ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

THE LAST OF THE BARONS — VOLUME 09

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The Last of the Barons — Volume 09:

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton
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BOOK IX.
THE WANDERERS AND THE EXILES

CHAPTER I.
HOW THE GREAT BARON BECOMES AS GREAT A REBEL

Hilyard was yet asleep in the chamber assigned to him as his prison, when a rough grasp shook off his slumbers, and he saw the earl before him, with a countenance so changed from its usual open majesty, so dark and sombre, that he said involuntarily, "You send me to the doomsman,—I am ready!"

"Hist, man! Thou hatest Edward of York?"

"An it were my last word, yes!"

"Give me thy hand—we are friends! Stare not at me with

those eyes of wonder, ask not the why nor wherefore! This last night gave Edward a rebel more in Richard Nevile! A steed waits thee at my gates; ride fast to young Sir Robert Welles with this letter. Bid him not be dismayed; bid him hold out, for ere many days are past, Lord Warwick, and it may be also the Duke of Clarence, will join their force with his. Mark, I say not that I am for Henry of Lancaster,—I say only that I am against Edward of York. Farewell, and when we meet again, blessed be the arm that first cuts its way to a tyrant's heart!"

Without another word, Warwick left the chamber. Hilyard at first could not believe his senses; but as he dressed himself in haste, he pondered over all those causes of dissension which had long notoriously subsisted between Edward and the earl, and rejoiced that the prophecy that he had long so shrewdly hazarded was at last fulfilled. Descending the stairs he gained the gate, where Marmaduke awaited him, while a groom held a stout haquenee (as the common riding-horse was then called), whose points and breeding promised speed and endurance.

"Mount, Master Robin," said Marmaduke; "I little thought we should ever ride as friends together! Mount!—our way for some miles out of London is the same. You go into Lincolnshire, I into the shire of Hertford."

"And for the same purpose?" asked Hilyard, as he sprang upon his horse, and the two men rode briskly on.

"Yes!"

"Lord Warwick is changed at last?"

"At last!"

"For long?"

"Till death!"

"Good, I ask no more!"

A sound of hoofs behind made the franklin turn his head, and he saw a goodly troop, armed to the teeth, emerge from the earl's house and follow the lead of Marmaduke. Meanwhile Warwick was closeted with Montagu.

Worldly as the latter was, and personally attached to Edward, he was still keenly alive to all that touched the honour of his House; and his indignation at the deadly insult offered to his niece was even more loudly expressed than that of the fiery earl.

"To deem," he exclaimed, "to deem Elizabeth Woodville worthy of his throne, and to see in Anne Nevile the only worthy to be his leman!"

"Ay!" said the earl, with a calmness perfectly terrible, from its unnatural contrast to his ordinary heat, when but slightly chafed, "ay! thou sayest it! But be tranquil; cold,—cold as iron, and as hard! We must scheme now, not storm and threaten—I never schemed before! You are right,—honesty is a fool's policy! Would I had known this but an hour before the news reached me! I have already dismissed our friends to their different districts, to support King Edward's cause—he is still king,—a little while longer king! Last night, I dismissed them—last night, at the very hour when—O God, give me patience!" He paused, and added in a low voice, "Yet—yet— how long the moments are how long!

Ere the sun sets, Edward, I trust, will be in my power!"

"How?"

"He goes, to-day, to the More,—he will not go the less for what hath chanced; he will trust to the archbishop to make his peace with me,— churchmen are not fathers! Marmaduke Nevile hath my orders; a hundred armed men, who would march against the fiend himself, if I said the word, will surround the More, and seize the guest!"

"But what then? Who, if Edward, I dare not say the word—who is to succeed him?"

"Clarence is the male heir."

"But with what face to the people proclaim—"

"There—there it is!" interrupted Warwick. "I have thought of that,— I have thought of all things; my mind seems to have traversed worlds since daybreak! True! all commotion to be successful must have a cause that men can understand. Nevertheless, you, Montagu—you have a smoother tongue than I; go to our friends—to those who hate Edward— seek them, sound them!"

"And name to them Edward's infamy?"

"'S death, dost thou think it? Thou, a Monthermer and Montagu: proclaim to England the foul insult to the hearth of an English gentleman and peer! feed every ribald Bourdour with song and roundel of Anne's virgin shame! how King Edward stole to her room at the dead of night, and wooed and pressed, and swore, and—God of Heaven, that this hand were on his

throat! No, brother, no! there are some wrongs we may not tell, —tumours and swellings of the heart which are eased not till blood can flow!"

During this conference between the brothers, Edward, in his palace, was seized with consternation and dismay on hearing that the Lady Anne could not be found in her chamber. He sent forthwith to summon Adam Warner to his presence, and learned from the simple sage, who concealed nothing, the mode in which Anne had fled from the Tower. The king abruptly dismissed Adam, after a few hearty curses and vague threats; and awaking to the necessity of inventing some plausible story, to account to the wonder of the court for the abrupt disappearance of his guest, he saw that the person who could best originate and circulate such a tale was the queen; and he sought her at once, with the resolution to choose his confidant in the connection most rarely honoured by marital trust in similar offences. He, however, so softened his narrative as to leave it but a venial error. He had been indulging over-freely in the wine-cup, he had walked into the corridor for the refreshing coolness of the air, he had seen the figure of a female whom he did not recognize; and a few gallant words, he scarce remembered what, had been misconstrued. On perceiving whom he had thus addressed, he had sought to soothe the anger or alarm of the Lady Anne; but still mistaking his intention, she had hurried into Warner's chamber; he had followed her thither, and now she had fled the palace. Such was his story, told lightly and laughingly, but ending with a grave

enumeration of the dangers his imprudence had incurred.

Whatever Elizabeth felt, or however she might interpret the confession, she acted with her customary discretion; affected, after a few tender reproaches, to place implicit credit in her lord's account, and volunteered to prevent all scandal by the probable story that the earl, being prevented from coming in person for his daughter, as he had purposed, by fresh news of the rebellion which might call him from London with the early day, had commissioned his kinsman Marmaduke to escort her home. The quick perception of her sex told her that, whatever license might have terrified Anne into so abrupt a flight, the haughty earl would shrink no less than Edward himself from making public an insult which slander could well distort into the dishonour of his daughter; and that whatever pretext might be invented, Warwick would not deign to contradict it. And as, despite Elizabeth's hatred to the earl, and desire of permanent breach between Edward and his minister, she could not, as queen, wife, and woman, but be anxious that some cause more honourable in Edward, and less odious to the people, should be assigned for quarrel, she earnestly recommended the king to repair at once to the More, as had been before arranged, and to spare no pains, disdain no expressions of penitence and humiliation, to secure the mediation of the archbishop. His mind somewhat relieved by this interview and counsel, the king kissed Elizabeth with affectionate gratitude, and returned to his chamber to prepare for his departure to the archbishop's palace. But then, remembering

that Adam and Sibyll possessed his secret, he resolved at once to banish them from the Tower. For a moment he thought of the dungeons of his fortress, of the rope of his doomsman; but his conscience at that hour was sore and vexed. His fierceness humbled by the sense of shame, he shrank from a new crime; and, moreover, his strong common-sense assured him that the testimony of a shunned and abhorred wizard ceased to be of weight the moment it was deprived of the influence it took from the protection of a king. He gave orders for a boat to be in readiness by the gate of St. Thomas, again summoned Adam into his presence, and said briefly, "Master Warner, the London mechanics cry so loudly against thine invention for lessening labour and starving the poor, the sailors on the wharfs are so mutinous at the thought of vessels without rowers, that, as a good king is bound, I yield to the voice of my people. Go home, then, at once; the queen dispenses with thy fair daughter's service, the damsel accompanies thee. A boat awaits ye at the stairs; a guard shall attend ye to your house. Think what has passed within these walls has been a dream,—a dream that, if told, is deathful, if concealed and forgotten hath no portent!"

Without waiting a reply, the king called from the anteroom one of his gentlemen, and gave him special directions as to the departure and conduct of the worthy scholar and his gentle daughter. Edward next summoned before him the warder of the gate, learned that he alone was privy to the mode of his guest's flight, and deeming it best to leave at large no commentator on

the tale he had invented, sentenced the astonished warder to three months' solitary imprisonment,—for appearing before him with soiled hosen! An hour afterwards, the king, with a small though gorgeous retinue, was on his way to the More.

The archbishop had, according to his engagement, assembled in his palace the more powerful of the discontented seigneurs; and his eloquence had so worked upon them, that Edward beheld, on entering the hall, only countenances of cheerful loyalty and respectful welcome. After the first greetings, the prelate, according to the custom of the day, conducted Edward into a chamber, that he might refresh himself with a brief rest and the bath, previous to the banquet.

Edward seized the occasion, and told his tale; but however softened, enough was left to create the liveliest dismay in his listener. The lofty scaffolding of hope upon which the ambitious prelate was to mount to the papal throne seemed to crumble into the dust. The king and the earl were equally necessary to the schemes of George Nevile. He chid the royal layman with more than priestly unction for his offence; but Edward so humbly confessed his fault, that the prelate at length relaxed his brow, and promised to convey his penitent assurances to the earl.

"Not an hour should be lost," he said; the only one who can soothe his wrath is your Highness's mother, our noble kinswoman. Permit me to despatch to her grace a letter, praying her to seek the earl, while I write by the same courier to himself."

"Be it all as you will," said Edward, doffing his surcoat, and

dipping his hands in a perfumed ewer; "I shall not know rest till I have knelt to the Lady Anne, and won her pardon."

The prelate retired, and scarcely had he left the room when Sir John Ratcliffe, [Afterwards Lord Fitzwalter. See Lingard (note, vol. iii. p. 507, quarto edition), for the proper date to be assigned to this royal visit to the More,—a date we have here adopted, not, as Sharon Turner and others place (namely, upon the authority of Hearne's Fragm., 302, which subsequent events disprove), after the open rebellion of Warwick, but just before it; that is, not after Easter, but before Lent.] one of the king's retinue, and in waiting on his person, entered the chamber, pale and trembling.

"My liege," he said, in a whisper, "I fear some deadly treason awaits you. I have seen, amongst the trees below this tower, the gleam of steel; I have crept through the foliage, and counted no less than a hundred armed men,—their leader is Sir Marmaduke Nevile, Earl Warwick's kinsman!"

"Ha!" muttered the king, and his bold face fell, "comes the earl's revenge so soon?"

"And," continued Ratcliffe, "I overheard Sir Marmaduke say, 'The door of the Garden Tower is unguarded,—wait the signal!' Fly, my liege! Hark! even now I hear the rattling of arms!"

The king stole to the casement; the day was closing; the foliage grew thick and dark around the wall; he saw an armed man emerge from the shade,—a second, and a third.

"You are right, Ratcliffe! Flight—but how?"

"This way, my liege. By the passage I entered, a stair winds to

a door on the inner court; there I have already a steed in waiting. Deign, for precaution, to use my hat and manteline."

The king hastily adopted the suggestion, followed the noiseless steps of Ratcliffe, gained the door, sprang upon his steed, and dashing right through a crowd assembled by the gate, galloped alone and fast, untracked by human enemy, but goaded by the foe that mounts the rider's steed, over field, over fell, over dyke, through hedge, and in the dead of night reined in at last before the royal towers of Windsor.

CHAPTER II.
MANY THINGS BRIEFLY TOLD

The events that followed the king's escape were rapid and startling. The barons assembled at the More, enraged at Edward's seeming distrust of them, separated in loud anger. The archbishop learned the cause from one of his servitors, who detected Marmaduke's ambush, but he was too wary to make known a circumstance suspicious to himself. He flew to London, and engaged the mediation of the Duchess of York to assist his own. [Lingard. See for the dates, Fabyan, 657.]

The earl received their joint overtures with stern and ominous coldness, and abruptly repaired to Warwick, taking with him the Lady Anne. There he was joined, the same day, by the Duke and Duchess of Clarence.

The Lincolnshire rebellion gained head: Edward made a dexterous feint in calling, by public commission, upon Clarence and Warwick to aid in dispersing it; if they refused, the odium of first aggression would seemingly rest with them. Clarence, more induced by personal ambition than sympathy with Warwick's wrong, incensed by his brother's recent slights, looking to Edward's resignation and his own consequent accession to the throne, and inflamed by the ambition and pride of a wife whom he at once feared and idolized, went hand in heart with the earl; but not one lord and captain whom Montagu had sounded lent

favour to the deposition of one brother for the advancement of the next. Clarence, though popular, was too young to be respected: many there were who would rather have supported the earl, if an aspirant to the throne; but that choice forbidden by the earl himself, there could be but two parties in England,—the one for Edward IV., the other for Henry VI.

Lord Montagu had repaired to Warwick Castle to communicate in person this result of his diplomacy. The earl, whose manner was completely changed, no longer frank and hearty, but close and sinister, listened in gloomy silence.

"And now," said Montagu, with the generous emotion of a man whose nobler nature was stirred deeply, "if you resolve on war with Edward, I am willing to renounce my own ambition, the hand of a king's daughter for my son, so that I may avenge the honour of our common name. I confess that I have so loved Edward that I would fain pray you to pause, did I not distrust myself, lest in such delay his craft should charm me back to the old affection. Nathless, to your arm and your great soul I have owed all, and if you are resolved to strike the blow, I am ready to share the hazard."

The earl turned away his face, and wrung his brother's hand.

"Our father, methinks, hears thee from the grave!" said he, solemnly, and there was a long pause. At length Warwick resumed: "Return to London; seem to take no share in my actions, whatever they be; if I fail, why drag thee into my ruin?—and yet, trust me, I am rash and fierce no more. He who sets his

heart on a great object suddenly becomes wise. When a throne is in the dust, when from St. Paul's Cross a voice goes forth to Carlisle and the Land's End, proclaiming that the reign of Edward the Fourth is past and gone, then, Montagu, I claim thy promise of aid and fellowship,—not before!"

Meanwhile, the king, eager to dispel thought in action, rushed in person against the rebellious forces. Stung by fear into cruelty, he beheaded, against all kingly faith, his hostages, Lord Welles and Sir Thomas Dymoke, summoned Sir Robert Welles, the leader of the revolt, to surrender; received for answer, that Sir Robert Welles would not trust the perfidy of the man who had murdered his father!—pushed on to Erpingham, defeated the rebels in a signal battle, and crowned his victory by a series of ruthless cruelties, committed to the fierce and learned Earl of Worcester, "Butcher of England." [Stowe. "Warkworth Chronicle"—Cont. Croyl. Lord Worcester ordered Clapham (a squire to Lord Warwick) and nineteen others, gentlemen and yeomen, to be impaled, and from the horror the spectacle inspired, and the universal odium it attached to Worcester, it is to be feared that the unhappy men were still sensible to the agony of this infliction, though they appear first to have been drawn, and partially hanged,—outrage confined only to the dead bodies of rebels being too common at that day to have excited the indignation which attended the sentence Worcester passed on his victims. It is in vain that some writers would seek to cleanse the memory of this learned nobleman from the stain

of cruelty by rhetorical remarks on the improbability that a cultivator of letters should be of a ruthless disposition. The general philosophy of this defence is erroneous. In ignorant ages a man of superior acquirements is not necessarily made humane by the cultivation of his intellect, on the contrary, he too often learns to look upon the uneducated herd as things of another clay. Of this truth all history is pregnant,—witness the accomplished tyrants of Greece, the profound and cruel intellect of the Italian Borgias. Richard III. and Henry VIII. were both highly educated for their age. But in the case of Tiptoft, Lord Worcester, the evidence of his cruelty is no less incontestable than that which proves his learning— the Croyland historian alone is unimpeachable. Worcester's popular name of "the Butcher" is sufficient testimony in itself. The people are often mistaken, to be sure, but can scarcely be so upon the one point, whether a man who has sat in judgment on themselves be merciful or cruel.]

With the prompt vigour and superb generalship which Edward ever displayed in war, he then cut his gory way to the force which Clarence and Warwick (though their hostility was still undeclared) had levied, with the intent to join the defeated rebels. He sent his herald, Garter King-at-arms, to summon the earl and the duke to appear before him within a certain day. The time expired; he proclaimed them traitors, and offered rewards for their apprehension. [One thousand pounds in money, or one hundred pounds a year in land; an immense reward for that day.]

So sudden had been Warwick's defection, so rapid the king's movements, that the earl had not time to mature his resources, assemble his vassals, consolidate his schemes. His very preparations, upon the night on which Edward had repaid his services by such hideous ingratitude, had manned the country with armies against himself. Girt but with a scanty force collected in haste (and which consisted merely of his retainers in the single shire of Warwick), the march of Edward cut him off from the counties in which his name was held most dear, in which his trumpet could raise up hosts. He was disappointed in the aid he had expected from his powerful but self-interested brother-in- law, Lord Stanley. Revenge had become more dear to him than life: life must not be hazarded, lest revenge be lost. On still marched the king; and the day that his troops entered Exeter, Warwick, the females of his family, with Clarence, and a small but armed retinue, took ship from Dartmouth, sailed for Calais (before which town, while at anchor, Isabel was confined of her first-born). To the earl's rage and dismay his deputy Vauclerc fired upon his ships. Warwick then steered on towards Normandy, captured some Flemish vessels by the way, in token of defiance to the earl's old Burgundian foe, and landed at Harfleur, where he and his companions were received with royal honours by the Admiral of France, and finally took their way to the court of Louis XI. at Amboise.

"The danger is past forever!" said King Edward, as the wine sparkled in his goblet. "Rebellion hath lost its head,—

and now, indeed, and for the first time, a monarch I reign alone!" [Before leaving England, Warwick and Clarence are generally said to have fallen in with Anthony Woodville and Lord Audley, and ordered them to execution, from which they were saved by a Dorsetshire gentleman. Carte, who, though his history is not without great mistakes, is well worth reading by those whom the character of Lord Warwick may interest, says, that the earl had "too much magnanimity to put them to death immediately, according to the common practice of the times, and only imprisoned them in the castle of Wardour, from whence they were soon rescued by John Thornhill, a gentleman of Dorsetshire." The whole of this story is, however, absolutely contradicted by the "Warkworth Chronicle" (p. 9, edited by Mr. Halliwell), according to which authority Anthony Woodville was at that time commanding a fleet upon the Channel, which waylaid Warwick on his voyage; but the success therein attributed to the gallant Anthony, in dispersing or seizing all the earl's ships, save the one that bore the earl himself and his family, is proved to be purely fabulous, by the earl's well-attested capture of the Flemish vessels, as he passed from Calais to the coasts of Normandy, an exploit he could never have performed with a single vessel of his own. It is very probable that the story of Anthony Woodville's capture and peril at this time originates in a misadventure many years before, and recorded in the "Paston Letters," as well as in the "Chronicles."—In the year 1459, Anthony Woodville and his father, Lord Rivers (then zealous

Lancastrians), really did fall into the hands of the Earl of March (Edward IV.), Warwick and Salisbury, and got off with a sound "rating" upon the rude language which such "knaves' sons" and "little squires" had held to those "who were of king's blood."]

CHAPTER III.
THE PLOT OF THE HOSTELRY —THE MAID AND THE SCHOLAR IN THEIR HOME

The country was still disturbed, and the adherents, whether of Henry or the earl, still rose in many an outbreak, though prevented from swelling into one common army by the extraordinary vigour not only of Edward, but of Gloucester and Hastings,—when one morning, just after the events thus rapidly related, the hostelry of Master Sancroft, in the suburban parish of Marybone, rejoiced in a motley crowd of customers and topers.

Some half-score soldiers, returned in triumph from the royal camp, sat round a table placed agreeably enough in the deep recess made by the large jutting lattice; with them were mingled about as many women, strangely and gaudily clad. These last were all young; one or two, indeed, little advanced from childhood. But there was no expression of youth in their hard, sinister features: coarse paint supplied the place of bloom; the very youngest had a wrinkle on her brow; their forms wanted the round and supple grace of early years. Living principally in the open air, trained from infancy to feats of activity, their muscles were sharp and prominent, their aspects had something of masculine audacity and rudeness; health itself seemed in them

more loathsome than disease. Upon those faces of bronze, vice had set its ineffable, unmistaken seal. To those eyes never had sprung the tears of compassion or woman's gentle sorrow; on those brows never had flushed the glow of modest shame: their very voices half belied their sex,—harsh and deep and hoarse, their laughter loud and dissonant. Some amongst them were not destitute of a certain beauty, but it was a beauty of feature with a common hideousness of expression,—an expression at once cunning, bold, callous, licentious. Womanless through the worst vices of woman, passionless through the premature waste of passion, they stood between the sexes like foul and monstrous anomalies, made up and fashioned from the rank depravities of both. These creatures seemed to have newly arrived from some long wayfaring; their shoes and the hems of their robes were covered with dust and mire; their faces were heated, and the veins in their bare, sinewy, sunburned arms were swollen by fatigue. Each had beside her on the floor a timbrel, each wore at her girdle a long knife in its sheath: well that the sheaths hid the blades, for not one—not even that which yon cold-eyed child of fifteen wore—but had on its steel the dark stain of human blood!

The presence of soldiers fresh from the scene of action had naturally brought into the hostelry several of the idle gossips of the suburb, and these stood round the table, drinking into their large ears the boasting narratives of the soldiers. At a small table, apart from the revellers, but evidently listening with attention to all the news of the hour, sat a friar, gravely discussing a mighty

tankard of huffcap, and ever and anon, as he lifted his head for the purpose of drinking, glancing a wanton eye at one of the tymbesteres.

"But an' you had seen," said a trooper, who was the mouthpiece of his comrades—"an' you had seen the raptrils run when King Edward himself led the charge! Marry, it was like a cat in a rabbit burrow! Easy to see, I trow, that Earl Warwick was not amongst them! His men, at least, fight like devils!"

"But there was one tall fellow," said a soldier, setting down his tankard, "who made a good fight and dour, and, but for me and my comrades, would have cut his way to the king."

"Ay, ay, true; we saved his highness, and ought to have been knighted,—but there's no gratitude nowadays!"

"And who was this doughty warrior?" asked one of the bystanders, who secretly favoured the rebellion.

"Why, it was said that he was Robin of Redesdale,—he who fought my Lord Montagu off York."

"Our Robin!" exclaimed several voices. "Ay, he was ever a brave fellow—poor Robin!"

"'Your Robin,' and 'poor Robin,' varlets!" cried the principal trooper. "Have a care! What do ye mean by your Robin?"

"Marry, sir soldier," quoth a butcher, scratching his head, and in a humble voice, "craving your pardon and the king's, this Master Robin sojourned a short time in this hamlet, and was a kind neighbour, and mighty glib of the tongue. Don't ye mind, neighbours," he added rapidly, eager to change the conversation,

"how he made us leave off when we were just about burning Adam Warner, the old nigromancer, in his den yonder? Who else could have done that? But an' we had known Robin had been a rebel to sweet King Edward, we'd have roasted him along with the wizard!"

One of the timbrel-girls, the leader of the choir, her arm round a soldier's neck, looked up at the last speech, and her eye followed the gesture of the butcher, as he pointed through the open lattice to the sombre, ruinous abode of Adam Warner.

"Was that the house ye would have burned?" she asked abruptly.

"Yes; but Robin told us the king would hang those who took on them the king's blessed privilege of burning nigromancers; and, sure enough, old Adam Warner was advanced to be wizard-in-chief to the king's own highness a week or two afterwards."

The friar had made a slight movement at the name of Warner; he now pushed his stool nearer to the principal group, and drew his hood completely over his countenance.

"Yea!" exclaimed the mechanic, whose son had been the innocent cause of the memorable siege to poor Adam's dilapidated fortress, related in the first book of this narrative"— yea; and what did he when there? Did he not devise a horrible engine for the destruction of the poor,— an engine that was to do all the work in England by the devil's help? —so that if a gentleman wanted a coat of mail, or a cloth tunic; if his dame needed a Norwich worsted; if a yeoman lacked a plough or a

wagon, or his good wife a pot or a kettle; they were to go, not to the armourer, and the draper, and the tailor, and the weaver, and the wheelwright, and the blacksmith,—but, hey presto! Master Warner set his imps a-churning, and turned ye out mail and tunic, worsted and wagon, kettle and pot, spick and span new, from his brewage of vapour and sea-coal. Oh, have I not heard enough of the sorcerer from my brother, who works in the Chepe for Master Stokton, the mercer!—and Master Stokton was one of the worshipful deputies to whom the old nigromancer had the front to boast his devices."

"It is true," said the friar, suddenly.

"Yes, reverend father, it is true," said the mechanic, doffing his cap, and inclining his swarthy face to this unexpected witness of his veracity. A murmur of wrath and hatred was heard amongst the bystanders. The soldiers indifferently turned to their female companions. There was a brief silence; and, involuntarily, the gossips stretched over the table to catch sight of the house of so demoniac an oppressor of the poor.

"See," said the baker, "the smoke still curls from the rooftop! I heard he had come back. Old Madge, his handmaid, has bought cimnel- cakes of me the last week or so; nothing less than the finest wheat serves him now, I trow. However, right's right, and —"

"Come back!" cried the fierce mechanic; "the owl hath kept close in his roost! An' it were not for the king's favour, I would soon see how the wizard liked to have fire and water brought to

bear against himself!"

"Sit down, sweetheart," whispered one of the young tymbesteres to the last speaker—

> "Come, kiss me, my darling,
> Warm kisses I trade for."

"Avaunt!" quoth the mechanic, gruffly, and shaking off the seductive arm of the tymbestere—"avaunt! I have neither liefe nor halfpence for thee and thine. Out on thee!—a child of thy years! a rope's end to thy back were a friend's best kindness!"

The girl's eyes sparkled, she instinctively put her hand to her knife; then turning to a soldier by her side, she said, "Hear you that, and sit still?"

"Thunder and wounds!" growled the soldier thus appealed to, "more respect to the sex, knave; if I don't break thy fool's costard with my sword-hilt, it is only because Red Grisell can take care of herself against twenty such lozels as thou. These honest girls have been to the wars with us; King Edward grudges no man his jolly fere. Speak up for thyself, Grisell! How many tall fellows didst thou put out of their pain after the battle of Losecote?"

"Only five, Hal," replied the cold-eyed girl, and showing her glittering teeth with the grin of a young tigress; "but one was a captain. I shall do better next time; it was my first battle, thou knowest!"

The more timid of the bystanders exchanged a glance of

horror, and drew back. The mechanic resumed sullenly,—"I seek no quarrel with lass or lover. I am a plain, blunt man, with a wife and children, who are dear to me; and if I have a grudge to the nigromancer, it is because he glamoured my poor boy Tim. See!"—and he caught up a blue- eyed, handsome boy, who had been clinging to his side, and baring the child's arm, showed it to the spectators; there was a large scar on the limb, and it was shrunk and withered.

"It was my own fault," said the little fellow, deprecatingly. The affectionate father silenced the sufferer with a cuff on the cheek, and resumed: "Ye note, neighbours, the day when the foul wizard took this little one in his arms: well, three weeks afterwards—that very day three weeks—as he was standing like a lamb by the fire, the good wife's caldron seethed over, without reason or rhyme, and scalded his arm till it rivelled up like a leaf in November; and if that is not glamour, why have we laws against witchcraft?"

"True, true!" groaned the chorus.

The boy, who had borne his father's blow without a murmur, now again attempted remonstrance. "The hot water went over the gray cat, too, but Master Warner never bewitched her, daddy."

"He takes his part!—You hear the daff laddy? He takes the old nigromancer's part,—a sure sign of the witchcraft; but I'll leather it out of thee, I will!" and the mechanic again raised his weighty arm. The child did not this time await the blow; he dodged under the butcher's apron, gained the door, and disappeared. "And he

teaches our own children to fly in our faces!" said the father, in a kind of whimper. The neighbours sighed in commiseration.

"Oh," he exclaimed in a fiercer tone, grinding his teeth, and shaking his clenched fist towards Adam Warner's melancholy house, "I say again, if the king did not protect the vile sorcerer, I would free the land from his devilries ere his black master could come to his help."

"The king cares not a straw for Master Warner or his inventions, my son," said a rough, loud voice. All turned, and saw the friar standing in the midst of the circle. "Know ye not, my children, that the king sent the wretch neck and crop out of the palace for having bewitched the Earl of Warwick and his grace the Lord Clarence, so that they turned unnaturally against their own kinsman, his highness? But 'Manus malorum suos bonos breaket,'—that is to say, the fists of wicked men only whack their own bones. Ye have all heard tell of Friar Bungey, my children?"

"Ay, ay!" answered two or three in a breath,—"a wizard, it's true, and a mighty one; but he never did harm to the poor; though they do say he made a quaint image of the earl, and—"

"Tut, tut!" interrupted the friar, "all Bungey did was to try to disenchant the Lord Warwick, whom yon miscreant had spellbound. Poor Bungey! he is a friend to the people: and when he found that Master Adam was making a device for their ruin, he spared no toil, I assure ye, to frustrate the iniquity. Oh, how he fasted and watched! Oh, how many a time he fought, tooth and nail, with the devil in person, to get at the infernal invention!

for if he had that invention once in his hands, he could turn it to good account, I can promise ye: and give ye rain for the green blade and sun for the ripe sheaf. But the fiend got the better at first; and King Edward, bewitched himself for the moment, would have hanged Friar Bungey for crossing old Adam, if he had not called three times, in a loud voice, 'Presto pepranxenon!' changed himself into a bird, and flown out of the window. As soon as Master Adam Warner found the field clear to himself, he employed his daughter to bewitch the Lord Hastings; he set brother against brother, and made the king and Lord George fall to loggerheads; he stirred up the rebellion; and where he would have stopped the foul fiend only knows, if your friend Friar Bungey, who, though a wizard as you say, is only so for your benefit (and a holy priest into the bargain), had not, by aid of a good spirit, whom he conjured up in the island of Tartary, disenchanted the king, and made him see in a dream what the villanous Warner was devising against his crown and his people,— whereon his highness sent Master Warner and his daughter back to their roost, and, helped by Friar Bungey, beat his enemies out of the kingdom. So, if ye have a mind to save your children from mischief and malice, ye may set to work with good heart, always provided that ye touch not old Adam's iron invention. Woe betide ye, if ye think to destroy that! Bring it safe to Friar Bungey, whom ye will find returned to the palace, and journeyman's wages will be a penny a day higher for the next ten years to come!" With these words the friar threw down his

reckoning, and moved majestically to the door.

"An' I might trust you!" said Tim's father, laying hold of the friar's serge.

"Ye may, ye may!" cried the leader of the tymbesteres, starting up from the lap of her soldier, "for it is Friar Bungey himself!"

A movement of astonishment and terror was universal. "Friar Bungey himself!" repeated the burly impostor. "Right, lassie, right; and he now goes to the palace of the Tower, to mutter good spells in King Edward's ear,—spells to defeat the malignant ones, and to lower the price of beer. Wax wobiscum!"

With that salutation, more benevolent than accurate, the friar vanished from the room; the chief of the tymbesteres leaped lightly on the table, put one foot on the soldier's shoulder, and sprang through the open lattice. She found the friar in the act of mounting a sturdy mule, which had been tied to a post by the door.

"Fie, Graul Skellet! Fie, Graul!" said the conjurer "Respect for my serge. We must not be noted together out of door in the daylight. There's a groat for thee. Vade, execrabilis,—that is, good-day to thee, pretty rogue!"

"A word, friar, a word. Wouldst thou have the old man burned, drowned, or torn piecemeal? He hath a daughter too, who once sought to mar our trade with her gittern; a daughter, then in a kirtle that I would not have nimmed from a hedge, but whom I last saw in sarcenet and lawn, with a great lord for her fere."

The tymbestere's eyes shone with malignant envy, as she added, "Graul Skellet loves not to see those who have worn worsted and say walk in sarcenet and lawn. Graul Skellet loves not wenches who have lords for their feres, and yet who shrink from Graul and her sisters as the sound from the leper."

"Fegs," answered the friar, impatiently, "I know naught against the daughter,—a pretty lass, but too high for my kisses. And as for the father, I want not the man's life,—that is, not very specially,—but his model, his mechanical. He may go free, if that can be compassed; if not, why, the model at all risks. Serve me in this."

"And thou wilt teach me the last tricks of the cards, and thy great art of making phantoms glide by on the wall?"

"Bring the model intact, and I will teach thee more, Graul,—the dead man's candle, and the charm of the newt; and I'll give thee, to boot, the Gaul of the parricide that thou hast prayed me so oft for. Hum! thou hast a girl in thy troop who hath a blinking eye that well pleases me; but go now, and obey me. Work before play, and grace before pudding!"

The tymbestere nodded, snapped her fingers in the air, and humming no holy ditty, returned to the house through the doorway.

This short conference betrays to the reader the relations, mutually advantageous, which subsisted between the conjuror and the tymbesteres. Their troop (the mothers, perchance, of the generation we treat of) had been familiar to the friar in his

old capacity of mountebank, or tregetour, and in his clerical and courtly elevation, he did not disdain an ancient connection that served him well with the populace; for these grim children of vice seemed present in every place, where pastime was gay, or strife was rampant,—in peace, at the merry-makings and the hostelries; in war, following the camp, and seen, at night, prowling through the battlefields to dispatch the wounded and to rifle the slain: in merrymaking, hostelry, or in camp, they could thus still spread the fame of Friar Bungey, and uphold his repute both for terrible lore and for hearty love of the commons.

Nor was this all; both tymbesteres and conjuror were fortune-tellers by profession. They could interchange the anecdotes each picked up in their different lines. The tymbestere could thus learn the secrets of gentle and courtier, the conjuror those of the artisan and mechanic.

Unconscious of the formidable dispositions of their neighbours, Sibyll and Warner were inhaling the sweet air of the early spring in their little garden. His disgrace had affected the philosopher less than might be supposed. True, that the loss of the king's favour was the deferring indefinitely—perhaps for life—any practical application of his adored theory; and yet, somehow or other, the theory itself consoled him. At the worst, he should find some disciple, some ingenious student, more fortunate than himself, to whom he could bequeath the secret, and who, when Adam was in his grave, would teach the world to revere his name. Meanwhile, his time was his own; he was lord

of a home, though ruined and desolate; he was free, with his free thoughts; and therefore, as he paced the narrow garden, his step was lighter, his mind less absent than when parched with feverish fear and hope for the immediate practical success of a principle which was to be tried before the hazardous tribunal of prejudice and ignorance.

"My child," said the sage, "I feel, for the first time for years, the distinction of the seasons. I feel that we are walking in the pleasant spring. Young days come back to me like dreams; and I could almost think thy mother were once more by my side!"

Sibyll pressed her father's hand, and a soft but melancholy sigh stirred her rosy lips. She, too, felt the balm of the young year; yet her father's words broke upon sad and anxious musings. Not to youth as to age, not to loving fancy as to baffled wisdom, has seclusion charms that compensate for the passionate and active world! On coming back to the old house, on glancing round its mildewed walls, comfortless and bare, the neglected, weed-grown garden, Sibyll had shuddered in dismay. Had her ambition fallen again into its old abject state? Were all her hopes to restore her ancestral fortunes, to vindicate her dear father's fame, shrunk into this slough of actual poverty,—the butterfly's wings folded back into the chrysalis shroud of torpor? The vast disparity between herself and Hastings had not struck her so forcibly at the court; here, at home, the very walls proclaimed it. When Edward had dismissed the unwelcome witnesses of his attempted crime, he had given orders that they should be conducted to their house

through the most private ways. He naturally desired to create no curious comment upon their departure. Unperceived by their neighbours, Sibyll and her father had gained access by the garden gate. Old Madge received them in dismay; for she had been in the habit of visiting Sibyll weekly at the palace, and had gained, in the old familiarity subsisting, then, between maiden and nurse, some insight into her heart. She had cherished the fondest hopes for the fate of her young mistress; and now, to labour and to penury had the fate returned! The guard who accompanied them, according to Edward's orders, left some pieces of gold, which Adam rejected, but Madge secretly received and judiciously expended. And this was all their wealth. But not of toil nor of penury in themselves thought Sibyll; she thought but of Hastings,—wildly, passionately, trustfully, unceasingly, of the absent Hastings. Oh, he would seek her, he would come, her reverse would but the more endear her to him! Hastings came not. She soon learned the wherefore. War threatened the land,—he was at his post, at the head of armies.

Oh, with what panoply of prayer she sought to shield that beloved breast! And now the old man spoke of the blessed spring, the holiday time of lovers and of love, and the young girl, sighing, said to her mournful heart, "The world hath its sun,—where is mine?"

The peacock strutted up to his poor protectors, and spread his plumes to the gilding beams. And then Sibyll recalled the day when she had walked in that spot with Marmaduke, and he had

talked of his youth, ambition, and lusty hopes, while, silent and absorbed, she had thought within herself, "Could the world be open to me as to him,—I too have ambition, and it should find its goal." Now what contrast between the two,—the man enriched and honoured, if to-day in peril or in exile, to-morrow free to march forward still on his career, the world the country to him whose heart was bold and whose name was stainless! and she, the woman, brought back to the prison-home, scorn around her, impotent to avenge, and forbidden to fly! Wherefore?—Sibyll felt her superiority of mind, of thought, of nature,—wherefore the contrast? The success was that of man, the discomfiture that of woman. Woe to the man who precedes his age; but never yet has an age been in which genius and ambition are safe to woman!

The father and the child turned into their house. The day was declining. Adam mounted to his studious chamber, Sibyll sought the solitary servant.

"What tidings, oh, what tidings? The war, you say, is over; the great earl, his sweet daughter, safe upon the seas, but Hastings —ob, Hastings! what of him?"

"My bonnibell, my lady-bird, I have none but good tales to tell thee. I saw and spoke with a soldier who served under Lord Hastings himself; he is unscathed, he is in London. But they say that one of his bands is quartered in the suburb, and that there is a report of a rising in Hertfordshire."

"When will peace come to England and to me!" sighed Sibyll.

CHAPTER IV.
THE WORLD'S JUSTICE, AND THE WISDOM OF OUR ANCESTORS

The night had now commenced, and Sibyll was still listening —or, perhaps, listening not—to the soothing babble of the venerable servant. They were both seated in the little room that adjoined the hall, and their only light came through the door opening on the garden,—a gray, indistinct twilight, relieved by the few earliest stars. The peacock, his head under his wing, roosted on the balustrade, and the song of the nightingale, from amidst one of the neighbouring copses, which studded the ground towards the chase of Marybone, came soft and distant on the serene air. The balm and freshness of spring were felt in the dews, in the skies, in the sweet breath of young herb and leaf; through the calm of ever-watchful nature, it seemed as if you might mark, distinct and visible, minute after minute, the blessed growth of April into May.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.