with herself, than one for giving preference to another woman. Coragio then, my brave guest! for if thou layest a petition from Sir Hugh at the foot of the throne, buckled by the story of thine own wrongs, the favourite Earl dared as soon leap into the Thames at the fullest and deepest, as offer to protect Varney in a cause of this nature. But to do this with any chance of success, you must go formally to work; and, without staying here to tilt with the master of horse to a privy councillor, and expose yourself to the dagger of his cameradoes, you should hie you to Devonshire, get a petition drawn up for Sir Hugh Robsart, and make as many friends as you can to forward your interest at court.”

“You have spoken well, mine host,” said Tressilian, “and I will profit by your advice, and leave you to-morrow early.”

“Nay, leave me to-night, sir, before to-morrow comes,” said he landlord. “I never prayed for a guest’s arrival more eagerly than I do to have you safely gone, My kinsman’s destiny is most like to be hanged for something, but I would not that the cause were the murder of an honoured guest of mine. ‘Better ride safe in the dark,’ says the proverb, ‘than in daylight with a cut-throat at your elbow.’ Come, sir, I move you for your own safety. Your horse and all is ready, and here is your score.”

“It is somewhat under a noble,” said Tressilian, giving one to the host; “give the balance to pretty Cicely, your daughter, and the servants of the house.”

“They shall taste of your bounty, sir,” said Gosling, “and you should taste of my daughter’s lips in grateful acknowledgment, but at this hour she cannot grace the porch to greet your departure.”

“Do not trust your daughter too far with your guests, my good landlord,” said Tressilian.

“Oh, sir, we will keep measure; but I wonder not that you are jealous of them all. – May I crave to know with what aspect the fair lady at the Place yesterday received you?”

“I own,” said Tressilian, “it was angry as well as confused, and affords me little hope that she is yet awakened from her unhappy delusion.”

“In that case, sir, I see not why you should play the champion of a wench that will none of you, and incur the resentment of a favourite’s favourite, as dangerous a monster as ever a knight adventurer encountered in the old story books.”

“You do me wrong in the supposition, mine host – gross wrong,” said Tressilian; “I do not desire that Amy should ever turn thought upon me more. Let me but see her restored to her father, and all I have to do in Europe – perhaps in the world – is over and ended.”

“A wiser resolution were to drink a cup of sack, and forget her,” said the landlord. “But five-and-twenty and fifty look on those matters with different eyes, especially when one cast of peepers is set in the skull of a young gallant, and the other in that of an old publican. I pity you, Master Tressilian, but I see not how I can aid you in the matter.”

“Only thus far, mine host,” replied Tressilian – “keep a watch on the motions of those at the Place, which thou canst easily learn without suspicion, as all men’s news fly to the ale-bench; and be pleased to communicate the tidings in writing to such person, and to no other, who shall bring you this ring as a special token. Look at it; it is of value, and I will freely bestow it on you.”

“Nay, sir,” said the landlord, “I desire no recompense – but it seems an unadvised course in me, being in a public line, to connect myself in a matter of this dark and perilous nature. I have no interest in it.”

“You, and every father in the land, who would have his daughter released from the snares of shame, and sin, and misery, have an interest deeper than aught concerning earth only could create.”

“Well, sir,” said the host, “these are brave words; and I do pity from my soul the frank-hearted old gentleman, who has minished his estate in good housekeeping for the honour of his country, and now has his daughter, who should be the stay of his age, and so forth, whisked up by such a kite as this Varney. And though your part in the matter is somewhat of the wildest, yet I will e’en be a madcap for company, and help you in your honest attempt to get back the good man’s child, so far as being your faithful intelligencer can serve. And as I shall be true to you, I pray you to be trusty to me, and keep my secret; for it were bad for the custom of the Black Bear should it be said the bear-warder interfered in such matters. Varney has interest enough with the justices to dismount my noble emblem from the post on which he swings so gallantly, to call in my license, and ruin me from garret to cellar.”

“Do not doubt my secrecy, mine host,” said Tressilian; “I will retain, besides, the deepest sense of thy service, and of the risk thou dost run – remember the ring is my sure token. And now, farewell! for it was thy wise advice that I should tarry here as short a time as may be.”

“Follow me, then, Sir Guest,” said the landlord, “and tread as gently as if eggs were under your foot, instead of deal boards. No man must know when or how you departed.”

By the aid of his dark lantern he conducted Tressilian, as soon as he had made himself ready for his journey, through a long intricacy of passages, which opened to an outer court, and from thence to a remote stable, where he had already placed his guest’s horse. He then aided him to fasten on the saddle the small portmantle which contained his necessaries, opened a postern door, and with a hearty shake of the hand, and a reiteration of his promise to attend to what went on at Cumnor Place, he dismissed his guest to his solitary journey.

## CHAPTER IX

Far in the lane a lonely hut he found,  
No tenant ventured on the unwholesome ground:  
Here smokes his forge, he bares his sinewy arm,  
And early strokes the sounding anvil warm;  
Around his shop the steely sparkles flew,  
As for the steed he shaped the bending shoe.

– *GAY'S TRIVIA.*

As it was deemed proper by the traveller himself, as well as by Giles Gosling, that Tressilian should avoid being seen in the neighbourhood of Cumnor by those whom accident might make early risers, the landlord had given him a route, consisting of various byways and lanes, which he was to follow in succession, and which, all the turns and short-cuts duly observed, was to conduct him to the public road to Marlborough.

But, like counsel of every other kind, this species of direction is much more easily given than followed; and what betwixt the intricacy of the way, the darkness of the night, Tressilian's ignorance of the country, and the sad and perplexing thoughts with which he had to contend, his journey proceeded so slowly, that morning found him only in the vale of Whitehorse, memorable for the defeat of the Danes in former days, with his horse deprived of a fore-foot shoe, an accident which threatened to put a stop to his journey by laming the animal. The residence of a smith was his first object of inquiry, in which he received little satisfaction from the dullness or sullenness of one or two peasants, early bound for their labour, who gave brief and indifferent answers to his questions on the subject. Anxious, at length, that the partner of his journey should suffer as little as possible from the unfortunate accident, Tressilian dismounted, and led his horse in the direction of a little hamlet, where he hoped either to find or hear tidings of such an artificer as he now wanted. Through a deep and muddy lane, he at length waded on to the place, which proved only an assemblage of five or six miserable huts, about the doors of which one or two persons, whose appearance seemed as rude as that of their dwellings, were beginning the toils of the day. One cottage, however, seemed of rather superior aspect, and the old dame, who was sweeping her threshold, appeared something less rude than her neighbours. To her Tressilian addressed the oft-repeated question, whether there was a smith in this neighbourhood, or any place where he could refresh his horse? The dame looked him in the face with a peculiar expression as she replied, "Smith! ay, truly is there a smith – what wouldst ha' wi' un, mon?"

"To shoe my horse, good dame," answered Tressilian; "you may see that he has thrown a fore-foot shoe."

"Master Holiday!" exclaimed the dame, without returning any direct answer – "Master Herasmus Holiday, come and speak to mon, and please you."

"FAVETE LINGUIS," answered a voice from within; "I cannot now come forth, Gammer Sludge, being in the very sweetest bit of my morning studies."

"Nay, but, good now, Master Holiday, come ye out, do ye. Here's a mon would to Wayland Smith, and I care not to show him way to devil; his horse hath cast shoe."

"QUID MIHI CUM CABALLO?" replied the man of learning from within; "I think there is but one wise man in the hundred, and they cannot shoe a horse without him!"

And forth came the honest pedagogue, for such his dress bespoke him. A long, lean, shambling, stooping figure was surmounted by a head thatched with lank, black hair somewhat inclining to grey. His features had the cast of habitual authority, which I suppose Dionysius carried with him from the throne to the schoolmaster's pulpit, and bequeathed as a legacy to all of the same profession, A black

buckram cassock was gathered at his middle with a belt, at which hung, instead of knife or weapon, a goodly leathern pen-and-ink case. His ferula was stuck on the other side, like Harlequin's wooden sword; and he carried in his hand the tattered volume which he had been busily perusing.

On seeing a person of Tressilian's appearance, which he was better able to estimate than the country folks had been, the schoolmaster unbonneted, and accosted him with, "SALVE, DOMINE. INTELLIGISNE LINGUAM LATINAM?"

Tressilian mustered his learning to reply, "LINGUAE LATINAE HAUD PENITUS IGNARUS, VENIA TUA, DOMINE ERUDITISSIME, VERNACULAM LIBENTIUS LOQUOR."

The Latin reply had upon the schoolmaster the effect which the mason's sign is said to produce on the brethren of the trowel. He was at once interested in the learned traveller, listened with gravity to his story of a tired horse and a lost shoe, and then replied with solemnity, "It may appear a simple thing, most worshipful, to reply to you that there dwells, within a brief mile of these TUGURIA, the best FABER FERARIUS, the most accomplished blacksmith, that ever nailed iron upon horse. Now, were I to say so, I warrant me you would think yourself COMPOS VOTI, or, as the vulgar have it, a made man."

"I should at least," said Tressilian, "have a direct answer to a plain question, which seems difficult to be obtained in this country."

"It is a mere sending of a sinful soul to the evil un," said the old woman, "the sending a living creature to Wayland Smith."

"Peace, Gammer Sludge!" said the pedagogue; "PAUCA VERBA, Gammer Sludge; look to the furmity, Gammer Sludge; CURETUR JENTACULUM, Gammer Sludge; this gentleman is none of thy gossips." Then turning to Tressilian, he resumed his lofty tone, "And so, most worshipful, you would really think yourself FELIX BIS TERQUE should I point out to you the dwelling of this same smith?"

"Sir," replied Tressilian, "I should in that case have all that I want at present – a horse fit to carry me forward; – out of hearing of your learning." The last words he muttered to himself.

"O CAECA MENS MORTALIUM!" said the learned man "well was it sung by Junius Juvenalis, 'NUMINIBUS VOTA EXAUDITA MALIGNIS!'"

"Learned Magister," said Tressilian, "your erudition so greatly exceeds my poor intellectual capacity that you must excuse my seeking elsewhere for information which I can better understand."

"There again now," replied the pedagogue, "how fondly you fly from him that would instruct you! Truly said Quintilian –"

"I pray, sir, let Quintilian be for the present, and answer, in a word and in English, if your learning can condescend so far, whether there is any place here where I can have opportunity to refresh my horse until I can have him shod?"

"Thus much courtesy, sir," said the schoolmaster, "I can readily render you, that although there is in this poor hamlet (NOSTRA PAUPERA REGNA) no regular HOSPITIUM, as my namesake Erasmus calleth it, yet, forasmuch as you are somewhat embued, or at least tinged, as it were, with good letters, I will use my interest with the good woman of the house to accommodate you with a platter of furmity – an wholesome food for which I have found no Latin phrase – your horse shall have a share of the cow-house, with a bottle of sweet hay, in which the good woman Sludge so much abounds, that it may be said of her cow, FAENUM HABET IN CORNU; and if it please you to bestow on me the pleasure of your company, the banquet shall cost you NE SEMISSEM QUIDEM, so much is Gammer Sludge bound to me for the pains I have bestowed on the top and bottom of her hopeful heir Dickie, whom I have painfully made to travel through the accidence."

"Now, God yield ye for it, Master Herasmus," said the good Gammer, "and grant that little Dickie may be the better for his accident! And for the rest, if the gentleman list to stay, breakfast

shall be on the board in the wringing of a dishclout; and for horse-meat, and man's meat, I bear no such base mind as to ask a penny."

Considering the state of his horse, Tressilian, upon the whole, saw no better course than to accept the invitation thus learnedly made and hospitably confirmed, and take chance that when the good pedagogue had exhausted every topic of conversation, he might possibly condescend to tell him where he could find the smith they spoke of. He entered the hut accordingly, and sat down with the learned Magister Erasmus Holiday, partook of his furmity, and listened to his learned account of himself for a good half hour, ere he could get him to talk upon any other topic, The reader will readily excuse our accompanying this man of learning into all the details with which he favoured Tressilian, of which the following sketch may suffice.

He was born at Hogsorton, where, according to popular saying, the pigs play upon the organ; a proverb which he interpreted allegorically, as having reference to the herd of Epicurus, of which litter Horace confessed himself a porker. His name of Erasmus he derived partly from his father having been the son of a renowned washerwoman, who had held that great scholar in clean linen all the while he was at Oxford; a task of some difficulty, as he was only possessed of two shirts, "the one," as she expressed herself, "to wash the other," The vestiges of one of these CAMICIAE, as Master Holiday boasted, were still in his possession, having fortunately been detained by his grandmother to cover the balance of her bill. But he thought there was a still higher and overruling cause for his having had the name of Erasmus conferred on him – namely, the secret presentiment of his mother's mind that, in the babe to be christened, was a hidden genius, which should one day lead him to rival the fame of the great scholar of Amsterdam. The schoolmaster's surname led him as far into dissertation as his Christian appellative. He was inclined to think that he bore the name of Holiday QUASI LUCUS A NON LUCENDO, because he gave such few holidays to his school. "Hence," said he, "the schoolmaster is termed, classically, LUDI MAGISTER, because he deprives boys of their play." And yet, on the other hand, he thought it might bear a very different interpretation, and refer to his own exquisite art in arranging pageants, morris-dances, May-day festivities, and such-like holiday delights, for which he assured Tressilian he had positively the purest and the most inventive brain in England; insomuch, that his cunning in framing such pleasures had made him known to many honourable persons, both in country and court, and especially to the noble Earl of Leicester. "And although he may now seem to forget me," he said, "in the multitude of state affairs, yet I am well assured that, had he some pretty pastime to array for entertainment of the Queen's Grace, horse and man would be seeking the humble cottage of Erasmus Holiday. PARVO CONTENTUS, in the meanwhile, I hear my pupils parse and construe, worshipful sir, and drive away my time with the aid of the Muses. And I have at all times, when in correspondence with foreign scholars, subscribed myself Erasmus ab Die Fausto, and have enjoyed the distinction due to the learned under that title: witness the erudite Diedrichus Buckerschockius, who dedicated to me under that title his treatise on the letter TAU. In fine, sir, I have been a happy and distinguished man."

"Long may it be so, sir!" said the traveller; "but permit me to ask, in your own learned phrase, QUID HOC AD IPHYCLI BOVES? what has all this to do with the shoeing of my poor nag?"

"FESTINALENTE," said the man of learning, "we will presently come to that point. You must know that some two or three years past there came to these parts one who called himself Doctor Doboobie, although it may be he never wrote even MAGISTER ARTIUM, save in right of his hungry belly. Or it may be, that if he had any degrees, they were of the devil's giving; for he was what the vulgar call a white witch, a cunning man, and such like. – Now, good sir, I perceive you are impatient; but if a man tell not his tale his own way, how have you warrant to think that he can tell it in yours?"

"Well, then, learned sir, take your way," answered Tressilian; "only let us travel at a sharper pace, for my time is somewhat of the shortest."

"Well, sir," resumed Erasmus Holiday, with the most provoking perseverance, "I will not say that this same Demetrius for so he wrote himself when in foreign parts, was an actual conjurer, but

certain it is that he professed to be a brother of the mystical Order of the Rosy Cross, a disciple of Geber (EX NOMINE CUJUS VENIT VERBUM VERNACULUM, GIBBERISH). He cured wounds by salving the weapon instead of the sore; told fortunes by palmistry; discovered stolen goods by the sieve and shears; gathered the right maddow and the male fern seed, through use of which men walk invisible; pretended some advances towards the panacea, or universal elixir; and affected to convert good lead into sorry silver.”

“In other words,” said Tressilian, “he was a quacksalver and common cheat; but what has all this to do with my nag, and the shoe which he has lost?”

“With your worshipful patience,” replied the diffusive man of letters, “you shall understand that presently – PATIENTIA then, right worshipful, which word, according to our Marcus Tullius, is ‘DIFFICILIUM RERUM DIURNA PERPESSIO.’ This same Demetrius Doboobie, after dealing with the country, as I have told you, began to acquire fame INTER MAGNATES, among the prime men of the land, and there is likelihood he might have aspired to great matters, had not, according to vulgar fame (for I aver not the thing as according with my certain knowledge), the devil claimed his right, one dark night, and flown off with Demetrius, who was never seen or heard of afterwards. Now here comes the MEDULLA, the very marrow, of my tale. This Doctor Doboobie had a servant, a poor snake, whom he employed in trimming his furnace, regulating it by just measure – compounding his drugs – tracing his circles – cajoling his patients, ET SIC DE CAETERIS. Well, right worshipful, the Doctor being removed thus strangely, and in a way which struck the whole country with terror, this poor Zany thinks to himself, in the words of Maro, ‘UNO AVULSO, NON DEFICIT ALTER;’ and, even as a tradesman’s apprentice sets himself up in his master’s shop when he is dead or hath retired from business, so doth this Wayland assume the dangerous trade of his defunct master. But although, most worshipful sir, the world is ever prone to listen to the pretensions of such unworthy men, who are, indeed, mere SALTIM BANQUI and CHARLATANI, though usurping the style and skill of doctors of medicine, yet the pretensions of this poor Zany, this Wayland, were too gross to pass on them, nor was there a mere rustic, a villager, who was not ready to accost him in the sense of Persius, though in their own rugged words, —

DILIUS HELLEBORUM CERTO COMPESCERE PUNCTO  
NESCIUS EXAMEN? VETAT HOC NATURA MEDENDI;

which I have thus rendered in a poor paraphrase of mine own, —

Wilt thou mix hellebore, who dost not know  
How many grains should to the mixture go?  
The art of medicine this forbids, I trow.

“Moreover, the evil reputation of the master, and his strange and doubtful end, or at least sudden disappearance, prevented any, excepting the most desperate of men, to seek any advice or opinion from the servant; wherefore, the poor vermin was likely at first to swarf for very hunger. But the devil that serves him, since the death of Demetrius or Doboobie, put him on a fresh device. This knave, whether from the inspiration of the devil, or from early education, shoes horses better than e’er a man betwixt us and Iceland; and so he gives up his practice on the bipeds, the two-legged and unfledged species called mankind, and betakes him entirely to shoeing of horses.”

“Indeed! and where does he lodge all this time?” said Tressilian. “And does he shoe horses well? Show me his dwelling presently.”

The interruption pleased not the Magister, who exclaimed, “O CAECA MENS MORTALIUM! – though, by the way, I used that quotation before. But I would the classics could afford me any sentiment of power to stop those who are so willing to rush upon their own destruction.

Hear but, I pray you, the conditions of this man,” said he, in continuation, “ere you are so willing to place yourself within his danger – ”

“A’ takes no money for a’s work,” said the dame, who stood by, enraptured as it were with the line words and learned apophthegms which glided so fluently from her erudite inmate, Master Holiday. But this interruption pleased not the Magister more than that of the traveller.

“Peace,” said he, “Gammer Sludge; know your place, if it be your will. SUFFLAMINA, Gammer Sludge, and allow me to expound this matter to our worshipful guest. – Sir,” said he, again addressing Tressilian, “this old woman speaks true, though in her own rude style; for certainly this FABER FERRARIUS, or blacksmith, takes money of no one.”

“And that is a sure sign he deals with Satan,” said Dame Sludge; “since no good Christian would ever refuse the wages of his labour.”

“The old woman hath touched it again,” said the pedagogue; “REM ACU TETIGIT – she hath pricked it with her needle’s point. This Wayland takes no money, indeed; nor doth he show himself to any one.”

“And can this madman, for such I hold him,” said the traveller, “know aught like good skill of his trade?”

“Oh, sir, in that let us give the devil his due – Mulciber himself, with all his Cyclops, could hardly amend him. But assuredly there is little wisdom in taking counsel or receiving aid from one who is but too plainly in league with the author of evil.”

“I must take my chance of that, good Master Holiday,” said Tressilian, rising; “and as my horse must now have eaten his provender, I must needs thank you for your good cheer, and pray you to show me this man’s residence, that I may have the means of proceeding on my journey.”

“Ay, ay, do ye show him, Master Herasmus,” said the old dame, who was, perhaps, desirous to get her house freed of her guest; “a’ must needs go when the devil drives.”

“DO MANUS,” said the Magister, “I submit – taking the world to witness, that I have possessed this honourable gentleman with the full injustice which he has done and shall do to his own soul, if he becomes thus a trinketer with Satan. Neither will I go forth with our guest myself, but rather send my pupil. – RICARDE! ADSIS, NEBULO.”

“Under your favour, not so,” answered the old woman; “you may peril your own soul, if you list, but my son shall budge on no such errand. And I wonder at you, Dominie Doctor, to propose such a piece of service for little Dickie.”

“Nay, my good Gammer Sludge,” answered the preceptor, “Ricardus shall go but to the top of the hill, and indicate with his digit to the stranger the dwelling of Wayland Smith. Believe not that any evil can come to him, he having read this morning, fasting, a chapter of the Septuagint, and, moreover, having had his lesson in the Greek Testament.”

“Ay,” said his mother, “and I have sewn a sprig of witch’s elm in the neck of un’s doublet, ever since that foul thief has begun his practices on man and beast in these parts.”

“And as he goes oft (as I hugely suspect) towards this conjurer for his own pastime, he may for once go thither, or near it, to pleasure us, and to assist this stranger. – ERGO, HEUS RICARDE! ADSIS, QUAESO, MI DIDASCULE.”

The pupil, thus affectionately invoked, at length came stumbling into the room; a queer, shambling, ill-made urchin, who, by his stunted growth, seemed about twelve or thirteen years old, though he was probably, in reality, a year or two older, with a carrotty pate in huge disorder, a freckled, sunburnt visage, with a snub nose, a long chin, and two peery grey eyes, which had a droll obliquity of vision, approaching to a squint, though perhaps not a decided one. It was impossible to look at the little man without some disposition to laugh, especially when Gammer Sludge, seizing upon and kissing him, in spite of his struggling and kicking in reply to her caresses, termed him her own precious pearl of beauty.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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