AINSWORTH WILLIAM HARRISON

OLD SAINT PAUL'S: A TALE OF THE PLAGUE AND THE FIRE

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Содержание

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BOOK THE FIRST.
APRIL, 1665

I.
THE GROCER OF WOOD-STREET AND HIS FAMILY

One night, at the latter end of April, 1665, the family of a citizen of London carrying on an extensive business as a grocer in Wood-street, Cheapside, were assembled, according to custom, at prayer. The grocer's name was Stephen Bloundel. His family consisted of his wife, three sons, and two daughters. He had, moreover, an apprentice; an elderly female serving as cook; her son, a young man about five-and-twenty, filling the place of porter to the shop and general assistant; and a kitchen-maid. The whole household attended; for the worthy grocer, being a strict observer of his religious duties, as well as a rigid disciplinarian in other respects, suffered no one to be absent, on any plea whatever, except indisposition, from morning and evening devotions; and these were always performed at stated times. In fact, the establishment was conducted with the regularity of clockwork, it being the aim of its master not to pass a single hour of the day unprofitably.

The ordinary prayers gone through, Stephen Bloundel offered up along and fervent supplication to the Most High for protection against the devouring pestilence with which the city was then scourged. He acknowledged that this terrible visitation had been justly brought upon it by the wickedness of its inhabitants; that they deserved their doom, dreadful though it was; that, like the dwellers in Jerusalem before it was given up to ruin and desolation, they "had mocked the messengers of God and despised His word;" that in the language of the prophet, "they had refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear; yea, had made their heart like an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law and the words which the Lord of Hosts had sent in his spirit by the former prophets." He admitted that great sins require great chastisement, and that the sins of London were enormous; that it was filled with strifes, seditions, heresies, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and every kind of abomination; that the ordinances of God were neglected, and all manner of vice openly practised; that, despite repeated warnings and afflictions less grievous than the present, these vicious practices had been persisted in. All this he humbly acknowledged. But he implored a gracious Providence, in consideration of his few faithful servants, to spare the others yet a little longer, and give them a last chance of repentance and amendment; or, if this could not be, and their utter extirpation was inevitable, that the habitations of the devout might be exempted from the general destruction—might be places of refuge, as Zoar was to Lot. He concluded by earnestly exhorting those around him to keep constant watch upon themselves; not to murmur at God's dealings and dispensations; but so to comport themselves, that "they might be able to stand in the day of wrath, in the day of death, and in the day of judgment." The exhortation produced a powerful effect upon its hearers, and they arose, some with serious, others with terrified looks.

Before proceeding further, it may be desirable to show in what manner the dreadful pestilence referred to by the grocer commenced, and how far its ravages had already extended. Two years before, namely, in 1663, more than a third of the population of Amsterdam was carried off by a desolating

plague. Hamburgh was also grievously afflicted about the same time, and in the same manner. Notwithstanding every effort to cut off communication with these states, the insidious disease found its way into England by means of some bales of merchandise, as it was suspected, at the latter end of the year 1664, when two persons died suddenly, with undoubted symptoms of the distemper, in Westminster. Its next appearance was at a house in Long Acre, and its victims two Frenchmen, who had brought goods from the Levant. Smothered for a short time, like a fire upon which coals had been heaped, it broke out with fresh fury in several places.

The consternation now began. The whole city was panic-stricken: nothing was talked of but the plague—nothing planned but means of arresting its progress—one grim and ghastly idea possessed the minds of all. Like a hideous phantom stalking the streets at noon-day, and scaring all in its path, Death took his course through London, and selected his prey at pleasure. The alarm was further increased by the predictions confidently made as to the vast numbers who would be swept away by the visitation; by the prognostications of astrologers; by the prophesyings of enthusiasts; by the denunciations of preachers, and by the portents and prodigies reported to have occurred. During the long and frosty winter preceding this fatal year, a comet appeared in the heavens, the sickly colour of which was supposed to forebode the judgment about to follow. Blazing stars and other meteors, of a lurid hue and strange and preternatural shape, were likewise seen. The sun was said to have set in streams of blood, and the moon to have shown without reflecting a shadow; grisly shapes appeared at night—strange clamours and groans were heard in the air—hearses, coffins, and heaps of unburied dead were discovered in the sky, and great cakes and clots of blood were found in the Tower moat; while a marvellous double tide occurred at London Bridge. All these prodigies were currently reported, and in most cases believed.

The severe frost, before noticed, did not break up till the end of February, and with the thaw the plague frightfully increased in violence. From Drury-lane it spread along Holborn, eastward as far as Great Turnstile, and westward to Saint Giles's Pound, and so along the Tyburn-road. Saint Andrew's, Holborn, was next infected; and as this was a much more populous parish than the former, the deaths were more numerous within it. For a while, the disease was checked by Fleet Ditch; it then leaped this narrow boundary, and ascending the opposite hill, carried fearful devastation into Saint James's, Clerkenwell. At the same time, it attacked Saint Bride's; thinned the ranks of the thievish horde haunting Whitefriars, and proceeding in a westerly course, decimated Saint Clement Danes.

Hitherto, the city had escaped. The destroyer had not passed Ludgate or Newgate, but environed the walls like a besieging enemy. A few days, however, before the opening of this history, fine weather having commenced, the horrible disease began to grow more rife, and laughing all precautions and impediments to scorn, broke out in the very heart of the stronghold—namely, in Bearbinder-lane, near Stock's Market, where nine persons died.

At a season so awful, it may be imagined how an impressive address, like that delivered by the grocer, would be received by those who saw in the pestilence, not merely an overwhelming scourge from which few could escape, but a direct manifestation of the Divine displeasure. Not a word was said. Blaize Shotterel, the porter, and old Josyna, his mother, together with Patience, the other woman-servant, betook themselves silently, and with troubled countenances, to the kitchen. Leonard Holt, the apprentice, lingered for a moment to catch a glance from the soft blue eyes of Amabel, the grocer's eldest daughter (for even the plague was a secondary consideration with him when she was present), and failing in the attempt, he heaved a deep sigh, which was luckily laid to the account of the discourse he had just listened to by his sharp-sighted master, and proceeded to the shop, where he busied himself in arranging matters for the night.

Having just completed his twenty-first year, and his apprenticeship being within a few months of its expiration, Leonard Holt began to think of returning to his native town of Manchester, where he intended to settle, and where he had once fondly hoped the fair Amabel would accompany him, in the character of his bride. Not that he had ever ventured to declare his passion, nor that he had received

sufficient encouragement to make it matter of certainty that if he did so declare himself, he should be accepted; but being both "proper and tall," and having tolerable confidence in his good looks, he had made himself, up to a short time prior to his introduction to the reader, quite easy on the point.

His present misgivings were occasioned by Amabel's altered manner towards him, and by a rival who, he had reason to fear, had completely superseded him in her good graces. Brought up together from an early age, the grocer's daughter and the young apprentice had at first regarded each other as brother and sister. By degrees, the feeling changed; Amabel became more reserved, and held little intercourse with Leonard, who, busied with his own concerns, thought little about her. But, as he grew towards manhood, he could not remain insensible to her extraordinary beauty—for extraordinary it was, and such as to attract admiration wherever she went, so that the "Grocer's Daughter" became the toast among the ruffling gallants of the town, many of whom sought to obtain speech with her. Her parents, however, were far too careful to permit any such approach. Amabel's stature was lofty; her limbs slight, but exquisitely symmetrical; her features small, and cast in the most delicate mould; her eyes of the softest blue; and her hair luxuriant, and of the finest texture and richest brown. Her other beauties must be left to the imagination; but it ought not to be omitted that she was barely eighteen, and had all the freshness, the innocence, and vivacity of that most charming period of woman's existence. No wonder she ravished every heart. No wonder, in an age when love-making was more general even than now, that she was beset by admirers. No wonder her father's apprentice became desperately enamoured of her, and proportionately jealous.

And this brings us to his rival. On the 10th of April, two gallants, both richly attired, and both young and handsome, dismounted before the grocer's door, and, leaving their steeds to the care of their attendants, entered the shop. They made sundry purchases of conserves, figs, and other dried fruit, chatted familiarly with the grocer, and tarried so long, that at last he began to suspect they must have some motive. All at once, however, they disagreed on some slight matter—Bloundel could not tell what, nor, perhaps, could the disputants, even if their quarrel was not preconcerted—high words arose, and in another moment, swords were drawn, and furious passes exchanged. The grocer called to his eldest son, a stout youth of nineteen, and to Leonard Holt, to separate them. The apprentice seized his cudgel—no apprentice in those days was without one—and rushed towards the combatants, but before he could interfere, the fray was ended. One of them had received a thrust through the sword arm, and his blade dropping, his antagonist declared himself satisfied, and with a grave salute walked off. The wounded man wrapped a lace handkerchief round his arm, but immediately afterwards complained of great faintness. Pitying his condition, and suspecting no harm, the grocer led him into an inner room, where restoratives were offered by Mrs. Bloundel and her daughter Amabel, both of whom had been alarmed by the noise of the conflict. In a short time, the wounded man was so far recovered as to be able to converse with his assistants, especially the younger one; and the grocer having returned to the shop, his discourse became so very animated and tender, that Mrs. Bloundel deemed it prudent to give her daughter a hint to retire. Amabel reluctantly obeyed, for the young stranger was so handsome, so richly dressed, had such a captivating manner, and so distinguished an air, that she was strongly prepossessed in his favour. A second look from her mother, however, caused her to disappear, nor did she return. After waiting with suppressed anxiety for some time, the young gallant departed, overwhelming the good dame with his thanks, and entreating permission to call again. This was peremptorily refused, but, notwithstanding the interdiction, he came on the following day. The grocer chanced to be out at the time, and the gallant, who had probably watched him go forth, deriding the remonstrances of the younger Bloundel and Leonard, marched straight to the inner room, where he found the dame and her daughter. They were much disconcerted at his appearance, and the latter instantly rose with the intention of retiring, but the gallant caught her arm and detained her.

"Do not fly me, Amabel," he cried, in an impassioned tone, "but suffer me to declare the love I have for you. I cannot live without you."

Amabel, whose neck and cheeks were crimsoned with blushes, cast down her eyes before the ardent regards of the gallant, and endeavoured to withdraw her hand.

"One word only," he continued, "and I release you. Am I wholly indifferent to you! Answer me—yes or no!"

"Do *not* answer him, Amabel," interposed her mother. "He is deceiving you. He loves you not. He would ruin you. This is the way with all these court butterflies. Tell him you hate him, child, and bid him begone."

"But I cannot tell him an untruth, mother," returned Amabel, artlessly, "for I do *not* hate him."

"Then you love me," cried the young man, falling on his knees, and pressing her hand to his lips. "Tell me so, and make me the happiest of men."

But Amabel had now recovered from the confusion into which she had been thrown, and, alarmed at her own indiscretion, forcibly withdrew her hand, exclaiming in a cold tone, and with much natural dignity, "Arise, sir. I will not tolerate these freedoms. My mother is right—you have some ill design."

"By my soul, no!" cried the gallant, passionately. "I love you, and would make you mine."

"No doubt," remarked Mrs. Bloundel, contemptuously, "but not by marriage."

"Yes, by marriage," rejoined the gallant, rising. "If she will consent, I will wed her forthwith."

Both Amabel and her mother looked surprised at the young man's declaration, which was uttered with a fervour that seemed to leave no doubt of its sincerity; but the latter, fearing some artifice, replied, "If what you say is true, and you really love my daughter as much as you pretend, this is not the way to win her; for though she can have no pretension to wed with one of your seeming degree, nor is it for her happiness that she should, yet, were she sought by the proudest noble in the land, she shall never, if I can help it, be lightly won. If your intentions are honourable, you must address yourself, in the first place, to her father, and if he agrees (which I much doubt) that you shall become her suitor, I can make no objection. Till this is settled, I must pray you to desist from further importunity."

"And so must I," added Amabel. "I cannot give you a hope till you have spoken to my father."

"Be it so," replied the gallant. "I will tarry here till his return."

So saying, he was about to seat himself, but Mrs. Bloundel prevented him.

"I cannot permit this, sir," she cried. "Your tarrying here may, for aught I know, bring scandal upon my house;—I am sure it will be disagreeable to my husband. I am unacquainted with your name and condition. You may be a man of rank. You may be one of the profligate and profane crew who haunt the court. You may be the worst of them all, my Lord Rochester himself. He is about your age, I have heard, and though a mere boy in years, is a veteran in libertinism. But, whoever you are, and whatever your rank and station may be, unless your character will bear the strictest scrutiny, I am certain Stephen Bloundel will never consent to your union with his daughter."

"Nay, mother," observed Amabel, "you judge the gentleman unjustly. I am sure he is neither a profligate gallant himself, nor a companion of such—especially of the wicked Earl of Rochester."

"I pretend to be no better than I am," replied the young man, repressing a smile that rose to his lips at Mrs. Bloundel's address; "but I shall reform when I am married. It would be impossible to be inconstant to so fair a creature as Amabel. For my rank, I have none. My condition is that of a private gentleman,—my name, Maurice Wyvil."

"What you say of yourself, Mr. Maurice Wyvil, convinces me you will meet with a decided refusal from my husband," returned Mrs. Bloundel.

"I trust not," replied Wyvil, glancing tenderly at Amabel. "If I should be so fortunate as to gain *his* consent, have I *yours*?"

"It is too soon to ask that question," she rejoined, blushing deeply.

"And now, sir, you must go, indeed, you must. You distress my mother."

"If I do not distress *you*, I will stay," resumed Wyvil, with an imploring look.

"You *do* distress me," she answered, averting her gaze.

"Nay, then, I must tear myself away," he rejoined. "I shall return shortly, and trust to find your father less flinty-hearted than he is represented."

He would have clasped Amabel in his arms, and perhaps snatched a kiss, if her mother had not rushed between them.

"No more familiarities, sir," she cried angrily; "no court manners here. If you look to wed my daughter, you must conduct yourself more decorously; but I can tell you, you have no chance—none whatever."

"Time will show," replied Wyvil, audaciously. "You had better give her to me quietly, and save me the trouble of carrying her off,—for have her I will."

"Mercy on us!" cried Mrs. Bloundel, in accents of alarm; "now his wicked intentions are out."

"Fear nothing, mother," observed Amabel, coldly. "He will scarcely carry me off without my own consent; and I am not likely to sacrifice myself for one who holds me in such light esteem."

"Forgive me, Amabel," rejoined Wyvil, in a voice so penitent that it instantly effaced her displeasure; "I meant not to offend. I spoke only the language of distraction. Do not dismiss me thus, or my death will lie at your door."

"I should be sorry for that," she replied; "but, inexperienced as I am, I feel this is not the language of real regard, but of furious passion."

A dark shade passed over Wyvil's handsome features, and the almost feminine beauty by which they were characterized gave place to a fierce and forbidding expression. Controlling himself by a powerful effort, he replied, with forced calmness, "Amabel, you know not what it is to love. I will not stir hence till I have seen your father."

"We will see that, sir," exclaimed Mrs. Bloundel, angrily. "What, ho! son Stephen! Leonard Holt! I say. This gentleman *will* stay here, whether I like or not. Show him forth."

"That I will, right willingly," replied the apprentice, rushing before the younger Bloundel, and flourishing his formidable cudgel. "Out with you, sir! Out with you!"

"Not at your bidding you, saucy knave," rejoined Wyvil, laying his hand upon his sword: "and if it were not for the presence of your mistress and her lovely daughter, I would crop your ears for your insolence."

"Their presence shall not prevent me from making my cudgel and your shoulders acquainted, if you do not budge," replied the apprentice, sturdily.

Enraged by the retort, Wyvil would have drawn his sword, but a blow on the arm disabled him.

"Plague on you, fellow!" he exclaimed; "you shall rue this to the last day of your existence."

"Threaten those who heed you," replied Leonard, about to repeat the blow.

"Do him no further injury!" cried Amabel, arresting his hand, and looking with the greatest commiseration at Wyvil. "You have dealt with him far too rudely already."

"Since I have your sympathy, sweet Amabel," rejoined Wyvil, "I care not what rude treatment I experience from this churl. We shall soon meet again." And bowing to her, he strode out of the room.

Leonard followed him to the shop-door, hoping some further pretext for quarrel would arise, but he was disappointed. Wyvil took no notice of him, and proceeded at a slow pace towards Cheapside.

Half an hour afterwards, Stephen Bloundel came home. On being informed of what had occurred, he was greatly annoyed, though he concealed his vexation, and highly applauded his daughter's conduct. Without further comment, he proceeded about his business, and remained in the shop till it was closed. Wyvil did not return, and the grocer tried to persuade himself they should see nothing more of him. Before Amabel retired to rest, he imprinted a kiss on her snowy brow, and said, in a tone of the utmost kindness, "You have never yet deceived me, child, and I hope never will. Tell me truly, do you take any interest in this young gallant?"

Amabel blushed deeply.

"I should not speak the truth, father," she rejoined, after a pause, "if I were to say I do not."

"I am sorry for it," replied Bloundel, gravely. "But you would not be happy with him. I am sure he is unprincipled and profligate:—you must forget him."

"I will try to do so," sighed Amabel. And the conversation dropped.

On the following day, Maurice Wyvil entered the grocer's shop. He was more richly attired than before, and there was a haughtiness in his manner which he had not hitherto assumed. What passed between him and Bloundel was not known, for the latter never spoke of it; but the result may be gathered from the fact that the young gallant was not allowed an interview with the grocer's daughter.

From this moment the change previously noticed took place in Amabel's demeanour towards Leonard. She seemed scarcely able to endure his presence, and sedulously avoided his regards. From being habitually gay and cheerful, she became pensive and reserved. Her mother more than once caught her in tears; and it was evident, from many other signs, that Wyvil completely engrossed her thoughts. Fully aware of this, Mrs. Bloundel said nothing of it to her husband, because the subject was painful to him; and not supposing the passion deeply rooted, she hoped it would speedily wear away. But she was mistaken—the flame was kept alive in Amabel's breast in a manner of which she was totally ignorant. Wyvil found means to deceive the vigilance of the grocer and his wife, but he could not deceive the vigilance of a jealous lover. Leonard discovered that his mistress had received a letter. He would not betray her, but he determined to watch her narrowly.

Accordingly, when she went forth one morning in company with her younger sister (a little girl of some five years old), he made an excuse to follow them, and, keeping within sight, perceived them enter Saint Paul's Cathedral, the mid aisle of which was then converted into a public walk, and generally thronged with town gallants, bullies, bona-robas, cut-purses, and rogues of every description. In short, it was the haunt of the worst of characters of the metropolis. When, therefore, Amabel entered this structure, Leonard felt certain it was to meet her lover. Rushing forward, he saw her take her course through the crowd, and attract general attention from her loveliness—but he nowhere discerned Maurice Wyvil.

Suddenly, however, she struck off to the right, and halted near one of the pillars, and the apprentice, advancing, detected his rival behind it. He was whispering a few words in her ear, unperceived by her sister. Maddened by the sight, Leonard hurried towards them, but before he could reach the spot Wyvil was gone, and Amabel, though greatly confused, looked at the same time so indignant, that he almost regretted his precipitation.

"You will, of course, make known to my father what you have just seen?" she said in a low tone.

"If you will promise not to meet that gallant again without my knowledge, I will not," replied Leonard.

After a moment's reflection, Amabel gave the required promise, and they returned to Wood-street together. Satisfied she would not break her word, the apprentice became more easy, and as a week elapsed, and nothing was said to him on the subject, he persuaded himself she would not attempt to meet her lover again.

Things were in this state at the opening of our tale, but upon the night in question, Leonard fancied he discerned some agitation in Amabel's manner towards him, and in consequence of this notion, he sought to meet her gaze, as before related, after prayers. While trying to distract his thoughts by arranging sundry firkins of butter, and putting other things in order, he heard a light footstep behind him, and turning at the sound, beheld Amabel.

"Leonard," she whispered, "I promised to tell you when I should next meet Maurice Wyvil. He will be here to-night." And without giving him time to answer, she retired.

For awhile, Leonard remained in a state almost of stupefaction, repeating to himself, as if unwilling to believe them, the words he had just heard. He had not recovered when the grocer entered the shop, and noticing his haggard looks, kindly inquired if he felt unwell. The apprentice returned an evasive answer, and half determined to relate all he knew to his master, but the next moment he changed his intention, and, influenced by that chivalric feeling which always governs those, of

whatever condition, who love profoundly, resolved not to betray the thoughtless girl, but to trust to his own ingenuity to thwart the designs of his rival, and preserve her Acting upon this resolution, he said he had a slight headache, and instantly resumed his occupation.

At nine o'clock, the whole family assembled at supper. The board was plentifully though plainly spread, but the grocer observed, with some uneasiness, that his apprentice, who had a good appetite in ordinary, ate little or nothing. He kept his eye constantly upon him, and became convinced from his manner that something ailed him. Not having any notion of the truth, and being filled with apprehensions of the plague, his dread was that Leonard was infected by the disease. Supper was generally the pleasantest meal of the day at the grocer's house, but on this occasion it passed off cheerlessly enough, and a circumstance occurred at its close which threw all into confusion and distress. Before relating this, however, we must complete our description of the family under their present aspect.

Tall, and of a spare frame, with good features, somewhat austere in their expression, and of the cast which we are apt to term precise and puritanical, but tempered with great benevolence, Stephen Bloundel had a keen, deep-seated eye, overshadowed by thick brows, and suffered his long-flowing grey hair to descend over his shoulders. His forehead was high and ample, his chin square and well defined, and his general appearance exceedingly striking. In age he was about fifty. His integrity and fairness of dealing, never once called in question for a period of thirty years, had won him the esteem of all who knew him; while his prudence and economy had enabled him, during that time, to amass a tolerable fortune. His methodical habits, and strong religious principles, have been already mentioned. His eldest son was named after him, and resembled him both in person and character, promising to tread in his footsteps. The younger sons require little notice at present. One was twelve, and the other only half that age; but both appeared to inherit many of their father's good qualities. Basil, the elder, was a stout, well-grown lad, and had never known a day's ill-health; while Hubert, the younger, was thin, delicate, and constantly ailing.

Mrs. Bloundel was a specimen of a city dame of the best kind. She had a few pardonable vanities, which no arguments could overcome—such as a little ostentation in dress—a little pride in the neatness of her house—and a good deal in the beauty of her children, especially in that of Amabel —as well as in the wealth and high character of her husband, whom she regarded as the most perfect of human beings. These slight failings allowed for, nothing but good remained. Her conduct was exemplary in all the relations of life. The tenderest of mothers, and the most affectionate of wives, she had as much genuine piety and strictness of moral principles as her husband. Short, plump, and well-proportioned, though somewhat, perhaps, exceeding the rules of symmetry—she had a rich olive complexion, fine black eyes, beaming with good nature, and an ever-laughing mouth, ornamented by a beautiful set of teeth. To wind up all, she was a few years younger than her husband.

Amabel has already been described. The youngest girl, Christiana, was a pretty little dove-eyed, flaxen-haired child, between four and five years old, and shared the fate of most younger children, being very much caressed, and not a little spoiled by her parents.

The foregoing description of the grocer's family would be incomplete without some mention of his household. Old Josyna Shotterel, the cook, who had lived with her master ever since his marriage, and had the strongest attachment for him, was a hale, stout dame, of about sixty, with few infirmities for her years, and with less asperity of temper than generally belongs to servants of her class. She was a native of Holland, and came to England early in life, where she married Blaize's father, who died soon after their union. An excellent cook in a plain way—indeed, she had no practice in any other— she would brew strong ale and mead, or mix a sack-posset with, any innkeeper in the city. Moreover, she was a careful and tender nurse, if her services were ever required in that capacity. The children looked upon her as a second mother; and her affection for them, which was unbounded, deserved their regard. She was a perfect storehouse of what are termed "old women's receipts;" and there were few complaints (except the plague) for which she did not think herself qualified to prescribe and able

to cure. Her skill in the healing art was often tested by her charitable mistress, who required her to prepare remedies, as well as nourishing broths, for such of the poor of the parish as applied to her for relief at times of sickness.

Her son, Blaize, was a stout, stumpy fellow, about four feet ten, with a head somewhat too large for his body, and extremely long arms. Ever since the plague had broken out in Drury-lane, it haunted him like a spectre, and scattered the few faculties he possessed. In vain he tried to combat his alarm—in vain his mother endeavoured to laugh him out of it. Nothing would do. He read the bills of mortality daily; ascertained the particulars of every case; dilated upon the agonies of the sufferers; watched the progress of the infection, and calculated the time it would take to reach Wood-street. He talked of the pestilence by day, and dreamed of it at night; and more than once alarmed the house by roaring for assistance, under the idea that he was suddenly attacked. By his mother's advice, he steeped rue, wormwood, and sage in his drink, till it was so abominably nauseous that he could scarcely swallow it, and carried a small ball in the hollow of his hand, compounded of wax, angelica, camphor, and other drugs. He likewise chewed a small piece of Virginian snake-root, or zedoary, if he approached any place supposed to be infected. A dried toad was suspended round his neck, as an amulet of sovereign virtue. Every nostrum sold by the quacks in the streets tempted him; and a few days before, he had expended his last crown in the purchase of a bottle of plague-water. Being of a superstitious nature, he placed full faith in all the predictions of the astrologers, who foretold that London should be utterly laid waste, that grass should grow in the streets, and that the living should not be able to bury the dead. He quaked at the terrible denunciations of the preachers, who exhorted their hearers to repentance, telling them a judgment was at hand, and shuddered at the wild and fearful prophesying of the insane enthusiasts who roamed the streets. His nativity having been cast, and it appearing that he would be in great danger on the 20th of June, he made up his mind that he should die of the plague on that day. Before he was assailed by these terrors, he had entertained a sneaking attachment for Patience, the kitchen-maid, a young and buxom damsel, who had no especial objection to him. But of late, his love had given way to apprehension, and his whole thoughts were centred in one idea, namely, self-preservation.

By this time supper was over, and the family were about to separate for the night, when Stephen, the grocer's eldest son, having risen to quit the room, staggered and complained of a strange dizziness and headache, which almost deprived him of sight, while his heart palpitated frightfully. A dreadful suspicion seized his father. He ran towards him, and assisted him to a seat. Scarcely had the young man reached it, when a violent sickness seized him; a greenish-coloured froth appeared at the mouth, and he began to grow delirious. Guided by the convulsive efforts of the sufferer, Bloundel tore off his clothes, and after a moment's search, perceived under the left arm a livid pustule. He uttered a cry of anguish. His son was plague-stricken.

II.
THE COFFIN-MAKER

The first shock over, the grocer bore the affliction manfully, and like one prepared for it. Exhibiting little outward emotion, though his heart was torn with anguish, and acting with the utmost calmness, he forbade his wife to approach the sufferer, and desired her instantly to retire to her own room with her daughters; and not to leave it on any consideration whatever, without his permission.

Accustomed to regard her husband's word as law, Mrs. Bloundel, for the first time in her life, disputed his authority, and, falling on her knees, besought him, with tears in her eyes, to allow her to nurse her son. But he remained inflexible, and she was forced to comply.

He next gave similar directions to old Josyna respecting his two younger sons, with this difference only, that when they were put to rest, and the door was locked upon them, she was to return to the kitchen and prepare a posset-drink of canary and spirits of sulphur, together with a poultice of mallows, lily-roots, figs, linseed, and palm-oil, for the patient.

These orders given and obeyed, with Leonard Holt's assistance-for Blaize, who had crept into a corner, in extremity of terror, was wholly incapable of rendering any help-he conveyed his son to the adjoining room, on the ground floor, where there was a bed, and placing him within it, heaped blankets upon him to promote profuse perspiration, while the apprentice lighted a fire.

Provided with the most efficacious remedies for the distemper, and acquainted with the mode of treating it prescribed by the College of Physicians, Bloundel was at no loss how to act, but, rubbing the part affected with a stimulating ointment, he administered at the same time doses of mithridate, Venice treacle, and other potent alexipharmics.

He had soon the satisfaction of perceiving that his son became somewhat easier; and after swallowing the posset-drink prepared by old Josyna, who used all the expedition she could, a moisture broke out upon the youth's skin, and appeared to relieve him so much, that, but for the ghastly paleness of his countenance, and the muddy look of his eye, his father would have indulged a hope of his recovery.

Up to this time, the grocer had acted for himself, and felt confident he had acted rightly; but he now deemed it expedient to call in advice, and, accordingly, commissioned his apprentice to fetch Doctor Hodges, a physician, residing in Great Knightrider-street, Doctors' Commons, who had recently acquired considerable reputation for his skilful treatment of those attacked by the plague, and who (it may be incidentally mentioned) afterwards gave to the medical world a curious account of the ravages of the disorder, as well as of his own professional experiences during this terrible period. He likewise told him—and he could not repress a sigh as he did so—to give notice to the Examiner of Health (there were one or two officers, so designated, appointed to every parish, at this awful season, by the city authorities) that his house was infected.

While preparing to set out, Leonard again debated with himself whether he should acquaint his master with Maurice Wyvil's meditated visit. But conceiving it wholly impossible that Amabel could leave her mother's room, even if she were disposed to do so, he determined to let the affair take its course. On his way to the shop, he entered a small room occupied by Blaize, and found him seated near a table, with his hands upon his knees, and his eyes fixed upon the ground, looking the very image of despair. The atmosphere smelt like that of an apothecary's shop, and was so overpowering, that Leonard could scarcely breathe. The table was covered with pill-boxes and phials, most of which were emptied, and a dim light was afforded by a candle with a most portentous crest of snuff.

"So you have been poisoning yourself, I perceive," observed Leonard, approaching him.

"Keep off!" cried the porter, springing suddenly to his feet. "Don't touch me, I say. Poisoning myself! I have taken three rufuses, or pestilential pills; two spoonfuls of alexiteral water; the same quantity of anti-pestilential decoction; half as much of Sir Theodore Mayerne's electuary; and a large

dose of orvietan. Do you call that poisoning myself? I call it taking proper precaution, and would recommend you to do the same. Beside this, I have sprinkled myself with vinegar, fumigated my clothes, and rubbed my nose, inside and out, till it smarted so intolerably, I was obliged to desist, with balsam of sulphur."

"Well, well, if you don't escape the plague, it won't be your fault," returned Leonard, scarcely able to refrain from laughing. "But I have something to tell you before I go."

"What is the matter?" demanded Blaize, in alarm. "Where—where are you going?"

"To fetch the doctor," replied Leonard.

"Is Master Stephen worse?" rejoined the porter.

"On the contrary, I hope he is better," replied Leonard "I shall be back directly, but as I have to give notice to the Examiner of Health that the house is infected, I may be detained a few minutes longer than I anticipate. Keep the street-door locked; I will fasten the yard-gate, and do not for your life let any one in, except Doctor Hodges, till I return. Do you hear?—do you understand what I say?"

"Yes, I hear plain enough," growled Blaize. "You say that the house is infected, and that we shall all be locked up."

"Dolt!" exclaimed the apprentice, "I said no such thing." And he repeated his injunctions, but Blaize was too much terrified to comprehend them. At last, losing all patience, Leonard cried in a menacing tone, "If you do not attend to me, I will cudgel you within an inch of your life, and you will find the thrashing harder to bear even than the plague itself. Rouse yourself, fool, and follow me."

Accompanied by the porter, he hurried to the yard-gate, saw it bolted within-side, and then returned to the shop, where, having found his cap and cudgel, he directed Blaize to lock the door after him, cautioning him, for the third time, not to admit any one except the doctor. "If I find, on my return, that you have neglected my injunctions," he concluded, "as sure as I now stand before you, I'll break every bone in your body."

Blaize promised obedience, adding in a supplicating tone, "Leonard, if I were you, I would not go to the Examiner of Health. Poor Stephen may not have the plague, after all. It's a dreadful thing to be imprisoned for a month, for that's the time appointed by the Lord Mayor. Only a week ago I passed several houses in Holborn, shut up on account of the plague, with a watchman at the door, and I never shall forget the melancholy faces I saw at the windows. It was a dreadful spectacle, and has haunted me ever since."

"It cannot be helped," rejoined Leonard, with a sigh. "If we disobey the Lord Mayor's orders, and neglect giving information, we shall all be sent to Newgate, while poor Stephen will be taken to the pest-house. Besides, the searchers will be here before morning. They are sure to learn what has happened from Doctor Hodges."

"True, true," replied Blaize; "I had forgotten that. Let me go with you, dear Leonard. I dare not remain here longer."

"What! would you leave your kind good master, at a time like this, when he most needs your services?" rejoined Leonard, reproachfully. "Out, cowardly hound! I am ashamed of you. Shake off your fears, and be a man. You can but die once; and what matters it whether you die of the plague or the cholic?"

"It matters a great deal," replied Blaize. "I am afraid of nothing but the plague. I am sure I shall be its next victim in this house. But you are right—I cannot desert my kind master, nor my old mother. Farewell, Leonard. Perhaps we may never meet again. I may be dead before you come back. I feel very ill already."

"No wonder, after all the stuff you have swallowed," returned Leonard. "But pluck up your courage, or you will bring on the very thing you are anxious to avoid. As many people have died from fear as from any other cause. One word before I go. If any one should get into the house by scaling the yard-wall, or through the window, instantly alarm our master."

"Certainly," returned Blaize, with a look of surprise, "But do you expect any one to enter the house in that way?"

"Ask no questions, but do as I bid you," rejoined Leonard, opening the door, and about to go forth.

"Stop a moment," cried Blaize, detaining him, and drawing from his pocket a handful of simples. "Won't you take some of them with you to guard against infection? There's wormwood, woodsorrel, masterwort, zedoary, and angelica; and lastly, there is a little bottle of the sovereign preservative against the plague, as prepared by the great Lord Bacon, and approved by Queen Elizabeth. Won't you take *that*?"

"I have no fear," replied Leonard, shutting the door in his face. And as he lingered for a moment while it was locked, he heard Blaize say to himself, "I must go and take three more rufuses and a large dose of diascordium."

It was a bright moonlight night, and as the apprentice turned to depart, he perceived a figure hastily retreating on the other side of the way. Making sure it was Maurice Wyvil, though he could not distinguish the garb of the person—that side of the street being in the shade—and stung by jealousy, he immediately started in pursuit. The fugitive struck down Lad-lane, and run on till he came to the end of Lawrence-lane, where, finding himself closely pressed, he suddenly halted, and pulling his hat over his brows to conceal his features, fiercely confronted his pursuer.

"Why do you follow me thus, rascal?" he cried, drawing his sword. "Would you rob me? Begone, or I will call the watch."

"It *is* his voice!" cried the apprentice. "I have news for you, Mr. Maurice Wyvil. You will not see Amabel to-night. The plague is in her father's house."

"The plague!" exclaimed Wyvil, in an altered tone, and dropping the point of his sword. "Is she smitten by it?"

The apprentice answered by a bitter laugh, and without tarrying longer to enjoy his rival's distress, set off towards Cheapside. Before reaching the end of Lawrence-lane, however, he half-repented his conduct, and halted to see whether Wyvil was following him; but as he could perceive nothing of him, he continued his course.

Entering Cheapside, he observed, to his surprise, a crowd of persons collected near the Cross, then standing a little to the east of Wood-street. This cross, which was of great antiquity, and had undergone many mutilations and alterations since its erection in 1486, when it boasted, amongst other embellishments, images of the Virgin and Saint Edward the Confessor, was still not without some pretensions to architectural beauty. In form it was hexagonal, and composed of three tiers, rising from one another like the divisions of a telescope, each angle being supported by a pillar surmounted by a statue, while the intervening niches were filled up with sculptures, intended to represent some of the sovereigns of England. The structure was of considerable height, and crowned by a large gilt cross. Its base was protected by a strong wooden railing. About a hundred yards to the east, there stood a smaller hexagonal tower, likewise ornamented with carvings, and having a figure on its conical summit blowing a horn. This was the Conduit. Midway between these buildings the crowd alluded to above was collected.

As Leonard drew near, he found the assemblage was listening to the exhortations of an enthusiast, whom he instantly recognised from a description he had heard of him from Blaize. The name of this half-crazed being was Solomon Eagle. Originally a Quaker, upon the outbreak of the plague he had abandoned his home and friends, and roamed the streets at night, denouncing doom to the city. He was a tall gaunt man, with long jet-black hair hanging in disordered masses over his shoulders. His eyes were large and black, and blazed with insane lustre, and his looks were so wild and terrific, that it required no great stretch of imagination to convert him into the genius of the pestilence. Entirely stripped of apparel except that his loins were girt with a sheep-skin, in imitation

of Saint John in the Wilderness, he bore upon his head a brazier of flaming coals, the lurid light of which falling upon his sable locks and tawny skin, gave him an unearthly appearance.

Impelled by curiosity, Leonard paused for a moment to listen, and heard him thunder forth the following denunciation:—"And now, therefore, as the prophet Jeremiah saith, 'I have this day declared it to you, but ye have not obeyed the voice of the Lord your God, nor anything for the which he hath sent me unto you. Now, therefore, know certainly that ye shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence.' Again, in the words of the prophet Amos, the Lord saith unto YOU by my mouth, 'I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt, yet have you not returned unto me. Therefore, will I do this unto thee, O Israel; and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God?' Do you hear this, O sinners? God will proceed against you in the day of His wrath, though He hath borne with you in the day of His patience? O how many hundred years hath He spared this city, notwithstanding its great provocations and wickedness! But now He will no longer show it pity, but will pour out His wrath upon it I Plagues shall come upon it, and desolation; and it shall be utterly burnt with fire,—for strong is the Lord who judgeth it!"

His address concluded, the enthusiast started off at a swift pace, shrieking, in a voice that caused many persons to throw open their windows to listen to him, "Awake! sinners, awake'—the plague is at your doors!—the grave yawns for you!—awake, and repent!" And followed by the crowd, many of whom kept up with him, he ran on vociferating in this manner till he was out of hearing.

Hurrying forward in the opposite direction, Leonard glanced at the ancient and picturesque houses on either side of the way,—now bathed in the moonlight, and apparently hushed in repose and security,—and he could not repress a shudder as he reflected that an evil angel was, indeed, abroad, who might suddenly arouse their slumbering inmates to despair and death. His thoughts took another turn as he entered the precincts of Saint Paul's, and surveyed the venerable and majestic fabric before him. His eyes rested upon its innumerable crocketed pinnacles, its buttresses, its battlements, and upon the magnificent rose-window terminating the choir. The apprentice had no especial love for antiquity, but being of an imaginative turn, the sight of this reverend structure conjured up old recollections, and brought to mind the noble Collegiate Church of his native town.

"Shall I ever see Manchester again?" he sighed: "shall I take Amabel with me there? Alas! I doubt it. If I survive the plague, she, I fear, will never be mine."

Musing thus, he scanned the roof of the cathedral, and noticing its stunted central tower, could not help thinking how much more striking its effects must have been, when the lofty spire it once supported was standing. The spire, it may be remarked, was twice destroyed by lightning; first in February, 1444, and subsequently in June, 1561, when it was entirely burnt down, and never rebuilt. Passing the Convocation House, which then stood at one side of the southern transept, Leonard struck down Paul's Chain, and turning to the right, speeded along Great Knightrider-street, until he reached an old habitation at the corner of the passage leading to Doctors' Commons.

Knocking at the door, an elderly servant presently appeared, and in answer to his inquiries whether Doctor Hodges was at home, stated that he had gone out, about half an hour ago, to attend Mr. Fisher, a proctor, who had been suddenly attacked by the plague at his residence in Bartholomew-close, near Smithfield.

"I am come on the same errand," said Leonard, "and must see your master instantly."

"If you choose to go to Bartholomew-close," replied the servant, "you may probably meet with him. Mr. Fisher's house is the last but two, on the right, before you come to the area in front of the church."

"I can easily find it," returned Leonard, "and will run there as fast as I can. But if your master should pass me on the road, beseech him to go instantly to Stephen Bloundell's, the grocer, in Wood-street."

The servant assenting, Leonard hastily retraced his steps, and traversing Blow-bladder-street and Saint-Martin's-le-Grand, passed through Aldersgate. He then shaped his course through the

windings of Little Britain and entered Duck-lane. He was now in a quarter fearfully assailed by the pestilence. Most of the houses had the fatal sign upon their doors—a red cross, of a foot long, with the piteous words above it, "Lord have mercy upon us," in characters so legible that they could be easily distinguished by the moonlight, while a watchman, with a halberd in his hand, kept guard outside.

Involuntarily drawing in his breath, Leonard quickened his pace. But he met with an unexpected and fearful interruption. Just as he reached the narrow passage leading from Duck-lane to Bartholomew-close, he heard the ringing of a bell, followed by a hoarse voice, crying, "Bring out your dead—bring out your dead!" he then perceived that a large, strangely-shaped cart stopped up the further end of the passage, and heard a window open, and a voice call out that all was ready. The next moment a light was seen at the door, and a coffin was brought out and placed in the cart. This done, the driver, who was smoking a pipe, cracked his whip, and put the vehicle in motion.

Shrinking into a doorway, and holding a handkerchief to his face, to avoid breathing the pestilential effluvia, Leonard saw that there were other coffins in the cart, and that it was followed by two persons in long black cloaks. The vehicle itself, fashioned like an open hearse, and of the same sombre colour, relieved by fantastical designs, painted in white, emblematic of the pestilence, was drawn by a horse of the large black Flanders breed, and decorated with funeral trappings. To Leonard's inexpressible horror, the cart again stopped opposite him, and the driver ringing his bell, repeated his doleful cry. While another coffin was brought out, and placed with the rest, a window in the next house was opened, and a woman looking forth screamed, "Is Anselm Chowles, the coffin-maker, there?"

"Yes, here I am, Mother Malmayns," replied one of the men in black cloaks, looking up as he spoke, and exhibiting features so hideous, and stamped with such a revolting expression, that Leonard's blood curdled at the sight. "What do you want with me?" he added.

"I want you to carry away old Mike Norborough," replied the woman.

"What, is the old miser gone at last?" exclaimed Chowles, with an atrocious laugh. "But how shall I get paid for a coffin?"

"You may pay yourself with what you can find in the house," replied Mother Malmayns; "or you may carry him to the grave without one, if you prefer it."

"No, no, that won't do," returned Chowles. "I've other customers to attend to who *will* pay; and, besides, I want to get home. I expect friends at supper. Good-night, Mother Malmayns. You know where to find me, if you want me. Move on, Jonas, or you will never reach Saint Sepulchre's."

The woman angrily expostulated with him, and some further parley ensued,—Leonard did not tarry to hear what, but rushing past them, gained Bartholomew-close.

He soon reached the proctor's house, and found it marked with the fatal cross. Addressing a watchman at the door, he learnt, to his great dismay, that Doctor Hodges had been gone more than a quarter of an hour. "He was too late," said the man. "Poor Mr. Fisher had breathed his last before he arrived, and after giving some directions to the family as to the precautions they ought to observe, the doctor departed."

"How unfortunate!" exclaimed Leonard, "I have missed him a second time.

But I will run back to his house instantly."

"You will not find him at home," returned the watchman "He is gone to Saint Paul's, to attend a sick person."

"To Saint Paul's at this hour!" cried the apprentice. "Why, no one is there, except the vergers or the sexton."

"He is gone to visit the sexton, who is ill of the plague," replied the watchman. "I have told you all I know about him. You can do what you think best."

Determined to make another effort before giving in, Leonard hurried back as fast as he could. While threading Duck-lane, he heard the doleful bell again, and perceived the dead-cart standing before a house, from which two small coffins were brought. Hurrying past the vehicle, he remarked

that its load was fearfully increased, but that the coffin-maker and his companion had left it. Another minute had not elapsed before he reached Aldersgate, and passing through the postern, he beheld a light at the end of Saint Anne's-lane, and heard the terrible voice of Solomon Eagle, calling to the sleepers to awake and repent.

Shutting his ears to the cry, Leonard did not halt till he reached the great western door of the cathedral, against which he knocked. His first summons remaining unanswered, he repeated it, and a wicket was then opened by a grey-headed verger, with a lantern in his hand, who at first was very angry at being disturbed; but on learning whom the applicant was in search of, and that the case was one of urgent necessity, he admitted that the doctor was in the cathedral at the time.

"Or rather, I should say," he added, "he is in Saint Faith's. I will conduct you to him, if you think proper. Doctor Hodges is a good man,—a charitable man," he continued, "and attends the poor for nothing. He is now with Matthew Malmayns, the sexton, who was taken ill of the plague yesterday, and will get nothing but thanks—if he gets those—for his fee. But, follow me, young man, follow me."

So saying, he shut the wicket, and led the way along the transept. The path was uneven, many of the flags having been removed, and the verger often paused to throw a light upon the ground, and warn his companion of a hole.

On arriving at the head of the nave, Leonard cast his eyes down it, and was surprised at the magical effect of the moonlight upon its magnificent avenue of pillars; the massive shafts on the left being completely illuminated by the silvery beams, while those on the right lay in deep shadow.

"Ay, it is a noble structure," replied the old verger, noticing his look of wonder and admiration, "and, like many a proud human being, has known better days. It has seen sad changes in my time, for I recollect it when good Queen Bess ruled the land. But come along, young man,—you have something else to think of now."

Bestowing a momentary glance upon the matchless choir, with its groined roof, its clerestory windows, its arched openings, its carved stalls, and its gorgeous rose-window, Leonard followed his conductor through a small doorway on the left of the southern transept, and descending a flight of stone steps, entered a dark and extensive vault, for such it seemed. The feeble light of the lantern fell upon ranks of short heavy pillars, supporting a ponderous arched roof.

"You are now in Saint Faith's," observed the verger, "and above you is the choir of Saint Paul's."

Leonard took no notice of the remark, but silently crossing the nave of this beautiful subterranean church (part of which still exists), traversed its northern aisle. At length the verger stopped before the entrance of a small chapel, once dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, but now devoted to a less sacred purpose. As they advanced, Leonard observed a pile of dried skulls and bones in one corner, a stone coffin, strips of woollen shrouds, fragments of coffins, mattocks, and spades. It was evidently half a charnel, half a receptacle for the sexton's tools.

"If you choose to open that door," said the verger, pointing to one at the lower end of the chamber, "you will find him you seek. I shall go no further."

Summoning up all his resolution, Leonard pushed open the door. A frightful scene met his gaze. At one side of a deep, low-roofed vault, the architecture of which was of great antiquity, and showed that it had been a place of burial, was stretched a miserable pallet, and upon it, covered by a single blanket, lay a wretch, whose groans and struggles proclaimed the anguish he endured. A lamp was burning on the floor, and threw a sickly light upon the agonized countenance of the sufferer. He was a middle-aged man, with features naturally harsh, but which now, contracted by pain, had assumed a revolting expression. An old crone, who proved to be his mother, and a young man, who held him down in bed by main force, tended him. He was rambling in a frightful manner; and as his ravings turned upon the most loathly matters, it required some firmness to listen to them.

At a little distance from him, upon a bench, sat a stout, shrewd-looking, but benevolent little personage, somewhat between forty and fifty. This was Doctor Hodges. He had a lancet in his hand, with which he had just operated upon the sufferer, and he was in the act of wiping it on a cloth. As

Leonard entered the vault, the doctor observed to the attendants of the sick man, "He will recover. The tumour has discharged its venom. Keep him as warm as you can, and do not let him leave his bed for two days. All depends upon that. I will send him proper medicines and some blankets shortly. If he takes cold, it will be fatal."

The young man promised to attend to the doctor's injunctions, and the old woman mumbled her thanks.

"Where is Judith Malmayns?" asked Doctor Hodges: "I am surprised not to see her. Is she afraid of the distemper?"

"Afraid of it!—not she," replied the old woman. "Since the plague has raged so dreadfully, she has gone out as a nurse to the sick, and my poor son has seen nothing of her."

Leonard then recollected that he had heard the woman, who called out of the miser's house, addressed as Mother Malmayns by the coffin-maker, and had no doubt that she was the sexton's wife. His entrance having been so noiseless that it passed unnoticed, he now stepped forward, and, addressing Doctor Hodges, acquainted him with his errand.

"What!" exclaimed the doctor, as soon as he concluded, "a son of Stephen Bloundel, the worthy grocer of Wood-street, attacked by the plague! I will go with you instantly, young man. I have a great regard for your master—a very great regard. There is not a better man living. The poor lad must be saved, if possible." And hastily repeating his instructions to the attendants of the sick man, he left the vault with the apprentice.

They found the verger in the charnel, and before quitting it, the doctor drew a small flask of canary from his pocket, and applied it to his lips.

"This is my anti-pestilential drink," he remarked with a smile, "and it has preserved me from contagion hitherto. You must let us out of the south door, friend," he added to the verger, "for I shall be obliged to step home for a moment, and it will save time. Come with me, young man, and tell me what has been done for the grocer's son."

As they traversed the gloomy aisle of Saint Faith, and mounted to the upper structure, Leonard related all that had taken place since poor Stephen's seizure. The doctor strongly expressed his approval of what had been done, and observed, "It could not be better. With Heaven's help, I have no doubt we shall save him, and I am truly glad of it for his father's sake."

By this time they had reached the southern door, and the verger having unlocked it, they issued forth. It was still bright moonlight, and Leonard, whose mind was greatly relieved by the assurances of the physician, felt in some degree reconciled to the delay, and kept up his part in the conversation promoted by his companion. The doctor, who was an extremely kind-hearted man, and appeared to have a great regard for the grocer, made many inquiries as to his family, and spoke in terms of the highest admiration of the beauty of his eldest daughter. The mention of Amabel's name, while it made Leonard's cheek burn, rekindled all his jealousy of Wyvil, and he tried to make some excuse to get away, but his companion would not hear of it.

"I tell you there is no hurry," said the doctor; "all is going on as well as possible. I will make your excuses to your master."

"On reaching the doctor's house they were ushered into a large room, surrounded with bookshelves and cases of anatomical preparations. Hodges seated himself at a table, on which a shaded lamp was placed, and writing out a prescription, desired his servant to get it made up at a neighbouring apothecary's, and to take it, with a couple of blankets, to the sexton of Saint Paul's. He then produced a bottle of medicated canary, and pouring out a large glass for the apprentice, drained another himself.

"I will answer for its virtue," he said: "it is a sure preservative against the plague."

Having furnished himself with several small packets of simples, a few pots of ointment, one or two phials, and a case of surgical instruments, he told Leonard he was ready to attend him.

"We will go round by Warwick-lane," he added. "I must call upon Chowles, the coffin-maker. It will not detain us a moment; and I have an order to give him."

The mention of this name brought to Leonard's mind the hideous attendant on the dead-cart, and he had no doubt he was the person in question. It did not become him, however, to make a remark, and they set out.

Mounting Addle-hill, and threading Ave-Maria-lane, they entered Warwick-lane, and about half-way up the latter thoroughfare, the doctor stopped before a shop, bearing on its immense projecting sign the representation of a coffin lying in state, and covered with scutcheons, underneath which was written, "ANSELM CHOWLES, COFFIN-MAKER."

"I do not think you will find Mr. Chowles at home," observed Leonard: "for I saw him with the dead-cart not half an hour ago."

"Very likely," returned the doctor; "but I shall see one of his men. The coffin-maker's business is now carried on in the night time," he added, with a sigh; "and he drives a flourishing trade. These sad times will make his fortune."

As he spoke, he rapped with his cane at the door, which, after a little delay, was opened by a young man in a carpenter's dress, with a hammer in his hand. On seeing who it was, this person exhibited great confusion, and would have retired; but the doctor, pushing him aside, asked for his master.

"You cannot see him just now, sir," replied the other, evidently considerably embarrassed. "He is just come home greatly fatigued, and is about to retire to rest."

"No matter," returned the doctor, entering a room, in which three or four other men were at work, hastily finishing coffins; "I *must* see him."

No further opposition being offered, Hodges, followed by the apprentice, marched towards an inner room. Just as he reached the door, a burst of loud laughter, evidently proceeding from a numerous party, arose from within, and a harsh voice was heard chanting the following strains:

SONG OF THE PLAGUE

To others the Plague a foe may be,
To me 'tis a friend—not an enemy;
My coffins and coffers alike it fills,
And the richer I grow the more it kills.
Drink the Plague! Drink the Plague!

For months, for years, may it spend its rage
On lusty manhood and trembling age;
Though half mankind of the scourge should die,
My coffins will sell—so what care I?
Drink the Plague! Drink the Plague!

Loud acclamations followed the song, and the doctor, who was filled with disgust and astonishment, opened the door. He absolutely recoiled at the scene presented to his gaze. In the midst of a large room, the sides of which were crowded with coffins, piled to the very ceiling, sat about a dozen personages, with pipes in their mouths, and flasks and glasses before them. Their seats were coffins, and their table was a coffin set upon a bier. Perched on a pyramid of coffins, gradually diminishing in size as the pile approached its apex, Chowles was waving a glass in one hand, and a bottle in the other, when the doctor made his appearance.

A more hideous personage cannot be imagined than the coffin-maker. He was clothed in a suit of rusty black, which made his skeleton limbs look yet more lean and cadaverous. His head was perfectly bald, and its yellow skin, divested of any artificial covering, glistened like polished ivory. His throat was long and scraggy, and supported a head unrivalled for ugliness. His nose had been broken in his youth, and was almost compressed flat with his face. His few remaining teeth were yellow and discoloured with large gaps between them. His eyes were bright, and set in deep cavernous recesses, and, now that he was more than half-intoxicated, gleamed with unnatural lustre. The friends by whom he was surrounded were congenial spirits,—searchers, watchmen, buriers, apothecaries, and other wretches, who, like himself, rejoiced in the pestilence, because it was a source of profit to them.

At one corner of the room, with a part-emptied glass before her, and several articles in her lap, which she hastily pocketed on the entrance of the doctor, sat the plague-nurse, Mother Malmayns; and Leonard thought her, if possible, more villainous-looking than her companions. She was a rough, raw-boned woman, with sandy hair and light brows, a sallow, freckled complexion, a nose with wide nostrils, and a large, thick-lipped mouth. She had, moreover, a look of mingled cunning and ferocity inexpressibly revolting.

Sharply rebuking Chowles, who, in springing from his lofty seat, upset several of the topmost coffins, the doctor gave him some directions, and, turning to the nurse, informed her of her husband's condition, and ordered her to go to him immediately. Mother Malmayns arose, and glancing significantly at the coffin-maker, took her departure.

Repeating his injunctions to Chowles in a severe tone, the doctor followed; and seeing her take the way towards Saint Paul's, proceeded at a brisk pace along Paternoster-row with the apprentice. In a few minutes they reached Wood-street, and knocking at the door, were admitted by Blaize.

"Heaven be praised, you are come at last!" exclaimed the porter. "Our master began to think something had happened to you."

"It is all my fault," returned Doctor Hodges; "but how is the young man?"

"Better, much better, as I understand," replied Blaize; "but I have not seen him."

"Come, that's well," rejoined Hodges. "Lead me to his room."

"Leonard will show you the way," returned the porter, holding back.

Glancing angrily at Blaize, the apprentice conducted the doctor to the inner room, where they found the grocer, with the Bible on his knee, watching by the bedside of his son. He was delighted with their appearance, but looked inquisitively at his apprentice for some explanation of his long absence. This Hodges immediately gave; and, having examined the sufferer, he relieved the anxious father by declaring, that, with due care, he had little doubt of his son's recovery.

"God be praised!" exclaimed Bloundel, falling on his knees.

Hodges then gave minute directions to the grocer as to how he was to proceed, and told him it would be necessary for some time to keep his family separate. To this Bloundel readily agreed. The doctor's next inquiries were, whether notice had been given to the Examiner of Health, and the grocer referring to Leonard, the latter acknowledged that he had forgotten it, but undertook to repair his omission at once.

With this view, he quitted the room, and was hastening towards the shop, when he observed a figure on the back stairs. Quickly mounting them, he overtook on the landing Maurice Wyvil.

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III.
THE GAMESTER AND THE BULLY

Before proceeding further, it will be necessary to retrace our steps for a short time, and see what was done by Maurice Wyvil after the alarming announcement made to him by the apprentice. Of a selfish nature and ungovernable temper, and seeking only in the pursuit of the grocer's daughter the gratification of his lawless desires, he was filled, in the first instance, with furious disappointment at being robbed of the prize, at the very moment he expected it to fall into his hands. But this feeling was quickly effaced by anxiety respecting his mistress, whose charms, now that there was every probability of losing her (for Leonard's insinuation had led him to believe she was assailed by the pestilence), appeared doubly attractive to him; and scarcely under the governance of reason, he hurried towards Wood-street, resolved to force his way into the house, and see her again, at all hazards. His wild design, however, was fortunately prevented. As he passed the end of the court leading to the ancient inn (for it was ancient even at the time of this history), the Swan-with-two-Necks, in Lad-lane, a young man, as richly attired as himself, and about his own age, who had seen him approaching, suddenly darted from it, and grasping his cloak, detained him.

"I thought it must be you, Wyvil," cried this person. "Where are you running so quickly? I see neither angry father, nor jealous apprentice, at your heels. What has become of the girl? Are you tired of her already?"

"Let me go, Lydyard," returned Wyvil, trying to extricate himself from his companion's hold, who was no other than the gallant that had accompanied him on his first visit to the grocer's shop, and had played his part so adroitly in the scheme devised between them to procure an interview with Amabel,—"let me go, I say, I am in no mood for jesting."

"Why, what the plague is the matter?" rejoined Lydyard. "Has your mistress played you false? Have you lost your wager?"

"The plague *is* the matter," replied Wyvil, sternly. "Amabel is attacked by it. I must see her instantly."

"The devil!" exclaimed Lydyard. "Here is a pretty termination to the affair. But if this is really the case, you must *not* see her. It is one thing to be run through the arm,—which you must own I managed as dexterously as the best master of fence could have done,—and lose a few drops of blood for a mistress, but it is another to brave the plague on her account."

"I care for nothing," replied Wyvil; "I *will* see her."

"This is madness!" remonstrated Lydyard, still maintaining his grasp. "What satisfaction will it afford you to witness her sufferings—to see the frightful ravages made upon her charms by this remorseless disease,—to throw her whole family into consternation, and destroy the little chance she may have of recovery, by your presence? What good will this do? No,—you must pay your wager to Sedley, and forget her."

"I cannot forget her," replied Wyvil. "My feelings have undergone a total change. If I *am* capable of real love, it is for her."

"Real love!" exclaimed Lydyard, in an incredulous tone. "If the subject were not too serious, I should laugh in your face. No doubt you would marry her, and abandon your design upon the rich heiress, pretty Mistress Mallet, whom old Rowley recommended to your attention, and whom the fair Stewart has more than half-won for you?"

"I would," replied the other, energetically.

"Nay, then, you are more insane than I thought you," rejoined Lydyard, relinquishing his hold; "and the sooner you take the plague the better. It may cure your present brain fever. I shall go back to Parravicin, and the others. You will not require my assistance further."

"I know not," replied Wyvil, distractedly; "I have not yet given up my intention of carrying off the girl."

"If you carry her oft in this state," rejoined the other, "it must be to the pest-house. But who told you she was attacked by the plague?"

"Her father's apprentice," replied Wyvil.

"And you believed him?" demanded Lydyard, with a derisive laugh.

"Undoubtedly," replied Wyvil. "Why not?"

"Because it is evidently a mere trick to frighten you from the house," rejoined Lydyard. "I am surprised so shallow a device should succeed with *you*."

"I wish I could persuade myself it was a trick," returned Wyvil. "But the fellow's manner convinced me he was in earnest."

"Well, I will not dispute the point, though I am sure I am right," returned Lydyard. "But be not too precipitate. Since the apprentice has seen you, some alteration may be necessary in your plans. Come with me into the house. A few minutes can make no difference."

Wyvil suffered himself to be led up the court, and passing through a door on the left, they entered a spacious room, across which ran a long table, furnished at one end with wine and refreshments, and at the other with cards and dice.

Three persons were seated at the table, the most noticeable of whom was a dissipated-looking young man, dressed in the extremity of the prevailing mode, with ruffles of the finest colbertine, three inches in depth, at his wrists; a richly-laced cravat round his throat; white silk hose, adorned with gold clocks; velvet shoes of the same colour as the hose, fastened with immense roses; a silver-hilted sword, supported by a broad embroidered silk band; and a cloak and doublet of carnation-coloured velvet, woven with gold, and decorated with innumerable glittering points and ribands. He had a flowing wig of flaxen hair, and a broad-leaved hat, looped with a diamond buckle, and placed negligently on the left side of his head. His figure was slight, but extremely well formed; and his features might have been termed handsome, but for their reckless and licentious expression. He was addressed by his companions as Sir Paul Parravicin.

The person opposite to him, whose name was Disbrowe, and who was likewise a very handsome young man, though his features were flushed and disturbed, partly by the wine he had drunk, and partly by his losses at play, was equipped in the splendid accoutrements of a captain in the king's body-guard. His left hand convulsively clutched an empty purse, and his eyes were fixed upon a large sum of money, which he had just handed over to the knight, and which the latter was carelessly transferring to his pocket.

The last of the three, whose looks betrayed his character—that of a sharper and a bully—called himself Major Pillichody, his pretensions to military rank being grounded upon his service (so ran his own statement, though it was never clearly substantiated) in the king's army during the civil wars. Major Pillichody was a man of remarkably fierce exterior. Seamed with many scars, and destitute of the left eye, the orifice of which was covered, with a huge black patch; his face was of a deep mulberry colour, clearly attesting his devotion to the bottle; while his nose, which was none of the smallest, was covered with "bubukles, and whelks, and knobs, and flames of fire." He was of the middle size, stoutly built, and given to corpulency, though not so much so as to impair his activity. His attire consisted of a cloak and doublet of scarlet cloth, very much stained and tarnished, and edged with gold lace, likewise the worse for wear; jack-boots, with huge funnel tops; spurs, with enormous rowels, and a rapier of preposterous length. He wore his own hair, which was swart and woolly, like that of a negro; and had beard and moustaches to match. His hat was fiercely cocked; his gestures swaggering and insolent; and he was perpetually racking his brain to invent new and extraordinary oaths.

"So soon returned!" cried Parravicin, as Wyvil appeared. "Accept my congratulations?"

"And mine!" cried Pillichody. "We wild fellows have but to be seen to conquer. Sugar and spice, and all that's nice!" he added, smacking his lips, as he filled a glass from a long-necked bottle on the table; "May the grocer's daughter prove sweeter than her father's plums, and more melting than his butter! Is she without? Are we to see her?"

Wyvil made no answer, but, walking to the other end of the room, threw himself into a chair, and, covering his face with his hands, appeared wrapped in thought. Lydyard took a seat beside him, and endeavoured to engage him in conversation; but, finding his efforts fruitless, he desisted.

"Something is wrong," observed Parravicin, to the major. "He has been foiled in his attempt to carry off the girl. Sedley has won his wager, and it is a heavy sum. Shall we resume our play?" he added, to Disbrowe.

"I have nothing more to lose," observed the young man, filling a large goblet to the brim, and emptying it at a draught. "You are master of every farthing I possess."

"Hum!" exclaimed Parravicin, taking up a pack of cards, and snapping them between his finger and thumb. "You are married, Captain Disbrowe?"

"What if I am?" cried the young man, becoming suddenly pale; "what if I am?" he repeated.

"I am told your wife is beautiful," replied Parravicin.

"Beautiful!" ejaculated Pillichody; "by the well-filled coffers of the widow of Watling-street! she is an angel. Beautiful is not the word: Mrs. Disbrowe is divine!"

"You have never seen her," said the young man, sternly.

"Ha!—fire and fury! my word doubted," cried the major, fiercely. "I have seen her at the play-houses, at the Mulberry-garden, at court, and at church. Not seen her! By the one eye of a Cyclops, but I have! You shall hear my description of her, and judge of its correctness. *Imprimis*, she has a tall and majestic figure, and might be a queen for her dignity."

"Go on," said Disbrowe, by no means displeased with the commencement.

"Secondly," pursued Pillichody, "she has a clear olive complexion, bright black eyes, hair and brows to match, a small foot, a pretty turn-up nose, a dimpling cheek, a mole upon her throat, the rosiest lips imaginable, an alluring look—"

"No more," interrupted Disbrowe. "It is plain you have never seen her."

"Unbelieving pagan!" exclaimed the major, clapping his hand furiously upon his sword. "I have done more—I have spoken with her."

"A lie!" replied Disbrowe, hurling a dice-box at his head.

"Ha!" roared Pillichody, in a voice of thunder, and pushing back his chair till it was stopped by the wall. "Death and fiends! I will make mincemeat of your heart, and send it as a love-offering to your wife."

And, whipping out his long rapier, he would have assaulted Disbrowe, if Sir Paul had not interposed, and commanded him authoritatively to put up his blade.

"You shall have your revenge in a safer way," he whispered.

"Well, Sir Paul," rejoined the bully, with affected reluctance, "as you desire it, I will spare the young man's life. I must wash away the insult in burgundy, since I cannot do so in blood."

With this, he emptied the flask next him, and called to a drawer, who was in attendance, in an imperious tone, to bring two more bottles.

Parravicin, meanwhile, picked up the dice-box, and, seating himself, spread a large heap of gold on the table.

"I mentioned your wife, Captain Disbrowe," he said, addressing the young officer, who anxiously watched his movements, "not with any intention of giving you offence, but to show you that, although you have lost your money, you have still a valuable stake left."

"I do not understand you, Sir Paul," returned Disbrowe, with a look of indignant surprise.

"To be plain, then," replied Parravicin, "I have won from you two hundred pounds—all you possess. You are a ruined man, and, as such, will run any hazard to retrieve your losses. I give you a

last chance. I will stake all my winnings, nay, double the amount, against your wife. You have a key of the house you inhabit, by which you admit yourself at all hours; so at least the major informs me. If I win, that key shall be mine. I will take my chance for the rest. Do you understand me now?"

"I do," replied the young man, with concentrated fury. "I understand that you are a villain. You have robbed me of my money, and would rob me of my honour."

"These are harsh words, sir," replied the knight, calmly; "but let them pass. We will play first, and fight afterwards. But you refuse my challenge ?"

"It is false!" replied Disbrowe, fiercely, "I accept it." And producing a key, he threw it on the table. "My life is, in truth, set on the die," he added, with a desperate look—"for if I lose, I will not survive my shame."

"You will not forget our terms," observed Parravicin. "I am to be your representative to-night. You can return home to-morrow."

"Throw, sir—throw," cried the young man, fiercely.

"Pardon, me," replied the knight; "the first cast is with you. A single main decides it."

"Be it so," returned Disbrowe, seizing the box. And as he shook the dice with a frenzied air, the major and Lydyard drew near the table, and even Wyvil roused himself to watch the result.

"Twelve!" cried Disbrowe, as he removed the box. "My honour is saved! My fortune retrieved —Huzza!"

"Not so fast," returned Parravicin, shaking the box in his turn. "You were a little too hasty," he added, uncovering the dice. "I am twelve, too. We must throw again."

"This to decide," cried the young officer, again rattling the dice.

"Six!"

Parravicin smiled, took the box, and threw ten.

"Perdition!" ejaculated Disbrowe, striking his brow with his clenched hand. "What devil tempted me to my undoing?—My wife trusted to this profligate! Horror!—it must not be!"

"It is too late to retract," replied Parravicin, taking up the key, and turning with a triumphant look to his friends.

Disbrowe noticed the smile, and stung beyond endurance, drew his sword, and called to the knight to defend himself.

In an instant, passes were exchanged. But the conflict was brief. Fortune, as before, declared herself in favour of Parravicin. He disarmed his assailant, who rushed out of the room, uttering the wildest ejaculations of rage and despair.

"I told you you should have your revenge," observed the knight to Pillichody, as soon as Disbrowe was gone. "Is his wife really as beautiful as you represent her?"

"Words are too feeble to paint her charms," replied the major. "Shafts of Cupid! she must be seen to be appreciated."

"Enough!" returned Parravicin. "I have not made a bad night's work of it, so far. I'faith, Wyvil, I pity you. To lose a heavy wager is provoking enough—but to lose a pretty mistress is the devil."

"I have lost neither yet," replied Wyvil, who had completely recovered his spirits, and joined in the general merriment occasioned by the foregoing occurrence. "I have been baffled, not defeated. What say you to an exchange of mistresses? I am so diverted with your adventure, that I am half inclined to give you the grocer's daughter for Disbrowe's wife. She is a superb creature—languid as a Circassian, and passionate as an Andalusian."

"I can't agree to the exchange, especially after your rapturous description," returned Parravicin, "but I'll stake Mrs. Disbrowe against Amabel. The winner shall have both. A single cast shall decide, as before."

"No," replied Wyvil, "I could not resign Amabel, if I lost. And the luck is all on your side to-night."

"As you please," rejoined the knight, sweeping the glittering pile into his pocket. "Drawer, another bottle of burgundy. A health to our mistresses!" he added, quaffing a brimmer.

"A health to the grocer's daughter!" cried Wyvil, with difficulty repressing a shudder, as he uttered the pledge.

"A health to the rich widow of Watling-street," cried Pillichody, draining a bumper, "and may I soon call her mine!"

"I have no mistress to toast," said Lydyard; "and I have drunk wine enough. Do not forget, gentlemen, that the plague is abroad."

"You are the death's-head at the feast, Lydyard," rejoined Parravicin, setting down his glass. "I hate the idea of the plague. It poisons all our pleasures. We must meet at noon to-morrow, at the Smyrna, to compare notes as to our successes. Before we separate, can I be of any further service to you, Wyvil? I came here to enjoy *your* triumph; but, egad, I have found so admirable a bubble in that hot-headed Disbrowe, whom I met at the Smyrna, and brought here to while away the time, that I must demand your congratulations upon *mine*."

"You have certainly achieved an easy victory over the husband," returned Wyvil; "and I trust your success with the wife will be commensurate. I require no further assistance. What I have to do must be done alone. Lydyard will accompany me to the house, and then I must shift for myself."

"Nay, we will all see you safe inside," returned Parravicin, "We shall pass by the grocer's shop. I know it well, having passed it a hundred times, in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of its lovely inmate."

"I am glad it *was* a vain hope," replied Wyvil. "But I must scale a wall to surprise the garrison."

"In that case you will need the rope-ladder," replied Lydyard; "it is in readiness."

"I will carry it," said Pillichody, picking up the ladder which was lying in a corner of the room, and throwing it over his shoulders. "Bombs and batteries! I like to be an escalader when the forts of love are stormed."

The party then set out. As they proceeded, Parravicin ascertained from the major that Disbrowe's house was situated in a small street leading out of Piccadilly, but as he could not be quite sure that he understood his informant aright, he engaged him to accompany him and point it out.

By this time they had reached Wood-street, and keeping in the shade, reconnoitred the house. But though Wyvil clapped his hands, blew a shrill whistle, and made other signals, no answer was returned, nor was a light seen at any of the upper windows. On the contrary, all was still and silent as death.

The grocer's was a large, old-fashioned house, built about the middle of the preceding century, or perhaps earlier, and had four stories, each projecting over the other, till the pile seemed completely to overhang the street. The entire front, except the upper story, which was protected by oaken planks, was covered with panels of the same timber, and the projections were supported by heavy beams, embellished with grotesque carvings. Three deeply-embayed windows, having stout wooden bars, filled with minute diamond panes, set in leaden frames, were allotted to each floor; while the like number of gables, ornamented with curiously-carved coignes, and long-moulded leaden spouts, shooting far into the street, finished the roof. A huge sign, with the device of Noah's Ark, and the owner's name upon it, hung before the door.

After carefully examining the house, peeping through the chinks in the lower shutters, and discovering the grocer seated by the bedside of his son, though he could not make out the object of his solicitude, Wyvil decided upon attempting an entrance by the backyard. To reach it, a court and a narrow alley, leading to an open space surrounded by high walls, had to be traversed. Arrived at this spot, Wyvil threw one end of the rope ladder over the wall, which was about twelve feet high, and speedily succeeding in securing it, mounted, and drawing it up after him, waved his hand to his companions, and disappeared on the other side. After waiting for a moment to listen, and hearing a window open, they concluded he had gained admittance, and turned to depart.

"And now for Mrs. Disbrowe!" cried Parravicin. "We shall find a coach or a chair in Cheapside. Can I take you westward, Lydyard?"

But the other declined the offer, saying, "I will not desert Wyvil. I feel certain he will get into some scrape, and may need me to help him out of it. Take care of yourself, Parravicin. Beware of the plague, and of what is worse than the plague, an injured husband. Good-night, major."

"Farewell, sir," returned Pillichody, raising his hat. "A merry watching, and a good catching, as the sentinels were wont to say, when I served King Charles the First. Sir Paul, I attend you."

IV.
THE INTERVIEW

Maurice Wyvil, as his friends conjectured, had found his way into the house. Creeping through the window, and entering a passage, he moved noiselessly along till he reached the head of the kitchen stairs, where, hearing voices below, and listening to what was said, he soon ascertained from the discourse of the speakers, who were no other than old Josyna and Patience, that it was not the grocer's daughter, but one of his sons, who was attacked by the plague, and that Amabel was in perfect health, though confined in her mother's bedroom.

Overjoyed at the information he had thus acquired, he retired as noiselessly as he came, and after searching about for a short time, discovered the main staircase, and ascended it on the points of his feet. He had scarcely, however, mounted a dozen steps, when a door opened, and Blaize crawled along the passage, groaning to himself, and keeping his eyes bent on the ground. Seeing he was unnoticed, Wyvil gained the landing, and treading softly, placed his ear at every door, until at last the musical accents of Amabel convinced him he had hit upon the right one.

His heart beat so violently that, for a few seconds, he was unable to move. Becoming calmer, he tried the door, and finding it locked, rapped with his knuckles against it. The grocer's wife demanded who was there. But Wyvil, instead of returning an answer, repeated his application. The same demand followed, and in a louder key. Still no answer. A third summons, however, so alarmed Mrs. Bloundel, that, forgetful of her husband's injunctions, she opened the door and looked out; but, as Wyvil had hastily retired into a recess, she could see no one.

Greatly frightened and perplexed, Mrs. Bloundel rushed to the head of the stairs, to see whether there was any one below; and as she did so, Wyvil slipped into the room, and locked the door. The only object he beheld—for he had eyes for nothing else—was Amabel, who, seeing him, uttered a faint scream. Clasping her in his arms, Wyvil forgot, in the delirium of the moment, the jeopardy in which he was placed.

"Do you know what has happened?" cried Amabel, extricating herself from his embrace.

"I know all," replied her lover; "I would risk a thousand deaths for your sake. You must fly with me."

"Fly!" exclaimed Amabel; "at such a time as this?—my brother dying—the whole house, perhaps, infected! How can you ask me to fly? Why have you come hither? You will destroy me."

"Not so, sweet Amabel," replied Wyvil, ardently. "I would bear you from the reach of this horrible disease. I am come to save you, and will not stir without you."

"What shall I do?" cried Amabel, distractedly. "But I am rightly punished for my disobedience and ingratitude to my dear father. Oh! Wyvil, I did not deserve this from you."

"Hear me, Amabel," cried her lover; "I implore your forgiveness. What I have done has been from irresistible passion, and from no other cause. You promised to meet me to-night. Nay, you half consented to fly with me. I have prepared all for it. I came hither burning with impatience for the meeting. I received no signal, but encountering your father's apprentice, was informed that you were attacked by the plague. Imagine my horror and distress at the intelligence. I thought it would have killed me. I determined, however, at all risks, to see you once more—to clasp you in my arms before you died—to die with you, if need be. I accomplished my purpose. I entered the house unobserved. I overheard the servants say it was your brother who was ill, not you. I also learnt that you were in your mother's room. I found the door, and by a fortunate device, obtained admittance. Now you know all, and will you not fly with me?"

"How *can* I fly?" cried Amabel, gazing wildly round the room, as if in search of some place of refuge or escape, and, noticing her little sister, Christiana, who was lying asleep in the bed—"Oh! how I envy that innocent!" she murmured.

"Think of nothing but yourself," rejoined Wyvil, seizing her hand. "If you stay here, it will be to perish of the plague. Trust to me, and I will secure your flight."

"I cannot—I dare not," cried Amabel, resisting him with all her force.

"You *must* come," cried Wyvil, dragging her along.

As he spoke, Mrs. Bloundel, who had been down to Blaize's room to ascertain what was the matter, returned. Trying the door, and finding it fastened, she became greatly alarmed, and called to Amabel to open it directly.

"It is my mother," cried Amabel. "Pity me, Heaven! I shall die with shame."

"Heed her not," replied Wyvil, in a deep whisper; "in her surprise and confusion at seeing me, she will not be able to stop us. Do not hesitate. There is not a moment to lose."

"What is the matter, child?" cried Mrs. Bloundel. "Why have you fastened the door? Is there any one in the room with you?"

"She hears us," whispered Amabel. "What shall I do? You must not be seen?"

"There is no use in further concealment," cried Wyvil. "You are mine, and twenty mothers should not bar the way."

"Hold!" cried Amabel, disengaging herself by a sudden effort. "I have gone too far—but not so far as you imagine. I am not utterly lost."

And before she could be prevented, she rushed to the door, threw it open, and flung herself into her mother's arms, who uttered an exclamation of terror at beholding Wyvil. The latter, though filled with rage and confusion, preserved an unmoved exterior, and folded his arms upon his breast.

"And so it was you who knocked at the door!" cried Mrs. Bloundel, regarding the gallant with a look of fury—"it was you who contrived to delude me into opening it! I do not ask why you have come hither like a thief in the night, because I require no information on the subject. You are come to dishonour my child—to carry her away from those who love her and cherish her, and would preserve her from such mischievous serpents as you. But, Heaven be praised! I have caught you before your wicked design could Be effected. Oh! Amabel, my child, my child!" she added, straining her to her bosom, "I had rather—far rather—see you stricken with the plague, like your poor brother, though I felt there was not a hope of your recovery, than you should fall into the hands of this Satan!"

"I have been greatly to blame, dear mother," returned Amabel, bursting into tears; "and I shall neither seek to exculpate myself, nor conceal what I have done. I have deceived you and my father. I have secretly encouraged the addresses of this gentleman. Nay, if the plague had not broken out in our house to-night, I should have flown from it with him."

"You shock me, greatly, child," returned Mrs. Bloundel; "but you relieve me at the same time. Make a clean breast, and hide nothing from me."

"I have nothing more to tell, dear mother," replied Amabel, "except that Maurice Wyvil has been in the room ever since you left it, and might, perhaps, have carried me off in spite of my resistance, if you had not returned when you did."

"It was, indeed, a providential interference," rejoined Mrs. Bloundel. "From what a snare of the evil one—from what a pitfall have you been preserved!"

"I feel I have had a narrow escape, dear mother," replied Amabel. "Pardon me. I do not deserve your forgiveness. But I will never offend you more."

"I forgive you from my heart, child, and will trust you," returned Mrs. Bloundel, in a voice broken by emotion.

"That is more than I would," thought Maurice Wyvil. "A woman who has once deceived those she holds dear, will not fail to do so a second time. The fairest promises are forgotten when the danger is past."

"Mr. Wyvil, if you have a particle of regard for me, you will instantly leave the house," said Amabel, turning to him.

"If had my own way, he should leave it through the window," said Mrs. Bloundel; "and if he tarries a minute longer, I will give the alarm."

"You hear this, sir," cried Amabel:—"go, I entreat you."

"I yield to circumstance, Amabel," replied Wyvil; "but think not I resign you. Come what will, and however I may be foiled, I will not desist till I make you mine."

"I tremble to hear him," cried Mrs. Bloundel, "and could not have believed such depravity existed. Quit the house, sir, directly, or I will have you turned out of it."

"Do not remain another moment," implored Amabel. "Do not, do not!"

"Since I have no other way of proving my love, I must perforce obey," returned Wyvil, trying to snatch her hand and press it to his lips; but she withdrew it, and clung more closely to her mother. "We part," he added, significantly, "only for a time."

Quitting the room, he was about to descend the stairs, when Mrs. Bloundel, who had followed to see him safely off the premises, hearing a noise below, occasioned by the return of Leonard with the doctor, cautioned him to wait. A further delay was caused by Blaize, who, stationing himself at the foot of the stairs, with a light in his hand, appeared unwilling to move. Apprehensive of a discovery, Mrs. Bloundel then directed the gallant to the back staircase, and he had got about halfway down, when he was surprised by Leonard Holt, as before related.

At the very moment that Wyvil was overtaken on the landing by the apprentice, Amabel appeared at the door of her chamber with a light. The different emotions of each party at this unexpected rencontre may be imagined. Leonard Holt, with a breast boiling with jealous rage, prepared to attack his rival. He had no weapon about him, having left his cudgel in the shop, but he doubled his fists, and, nerved by passion, felt he had the force of a Hercules in his arm. Wyvil, in his turn, kept his hand upon his sword, and glanced at his mistress, as if seeking instructions how to act. At length, Mrs. Bloundel, who formed one of the group, spoke.

"Leonard Holt," she said, "show this person out at the door. Do not lose sight of him for an instant; and, as soon as he is gone, try to find out how he entered the house."

"He entered it like a robber," returned Leonard, looking fiercely at the gallant, "and if I did my strict duty, I should seize him and give him in charge to the watch. He has come here for the purpose of stealing my master's chief valuable—his daughter."

"I am aware of it," replied Mrs. Bloundel, "and nothing but consideration for my husband prevents my delivering him up to justice. As it is, he may go free. But should he return—"

"If I catch him here again," interrupted Leonard, "I will shoot him as I would a dog, though I should be hanged for the deed. Have you considered well what you are doing, madam? I would not presume beyond my station, but there are seasons when an inferior may give wholesome advice. Are you certain you are acting as your worthy husband would, in allowing this person to depart? If you have any doubt, speak. Fear nothing. Unarmed as I am, I am a match for him, and will detain him."

"Do not heed what Leonard says, dear mother," interposed Amabel. "For my sake, let Mr. Wyvil go."

"I *have* considered the matter, Leonard," returned Mrs. Bloundel, "and trust I am acting rightly. At all events, I am sure I am sparing my husband pain."

"It is mistaken tenderness," rejoined Leonard, "and Heaven grant you may not have cause to repent it. If I had your permission, I would so deal with this audacious intruder, that he should never venture to repeat his visit."

"You know that you speak safely, fellow," rejoined Wyvil, "and you, therefore, give full license to your scurrile tongue. But a time will come when I will chastise your insolence."

"No more of this," cried Mrs. Bloundel. "Do as I bid you, Leonard; and, as you value my regard, say nothing of what has occurred to your master."

Sullenly acquiescing, the apprentice preceded Wyvil to the shop, and opened the door.

As the other passed through it, he said, "You spoke of chastising me just now. If you have courage enough—which I doubt—to make good your words, and will wait for me for five minutes, near Saint Alban's Church in this street, you shall have the opportunity."

Wyvil did not deign a reply, but wrapping his cloak around him, strode away. He had not proceeded far, when it occurred to him that, possibly, notwithstanding his interdiction, some of his companions might be waiting for him, and hurrying down the passage leading to the yard, he found Lydyard, to whom he recounted his ill-success.

"I shall not, however, abandon my design," he said. "These failures are only incentives to further exertion."

"In the meantime, you must pay your wager to Sedley," laughed Lydyard, "and as the house is really infected with the plague, it behoves you to call at the first apothecary's shop we find open, and get your apparel fumigated. You must not neglect due precautions."

"True," replied Wyvil, "and as I feel too restless to go home at present, suppose we amuse ourselves by calling on some astrologer, to see whether the stars are favourable to my pursuit of this girl."

"A good idea," replied Lydyard. "There are plenty of the 'Sons of Urania,' as they term themselves, hereabouts.

"A mere juggler will not serve my turn," returned Wyvil.

"William Lilly, the almanack-maker, who predicted the plague, and, if old Rowley is to be believed, has great skill in the occult sciences, lives somewhere in Friday-street, not a stone's throw from this place. Let us go and find him out."

"Agreed," replied Lydyard.

V.
THE POMANDER-BOX

Any doubts entertained by Leonard Holt as to the manner in which his rival entered the house, were removed by discovering the open window in the passage and the rope-ladder hanging to the yard-wall. Taking the ladder away, and making all as secure as he could, he next seized his cudgel, and proceeded to Blaize's room, with the intention of inflicting upon him the punishment he had threatened: for he naturally enough attributed to the porter's carelessness all the mischief that had just occurred. Not meeting with him, however, and concluding he was in the kitchen, he descended thither, and found him in such a pitiable plight, that his wrath was instantly changed to compassion.

Stretched upon the hearth before a blazing sea-coal fire, which seemed large enough to roast him, with his head resting upon the lap of Patience, the pretty kitchen-maid, and his left hand upon his heart, the porter loudly complained of a fixed and burning pain in that region; while his mother, who was kneeling beside him, having just poured a basin of scalding posset-drink down his throat, entreated him to let her examine his side to see whether he had any pestilential mark upon it, but he vehemently resisted her efforts.

"Do you feel any swelling, myn lief zoon?" asked old Josyna, trying to remove his hand.

"Swelling!" ejaculated Blaize,—"there's a tumour as big as an egg."

"Is id possible?" exclaimed Josyna, in great alarm. "Do let me look ad id."

"No, no, leave me alone," rejoined Blaize. "Don't disturb me further.

You will catch the distemper if you touch the sore."

"Dat wond hinder me from drying to zaave you," replied his mother, affectionately. "I must see vad is de madder vid you, or I cannod cure you."

"I am past your doctoring, mother," groaned Blaize. "Leave me alone, I say. You hurt me shockingly!"

"Poor child!" cried Josyna, soothingly, "I'll be as dender as possible.

I'll nod give you de leasd pain—nod de leasd bid."

"But I tell you, you *do* give me a great deal," rejoined Blaize. "I can't bear it. Your fingers are like iron nails. Keep them away."

"Bless us! did I ever hear de like of dad!" exclaimed Josyna. "Iron nails! if you think so, myn arm zoon, you musd be very ill indeed."

"I *am* very ill," groaned her son. "I am not long for this world."

"Oh! don't say so, dear Blaize," sobbed Patience, letting fall a plentiful shower of tears on his face. "Don't say so. I can't bear to part with you."

"Then don't survive me," returned Blaize. "But there's little chance of your doing so. You are certain to take the plague."

"I care not what becomes of myself, if I lose you, Blaize," responded Patience, bedewing his countenance with another shower; "but I hope you won't die yet."

"Ah! it's all over with me—all over," rejoined Blaize. "I told Leonard Holt how it would be. I said I should be the next victim. And my words are come true."

"You are as clever as a conjurer," sobbed Patience; "but I wish you hadn't been right in this instance. However, comfort yourself. I'll die with you. We'll be carried to the grave in the same plague-cart."

"That's cold comfort," returned Blaize, angrily. "I beg you'll never mention the plague-cart again. The thought of it makes me shiver all over—oh!" And he uttered a dismal and prolonged groan.

At this juncture, Leonard thought it time to interfere.

"If you are really attacked by the plague, Blaize," he said, advancing, "you must have instant advice. Doctor Hodges is still upstairs with our master. He must see you."

"On no account," returned the porter, in the greatest alarm, and springing to his feet. "I am better—much better. I don't think I am ill at all."

"For the first time, I suspect the contrary," replied the apprentice, "since you are afraid of owning it. But this is not a matter to be trifled with. Doctor Hodges will soon settle the point." And he hurried out of the room to summon the physician.

"Oh! mother!—dear Patience!" roared Blaize, capering about in an ecstasy of terror; "don't let the doctor come near me. Keep me out of his sight. You don't know what horrid things are done to those afflicted with my complaint. But I do,—for I have informed myself on the subject. Their skins are scarified, and their sores blistered, lanced, cauterized, and sometimes burned away with a knob of red-hot iron, called 'the button.'"

"But iv id is necessary, myn goed Blaize, you musd submid," replied his mother. "Never mind de hod iron or de lance, or de blisder, iv dey make you well. Never mind de pain. It will soon be over."

"Soon over!" bellowed Blaize, sinking into a chair. "Yes, I feel it will. But not in the way you imagine. This Doctor Hodges will kill me. He is fond of trying experiments, and will make me his subject. Don't let him—for pity's sake, don't."

"But I musd, myn lief jonger," replied his mother, "I musd."

"Oh, Patience!" supplicated Blaize, "you were always fond of me. My mother has lost her natural affection. She wishes to get rid of me. Don't take part with her. My sole dependence is upon you."

"I will do all I can for you, dear Blaize," blubbered the kitchen-maid.

"But it is absolutely necessary you should see the doctor."

"Then I won't stay here another minute," vociferated Blaize. "I'll die in the street rather than under his hands."

And bursting from them, he would have made good his retreat, but for the entrance of Leonard and Hodges.

At the sight of the latter, Blaize ran back and endeavoured to screen himself behind Patience.

"Is this the sick man?" remarked Hodges, scarcely able to refrain from laughing. "I don't think he can be in such imminent danger as you led me to suppose."

"No, I am better—much better, thank you," returned Blaize, still keeping Patience between him and the doctor. "The very sight of you has frightened away the plague."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Hodges, smiling, "then it is the most marvellous cure I ever yet effected. But, come forward, young man, and let us see what is the matter with you."

"You neither lance nor cauterize an incipient tumour, do you, doctor?" demanded Blaize, without abandoning his position.

"Eh, day!" exclaimed Hodges, "have we one of the faculty here? I see how it is, friend. You have been reading some silly book about the disease, and have frightened yourself into the belief that you have some of its symptoms. I hope you haven't been doctoring yourself, likewise. What have you taken?"

"It would be difficult to say what he has *not* taken," remarked Leonard. "His stomach must be like an apothecary's shop."

"I have only used proper precautions," rejoined Blaize, testily.

"And what may those be—eh?" inquired the doctor. "I am curious to learn."

"Come from behind Patience," cried Leonard, "and don't act the fool longer, or I will see whether your disorder will not yield to a sound application of the cudgel."

"Don't rate him thus, good Master Leonard," interposed Patience. "He is very ill—he is, indeed."

"Then let him have a chance of getting better," returned the apprentice. "If he *is* ill, he has no business near you. Come from behind her, Blaize, I say. Now speak," he added, as the porter crept tremblingly forth, "and let us hear what nostrums you have swallowed. I know you have dosed

yourself with pills, electuaries, balsams, tinctures, conserves, spirits, elixirs, decoctions, and every other remedy, real or imaginary. What else have you done?"

"What Dr. Hodges, I am sure, will approve," replied Blaize, confidently. "I have rubbed myself with vinegar, oil of sulphur, extract of tar, and spirit of turpentine."

"What next?" demanded Hodges.

"I placed saltpetre, brimstone, amber, and juniper upon a chafing-dish to fumigate my room," replied Blaize; "but the vapour was so overpowering, I could not bear it."

"I should be surprised if you could," replied the doctor. "Indeed, it is astonishing to me, if you have taken half the remedies Leonard says you have, and which, taken in this way, are no remedies at all, since they counteract each other—that you are still alive. But let us see what is the matter with you. What ails you particularly?"

"Nothing," replied Blaize, trembling; "I am quite well."

"He complains of a fixed pain near de haard, docdor," interposed his mother, "and says he has a large dumour on his side. But he wond let me examine id."

"That's a bad sign," observed Hodges, shaking his head. "I am afraid it's not all fancy, as I at first supposed. Have you felt sick of late, young man?"

"Not of late," replied Blaize, becoming as white as ashes; "but I do now."

"Another bad symptom," rejoined the doctor. "Take off your doublet and open your shirt."

"Do as the doctor bids you," said Leonard, seeing that Blaize hesitated, "or I apply the cudgel."

"Ah! bless my life! what's this?" cried Hodges, running his hand down the left side of the porter, and meeting with a large lump. "Can it be a carbuncle?"

"Yes, it's a terrible carbuncle," replied Blaize; "but don't cauterize it, doctor."

"Let me look at it," cried Hodges, "and I shall then know how to proceed."

And as he spoke, he tore open the porter's shirt, and a silver ball, about as large as a pigeon's egg, fell to the ground. Leonard picked it up, and found it so hot that he could scarcely hold it.

"Here is the terrible carbuncle," he cried, with a laugh, in which all the party, except Blaize, joined.

"It's my pomander-box," said the latter. "I filled it with a mixture of citron-peel, angelica seed, zedoary, yellow saunders, aloes, benzoin, camphor, and gum-tragacanth, moistened with spirit of roses; and after placing it on the chafing-dish to heat it, hung it by a string round my neck, next my dried toad. I suppose, by some means or other, it dropped through my doublet, and found its way to my side. I felt a dreadful burning there, and that made me fancy I was attacked by the plague."

"A very satisfactory solution of the mystery," replied the doctor, laughing; "and you may think yourself well off with the blister which your box has raised. It will be easier to bear than the cataplasm I should have given you, had your apprehensions been well founded. As yet, you are free from infection, young man; but if you persist in this silly and pernicious practice of quacking yourself, you will infallibly bring on some fatal disorder—perhaps the plague itself. If your mother has any regard for you she will put all your medicines out of your reach. There are few known remedies against this frightful disease; and what few there are, must be adopted cautiously. My own specific is sack."

"Sack!" exclaimed Blaize, in astonishment. "Henceforth, I will drink nothing else. I like the remedy amazingly."

"It must be taken in moderation," said the doctor: "otherwise it is as dangerous as too much physic."

"I have a boddle or doo of de liquor you commend, docdor, in my private cupboard," observed Josyna. "Will you dasde id?"

"With great pleasure," replied Hodges, "and a drop of it will do your son no harm."

The wine was accordingly produced, and the doctor pronounced it excellent, desiring that a glass might always be brought him when he visited the grocer's house.

"You may rely upon id, mynheer, as long as my small sdore lasds," replied Josyna.

Blaize, who, in obedience to the doctor's commands, had drained a large glass of sack, felt so much inspirited by it, that he ventured, when his mother's back was turned, to steal a kiss from Patience, and to whisper in her ear, that if he escaped the plague, he would certainly marry her—an assurance that seemed to give her no slight satisfaction. His new-born courage, however, was in some degree damped by Leonard, who observed to him in an undertone:

"You have neglected my injunctions, sirrah, and allowed the person I warned you of to enter the house. When a fitting season arrives, I will not fail to pay off old scores."

Blaize would have remonstrated, and asked for some explanation, but the apprentice instantly left him, and set out upon his errand to the Examiner of Health. Accompanied by his mother, who would not even allow him to say good-night to Patience, the porter then proceeded to his own room, where the old woman, to his infinite regret, carried off his stores of medicine in a basket, which she brought with her for that purpose, and locked the door upon him.

"This has escaped her," said Blaize, as soon as she was gone, opening a secret drawer in the cupboard. "How fortunate that I kept this reserve. I have still a tolerable supply in case of need. Let me examine my stock. First of all, there are plague-lozenges, composed of angelica, liquorice, flower of sulphur, myrrh, and oil of cinnamon. Secondly, an electuary of bole-armoniac, hartshorn-shavings, saffron, and syrup of wood-sorrel. I long to taste it. But then it would be running in the doctor's teeth. Thirdly, there is a phial labelled *Aqua Theriacalis Stillatitia*—in plain English, distilled treacle-water. A spoonful of this couldn't hurt me. Fourthly, a packet of powders, entitled *Manus Christi*—an excellent mixture. Fifthly, a small pot of diatesseron, composed of gentian, myrrh, bayberries, and round aristolochia. I must just taste it. Never mind the doctor! He does not know what agrees with my constitution as well as I do myself. Physic comes as naturally to me as mother's milk. Sixthly, there is *Aqua Epidemica*, commonly called the Plague-Water of Matthias—delicious stuff! I will only just sip it. What a fine bitter it has! I'm sure it must be very wholesome. Next, for I've lost my count, comes salt of vipers—next, powder of unicorn's horn—next, oil of scorpions from Naples—next, dragon-water—all admirable. Then there are cloves of garlics—sovereign fortifiers of the stomach—and, lastly, there is a large box of my favourite rufuses. How many pills have I taken? Only half a dozen! Three more may as well go to keep the others company."

And hastily swallowing them, as if afraid of detection, he carefully shut the drawer, and then crept into bed, and, covering himself with blankets, endeavoured to compose himself to slumber.

Doctor Hodges, meantime, returned to the grocer, and acquainted him that it was a false alarm, and that the porter was entirely free from infection.

"I am glad to hear it," replied Bloundel; "but I expected as much. Blaize is like the shepherd's boy in the fable: he has cried 'wolf' so often, that when the danger really arrives, no one will heed him."

"I must now take my leave, Mr. Bloundel," said Hodges. "I will be with you the first thing to-morrow, and have little doubt I shall find your son going on well. But you must not merely take care of him, but of yourself, and your household. It will be well to set a chafing-dish in the middle of the room, and scatter some of these perfumes occasionally upon it!" and producing several small packets, he gave them to the grocer. "If you ever smoke a pipe, I would advise you to do so now."

"I never smoke," replied Bloundel, "and hold it as a filthy and mischievous habit, which nothing but necessity should induce me to practise."

"It is advisable now," returned Hodges, "and you should neglect no precaution. Take my word for it, Mr. Bloundel, the plague is only beginning. When the heats of summer arrive, its ravages will be frightful. Heaven only knows what will become of us all!"

"If my poor son is spared, and we escape contagion," returned Bloundel, "I will put into execution a scheme which has occurred to me, and which (under Providence!) will, I trust, secure my family from further hazard."

"Ah, indeed! what is that?" inquired Hodges.

"We must talk of it some other time," returned Bloundel "Good-night, doctor, and accept my thanks for your attention. To-morrow, at as early an hour as you can make convenient, I shall hope to see you." And with a friendly shake of the hand, and a reiteration of advice and good wishes, Hodges departed.

Soon after this the apprentice returned, and by his master's directions, placed a chafing-dish in the middle of the room, supplying it with the drugs and herbs left by the doctor. About four o'clock, a loud knocking was heard. Instantly answering the summons, Leonard found four men at the shop-door, two of whom he knew, by red wands they carried, were searchers; while their companions appeared to be undertakers, from their sable habits and long black cloaks.

Marching unceremoniously into the shop, the searchers desired to see the sick man; and the apprentice then perceived that one of the men in black cloaks was the coffin-maker, Chowles. He could not, however, refuse him admittance, and led the way to the grocer's chamber. As they entered it, Bloundel arose, and placing his finger to his lips in token of silence, raised the blankets, and exhibited the blotch, which had greatly increased in size, under the arm of his slumbering son. The foremost of the searchers, who kept a phial of vinegar to his nose all the time he remained in the room, then demanded in a low tone whether there were any other of the household infected? The grocer replied in the negative. Upon this, Chowles, whose manner showed he was more than half intoxicated, took off his hat, and bowing obsequiously to the grocer, said, "Shall I prepare you a coffin, Mr. Bloundel?—you are sure to want one, and had better give the order in time, for there is a great demand for such articles just now. If you like, I will call with it tomorrow night. I have a plague-cart of my own, and bury all my customers."

"God grant I may not require your services, sir!" replied the grocer, shuddering. "But I will give you timely notice."

"If you are in want of a nurse, I can recommend an experienced one," added Chowles. "Her last employer is just dead."

"I may need assistance," replied the grocer, after a moment's reflection. "Let her call to-morrow."

"She understands her business perfectly, and will save you a world of trouble," replied Chowles; "besides securing me the sale of another coffin," he added to himself.

He then quitted the room with the searchers, and Leonard felt inexpressibly relieved by their departure.

As soon as the party gained the street, the fourth person, who was provided with materials for the task, painted a red cross of the prescribed size—namely, a foot in length—in the middle of the door; tracing above it, in large characters, the melancholy formula—"LORD, HAVE MERCY UPON US!"

VI.
THE LIBERTINE PUNISHED

Sir Paul Parravicin and Major Pillichody arrived without any particular adventure at the top of the Haymarket, where the former dismissed the coach he had hired in Cheapside, and they proceeded towards Piccadilly on foot. Up to this time the major had been in very high spirits, boasting what he would do, in case they encountered Disbrowe, and offering to keep guard outside the door while the knight remained in the house. But he now began to alter his tone, and to frame excuses to get away. He had noticed with some uneasiness, that another coach stopped lower down the Haymarket, at precisely the same time as their own; and though he could not be quite certain of the fact, he fancied he perceived a person greatly resembling Captain Disbrowe alight from it. Mentioning the circumstance to his companion, he pointed out a tall figure following them at some distance; but the other only laughed at him, and said, "It may possibly be Disbrowe—but what if it is? He cannot get into the house without the key; and if he is inclined to measure swords with me a second time, he shall not escape so lightly as he did the first."

"Right, Sir Paul, right," returned Pillichody, "exterminate him—spare him not. By Bellerophon! that's my way. My only apprehension is lest he should set upon us unawares. The bravest are not proof against the dagger of an assassin."

"There you wrong Disbrowe, major, I am persuaded," returned Parravicin.

"He is too much a man of honour to stab a foe behind his back."

"It may be," replied Pillichody, "but jealousy will sometimes turn a man's brain. By the snakes of Tisiphone! I have known an instance of it myself. I once made love to a tailor's wife, and the rascal coming in unawares, struck me to the ground with his goose, and well nigh murdered me."

"After such a mischance, I am surprised you should venture to carry on so many hazardous intrigues," laughed the knight. "But you proposed just now to keep watch outside the house. If it is Disbrowe who is following us, you had better do so."

"Why, Sir Paul—you see,"—stammered the major, "I have just bethought me of an engagement."

"An engagement at this hour—impossible!" cried Parravicin.

"An assignation, I ought to say," returned Pillichody.

"Couches of Cytheraea!—an affair like your own. You would not have me keep a lady waiting."

"It is strange you should not recollect it till this moment," replied Parravicin. "But be your inamorata whom she may—even the rich widow of Watling-street, of whom you prate so much—you must put her off to-night."

"But, Sir Paul–"

"I will have no denial," replied the knight, peremptorily. If you refuse, you will find me worse to deal with than Disbrowe. You must remain at the door till I come out. And now let us lose no more time. I am impatient to behold the lady."

"Into what a cursed scrape have I got myself!" thought the major, as he walked by the side of his companion, ever and anon casting wistful glances over his shoulder. "I am fairly caught on the horns of a dilemma. I instinctively feel that Disbrowe *is* dogging us. What will become of me? The moment this harebrained coxcomb enters the house, I will see whether a light pair of heels cannot bear me out of harm's way."

By this time, they had reached a passage known as Bear-alley (all traces of which have been swept away by modern improvements), and threading it, they entered a narrow thoroughfare, called Castle-street. Just as they turned the corner, Pillichody again noticed the figure at the further end of the alley, and, but for his fears of the knight, would have instantly scampered off.

"Are we far from the house?" inquired Parravicin.

"No," replied the major, scarcely able to conceal his trepidation. "It is close at hand—and so is the lady's husband."

"So much the better," replied the knight; "it will afford you some amusement to beat him off. You may affect not to know him, and may tell him the lady's husband is just come home—her *husband*!—do you take, Pillichody?"

"I do—ha! ha! I do," replied the major, in a quavering tone.

"But you don't appear to relish the jest," rejoined Parravicin, sneeringly.

"Oh, yes, I relish it exceedingly," replied Pillichody; "her husband—ha!—ha!—and Disbrowe is the disappointed lover—capital! But here we are—and I wish we were anywhere else," he added to himself.

"Are you sure you are right?" asked Parravicin, searching for the key.

"Quite sure," returned Pillichody. "Don't you see some one behind that wall?"

"I see nothing," rejoined the knight. "You are afraid of shadows, major."

"Afraid!" ejaculated Pillichody. "Thousand thunders! I am afraid of nothing."

"In that case, I shall expect to find you have slain Disbrowe, on my return," rejoined Parravicin, unlocking the door.

"The night is chilly," observed the major, "and ever since my campaigns in the Low Countries, I have been troubled with rheumatism. I should prefer keeping guard inside."

"No, no, you must remain where you are," replied the knight, shutting the door.

Pillichody was about to take to his heels, when he felt himself arrested by a powerful arm. He would have roared for aid, but a voice, which he instantly recognised, commanded him to keep silence, if he valued his life.

"Is your companion in the house?" demanded Disbrowe, in a hollow tone.

"I am sorry to say he is, Captain Disbrowe," replied the bully. "I did my best to prevent him, but remonstrance was in vain."

"Liar," cried Disbrowe, striking him with his clenched hand. "Do you think to impose upon me by such a pitiful fabrication? It was you who introduced me to this heartless libertine—you who encouraged me to play with him, telling me I should easily strip him of all he possessed—you who excited his passion for my wife, by praising her beauty—and it was you who put it into his head to propose that fatal stake to me."

"There you are wrong, Captain Disbrowe," returned Pillichody, in a supplicatory tone. "On my soul, you are! I certainly praised your wife (as who would not?), but I never advised Parravicin to play for her. That was his own idea entirely."

"The excuse shall not avail you," cried Disbrowe, fiercely. "To you I owe all my misery. Draw and defend yourself."

"Be not so hasty, captain," cried Pillichody, abjectedly. "I have injured you sufficiently already. I would not have your blood on my head. On the honour of a soldier, I am sorry for the wrong I have done you, and will strive to repair it."

"Repair it!" shrieked Disbrowe. "It is too late." And seizing the major's arm, he dragged him by main force into the alley.

"Help! help!" roared Pillichody. "Would you murder me?"

"I will assuredly cut your throat, if you keep up this clamour," rejoined Disbrowe, snatching the other's long rapier from his side. "Coward!" he added, striking him with the flat side of the weapon, "this will teach you to mix yourself up in such infamous affairs for the future."

And heedless of the major's entreaties and vociferations, he continued to belabour him, until compelled by fatigue to desist; when the other, contriving to extricate himself, ran off as fast as his legs could carry him. Disbrowe looked after him for a moment, as if uncertain whether to follow, and then hurrying to the house, stationed himself beneath the porch.

"I will stab him as he comes forth," he muttered, drawing his sword, and hiding it beneath his mantle.

Parravicin, meanwhile, having let himself into the house, marched boldly forward, though the passage was buried in darkness, and he was utterly unacquainted with it. Feeling against the wall, he presently discovered a door, and opening it, entered a room lighted by a small silver lamp placed on a marble slab. The room was empty, but its furniture and arrangements proclaimed it the favourite retreat of the fair mistress of the abode. Parravicin gazed curiously round, as if anxious to gather from what he saw some idea of the person he so soon expected to encounter. Everything betokened a refined and luxurious taste. A few French romances, the last plays of Etherege, Dryden, and Shadwell, a volume of Cowley, and some amorous songs, lay on the table; and not far from them were a loomask, pulvil purse, a pair of scented gloves, a richly-laced mouchoir, a manteau girdle, palatine tags, and a golden bodkin for the hair.

Examining all these things, and drawing his own conclusions as to the character of their owner, Parravicin turned to a couch on which a cittern was thrown, while beside it, on a cushion, were a pair of tiny embroidered velvet slippers. A pocket-mirror, or sprunking-glass, as it was then termed, lay on a side-table, and near it stood an embossed silver chocolate-pot, and a small porcelain cup with a golden spoon inside it, showing what the lady's last repast had been. On another small table, covered with an exquisitely white napkin, stood a flask of wine, a tall-stemmed glass, and a few cakes on a China dish, evidently placed there for Disbrowe's return.

As Parravicin drew near this table, a slip of paper, on which a few lines were traced, attracted his attention, and taking it up, he read as follows:

"It is now midnight, and you promised to return early. I have felt your absence severely, and have been suffering from a violent headache, which has almost distracted me. I have also been troubled with strange and unaccountable misgivings respecting you. I am a little easier now, but still far from well, and about to retire to rest. At what hour will this meet your eye?"

"MARGARET."

"Charming creature!" exclaimed Parravicin, as the paper dropped from his hand; "she little dreamed, when she wrote it, who would read her billet. Disbrowe does not deserve such a treasure. I am sorry she is unwell. I hope she has not taken the plague. Pshaw, what could put such an idea into my head? Lydyard's warning, I suppose. That fellow, who is the veriest rake among us, is always preaching. Confound him! I wish he had not mentioned it. A glass of wine may exhilarate me." And pouring out a bumper, he swallowed it at a draught. "And so the fond fool is pining for her husband, and has some misgivings about him. Egad! it is well for her she does not know what has really taken place. She'll learn that soon enough. What's this?" he added, glancing at a picture on the wall. "Her miniature! It must be; for it answers exactly to Pillichody's description. A sparkling brunette, with raven hair, and eyes of night. I am on fire to behold her: but I must proceed with prudence, or I may ruin all. Is there nothing of Disbrowe's that I could put on for the nonce? 'Fore Heaven! the very thing I want!"

The exclamation was occasioned by his observing a loose silken robe lying across a chair. Wrapping it round him, and throwing down his hat, he took the lamp and went up stairs.

Daring as he was, Parravicin felt his courage desert him, as having found the door of Mrs. Disbrowe's chamber, he cautiously opened it. A single glance showed him that the room was more exquisitely, more luxuriously furnished than that he had just quitted. Articles of feminine attire, of the richest kind, were hung against the walls, or disposed on the chairs. On one side stood the toilette-table, with its small mirror then in vogue, and all its equipage of silver flasks, filligree cassets, japan patch-boxes, scent-bottles, and pomatum-pots.

As he entered the room, a faint voice issuing from behind the rich damask curtains of the bed, demanded, "Is it you, Disbrowe?"

"It is, Margaret," replied Parravicin, setting down the lamp, and speaking with a handkerchief at his mouth, to disguise his voice and conceal his features.

"You are late—very late," she rejoined, "and I have been ill. I fancied myself dying."

"What has been the matter with you sweet, Meg?" asked Parravicin, approaching the bed, and seating himself behind the curtains.

"I know not," she replied. "I was seized with a dreadful headache about an hour ago. It has left me; but I have a strange oppression at my chest, and breathe with difficulty."

"You alarm me, my love," rejoined Parravicin. "Were you ever attacked thus before?"

"Never," she replied. "Oh! Disbrowe! if you knew how I have longed for your return, you would blame yourself for your absence. You have grown sadly neglectful of late. I suspect you love some one else. If I thought so–"

"What if you thought so, Margaret?" demanded Parravicin.

"What!" cried Mrs. Disbrowe, raising herself in the bed. "I would requite your perfidy—terribly requite it!"

"Then learn that Captain Disbrowe *is* faithless," cried Parravicin, throwing back the curtains, and disclosing himself. "Learn that he loves another, and is with her now. Learn that he cares so little for you, that he has surrendered you to me."

"What do I hear?" exclaimed Mrs. Disbrowe. "Who are you, and what brings you here?"

"You may guess my errand from my presence," replied the knight. "I am called Sir Paul Parravicin, and am the most devoted of your admirers."

"My husband surrender me to a stranger! It cannot be!" cried the lady, distractedly.

"You see me here, and may judge of the truth of my statement," rejoined the knight. "Your husband gave me this key, with which I introduced myself to the house."

"What motive could he have for such unheard-of baseness—such barbarity?" cried Mrs. Disbrowe, bursting into tears.

"Shall I tell you, madam?" replied Parravicin. "He is tired of you, and has taken this means of ridding himself of you."

Mrs. Disbrowe uttered a loud scream, and fell back in the bed. Parravicin waited for a moment; but not hearing her move, brought the lamp to see what was the matter. She had fainted, and was lying across the pillow, with her night-dress partly open, so as to expose her neck and shoulders.

The knight was at first ravished with her beauty; but his countenance suddenly fell, and an expression of horror and alarm took possession of it. He appeared rooted to the spot, and instead of attempting to render her any assistance, remained with his gaze fixed upon her neck.

Rousing himself at length, he rushed out of the room, hurried down stairs, and without pausing for a moment, threw open the street-door. As he issued from it, his throat was forcibly griped, and the point of a sword was placed at his breast.

"You are now in my power, villain," cried Disbrowe, "and shall not escape my vengeance."

"You are already avenged," replied Parravicin, shaking off his assailant. "Your wife has the plague."

VII.
THE PLAGUE NURSE

"And so my husband has got the plague," muttered Mother Malmayns, as she hastened towards Saint Paul's, after the reproof she had received from Doctor Hodges. "Well, it's a disorder that few recover from, and I don't think he stands a better chance than his fellows. I've been troubled with him long enough. I've borne his ill-usage and savage temper for twenty years, vainly hoping something would take him off; but though he tried his constitution hard, it was too tough to yield. However, he's likely to go now. If I find him better than I expect, I can easily make all sure. That's one good thing about the plague. You may get rid of a patient without any one being the wiser. A wrong mixture —a pillow removed—a moment's chill during the fever—a glass of cold water—the slightest thing will do it. Matthew Malmayns, you will die of the plague, that's certain. But I must be careful how I proceed. That cursed doctor has his eye upon me. As luck would have it, I've got Sibbald's ointment in my pocket. That is sure to do its business—and safely."

Thus ruminating, she shaped her course towards the southwest corner of the cathedral, and passing under the shrouds and cloisters of the Convocation House, raised the latch of a small wooden shed fixed in the angle of a buttress. Evidently well acquainted with the place, she was not long in finding a lantern and materials to light it, and inserting her fingers in a crevice of the masonry, from which the mortar had been removed, she drew forth a key.

"It has not been stirred since I left it here a month ago," she muttered. "I must take care of this key, for if Matthew *should* die, I may not be able to enter the vaults of Saint Faith's without it; and as I know all their secret places and passages, which nobody else does, except my husband, I can make them a storehouse for the plunder I may obtain during the pestilence. If it rages for a year, or only half that time, and increases in violence (as God grant it may), I will fill every hole in those walls with gold."

With this, she took up the lantern, and crept along the side of the cathedral, until she came to a flight of stone steps. Descending them, she unlocked a small but strong door, cased with iron, and fastening it after her, proceeded along a narrow stone passage, which brought her to another door, opening upon the south aisle of Saint Faith's.

Pausing for a moment to listen whether any one was within the sacred structure—for such was the dead and awful silence of the place, that the slightest whisper or footfall, even at its farthest extremity, could be distinguished—she crossed to the other side, glancing fearfully around her as she threaded the ranks of pillars, whose heavy and embrowned shafts her lantern feebly illumined, and entering a recess, took a small stone out of the wall, and deposited the chief part of the contents of her pocket behind it, after which she carefully replaced the stone. This done, she hurried to the charnel, and softly opened the door of the crypt.

Greatly relieved by the operation he had undergone, the sexton had sunk into a slumber, and was, therefore, unconscious of the entrance of his wife, who, setting down the lantern, advanced towards the pallet. His mother and the young man were still in attendance, and the former, on seeing her daughter-in-law, exclaimed, in low but angry accents—"What brings you here, Judith? I suppose you expected to find my son dead. But he will disappoint you. Doctor Hodges said he would recover —did he not Kerrich?" she added, appealing to the young man, who nodded acquiescence. "He will recover, I tell you."

"Well, well," replied Judith, in the blandest tone she could assume; "I hope he will. And if the doctor says so, I have no doubt of it. I only heard of his illness a few minutes ago, and came instantly to nurse him."

"*You* nurse him?" cried the old woman; "if you show him any affection now, it will be for the first time since your wedding-day."

"How long has he been unwell?" demanded Judith, with difficulty repressing her anger.

"He was seized the night before last," replied the old woman; "but he didn't know what was the matter with him when it began. I saw him just before he went to rest, and he complained of a slight illness, but nothing to signify. He must have passed a frightful night, for the vergers found him in the morning running about Saint Faith's like a madman, and dashing his spades and mattocks against the walls and pillars. They secured him, and brought him here, and on examination, he proved to have the plague."

"You surprise me by what you say," replied Judith. "During the last month, I have nursed more than a dozen patients, and never knew any of them so violent. I must look at his sore."

"The doctor has just dressed it," observed the old woman.

"I don't mind that," rejoined Judith, turning down the blanket, and examining her husband's shoulder. "You are right," she added, "he is doing as well as possible."

"I suppose I shan't be wanted any more," observed Kerrich, "now you're come back to nurse your husband, Mrs. Malmayns? I shall be glad to get home to my own bed, for I don't feel well at all."

"Don't alarm yourself," replied Judith. "There's a bottle of plague vinegar for you. Dip a piece of linen in it, and smell at it, and I'll insure you against the pestilence."

Kerrich took the phial, and departed. But the remedy was of little avail. Before daybreak, he was seized with the distemper, and died two days afterwards.

"I hope poor Kerrich hasn't got the plague?" said the old woman, in a tremulous tone.

"I am afraid he has," replied the daughter-in-law, "but I didn't like to alarm him."

"Mercy on us!" cried the other, getting up. "What a dreadful scourge it is."

"You would say so, if you had seen whole families swept off by it, as I have," replied Judith. "But it mostly attacks old persons and children."

"Lord help us!" cried the crone, "I hope it will spare me. I thought my age secured me."

"Quite the reverse," replied Judith, desirous of exciting her mother-in-law's terrors; "quite the reverse. You must take care of yourself."

"But you don't think I'm ill, do you?" asked the other, anxiously.

"Sit down, and let me look at you," returned Judith.

And the old woman tremblingly obeyed.

"Well, what do you think of me—what's the matter?" she asked, as her daughter-in-law eyed her for some minutes in silence. "What's the matter, I say?"

But Judith remained silent.

"I insist upon knowing," continued the old woman.

"Are you able to bear the truth?" returned her daughter-in-law.

"You need say no more," groaned the old woman. "I know what the truth must be, and will try to bear it. I will get home as fast as I can, and put my few affairs in order, so that if I am carried off, I may not go unprepared."

"You had better do so," replied her daughter-in-law.

"You will take care of my poor son, Judith," rejoined the old woman, shedding a flood of tears. "I would stay with him, if I thought I could do him any good; but if I really am infected, I might only be in the way. Don't neglect him—as you hope for mercy hereafter, do not."

"Make yourself easy, mother," replied Judith. "I will take every care of him."

"Have you no fears of the disorder yourself?" inquired the old woman.

"None whatever," replied Judith. "I am *a safe woman*."

"I do not understand you," replied her mother-in-law, in surprise.

"I have had the plague," replied Judith; "and those who have had it once, never take it a second time."

This opinion, entertained at the commencement of the pestilence, it may be incidentally remarked, was afterwards found to be entirely erroneous; some persons being known to have the distemper three or four times.

"You never let us know you were ill," said the old woman.

"I could not do so," replied Judith, "and I don't know that I should have done if I could. I was nursing two sisters at a small house in Clerkenwell Close, and they both died in the night-time, within a few hours of each other. The next day, as I was preparing to leave the house, I was seized myself, and had scarcely strength to creep up-stairs to bed. An old apothecary, named Sibbald, who had brought drugs to the house, attended me, and saved my life. In less than a week, I was well again, and able to move about, and should have returned home, but the apothecary told me, as I had had the distemper once, I might resume my occupation with safety. I did so, and have found plenty of employment."

"No doubt," rejoined the old woman; "and you will find plenty more—plenty more."

"I hope so," replied the other.

"Oh! do not give utterance to such a dreadful wish, Judith," rejoined her mother-in-law. "Do not let cupidity steel your heart to every better feeling."

A slight derisive smile passed over the harsh features of the plague-nurse.

"You heed me not," pursued the old woman. "But a time will come when you will recollect my words."

"I am content to wait till then," rejoined Judith.

"Heaven grant you a better frame of mind!" exclaimed the old woman. "I must take one last look of my son, for it is not likely I shall see him again."

"Not in this world," thought Judith.

"I conjure you, by all that is sacred, not to neglect him," said the old woman.

"I have already promised to do so," replied Judith, impatiently.

"Good-night, mother."

"It will be a long good-night to me, I fear," returned the dame. "Doctor Hodges promised to send some blankets and medicine for poor Matthew. The doctor is a charitable man to the poor, and if he learns I am sick, he may, perhaps, call and give me advice."

"I am sure he will," replied Judith. "Should the man bring the blankets, I will tell him to acquaint his master with your condition. And now take this lantern, mother, and get home as fast as you can."

So saying, she almost pushed her out of the vault, and closed the door after her.

"At last I am rid of her," she muttered. "She would have been a spy over me. I hope I have frightened her into the plague. But if she dies of fear, it will answer my purpose as well. And now for my husband."

Taking up the lamp, and shading it with her hand, she gazed at his ghastly countenance.

"He slumbers tranquilly," she muttered, after contemplating him for some time, adding with a chuckling laugh, "it would be a pity to waken him."

And seating herself on a stool near the pallet, she turned over in her mind in what way she could best execute her diabolical purpose.

While she was thus occupied, the messenger from Doctor Hodges arrived with a bundle of blankets and several phials and pots of ointment. The man offered to place the blankets on the pallet, but Judith would not let him.

"I can do it better myself, and without disturbing the poor sufferer," she said. "Give my dutiful thanks to your master. Tell him my husband's mother, old widow Malmayns, fancies herself attacked by the plague, and if he will be kind enough to visit her, she lodges in the upper attic of a baker's house, at the sign of the Wheatsheaf, in Little Distaff-lane, hard by."

"I will not fail to deliver your message to the doctor," replied the man, as he took his departure.

Left alone with her husband a second time, Judith waited till she thought the man had got out of the cathedral, and then rising and taking the lamp, she repaired to the charnel, to make sure it

was untenanted. Not content with this, she stole out into Saint Faith's, and gazing round as far as the feeble light of her lamp would permit, called out in a tone that even startled herself, "Is any one lurking there?" but receiving no other answer than was afforded by the deep echoes of the place, she returned to the vault. Just as she reached the door, a loud cry burst upon her ear, and rushing forward, she found that her husband had wakened.

"Ah!" roared Malmayns, raising himself in bed, as he perceived her, "are you come back again, you she-devil? Where is my mother? Where is Kerrich? What have you done with them?"

"They have both got the plague," replied his wife. "They caught it from you. But never mind them. I will watch over you as long as you live."

"And that will be for years, you accursed jade," replied the sexton; "Dr. Hodges says I shall recover."

"You have got worse since he left you," replied Judith. "Lie down, and let me throw these blankets over you."

"Off!" cried the sick man, furiously. "You shall not approach me. You want to smother me."

"I want to cure you," replied his wife, heaping the blankets upon the pallet. "The doctor has sent some ointment for your sore."

"Then let him apply it himself," cried Malmayns, shaking his fist at her. "You shall not touch me. I will strangle you if you come near me."

"Matthew," replied his wife, "I have had the plague myself, and know how to treat it better than any doctor in London. I will cure you, if you will let me."

"I have no faith in you," replied Malmayns, "but I suppose I must submit. Take heed what you do to me, for if I have but five minutes to live, it will be long enough to revenge myself upon you."

"I will anoint your sore with this salve," rejoined Judith, producing a pot of dark-coloured ointment, and rubbing his shoulder with it. "It was given me by Sibbald, the apothecary of Clerkenwell He is a friend of Chowles, the coffin-maker. You know Chowles, Matthew?"

"I know him for as great a rascal as ever breathed," replied her husband, gruffly. "He has always cheated me out of my dues, and his coffins are the worst I ever put under ground."

"He is making his fortune now," said Judith.

"By the plague, eh?" replied Matthew. "I don't envy him. Money so gained won't stick to him. He will never prosper."

"I wish *you* had his money, Matthew," replied his wife, in a coaxing tone.

"If the plague hadn't attacked me when it did, I should have been richer than Chowles will ever be," replied the sexton,—"nay, I am richer as it is."

"You surprise me," replied Judith, suddenly pausing in her task. "How have you obtained your wealth?"

"I have discovered a treasure," replied, the sexton, with a mocking laugh,—"a secret hoard—a chest of gold—ha! ha!"

"Where—where?" demanded his wife, eagerly.

"That's a secret," replied Matthew.

"I must have it from him before he dies," thought his wife. "Had we better not secure it without delay?" she added, aloud. "Some other person may find it."

"Oh, it's safe enough," replied Matthew. "It has remained undiscovered for more than a hundred years, and will continue so for a hundred to come, unless I bring it forth."

"But you *will* bring it forth, won't you?" said Judith.

"Undoubtedly," replied Matthew, "if I get better. But not otherwise.

Money would be of no use to me in the grave."

"But it would be of use to *me*," replied his wife.

"Perhaps it might," replied the sexton; "but if I die, the knowledge of the treasure shall die with me."

"He is deceiving me," thought Judith, beginning to rub his shoulder afresh.

"I suspect you have played me false, you jade," cried Malmayns, writhing with pain. "The stuff you have applied burns like caustic, and eats into my flesh."

"It is doing its duty," replied his wife, calmly watching his agonies.

"You will soon be easier."

"Perhaps I shall—in death," groaned the sufferer. "I am parched with thirst. Give me a glass of water."

"You shall have wine, Matthew, if you prefer it. I have a flask in my pocket," she replied. "But what of the treasure—where is it?"

"Peace!" he cried. "I will baulk your avaricious hopes. You shall never know where it is."

"I shall know as much as you do," she rejoined, in a tone of incredulity. "I don't believe a word you tell me. You have found no treasure."

"If this is the last word I shall ever utter, I *have*," he returned; —"a mighty treasure. But you shall never possess it—never!—ah! ah!"

"Nor shall you have the wine," she replied; "there is water for you," she added, handing him a jug, which he drained with frantic eagerness. "He is a dead man," she muttered.

"I am chilled to the heart," grasped the sexton, shivering from head to foot, while chill damps gathered on his brow. "I have done wrong in drinking the water, and you ought not to have given it me."

"You asked for it," she replied. "You should have had wine but for your obstinacy. But I will save you yet, if you will tell me where to find the treasure."

"Look for it in my grave," he returned, with a hideous grin.

Soon after this, he fell into a sort of stupor. His wife could now have easily put a period to his existence, but she still hoped to wrest the secret from him. She was assured, moreover, that his recovery was hopeless. At the expiration of about two hours, he was aroused by the excruciating anguish of his sore. He had again become delirious, and raved as before about coffins, corpses, graves, and other loathsome matters. Seeing, from his altered looks and the livid and gangrenous appearance which the tumour had assumed, that his end was not far off, Judith resolved not to lose a moment, but to try the effect of a sudden surprise. Accordingly, she bent down her head, and shouted in his ear, "What has become of your treasure, Matthew?"

The plan succeeded to a miracle. The dying man instantly raised himself.

"My treasure!" he echoed with a yell that made the vault ring again. "Well thought on! I have not secured it. They are carrying it off. I must prevent them." And throwing off the coverings, he sprang out of bed.

"I shall have it now," thought his wife. "You are right," she added,—"they are carrying it off. The vergers have discovered it. They are digging it up. We must instantly prevent them."

"We must!" shrieked Malmayns. "Bring the light! bring the light!" And bursting open the door, he rushed into the adjoining aisle.

"He will kill himself, and discover the treasure into the bargain," cried Judith, following him. "Ah! what do I see! People in the church. Curses on them! they have ruined my hopes."

VIII.
THE MOSAICAL RODS

In pursuance of their design of seeking out an astrologer, Maurice Wyvil and Lydyard crossed Cheapside and entered Friday-street. They had not proceeded far, when they perceived a watchman standing beneath a porch with a lantern in his hand, and thinking it an intimation that the house was attacked by the plague, they hurried to the opposite side of the street, and called to the watchman to inquire whether he knew where Mr. Lilly lived.

Ascertaining that the house they sought was only a short distance off, they repaired thither, and knocking at the door, a small wicket, protected by a grating, was open within it, and a sharp female voice inquired their business.

"Give this to your master, sweetheart," replied Wyvil, slipping a purse through the grating; "and tell him that two gentlemen desire to consult him."

"He is engaged just now," replied the woman, in a much softer tone; "but I will take your message to him."

"You have more money than wit," laughed Lydyard. "You should have kept back your fee till you had got the information."

"In that case I should never have received any," replied Wyvil. "I have taken the surest means of obtaining admission to the house."

As he spoke, the door was unbolted by the woman, who proved to be young and rather pretty. She had a light in her hand, and directing them to follow her, led the way to a sort of anteroom, divided, as it appeared, from a larger room by a thick black curtain. Drawing aside the drapery, their conductress ushered them into the presence of three individuals, who were seated at a table strewn with papers, most of which were covered with diagrams and, astrological calculations.

One of these persons immediately rose on their appearance, and gravely but courteously saluted them. He was a tall man, somewhat advanced in life, being then about sixty-three, with an aquiline nose, dark eyes, not yet robbed of their lustre, grey hair waving over his shoulders, and a pointed beard and moustache. The general expression of his countenance was shrewd and penetrating, and yet there were certain indications of credulity about it, showing that he was as likely to be imposed upon himself as to delude others. It is scarcely necessary to say that this was Lilly.

The person on his right, whose name was John Booker, and who, like himself, was a proficient in astrology, was so buried in calculation, that he did not raise his eyes from the paper on the approach of the strangers. He was a stout man, with homely but thoughtful features, and though not more than a year older than Lilly, looked considerably his senior. With the exception of a few silver curls hanging down the back of his neck, he was completely bald; but his massive and towering brow seemed to indicate the possession of no ordinary intellectual qualities. He was a native of Manchester, and was born in 1601, of a good family. "His excellent verses upon the twelve months," says Lilly, in his autobiography, "framed according to the configurations of each month, being blessed with success according to his predictions, procured him much reputation all over England. He was a very honest man," continues the same authority; "abhorred any deceit in the art he studied; had a curious fancy in judging of thefts; and was successful in resolving love-questions. He was no mean proficient in astronomy; understood much in physic, was a great admirer of the antimonial cup; and not unlearned in chemistry, which he loved well, but did not practise." At the period of this history, he was clerk to Sir Hugh Hammersley, alderman.

The third person,—a minor canon of Saint Paul's, named Thomas Quatremain,—was a grave, sallow-complexioned man, with a morose and repulsive physiognomy. He was habited in the cassock of a churchman of the period, and his black velvet cap lay beside him on the table. Like Booker, he

was buried in calculations, and though he looked up for a moment as the others entered the room, he instantly resumed his task, without regard to their presence.

After looking earnestly at his visitors for a few moments, and appearing to study their features, Lilly motioned them to be seated; but they declined the offer.

"I am not come to take up your time, Mr. Lilly," said Wyvil, "but simply to ask your judgment in a matter in which I am much interested."

"First permit me to return you your purse, sir, since it is from you, I presume, that I received it," replied the astrologer. "No information that I can give deserves so large a reward as this."

Wyvil would have remonstrated. But seeing the other resolute, he was fain to concede the point.

"What question do you desire to have resolved, sir?" pursued Lilly.

"Shall I be fortunate in my hopes?" rejoined Wyvil.

"You must be a little more precise," returned the astrologer. "To what do your hopes relate?—to wealth, dignity, or love?"

"To the latter," replied Wyvil.

"So I inferred from your appearance, sir," rejoined Lilly, smiling. "Venus was strong in your nativity, though well-dignified; and I should, therefore, say you were not unfrequently entangled in love affairs. Your inamorata, I presume, is young, perhaps fair,—blue-eyed, brown-haired, tall, slender, and yet perfectly proportioned."

"She is all you describe," replied Wyvil.

"Is she of your own rank?" asked Lilly.

"Scarcely so," replied Wyvil, hesitating before he answered the question.

"I will instantly erect a scheme," replied the astrologer, rapidly tracing a figure on a sheet of paper. "The question refers to the seventh house. I shall take Venus as the natural significatrix of the lady. The moon is in trine with the lord of the ascendant,—so far, good; but there is a cross aspect from Mars, who darts forth malicious rays upon them. Your suit will probably be thwarted. But what Mars bindeth, Venus dissolveth. It is not wholly hopeless. I should recommend you to persevere."

"Juggler!" exclaimed "Wyvil between his teeth.

"I am no juggler!" replied Lilly, angrily; "and to prove I am not, I will tell you who you are who thus insult me, though you have not announced yourself, and are desirous of preserving your *incognito*. You are the Earl of Rochester, and your companion is Sir George Etherege."

"'Fore heaven! we are discovered," cried the earl; "but whether by art, magic, or from previous acquaintance with our features, I pretend not to determine."

"In either case, my lord,—for it is useless, since you have avowed yourself, to address you longer as Wyvil," replied Etherege,—"you owe Mr. Lilly an apology for the insult you have offered him. It was as undeserved as uncalled for; for he described your position with Amabel exactly."

"I am sorry for what I said," replied the earl, with great frankness, "and entreat Mr. Lilly to overlook it, and impute it to its real cause,—disappointment at his judgment."

"I wish I could give you better hopes, my lord," replied Lilly; "but I readily accept your apology. Have you any further questions to ask me?"

"Not to-night," replied the earl; "except that I would gladly learn whether it is your opinion that the plague will extend its ravages?"

"It will extend them so far, my lord, that there shall neither be buriers for the dead, nor sound to look after the sick," replied Lilly. "You may have seen a little tract of mine published in 1651,—some fourteen years ago,—called '*Monarchy or No Monarchy in England*,' in which, by an hieroglyphic, I foretold this terrible calamity."

"I heard his majesty speak of the book no later than yesterday," replied Rochester. "He has the highest opinion of your skill, Mr. Lilly, as he cannot blind himself to the fact that you foretold his father's death. But this is not the only visitation with which you threaten our devoted city."

"It is threatened by Heaven, not by me, my lord," replied Lilly. "London will be devoured by plague and consumed by fire."

"In our time?" asked Etherege.

"Before two years have passed over our heads," returned the astrologer. "The pestilence originated in the conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in Sagittarius, on the 10th of last October, and the conjunction of Saturn and Mars in the same sign, on the 12th of November. It was harbingered also by the terrible comet of January, which appeared in a cadent and obscure house, denoting sickness and death: and another and yet more terrible comet, which will be found in the fiery triplicity of Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius, will be seen before the conflagration."

"My calculations are, that the plague will be at its worst in August and September, and will not cease entirely till the beginning of December," observed Booker, laying aside his pen.

"And I doubt not you are right, sir," said Lilly, "for your calculations are ever most exact."

"My labour is not thrown away, Mr. Lilly," cried Quatremain, who had finished his task at the same time. "I have discovered what I have long suspected, that treasure *is* hidden in Saint Paul's Cathedral. Mercury is posited in the north angle of the fourth house; the dragon's tail is likewise within it; and as Sol is the significator, it must be gold."

"True," replied Lilly.

"Furthermore," proceeded Quatremain, "as the sign is earthy, the treasure must be buried in the vaults."

"Undoubtedly," replied Booker.

"I am all impatience to search for it," said Quatremain. "Let us go there at once, and make trial of the mosaical rods."

"With all my heart," replied Lilly. "My lord," he added to Rochester, "I must pray you to excuse me. You have heard what claims my attention."

"I have," returned the earl, "and should like to accompany you in the quest, if you will permit me."

"You must address yourself to Mr. Quatremain," rejoined Lilly. "If he consents, I can make no objection."

The minor canon, on being appealed to, signified his acquiescence, and after some slight preparation, Lilly produced two hazel rods, and the party set out.

A few minutes' walking brought them to the northern entrance of the cathedral, where they speedily aroused the poor verger, who began to fancy he was to have no rest that night. On learning their purpose, however, he displayed the utmost alacrity, and by Quatremain's directions went in search of his brother-verger, and a mason, who, being employed at the time in making repairs in the chantries, lodged within the cathedral.

This occasioned a delay of a few minutes, during which Rochester and Etherege had an opportunity, like that enjoyed a short time before by Leonard Holt, of beholding the magnificent effect of the columned aisles by moonlight. By this time the other verger, who was a young and active man, and the mason, arrived, and mattocks, spades, and an iron bar being procured, and a couple of torches lighted, they descended to Saint Faith's.

Nothing more picturesque can be conceived than the effect of the torchlight on the massive pillars and low-browed roof of the subterranean church. Nor were the figures inappropriate to the scene. Lilly, with the mosaical rods in his hand, which he held at a short distance from the floor, moving first to one point, then to another; now lingering within the gloomy nave, now within the gloomier aisles; the grave minor canon, who kept close beside him, and watched his movements with the most intense anxiety; Booker, with his venerable head uncovered, and his bald brow reflecting the gleam of the torches; the two court gallants in their rich attire; and the vergers and their comrade, armed with the implements for digging;—all constituted a striking picture. And as Rochester stepped aside to gaze at it, he thought he had never beheld a more singular scene.

Hitherto, no success had attended the searchers. The mosaical rods had continued motionless. At length, however, Lilly reached a part of the wall where a door appeared to have been stopped up, and playing the rods near it, they turned one over the other.

"The treasure is here!" he exclaimed. "It is hidden beneath this flag."

Instantly, all were in action. Quatremain called to his assistants to bring their mattocks and the iron bar. Rochester ran up and tendered his aid; Etherege did the same; and in a few moments the flag was forced from its position.

On examination, it seemed as if the ground beneath it had been recently disturbed, though it was carefully trodden down. But without stopping to investigate the matter, the mason and the younger verger commenced digging. When they were tired, Lilly and Quatremain took their places, and in less than an hour they had got to the depth of upwards of four feet. Still nothing had been found, and Lilly was just about to relinquish his spade to the mason, when, plunging it more deeply into the ground, it struck against some hard substance.

"It is here—we have it!" he cried, renewing his exertions.

Seconded by Quatremain, they soon cleared off the soil, and came to what appeared to be a coffin or a large chest. Both then got out of the pit to consider how they should remove the chest; the whole party were discussing the matter, when a tremendous crash, succeeded by a terrific yell, was heard at the other end of the church, and a ghastly and half-naked figure, looking like a corpse broken from the tomb, rushed forward with lightning swiftness, and shrieking—"My treasure!—my treasure!—you shall not have it!"—thrust aside the group, and plunged into the excavation.

When the bystanders recovered sufficient courage to drag the unfortunate sexton out of the pit, they found him quite dead.

IX.
THE MINIATURE

According to his promise, Doctor Hodges visited the grocer's house early on the following day, and the favourable opinion he had expressed respecting Stephen Bloundel was confirmed by the youth's appearance. The pustule had greatly increased in size; but this the doctor looked upon as a good sign: and after applying fresh poultices, and administering a hot posset-drink, he covered the patient with blankets, and recommending as much tranquillity as possible, he proceeded, at Bloundel's request, to ascertain the state of health of the rest of the family. Satisfied that all the household (including Blaize, who, being a little out of order from the quantity of medicine he had swallowed, kept his bed) were uninfected, he went upstairs, and finding the two boys quite well, and playing with their little sister Christiana, in the happy unconsciousness of childhood, he tapped at the door of Mrs. Bloundel's chamber, and was instantly admitted. Amabel did not raise her eyes at his entrance, but continued the employment on which she was engaged. Her mother, however, overwhelmed him with inquiries as to the sufferer, and entreated him to prevail upon her husband to let her take his place at the sick bed.

"I cannot accede to your request, madam," replied Hodges; "because I think the present arrangement the best that could be adopted."

"And am I not to see poor Stephen again?" cried Mrs. Bloundel, bursting into tears.

"I hope you will soon see him again, and not lose sight of him for many years to come," replied the doctor. "As far as I can judge, the danger is over, and, aided by your husband's care and watchfulness, I have little doubt of bringing the youth round."

"You reconcile me to the deprivation, doctor," rejoined Mrs. Bloundel; "but can you insure my husband against the distemper?"

"I can insure no one against contagion," replied Hodges; "but there is much in his favour. He has no fear, and takes every needful precaution. You must hope for the best. I think it right to tell you, that you will be separated from him for a month."

"Separated from my husband for a month, doctor!" cried Mrs. Bloundel. "I must see him to-day. I have something of importance to say to him."

At this point of the conversation Amabel for the first time looked up. Her eyes were red and inflamed with weeping, and her looks betrayed great internal suffering.

"You cannot see my father, mother," she said in a broken and supplicatory tone.

"But she can write to him, or send a message by me," rejoined Hodges. "I will deliver it when I go downstairs."

"What my mother has to say cannot be confided to a third party, sir," returned Amabel.

"Better defer it, then," said the doctor, who, as he looked hard at her, and saw the colour mount to her cheeks, began to suspect something of the truth. "Whatever you have to say, Mrs. Bloundel, may be very well delayed; for the house is now closed, with a watchman at the door, and will continue so for a month to come. No one can quit it, except members of our profession, searchers, nurses, and other authorized persons, during that time."

"But can no one enter it, do you think?" asked Mrs. Bloundel.

"No one would desire to do so, I should conceive, except a lover," replied Hodges, with a sly look at Amabel, who instantly averted her gaze. "Where a pretty girl is concerned, the plague itself has no terrors."

"Precisely my opinion, doctor," rejoined Mrs. Bloundel; "and as I cannot consult my husband, perhaps you will favour me with your advice as to how I ought to act, if such a person as you describe should get into the house."

"I seldom meddle with family matters," rejoined Hodges; "but I feel so much interest in all that relates to Mr. Bloundel, that I am induced to depart from my rule on the present occasion. It is evident you have lost your heart," he added, to Amabel, whose blushes told him he was right; "but not, I hope, to one of those worthless court-gallants, who, as I learn from common report, are in the habit of toasting you daily. If it is so, you must subdue your passion; for it cannot lead to good. Be not dazzled by a brilliant exterior, which often conceals a treacherous heart; but try to fix your affections on some person of little pretension, but of solid worth. Never, I grieve to say, was there a season when such universal profligacy prevailed as at present. Never was it so necessary for a young maiden, possessed of beauty like yours, to act with discretion. Never was a court so licentious as that of our sovereign, Charles the Second, whose corrupt example is imitated by every one around him, while its baneful influence extends to all classes. Were I to echo the language of the preachers, I should say it was owing to the wickedness and immorality of the times that this dreadful judgment of the plague has been inflicted upon us; but I merely bring it forward as an argument to prove to you, Amabel, that if you would escape the moral contagion by which you are threatened, you must put the strictest guard upon your conduct."

Amabel faintly murmured her thanks.

"You speak as my husband himself would have spoken," said Mrs. Bloundel. "Ah! we little thought, when we prayed that the pestilence might be averted from us, that a worse calamity was behind, and that one of the most profligate of the courtiers you have mentioned would find his way to our house."

"One of the most profligate of them?" cried Hodges. "Who, in Heaven's name?"

"He calls himself Maurice Wyvil," replied Mrs. Bloundel.

"I never heard of such a person," rejoined the doctor. "It must be an assumed name. Have you no letter or token that might lead to his discovery?" he added, turning to Amabel.

"I have his portrait," she replied, drawing a small miniature from her bosom.

"I am glad I have seen this," said the doctor, slightly starting as he cast his eyes upon it. "I hope it is not too late to save you, Amabel," he added, in a severe tone. "I hope you are free from contamination?"

"As I live, I am," she replied. "But you recognise the likeness?"

"I do," returned Hodges. "It is the portrait of one whose vices and depravity are the town's cry, and whose name coupled with that of a woman, is sufficient to sully her reputation."

"It is the Earl of Rochester," said Mrs. Bloundel.

"You have guessed aright," replied the doctor; "it is."

Uttering an exclamation of surprise and terror, Amabel fell back in her chair.

"I thought it must be that wicked nobleman," cried Mrs. Bloundel. "Would you believe it, doctor, that he forced himself into the house—nay, into this room—last night, and would have carried off my daughter, in spite of her resistance, if I had not prevented him."

"I can believe anything of him," replied Hodges. "But your husband, of course, knows nothing of the matter?"

"Not as yet," replied Mrs. Bloundel; "but I authorize you to tell him all."

"Mother, dear mother," cried Amabel, flinging herself on her knees before her, "I implore you not to add to my father's present distress. I might not have been able to conquer my attachment to Maurice Wyvil, but now that I find he is the Earl of Rochester, I regard him with abhorrence."

"If I could believe you sincere," said Mrs. Bloundel, "I might be induced to spare your father the pain which the knowledge of this unfortunate affair would necessarily inflict."

"I am sincere,—indeed I am," replied Amabel.

"To prove that the earl could not have had honourable intentions towards you, Amabel," said the doctor, "I may mention that he is at this moment urging his suit with Mistress Mallet,—a young heiress."

"Ah!" exclaimed Amabel."

"I was in attendance upon Mistress Stewart, the king's present favourite, the day before yesterday," continued Hodges, "and heard his majesty entreat her to use her influence with Mistress Mallet in Rochester's behalf. After this, you cannot doubt the nature of his intentions towards yourself."

"I cannot—I cannot," rejoined Amabel. "He is perfidy itself. But is Mistress Mallet very beautiful, doctor?"

"Very beautiful, and very rich," he replied, "and the earl is desperately in love with her. I heard him declare laughingly to the king, that if she would not consent to marry him, he would carry her off."

"Just what he said to me," exclaimed Amabel—"perjured and faithless that he is!"

"Harp on that string, doctor," whispered Mrs. Bloundel. "You understand her feelings exactly."

"Strangely enough," pursued the doctor, who, having carefully examined the miniature, had opened the back of the case, and could not repress a smile at what he beheld—"strangely enough, this very picture will convince you of the earl's inconstancy. It was evidently designed for Mistress Mallet, and, as she would not accept it, transferred to you."

"How do you know this, sir?" inquired Amabel, in a mortified tone.

"Hear what is written within it," answered Hodges, laying the open case before her, and reading as follows: "'To the sole possessor of his heart, the fair Mistress Mallet, this portrait is offered by her devoted slave—ROCHESTER.' 'The *sole* possessor of his heart!' So you have no share in it, you perceive, Amabel. 'Her devoted slave!' Is he your slave likewise? Ha! ha!"

"It *is* his writing," cried Amabel. "This note," she added, producing a billet, "is in the same hand. My eyes are indeed open to his treachery."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Hodges, "and if I can preserve you from the snares of this noble libertine, I shall rejoice as much as in curing your brother of the plague. But can you rely upon yourself, in case the earl should make another attempt to see you?"

"I can," she averred confidently.

"In that case there is nothing to apprehend," rejoined Hodges; "and I think it better on many accounts not to mention the subject to your father. It would only distract his mind, and prevent him from duly discharging the painful task he has undertaken. Were I in your place, Amabel, I would not only forget my present perfidious lover, but would instantly bestow my affections on some worthy person."

"It would gladden me if she would do so," said Mrs. Bloundel.

"There is your father's apprentice, Leonard Holt, a good-looking, well-grown lad," pursued the doctor; "and I much mistake if he is insensible to your attractions."

"I am sure he loves her dearly, doctor," replied Mrs. Bloundel. "He is as well-principled as well-looking. I have never had a fault to find with him since he came to live with us. It will rejoice me, and I am sure would not displease my husband, to see our child united to Leonard Holt."

"Well, what say you, Amabel?" asked Hodges. "Can you give him a hope?"

"Alas, no!" replied Amabel; "I have been deceived once, but I will not be deceived a second time. I will never wed."

"So every woman says after her first disappointment," observed Hodges; "but not one in ten adheres to the resolution. When you become calmer, I would recommend you to think seriously of Leonard Holt."

At this moment, a tap was heard at the door, and opening it, the doctor beheld the person in question.

"What is the matter?" cried Hodges. "I hope nothing is amiss."

"Nothing whatever," replied Leonard, "but my master wishes to see you before you leave the house."

"I will go to him at once," replied the doctor. "Good day, Mrs. Bloundel. Take care of your daughter, and I hope she will take care of herself. We have been talking about you, young man," he added in a low tone to the apprentice, "and I have recommended you as a husband to Amabel."

"There was a time, sir," rejoined Leonard, in a tone of deep emotion, "when I hoped it might be so, but that time is past."

"No such thing," replied the doctor. "Now is the time to make an impression. Her heart is on the rebound. She is satisfied of her lover's treachery. Her mother is on your side. Do not neglect the present opportunity, for another may not arrive." With this he pushed Leonard into the room, and, shutting the door upon him, hurried downstairs.

"You have arrived at a seasonable juncture, Leonard," observed Mrs. Bloundel, noticing the apprentice's perplexity, and anxious to relieve it. "We have just discovered that the person calling himself Maurice Wyvil is no other than the Earl of Rochester."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Leonard.

"Yes, indeed," returned Mrs. Bloundel. "But this is not all. Amabel has promised to forget him, and I have urged her to think of you."

"Amabel," said Leonard, advancing towards her, and taking her hand, "I can scarcely credit what I hear. Will you confirm your mother's words?"

"Leonard," returned Amabel, "I am not insensible to your good qualities, and no one can more truly esteem you than I do. Nay, till I unfortunately saw the Earl of Rochester, whom I knew not as such, I might have loved you. But now I cannot call my heart my own. I have not the affection you deserve to bestow upon you. If I can obliterate this treacherous man's image from my memory—and Heaven, I trust, will give me strength to do so—I will strive to replace it with your own."

"That is all I ask," cried Leonard, dropping on his knee before her, and pressing his lips to her hand.

"Nothing would make me happier than to see you united, my children," said Mrs. Bloundel, bending affectionately over them.

"And I would do anything to make you happy, dear mother," replied Amabel, gently withdrawing her hand, from that of the apprentice.

"Before I leave you," said Leonard, rising, "I must give you this note. I found it lying before your chamber door as I passed this morning. How it came there I know not, but I can give a shrewd guess as to the writer. I ought to tell you, that but for what has just occurred, I should not have delivered it to you."

"It is from Wyvil—I mean Rochester," said Amabel, taking the note with a trembling hand.

"Let me see it, child," cried Mrs. Bloundel, snatching it from her, and breaking the seal. "Insolent!" she exclaimed, as she cast her eyes over it. "I can scarcely contain my indignation. But let him cross my path again, and he shall find whether I cannot resent such shameful usage."

"What does he say, dear mother ?" asked Amabel.

"You shall hear," replied Mrs. Bloundel, "though I blush to repeat his words: 'Amabel, you are mine. No one shall keep you from me. Love like mine will triumph over all obstacles!'—Love like his, forsooth!" she remarked; "let him keep such stuff as that for Mistress Mallet, or his other mistresses. But I will go on: 'I may be foiled ninety-nine times, but the hundredth will succeed. We shall soon meet again. 'MAURICE WYVIL.'"

"Never!" cried Amabel. "We will never meet again. If he holds me thus cheaply, I will let him see that he is mistaken. Leonard Holt, I have told you the exact state of my feelings. I do not love you now, but I regard you as a true friend, and love may come hereafter. If in a month's time you claim my hand; if my father consents to our union, for you are aware that my mother will not oppose it—I am yours."

Leonard attempted to speak, but his voice was choked with emotion, and the tears started to his eyes.

"Farewell," said Amabel. "Do not let us meet till the appointed time.

Rest assured, I will think of you as you deserve."

"We could not meet till that time, even if you desired it," said Leonard, "for your father has forbidden any of the household, except old Josyna, to approach you till all fear of contagion is at an end, and I am now transgressing his commands. But your mother, I am sure, will acquit me of intentional disobedience."

"I do," replied Mrs. Bloundel; "it was the doctor who forced you into the room. But I am heartily glad he did so."

"Farewell, Amabel," said Leonard. "Though I shall not see you, I will watch carefully over you." And gazing at her with unutterable affection, he quitted the chamber.

"You must now choose between the heartless and depraved nobleman, who would desert you as soon as won," observed Mrs. Bloundel, "and the honest apprentice, whose life would be devoted to your happiness."

"I *have* chosen," replied her daughter.

Doctor Hodges found the grocer writing at a small table, close to the bedside of his son.

"I am happy to tell you, Mr. Bloundel," he said, in a low tone, as he entered the room, "that all your family are still free from infection, and with due care will, I hope, continue so. But I entirely approve of your resolution of keeping apart from them till the month has expired. If your son goes on as he is doing now, he will be as strong as ever in less than a fortnight. Still, as we cannot foresee what may occur, it is better to err on the cautious side."

"Pray be seated for a moment," rejoined the grocer, motioning the other to the chair. "I mentioned to you last night that in case my son recovered, I had a plan which I trusted (under Providence!) would preserve my family from the further assaults of the pestilence."

"I remember your alluding to it," replied Hodges, "and should be glad to know what it is."

"I must tell it you in confidence," rejoined Bloundel, "because I think secresy essential to its entire accomplishment. My plan is a very simple one, and only requires firmness in its execution—and that quality, I think, I possess. It is your opinion, I know, as it is my own, that the plague will increase in violence and endure for months—probably, till next winter. My intention is to store my house with provisions, as a ship is victualled for a long voyage, and then to shut it up entirely till the scourge ceases."

"If your project is practicable," said Hodges, after a moment's reflection, "I have no doubt it will be attended, with every good result you can desire. This house, which is large and roomy, is well adapted for your purpose. But you must consider well whether your family will submit to be imprisoned during the long period you propose."

"They shall remain close prisoners, even if the pestilence lasts for a twelvemonth," replied the grocer. "Whoever quits the house, when it is once closed, and on whatever plea, be it wife, son, or daughter, returns not. That is my fixed resolve."

"And you are right," rejoined Hodges, "for on that determination the success of your scheme entirely depends."

While they were thus conversing, Leonard entered the chamber, and informed his master that Chowles, the coffin-maker, and Mrs. Malmayns, the plague-nurse, desired to see him.

"Mrs. Malmayns!" exclaimed Hodges, in surprise. "I heard that something very extraordinary occurred last night in Saint Faith's. With your permission, Mr. Bloundel, she shall be admitted; I want to ask her a few questions. You had better hesitate about engaging her," he observed to the grocer, as Leonard departed, "for she is a woman of very indifferent character, though she may (for aught I know) be a good and fearless nurse."

"If there is any doubt about her, I *cannot* hesitate," returned Bloundel.

As he said this, the door was opened by Leonard, and Chowles and Judith entered the room. The latter, on seeing the doctor, looked greatly embarrassed.

"I have brought you the nurse I spoke of, Mr. Bloundel," said Chowles, bowing, "and am come to inquire whether you want a coffin to-night."

"Mr. Bloundel is not likely to require a coffin at present, Chowles," returned the doctor, severely; "neither does his son stand in need of a nurse. How is your husband, Mrs. Malmayns?"

"He is dead, sir," replied Judith.

"Dead!" echoed the doctor. "When I left him at one o'clock this morning, he was doing well. Your attendance seems to have accelerated his end."

"His death was occasioned by an accident, sir," replied Judith. "He became delirious about three o'clock, and, in spite of all my efforts to detain him, started out of bed, rushed into Saint Faith's, and threw himself into a pit, which Mr. Lilly and some other persons had digged in search of treasure."

"This is a highly improbable story, Mrs. Malmayns," returned Hodges, "and I must have the matter thoroughly investigated before I lose sight of you."

"I will vouch for the truth of Mrs. Malmayn's statement," interposed Chowles.

"You!" cried Hodges, contemptuously.

"Yes, I," replied the coffin-maker. "It seems that the sexton had found a chest of treasure buried in Saint Faith's, and being haunted by the idea that some one was carrying it off, he suddenly sprang out of bed, and rushed to the church, where, sure enough, Mr. Lilly, Mr. Quatremain, the Earl of Rochester, and Sir George Etherege, having, by the help of mosaical rods, discovered this very chest, were digging it up. Poor Matthew instantly plunged into the grave, and died of a sudden chill."

"That is not impossible," observed Hodges, after a pause. "But what has become of the treasure?"

"It is in the possession of Mr. Quatremain, who has given notice of it to the proper authorities," replied Chowles. "It consists, as I understand, of gold pieces struck in the reign of Philip and Mary, images of the same metal, crosses, pyxes, chalices, and other Popish and superstitious vessels, buried, probably, when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne, and the religion changed."

"Not unlikely," replied Hodges. "Where is your husband's body, Mrs. Malmayns?"

"It has been removed to the vault which he usually occupied," replied Judith. "Mr. Chowles has undertaken to bury it to-night."

"I must see it first," replied Hodges, "and be sure that he has not met with foul play."

"And I will accompany you," said Chowles. "So you do not want a coffin, Mr. Bloundel?"

The grocer shook his head.

"Good day, Mr. Bloundel," said Hodges. "I shall visit you to-morrow, and hope to find your son as well as I leave him. Chowles, you will be answerable for the safe custody of Mrs. Malmayns."

"I have no desire to escape, sir," replied the nurse. "You will find everything as I have represented."

"We shall see," replied the doctor. "If not, you will have to tend the sick in Newgate."

The trio then proceeded to Saint Paul's, and descended to the vaults. Hodges carefully examined the body of the unfortunate sexton, but though he entertained strong suspicions, he could not pronounce positively that he had been improperly treated; and as the statement of Mrs. Malmayns was fully borne out by the vergers and others, he did not think it necessary to pursue the investigation further. As soon as he was gone, Judith accompanied the coffin-maker to his residence, where she remained, till the evening, when she was suddenly summoned, in a case of urgency, by a messenger from Sibbald, the apothecary of Clerkenwell.

X.
THE DUEL

After Parravicin's terrible announcement, Disbrowe offered him no further violence, but, flinging down his sword, burst open the door, and rushed upstairs. His wife was still insensible, but the fatal mark that had betrayed the presence of the plague to the knight manifested itself also to him, and he stood like one entranced, until Mrs. Disbrowe, recovering from her swoon, opened her eyes, and, gazing at him, cried—"You here!—Oh Disbrowe, I dreamed you had deserted me—had sold me to another."

"Would it were a dream!" replied her husband.

"And was it not so?" she rejoined, pressing her hand to her temples. "It is true! oh! yes, I feel it is. Every circumstance rushes upon me plainly and distinctly. I see the daring libertine before me. He stood where you stand, and told me what you had done."

"What did he tell you, Margaret?" asked Disbrowe in a hollow voice.

"He told me you were false—that you loved another, and had abandoned me."

"He lied!" exclaimed Disbrowe, in a voice of uncontrollable fury. "It is true that, in a moment of frenzy, I was tempted to set you—yes, *you*, Margaret—against all I had lost at play, and was compelled to yield up the key of my house to the winner. But I have never been faithless to you—never."

"Faithless or not," replied his wife, bitterly, "it is plain you value me less than play, or you would not have acted thus."

"Reproach me not, Margaret," replied Disbrowe; "I would give worlds to undo what I have done."

"Who shall guard me against the recurrence of such conduct?" said Mrs. Disbrowe, coldly. "But you have not yet informed me how I was saved."

Disbrowe averted his head.

"What mean you?" she cried, seizing his arm. "What has happened? Do not keep me in suspense? Were you my preserver?"

"Your preserver was the plague," rejoined Disbrowe, in a sombre tone.

The unfortunate lady then, for the first time, perceived that she was attacked by the pestilence, and a long and dreadful pause ensued, broken only by exclamations of anguish from both.

"Disbrowe!" cried Margaret, at length, raising herself in bed, "you have deeply—irrecoverably injured me. But promise me one thing."

"I swear to do whatever you may desire," he replied.

"I know not, after what I have heard, whether you have courage for the deed," she continued. "But I would have you kill this man."

"I will do it," replied Disbrowe.

"Nothing but his blood can wipe out the wrong he has done me," she rejoined. "Challenge him to a duel—a mortal duel. If he survives, by my soul, I will give myself to him."

"Margaret!" exclaimed Disbrowe.

"I swear it," she rejoined. "And you know my passionate nature too well to doubt I will keep my word."

"But you have the plague!"

"What does that matter? I may recover."

"Not so," muttered Disbrowe. "If I fall, I will take care you do not recover. I will fight him to-morrow," he added aloud.

He then summoned his servants, but when they found their mistress was attacked by the plague, they framed some excuse to leave the room, and instantly fled the house. Driven almost to his wits' end, Disbrowe went in search of other assistance, and was for a while unsuccessful, until a

coachman, to whom he applied, offered, for a suitable reward, to drive to Clerkenwell—to the shop of an apothecary named Sibbald (with whose name the reader is already familiar), who was noted for his treatment of plague patients, and to bring him to the other's residence. Disbrowe immediately closed with the man, and in less than two hours Sibbald made his appearance. He was a singular and repulsive personage, with an immense hooked nose, dark, savage-looking eyes, a skin like parchment, and high round shoulders, which procured him the nickname of Aesop among his neighbours. He was under the middle size, and of a spare figure, and in age might be about sixty-five.

On seeing Mrs. Disbrowe, he at once boldly asserted that he could cure her, and proceeded to apply his remedies. Finding the servants fled, he offered to procure a nurse for Disbrowe, and the latter, thanking him, eagerly embraced the offer. Soon after this he departed. In the evening the nurse, who (as may be surmised) was no other than Judith Malmayns, arrived, and immediately commenced her functions.

Disbrowe had no rest that night. His wife slept occasionally for a few minutes, but, apparently engrossed by one idea, never failed when she awoke to urge him to slay Parravicin; repeating her oath to give herself to the knight if he came off victorious. Worn out at length, Disbrowe gave her a terrible look, and rushed out of the room.

He had not been alone many minutes when he was surprised by the entrance of Judith. He eagerly inquired whether his wife was worse, but was informed she had dropped into a slumber.

"Hearing what has passed between you," said the nurse, "and noticing your look when you left the room, I came to tell you, that if you fall in this duel, your last moments need not be embittered by any thoughts of your wife. I will take care she does not recover."

A horrible smile lighted up Disbrowe's features.

"You are the very person I want," he said. "When I would do evil, the fiend rises to my bidding. If I am slain, you know what to do. How shall I requite the service?"

"Do not concern yourself about that, captain," rejoined Judith. "I will take care of myself."

About noon, on the following day, Disbrowe, without venturing to see his wife, left the house, and proceeded to the Smyrna, where, as he expected, he found Parravicin and his companions.

The knight instantly advanced towards him, and, laying aside for the moment his reckless air, inquired, with a look of commiseration, after his wife.

"She is better," replied Disbrowe, fiercely. "I am come to settle accounts with you."

"I thought they were settled long ago," returned Parravicin, instantly resuming his wonted manner. "But I am glad to find you consider the debt unpaid."

Disbrowe lifted the cane he held in his hand, and struck the knight with it forcibly on the shoulder. "Be that my answer," he said.

"I will have your life first, and your wife afterwards," replied Parravicin, furiously.

"You shall have her if you slay me, but not otherwise," retorted Disbrowe. "It must be a mortal duel."

"It must," replied Parravicin. "I will not spare you this time."

"Spare him!" cried Pillichody. "Shield of Agamemnon! I should hope not.

Spit him as you would a wild boar."

"Peace, fool!" cried Parravicin. "Captain Disbrowe, I shall instantly proceed to the west side of Hyde Park, beneath the trees. I shall expect you there. On my return I shall call on your wife."

"I pray you do so, sir," replied Disbrowe, disdainfully.

Both then quitted the coffee-house, Parravicin attended by Rochester and Pillichody, and Disbrowe accompanied by a military friend, whom he accidentally encountered. Each party taking a coach, they soon reached the ground,—a retired spot, completely screened from observation by trees. The preliminaries were soon arranged, for neither would admit of delay. The conflict then commenced with great fury on both sides; but Parravicin, in spite of his passion, observed far more

caution than his antagonist; and, taking advantage of an unguarded movement, occasioned by the other's impetuosity, passed his sword through his body.

Disbrowe fell.

"You are again successful," he groaned, "but save my wife—save her."

"What mean you?" cried Parravicin, leaning over him, as he wiped his sword.

But Disbrowe could make no answer. His utterance was choked by a sudden effusion of blood on the lungs, and he instantly expired. Leaving the body in care of the second, Parravicin and his friends returned to the coach, where the major rejoiced greatly at the issue of the duel; but the knight looked grave, and pondered upon the words of the dying man. After a time, however, he recovered his spirits, and dined with his friends at the Smyrna; but they observed that he drank more deeply than usual. His excesses did not, however, prevent him from playing with his usual skill, and he won a large sum from Rochester at hazard.

Flushed with success, and heated with wine, he walked up to Disbrowe's residence about an hour after midnight. As he approached the house, he observed a strangely-shaped cart at the door, and, halting for a moment, saw a body, wrapped in a shroud, brought out. Could it be Mrs. Disbrowe? Rushing forward, to one of the assistants in black cloaks—and who was no other than Chowles—he asked whom he was about to inter.

"It is a Mrs. Disbrowe," replied the coffin-maker. "She died of grief, because her husband was killed this morning in a duel; but as she had the plague, it must be put down to that. We are not particular in such matters, and shall bury her and her husband together; and as there is no money left to pay for coffins, they must go to the grave without them. What, ho! Mother Malmayns, let Jonas have the captain as soon as you have stripped him. I must be starting."

And as the body of his victim was brought forth, Parravicin fell against the wall in a state almost of stupefaction.

At this moment Solomon Eagle, with his brazier on his head, suddenly turned the corner of the street, and stationing himself before the dead-cart, cried in a voice of thunder, "Woe to the libertine! woe to the homicide! for he shall perish in everlasting fire! Woe! woe!"

BOOK THE SECOND.
MAY, 1665

I.
PROGRESS OF THE PESTILENCE

Towards the middle of May, the bills of mortality began to swell greatly in amount, and though but few were put down to the plague, and a large number to the spotted fever (another frightful disorder raging at the period), it is well known that the bulk had died of the former disease. The rigorous measures adopted by the authorities (whether salutary or not has been questioned), in shutting up houses and confining the sick and sound within them for forty days, were found so intolerable, that most persons were disposed to run any risk rather than be subjected to such a grievance, and every artifice was resorted to for concealing a case when it occurred. Hence, it seldom happened, unless by accident, that a discovery was made. Quack doctors were secretly consulted, instead of the regular practitioners; the searchers were bribed to silence; and large fees were given to the undertakers and buriers to lay the deaths to the account of some other disorder. All this, however, did not blind the eyes of the officers to the real state of things. Redoubling their vigilance, they entered houses on mere suspicion; inflicted punishments where they found their orders disobeyed or neglected; sent the sound to prison,—the sick to the pest-house; and replaced the faithless searchers by others upon whom they could place reliance. Many cases were thus detected; but in spite of every precaution, the majority escaped; and the vent was no sooner stopped in one quarter than it broke out with additional violence in another.

By this time the alarm had become general. All whose business or pursuits permitted it, prepared to leave London, which they regarded as a devoted city, without delay. As many houses were, therefore, closed from the absence of the inhabitants as from the presence of the plague, and this added to the forlorn appearance of the streets, which in some quarters were almost deserted. For a while, nothing was seen at the great outlets of the city but carts, carriages, and other vehicles, filled with goods and movables, on their way to the country; and, as may be supposed, the departure of their friends did not tend to abate the dejection of those whose affairs compelled them to remain behind.

One circumstance must not be passed unnoticed, namely, the continued fineness and beauty of the weather. No rain had fallen for upwards of three weeks. The sky was bright and cloudless; the atmosphere, apparently, pure and innoxious; while the heat was as great as is generally experienced in the middle of summer. But instead of producing its usual enlivening effect on the spirits, the fine weather added to the general gloom and apprehension, inasmuch as it led to the belief (afterwards fully confirmed), that if the present warmth was so pernicious, the more sultry seasons which were near at hand would aggravate the fury of the pestilence. Sometimes, indeed, when the deaths were less numerous, a hope began to be entertained that the distemper was abating, and confidence was for a moment restored; but these anticipations were speedily checked by the reappearance of the scourge, which seemed to baffle and deride all human skill and foresight.

London now presented a lamentable spectacle. Not a street but had a house in it marked with a red cross—some streets had many such. The bells were continually tolling for burials, and the dead-carts went their melancholy rounds at night and were constantly loaded. Fresh directions were issued by the authorities; and as domestic animals were considered to be a medium of conveying the infection, an order, which was immediately carried into effect, was given to destroy all dogs and cats. But this plan proved prejudicial rather than the reverse, as the bodies of the poor animals, most of

which were drowned in the Thames, being washed ashore, produced a horrible and noxious effluvium, supposed to contribute materially to the propagation of the distemper.

No precautionary measure was neglected; but it may be doubted whether any human interference could have averted the severity of the scourge, which, though its progress might be checked for a few days by attention, or increased in the same ratio by neglect, would in the end have unquestionably fulfilled its mission. The College of Physicians, by the king's command, issued simple and intelligible directions, in the mother tongue, for the sick. Certain of their number, amongst whom was the reader's acquaintance, Doctor Hodges, were appointed to attend the infected; and two out of the Court of Aldermen were required to see that they duly executed their dangerous office. Public prayers and a general fast were likewise enjoined. But Heaven seemed deaf to the supplications of the doomed inhabitants—their prayers being followed by a fearful increase of deaths. A vast crowd was collected within Saint Paul's to hear a sermon preached by Doctor Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury,—a prelate greatly distinguished during the whole course of the visitation, by his unremitting charity and attention to the sick; and before the discourse was concluded, several fell down within the sacred walls, and, on being conveyed to their own homes, were found to be infected. On the following day, too, many others who had been present were seized with the disorder.

A fresh impulse was given to the pestilence from an unlooked for cause. It has been mentioned that the shutting up of houses and seclusion of the sick were regarded as an intolerable grievance, and though most were compelled to submit to it, some few resisted, and tumults and disturbances ensued. As the plague increased, these disturbances became more frequent, and the mob always taking part against the officers, they were frequently interrupted in the execution of their duty.

About this time a more serious affray than usual occurred, attended-with loss of life and other unfortunate consequences, which it may be worth while to relate, as illustrative of the peculiar state of the times. The wife of a merchant, named Barcroft, residing in Lothbury, being attacked by the plague, the husband, fearing his house would be shut up, withheld all information from the examiners and searchers. His wife died, and immediately afterwards one of his children was attacked. Still he refused to give notice. The matter, however, got wind. The searchers arrived at night, and being refused admittance, they broke into the house. Finding undoubted evidence of infection, they ordered it to be closed, stationed a watchman at the door, and marked it with the fatal sign. Barcroft remonstrated against their proceedings, but in vain. They told him he might think himself well off that he was not carried before the Lord Mayor, who would undoubtedly send him to Ludgate; and with other threats to the like effect, they departed.

The unfortunate man's wife and child were removed the following night in the dead-cart, and, driven half-mad by grief and terror, he broke open the door of his dwelling, and, plunging a sword in the watchman's breast, who opposed his flight, gained the street. A party of the watch happened to be passing at the time, and the fugitive was instantly secured. He made a great clamour, however,—calling to his neighbours and the bystanders to rescue him, and in another moment the watch was beaten off, and Barcroft placed on a post, whence he harangued his preservers on the severe restraints imposed upon the citizens, urging them to assist in throwing open the doors of all infected houses, and allowing free egress to their inmates.

Greedily listening to this insane counsel, the mob resolved to act upon it. Headed by the merchant, they ran down Thread-needle-street, and, crossing Stock's Market, burst open several houses in Bearbinder-lane, and drove away the watchmen. One man, more courageous than the others, tried to maintain his post, and was so severely handled by his assailants, that he died a few days afterwards of the injuries he had received. Most of those who had been imprisoned within their dwellings immediately issued forth, and joining the mob, which received fresh recruits each moment, started on the same errand.

Loud shouts were now raised of—"Open the doors! No plague prisoners! No plague prisoners!" and the mob set off along the Poultry. They halted, however, before the Great Conduit, near the end

of Bucklersbury, and opposite Mercer's Hall, because they perceived a company of the Train-bands advancing to meet them. A council of war was held, and many of the rabble were disposed to fly; but Barcroft again urged them to proceed, and they were unexpectedly added by Solomon Eagle, who, bursting through their ranks, with his brazier on his head, crying, "Awake! sleepers, awake! the plague is at your doors! awake!" speeded towards the Train-bands, scattering sparks of fire as he pursued his swift career. The mob instantly followed, and, adding their shouts to his outcries, dashed on with such fury that the Train-bands did not dare to oppose them, and, after a slight and ineffectual resistance, were put to rout.

Barcroft, who acted as leader, informed them that there was a house in Wood-street shut up, and the crowd accompanied him thither. In a few minutes they had reached Bloundel's shop, but finding no one on guard—for the watchman, guessing their errand, had taken to his heels—they smeared over the fatal cross and inscription with a pail of mud gathered from the neighbouring kennel, and then broke open the door. The grocer and his apprentice hearing the disturbance, and being greatly alarmed at it, hurried to the shop, and found it full of people.

"You are at liberty Mr. Bloundel," cried the merchant, who was acquainted with the grocer. "We are determined no longer to let our families be imprisoned at the pleasure of the Lord Mayor and aldermen. We mean to break open all the plague houses, and set free their inmates."

"For Heaven's sake, consider what you are about, Mr. Barcroft," cried the grocer. "My house has been closed for nearly a month. Nay, as my son has entirely recovered, and received his certificate of health from Doctor Hodges, it would have been opened in three days hence by the officers; so that I have suffered all the inconvenience of the confinement, and can speak to it. It is no doubt very irksome, and may be almost intolerable to persons of an impatient temperament: but I firmly believe it is the only means to check the progress of contagion. Listen to me, Mr. Barcroft—listen to me, good friends, and hesitate before you violate laws which have been made expressly to meet this terrible emergency."

Here he was checked by loud groans and upbraidings from the bystanders.

"He tells you himself that the period of his confinement is just over," cried Barcroft. "It is plain he has no interest in the matter, except that he would have others suffer as he has done. Heed him not, my friends; but proceed with the good work. Liberate the poor plague prisoners. Liberate them. On! on!"

"Forbear, rash men" cried Bloundel, in an authoritative voice. "In the name of those you are bound to obey, I command you to desist."

"Command us!" cried one of the bystanders, raising his staff in a menacing manner. "Is this your gratitude for the favour we have just conferred upon you? Command us, forsooth! You had better repeat the order, and see how it will be obeyed."

"I *do* repeat it," rejoined the grocer, firmly. "In the Lord Mayor's name, I command you to desist, and return to your homes."

The man would have struck him with his staff, if he had not been himself felled to the ground by Leonard. This was the signal for greater outrage. The grocer and his apprentice were instantly assailed by several others of the mob, who, leaving them both on the floor covered with bruises, helped themselves to all they could lay hands on in the shop, and then quitted the premises.

It is scarcely necessary to track their course further; and it may be sufficient to state, that they broke open upwards of fifty houses in different streets. Many of the plague-stricken joined them, and several half-naked creatures were found dead in the streets on the following morning. Two houses in Blackfriars-lane were set on fire, and the conflagration was with difficulty checked; nor was it until late on the following day that the mob could be entirely dispersed. The originator of the disturbance, Barcroft, after a desperate resistance, was shot through the head by a constable.

The result of this riot, as will be easily foreseen, was greatly to increase the pestilence; and many of those who had been most active in it perished in prison of the distemper. Far from being

discouraged by the opposition offered to their decrees, the city authorities enforced them with greater rigour than ever, and, doubling the number of the watch, again shut up all those houses which had been broken open during the late tumult.

Bloundel received a visit from the Lord Mayor, Sir John Lawrence, who, having been informed of his conduct, came to express his high approval of it, offering to remit the few days yet unexpired of his quarantine. The grocer, however, declined the offer, and with renewed expressions of approbation, Sir John Lawrence took his leave.

Three days afterwards, the Examiner of Health pronounced the grocer's house free from infection. The fatal mark was obliterated from the door; the shutters were unfastened; and Bloundel resumed his business as usual. Words are inadequate to describe the delight that filled the breast of every member of his family, on their first meeting after their long separation. It took place in the room adjoining the shop. Mrs. Bloundel received the joyful summons from Leonard, and, on descending with her children, found her husband and her son Stephen anxiously expecting her. Scarcely able to make up her mind as to which of the two she should embrace first, Mrs. Bloundel was decided by the pale countenance of her son, and rushing towards him, she strained him to her breast, while Amabel flew to her father's arms. The grocer could not repress his tears; but they were tears of joy, and that night's happiness made him ample amends for all the anxiety he had recently undergone.

"Well, Stephen, my dear child," said his mother, as soon as the first tumult of emotion had subsided,—"well, Stephen," she said, smiling at him through her tears, and almost smothering him with kisses, "you are not so much altered as I expected; and I do not think, if I had had the care of you, I could have nursed you better myself. You owe your father a second life, and we all owe him the deepest gratitude for the care he has taken of you."

"I can never be sufficiently grateful for his kindness," returned Stephen, affectionately.

"Give thanks to the beneficent Being who has preserved you from this great danger, my son, not to me," returned Bloundel. "The first moments of our reunion should be worthily employed."

So saying, he summoned the household, and, for the first time for a month, the whole family party assembled, as before, at prayer. Never were thanksgivings more earnestly, more devoutly uttered. All arose with bright and cheerful countenances; and even Blaize seemed to have shaken off his habitual dread of the pestilence. As he retired with Patience, he observed to her, "Master Stephen looks quite well, though a little thinner. I must ascertain from him the exact course of treatment pursued by his father. I wonder whether Mr. Bloundel would nurse *me* if I were to be suddenly seized with the distemper?"

"If he wouldn't, I *would*," replied Patience.

"Thank you, thank you," replied Blaize. "I begin to think we shall get through it. I shall go out to-morrow and examine the bills of mortality, and see what progress the plague is making. I am all anxiety to know. I must get a fresh supply of medicine, too. My private store is quite gone, except three of my favourite rufuses, which I shall take before I go to bed to-night. Unluckily, my purse is as empty as my phials."

"I can lend you a little money," said Patience. "I haven't touched my last year's wages. They are quite at your service."

"You are too good," replied Blaize; "but I won't decline the offer. I heard a man crying a new anti-pestilential elixir, as he passed the house yesterday. I must find him out and buy a bottle. Besides, I must call on my friend Parkhurst, the apothecary.—You are a good girl, Patience, and I'll marry you as soon as the plague ceases."

"I have something else to give you," rejoined Patience. "This little bag contains a hazel-nut, from which I have picked the kernel, and filled its place with quicksilver, stopping the hole with wax. Wear it round your neck, and you will find it a certain preservative against the pestilence."

"Who told you of this remedy?" asked Blaize, taking the bag.

"Your mother," returned Patience.

"I wonder I never heard of it," said the porter.

"She wouldn't mention it to you, because the doctor advised her not to put such matters into your head," replied Patience. "But I couldn't help indulging you. Heigho! I hope the plague will soon be over."

"It won't be over for six months," rejoined Blaize, shaking his head. "I read in a little book, published in 1593, in Queen Elizabeth's reign, and written by Simon Kelway, 'that when little children flock together, and pretend that some of their number are dead, solemnizing the burial in a mournful sort, it is a certain token that a great mortality is at hand.' This I have myself seen more than once. Again, just before the great sickness of 1625, the churchyard wall of St. Andrew's, Holborn, fell down. I need not tell you that the same thing occurred after the frost this winter."

"I heard of it," replied Patience: "but I did not know it was a bad sign."

"It is a dreadful sign," returned Blaize, with a shudder "The thought of it brings back my old symptoms. I must have a supper to guard against infection—a slice of toasted bread, sprinkled with vinegar, and powdered with nutmeg."

And chattering thus, they proceeded to the kitchen.

Before supper could be served, Dr. Hodges made his appearance. He was delighted to see the family assembled together again, and expressed a hearty wish that they might never more be divided. He watched Amabel and Leonard carefully, and seemed annoyed that the former rather shunned than favoured the regards of the apprentice.

Leonard, too, looked disconcerted; and though he was in possession of his mistress's promise, he did not like to reclaim it. During the whole of the month, he had been constantly on the watch, and had scarcely slept at night, so anxious was he to prevent the possibility of any communication taking place between Rochester and his mistress. But, in spite of all his caution, it was possible he might be deceived. And when on this, their first meeting, she returned his anxious gaze with averted looks, he felt all his jealous misgivings return.

Supper, meanwhile, proceeded. Doctor Hodges was in excellent spirits, and drank a bottle of old sack with great relish. Overcome by the sight of his wife and children, the grocer abandoned himself to his feelings. As to his wife, she could scarcely contain herself, but wept and laughed by turns—now embracing her husband, now her son, between whom she had placed herself. Nor did she forget Doctor Hodges; and such was the exuberance of her satisfaction, that when the repast was ended, she arose, and, flinging her arms about his neck, termed him the preserver of her son.

"If any one is entitled to that appellation it is his father," replied Hodges, "and I may say, that in all my experience I have never witnessed such generous self-devotion as Mr. Bloundel has exhibited towards his son. You must now be satisfied, madam, that no person can so well judge what is proper for the safety of his family as your husband."

"I never doubted it, sir," replied Mrs. Bloundel.

"I must apprise you, then, that he has conceived a plan by which he trusts to secure you and his children and household from any future attack," returned Hodges.

"I care not what it is, so it does not separate me from him," replied Mrs. Bloundel.

"It does not," replied the grocer. "It will knit us more closely together than we have yet been. I mean to shut up my house, having previously stored it with provisions for a twelvemonth, and shall suffer no member of my family to stir forth as long as the plague endures."

"I am ready to remain within doors, if it continues twenty years," replied his wife. "But how long do you think it *will* last, doctor?"

"Till next December, I have no doubt," returned Hodges.

"So long?" exclaimed Amabel.

"Ay, so long," repeated the doctor. "It has scarcely begun now. Your father is right to adopt these precautions. It is the only way to insure the safety of his family."

"But–" cried Amabel.

"I am resolved," interrupted Bloundel, peremptorily. "Who ever leaves the house—if but for a moment—never returns."

"And when do you close it, father?" asked Amabel.

"A week hence," replied the grocer; "as soon as I have laid in a sufficient stock of provisions."

"And am I not to leave the house for a year?" cried Amabel, with a dissatisfied look.

"Why should you wish to leave it?" asked her father, curiously.

"Ay, why?" repeated Leonard, in a low tone. "I shall be here."

Amabel seemed confused, and looked from her father to Leonard. The former, however, did not notice her embarrassment, but observed to Hodges—"I shall begin to victual the house to-morrow."

"Amabel," whispered Leonard, "you told me if I claimed your hand in a month, you would yield it to me. I require the fulfilment of your promise."

"Give me till to-morrow," she replied, distractedly.

"She has seen Rochester," muttered the apprentice, turning away.

II.
IN WHAT MANNER THE GROCER VICTUALLED HIS HOUSE

Leonard Holt was wrong in his suspicions. Amabel had neither seen nor heard from Rochester. But, if the truth must be told, he was never out of her mind, and she found, to her cost, that the heart will not be controlled. Convinced of her noble lover's perfidy, and aware she was acting wrongfully in cherishing a passion for him, after the exposure of his base designs towards herself, no reasoning of which she was capable could banish him from her thoughts, or enable her to transfer her affections to the apprentice.

This conflict of feeling produced its natural result. She became thoughtful and dejected—was often in tears—had no appetite—and could scarcely rouse herself sufficiently to undertake any sort of employment. Her mother watched her with great anxiety, and feared—though she sought to disguise it from herself—what was the real cause of her despondency.

Things were in this position at the end of the month, and it occasioned no surprise to Mrs. Bloundel, though it afflicted her deeply, to find that Amabel sedulously avoided the apprentice's regards on their first meeting. When Doctor Hodges was gone, and the rest of the family had retired, she remarked to her husband, "Before you shut up the house as you propose, I should, wish one important matter settled."

The grocer inquired what she meant.

"I should wish to have Amabel married," was the answer.

"Married!" exclaimed Bloundel, in astonishment. "To whom?"

"To Leonard Holt."

Bloundel could scarcely repress his displeasure.

"It will be time enough to talk of that a year hence," he answered.

"I don't think so," returned his wife; "and now, since the proper time for the disclosure of the secret has arrived, I must tell you that the gallant who called himself Maurice Wyvil, and whom you so much dreaded, was no other than the Earl of Rochester."

"Rochester!" echoed the grocer, while an angry flush stained his cheek; "has that libertine dared to enter my house?"

"Ay, and more than once," replied Mrs. Bloundel.

"Indeed!" cried her husband, with difficulty controlling his indignation. "When was he here?—tell me quickly."

His wife then proceeded to relate all that had occurred, and he listened with profound attention to her recital. At its close, he arose and paced the chamber for some time in great agitation.

At length he suddenly paused, and, regarding his wife with great sternness, observed, in a severe tone, "You have done very wrong in concealing this from me, Honora—very wrong."

"If I have erred, it was to spare you uneasiness," returned Mrs. Bloundel, bursting into tears. "Doctor Hodges agreed with me that it was better not to mention the subject while you had so many other anxieties pressing upon you."

"I have a stout heart, and a firm reliance on the goodness of Heaven, which will enable me to bear up against most evils," returned the grocer. "But on this point I ought, under any circumstances, to have been consulted. And I am greatly surprised that Doctor Hodges should advise the contrary."

"He was influenced, like myself, by the kindliest feelings towards you," sobbed Mrs. Bloundel.

"Well, well, I will not reproach you further," returned the grocer, somewhat moved by her tears. "I have no doubt you conceived you were acting for the best. But I must caution you against such

conduct for the future." After a pause, he added, "Is it your opinion that our poor deluded child still entertains any regard for this profligate nobleman?"

"I am sure she does," replied Mrs. Bloundel; "and it is from that conviction that I so strongly urge the necessity of marrying her to Leonard Holt."

"I will never compel her to do anything to endanger her future happiness," returned the grocer. "She must not marry Leonard Holt without loving him. It is better to risk an uncertain evil, than to rush upon a certain one."

"Then I won't answer for the consequences," replied his wife.

"What!" cried Bloundel; "am I to understand you have no reliance on Amabel? Has all our care been thrown away?"

"I do not distrust her," returned Mrs. Bloundel; "but consider whom she has to deal with. She is beset by the handsomest and most fascinating man of the day—by one understood to be practised in all the arts most dangerous to our sex—and a nobleman to boot. Some allowance must be made for her."

"I will make none," rejoined Bloundel, austerely. "She has been taught to resist temptation in whatever guise it may present itself; and if the principles I have endeavoured to implant within her breast had found lodgment there, she *would* have resisted it. I am deeply grieved to find this is not the case, and that she must trust to others for protection, when she ought to be able to defend herself."

The subject was not further discussed, and the grocer and his wife shortly afterwards retired to rest.

On the following morning, Bloundel remarked to the apprentice as they stood together in the shop, "Leonard, you are aware I am about to shut up my house. Before doing so, I must make certain needful arrangements. I will not disguise from you that I should prefer your remaining with me, but at the same time I beg you distinctly to understand that I will not detain you against your will. Your articles are within two months of expiring; and, if you desire it, I will deliver them to you to-morrow, and release you from the rest of your time."

"I do not desire it, sir," replied Leonard; "I will remain as long as I can be serviceable to you."

"Take time for reflection," rejoined his master, kindly. "In all probability, it will be a long confinement, and you may repent, when too late, having subjected yourself to it."

"Last month's experience has taught me what I have to expect," remarked Leonard, with a smile. "My mind is made up, I will stay with you."

"I am glad of it," returned Bloundel, "and now I have something further to say to you. My wife has acquainted me with the daring attempt of the Earl of Rochester to carry off Amabel."

"Has my mistress, also, told you of my attachment to your daughter?" demanded Leonard, trembling, in spite of his efforts to maintain a show of calmness.

Bloundel nodded an affirmative.

"And of Amabel's promise to bestow her hand upon me, if I claimed it at the month's end?" continued the apprentice.

"No!" replied the grocer, a good deal surprised—"I heard of no such promise. Nor was I aware the matter had gone so far. But have you claimed it?"

"I have," replied Leonard; "but she declined giving an answer till to-day."

"We will have it, then, at once," cried Bloundel "Come with me to her."

So saying, he led the way to the inner room, where they found Amabel and her mother. At the sight of Leonard, the former instantly cast down her eyes.

"Amabel," said her father, in a tone of greater severity than he had ever before used towards her, "all that has passed is known to me. I shall take another and more fitting opportunity to speak to you on your ill-advised conduct. I am come for a different purpose. You have given Leonard Holt a promise (I need not tell you of what nature), and he claims its fulfilment."

"If he insists upon my compliance," replied Amabel, in a tremulous voice, "I must obey. But it will make me wretched."

"Then I at once release you," replied Leonard. "I value your happiness far more than my own."

"You deserve better treatment, Leonard," said Bloundel; "and I am sorry my daughter cannot discern what is for her good. Let us hope that time will work a change in your favour."

"No," replied the apprentice, bitterly; "I will no longer delude myself with any such vain expectation."

"Amabel," observed the grocer, "as your father—as your wellwisher—I should desire to see you wedded to Leonard. But I have told your mother, and now tell you, that I will not control your inclinations, and will only attempt to direct you so far as I think likely to be conducive to your happiness. On another point, I must assume a very different tone. You can no longer plead ignorance of the designs of the depraved person who besets you. You may not be able to forget him—but you can avoid him. If you see him alone again—if but for a moment—I cast you off for ever. Yes, for ever," he repeated, with stern emphasis.

"I will never voluntarily see him again," replied Amabel, tremblingly.

"You have heard my determination," rejoined her father. "Do you still adhere to your resolution of remaining with me, Leonard?" he added, turning to the apprentice. "If what has just passed makes any alteration in your wishes, state so, frankly."

"I will stay," replied Leonard.

"There will be one advantage, which I did not foresee, in closing my house," remarked the grocer aside to the apprentice. "It will effectually keep away this libertine earl."

"Perhaps so," replied the other. "But I have more faith in my own vigilance than in bolts and bars."

Bloundel and Leonard then returned to the shop, where the former immediately began to make preparations for storing his house; and in the prosecution of his scheme he was greatly aided by the apprentice.

The grocer's dwelling, as has been stated, was large and commodious. It was three stories high; and beneath the ground-floor there were kitchens and extensive cellars. Many of the rooms were spacious, and had curiously carved fireplaces, walls pannelled with fine brown oak, large presses, and cupboards.

In the yard, at the back of the house, there was a pump, from which excellent water was obtained. There were likewise three large cisterns, supplied from the New River. Not satisfied with this, and anxious to obtain water in which no infected body could have lain, or clothes have been washed, Bloundel had a large tank placed within the cellar, and connecting it by pipes with the pump, he contrived an ingenious machine, by which he could work the latter from within the house—thus making sure of a constant supply of water direct from the spring.

He next addressed himself to the front of the house, where he fixed a pulley, with a rope and hook attached to it, to the beam above one of the smaller bay windows on the second story. By this means, he could let down a basket or any other article into the street, or draw up whatever he desired; and as he proposed using this outlet as the sole means of communication with the external world when his house was closed, he had a wooden shutter made in the form of a trap-door, which he could open and shut at pleasure.

Here it was his intention to station himself at certain hours of the day, and whenever he held any communication below, to flash off a pistol, so that the smoke of the powder might drive back the air, and purify any vapour that found entrance of its noxious particles.

He laid down to himself a number of regulations, which will be more easily shown and more clearly understood, on arriving at the period when his plans came to be in full operation. To give an instance, however—if a letter should be conveyed to him by means of the pulley, he proposed to

steep it in a solution of vinegar and sulphur; and when dried and otherwise fumigated, to read it at a distance by the help of strong glasses.

In regard to provisions, after a careful calculation, he bought upwards of three thousand pounds' weight of hard sea-biscuits, similar to those now termed captain's biscuits, and had them stowed away in hogsheads. He next ordered twenty huge casks of the finest flour, which he had packed up with the greatest care, as if for a voyage to Barbadoes or Jamaica. As these were brought in through the yard an accident had well-nigh occurred which might have proved fatal to him. While superintending the labours of Leonard and Blaize, who were rolling the casks into the house—having stowed away as many as he conveniently could in the upper part of the premises—he descended to the cellar, and, opening a door at the foot of a flight of steps leading from the yard, called to them to lower the remaining barrels with ropes below. In the hurry, Blaize rolled a cask towards the open door, and in another instant it would have fallen upon the grocer, and perhaps have crushed him, but for the interposition of Leonard. Bloundel made no remark at the time; but he never forgot the service rendered him by the apprentice.

To bake the bread required an oven, and he accordingly built one in the garret, laying in a large stock of wood for fuel. Neither did he neglect to provide himself with two casks of meal.

But the most important consideration was butcher's meat; and for this purpose he went to Rotherhithe, where the plague had not yet appeared, and agreed with a butcher to kill him four fat bullocks, and pickle and barrel them as if for sea stores. He likewise directed the man to provide six large barrels of pickled pork, on the same understanding. These were landed at Queenhithe, and brought up to Wood-street, so that they passed for newly-landed grocery.

Hams and bacon forming part of his own trade, he wrote to certain farmers with whom he was in the habit of dealing, to send him up an unlimited supply of flitches and gammons; and his orders being promptly and abundantly answered, he soon found he had more bacon than he could possibly consume. He likewise laid in a good store of tongues, hung beef, and other dried meats.

As to wine, he already had a tolerable stock; but he increased it by half a hogshead of the best canary he could procure; two casks of malmsey, each containing twelve gallons; a quarter-cask of Malaga sack; a runlet of muscadine; two small runlets of aqua vitae; twenty gallons of aniseed water; and two eight-gallon runlets of brandy. To this he added six hogsheads of strongly-hopped Kent ale, calculated for keeping, which he placed in a cool cellar, together with three hogsheads of beer, for immediate use. Furthermore, he procured a variety of distilled waters for medicinal purposes, amongst which he included a couple of dozen of the then fashionable and costly preparation, denominated plague-water.

As, notwithstanding all his precautions, it was not impossible that some of his household might be attacked by the distemper, he took care to provide proper remedies, and, to Blaize's infinite delight, furnished himself with mithridates, Venice treacle, diascorium, the pill rufus (oh! how the porter longed to have the key of the medicine chest!), London treacle, turpentine, and other matters. He likewise collected a number of herbs and simples; as Virginian snakeweed, contrajerva, pestilence-wort, angelica, elecampane, zedoary, tormentil, valerian, lovage, devils-bit, dittany, master-wort, rue, sage, ivy-berries, and walnuts; together with bole ammoniac, terra sigillata, bezoar-water, oil of sulphur, oil of vitriol, and other compounds. His store of remedies was completed by a tun of the best white-wine vinegar, and a dozen jars of salad-oil.

Regulating his supplies by the provisions he had laid in, he purchased a sufficient stock of coals and fagots to last him during the whole period of his confinement; and he added a small barrel of gunpowder, and a like quantity of sulphur for fumigation.

His eatables would not have been complete without cheese; and he therefore ordered about six hundredweight from Derbyshire, Wiltshire, and Leicestershire, besides a couple of large old cheeses from Rostherne, in Cheshire—even then noted for the best dairies in the whole county. Several tubs of salted butter were sent him out of Berkshire, and a few pots, from Suffolk.

It being indispensable, considering the long period he meant to close his house, to provide himself and his family with every necessary, he procured a sufficient stock of wearing apparel, hose, shoes and boots. Spice, dried fruit, and other grocery articles, were not required, because he already possessed them. Candles also formed an article of his trade, and lamp-oil; but he was recommended by Doctor Hodges, from a fear of the scurvy, to provide a plentiful supply of lemon and lime juice.

To guard against accident, he also doubly stocked his house with glass, earthenware, and every article liable to breakage. He destroyed all vermin, such as rats and mice, by which the house was infested; and the only live creatures he would suffer to be kept were a few poultry. He had a small hutch constructed near the street-door, to be used by the watchman he meant to employ; and he had the garrets fitted up with beds to form an hospital, if any part of the family should be seized with the distemper, so that the sick might be sequestered from the sound.

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III.
THE QUACK DOCTORS

Patience, it may be remembered, had promised Blaize to give him her earnings to enable him to procure a fresh supply of medicine, and about a week after he had received the trifling amount (for he had been so constantly employed by the grocer that he had no opportunity of getting out before), he sallied forth to visit a neighbouring apothecary, named Parkhurst, from whom he had been in the habit of purchasing drugs, and who occupied a small shop not far from the grocer's, on the opposite side of the street. Parkhurst appeared overjoyed to see him, and, without giving him time to prefer his own request, inquired after his master's family—whether they were all well, especially fair Mistress Amabel—and, further, what was the meaning of the large supplies of provision which he saw daily conveyed to the premises? Blaize shook his head at the latter question, and for some time refused to answer it. But being closely pressed by Parkhurst, he admitted that his master was about to shut up his house.

"Shut up his house!" exclaimed Parkhurst. "I never heard of such a preposterous idea. If he does so, not one of you will come out alive. But I should hope that he will be dissuaded from his rash design."

"Dissuaded!" echoed Blaize. "You don't know my master. He's as obstinate as a mule when he takes a thing into his head. Nothing will turn him. Besides, Doctor Hodges sanctions and even recommends the plan."

"I have no opinion of Doctor Hodges," sneered the apothecary. "He is not fit to hold a candle before a learned friend of mine, a physician, who is now in that room. The person I speak of thoroughly understands the pestilence, and never fails to cure every case that comes before him. No shutting up houses with him. He is in possession of an infallible remedy."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Blaize, pricking up his ears. "What is his name?"

"His name!" cried Parkhurst, with a puzzled look. "How strange it should slip my memory! Ah, now I recollect. It is Doctor Calixtus Bottesham."

"A singular name, truly," remarked Blaize; "but it sounds like that of a clever man."

"Doctor Calixtus Bottesham is a wonderful man," returned the apothecary. "I have never met with his like. I would trumpet forth his merits through the whole city, but that it would ruin my trade. The plague is our harvest, as my friend Chowles, the coffin-maker, says, and it will not do to stop it—ha! ha!"

"It is too serious a subject to laugh at," returned Blaize, gravely.

"But are the doctor's fees exorbitant?"

"To the last degree," replied Parkhurst. "I am afraid to state how much he asks."

"I fear I shall not be able to consult him, then," said Blaize, turning over the coin in his pocket; "and yet I should greatly like to do so."

"Have no fear on that score," returned the apothecary. "I have been able to render him an important service, and he will do anything for me. He shall give you his advice gratis."

"Thank you! thank you!" cried Blaize, transported with delight.

"Wait here a moment, and I will ascertain whether he will see you," replied Parkhurst.

So saying, he quitted the porter, who amused himself during his absence by studying the labels affixed to the jars and bottles on the shelves. He had much ado to restrain himself from opening some of them, and tasting their contents.

Full a quarter of an hour elapsed before the apothecary appeared.

"I am sorry to have detained you so long," he said; "but I had more difficulty with the doctor than I expected, and for some time he refused to see you on any terms, because he has a violent

antipathy to Doctor Hodges, whom he regards as a mere pretender, and whose patient he conceives you to be."

"I am not Doctor Hodges' patient," returned Blaize; "and I regard him as a pretender myself."

"That opinion will recommend you to Doctor Bottesham," replied Parkhurst; "and since I have smoothed the way for you, you will find him very affable and condescending. He has often heard me speak of your master; and if it were not for his dislike of Doctor Hodges, whom he might accidentally encounter, he would call upon him."

"I wish I could get my master to employ him instead of the other," said Blaize.

"I wish so too," cried Parkhurst, eagerly. "Do you think it could be managed?"

"I fear not," returned Blaize.

"There would be no harm in making the trial," replied Parkhurst. "But you shall now see the learned gentleman. I ought to apprise you that he has two friends with him—one a young gallant, named Hawkswood, whom he has recently cured of the distemper, and who is so much attached to him that he never leaves him; the other, a doctor, like himself, named Martin Furbisher, who always accompanies him in his visits to his patients, and prepares his mixtures for him. You must not be surprised at their appearance. And now come with me."

With this, he led the way into a small room at the back of the shop, where three personages were seated at the table, with a flask of wine and glasses before them. Blaize detected Doctor Bottesham at a glance. He was an ancient-looking man, clad in a suit of rusty black, over which was thrown a velvet robe, very much soiled and faded, but originally trimmed with fur, and lined with yellow silk. His powers of vision appeared to be feeble, for he wore a large green shade over his eyes, and a pair of spectacles of the same colour. A venerable white beard descended almost to his waist. His head was protected by a long flowing grey wig, over which he wore a black velvet cap. His shoulders were high and round, his back bent, and he evidently required support when he moved, as a crutch-headed staff was reared against his chair. On his left was a young, handsome, and richly-attired gallant, answering to the apothecary's description of Hawkswood; and on the right sat a stout personage precisely habited like himself, except that he wore a broad-leaved hat, which completely overshadowed his features. Notwithstanding this attempt at concealment, it was easy to perceive that Doctor Furbisher's face was covered with scars, that he had a rubicund nose, studded with carbuncles, and a black patch over his left eye.

"Is this the young man who desires to consult me?" asked Doctor Calixtus Bottesham, in the cracked and quavering voice of old age, of Parkhurst.

"It is," replied the apothecary, respectfully. "Go forward," he added to Blaize, "and speak for yourself."

"What ails you?" pursued Bottesham, gazing at him through his spectacles. "You look strong and hearty."

"So I am, learned sir," replied Blaize, bowing to the ground; "but understanding from Mr. Parkhurst that you have an infallible remedy against the plague, I would gladly procure it from you, as, if I should be attacked, I may not have an opportunity of consulting you."

"Why not?" demanded Bottesham. "I will come to you if you send for me."

"Because," replied Blaize, after a moment's hesitation, "my master is about to shut up his house, and no one will be allowed to go forth, or to enter it, till the pestilence is at an end."

"Your master must be mad to think of such a thing," rejoined Bottesham. "What say you, brother Furbisher?—is that the way to keep off the plague?"

"Gallipots of Galen! no," returned the other; "it is rather the way to invite its assaults."

"When does your master talk of putting this fatal design—for fatal it will be to him and all his household—into execution?" demanded Bottesham.

"Very shortly, I believe," replied Blaize. "He meant to begin on the first of June, but as the pestilence is less violent than it was, Doctor Hodges has induced him to defer his purpose for a few days."

"Doctor Hodges!" exclaimed Bottesham, contemptuously. "It was an unfortunate day for your master when he admitted that sack-drinking impostor into his house."

"I have no great opinion of his skill," replied Blaize, "but, nevertheless, it must be admitted that he cured Master Stephen in a wonderful manner."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Bottesham, "that was mere accident. I heard the particulars of the case from Parkhurst, and am satisfied the youth would have recovered without his aid. But what a barbarian Mr. Bloundel must be to think of imprisoning his family in this way!"

"He certainly does not consult my inclinations in the matter," returned Blaize.

"Nor those of his wife and daughter, I should imagine," continued Bottesham. "How do *they* like it?"

"I cannot exactly say," answered Blaize. "What a dreadful thing it would be if I should be attacked by the plague, and no assistance could be procured!"

"It would be still more dreadful if so angelic a creature as Bloundel's daughter is represented to be—for I have never seen her—should be so seized," observed Bottesham. "I feel so much interested about her that I would do anything to preserve her from the fate with which she is menaced."

"Were it not inconsistent with your years, learned sir, I might suspect you of a tenderer feeling towards her," observed Blaize, archly. "But, in good sooth, her charms are so extraordinary, that I should not be surprised at any effect they might produce."

"They would produce no effect on me," replied Bottesham. "I am long past such feelings. But in regard to yourself. You say you are afraid of the plague. I will give you an electuary to drive away the panic;" and he produced a small jar, and handed it to the porter. "It is composed of conserve of roses, gillyflowers, borage, candied citron, powder of *laetificans Galeni*, Roman zedoary, doronicum, and saffron. You must take about the quantity of a large nutmeg, morning and evening."

"You make me for ever your debtor, learned sir," rejoined Blaize. "What a charming mixture!"

"I will also add my remedy," said Furbisher. "It is a powder compounded of crabs' eyes, burnt hartshorn, the black tops of crabs' claws, the bone from a stag's heart, unicorn's horn, and salt of vipers. You must take one or two drams—not more—in a glass of hot posset-drink, when you go to bed, and swallow another draught of the same potion to wash it down."

"I will carefully observe your directions," replied Blaize, thankfully receiving the powder.

"Of all things," said Bottesham, claiming the porter's attention by tapping him on the head with his cane, "take care never to be without vinegar. It is the grand specific, not merely against the plague, but against all disorders. It is food and physic, meat and medicine, drink and julep, cordial and antidote. If you formerly took it as a sauce, now take it as a remedy. To the sound it is a preservative from sickness, to the sick, a restorative to health. It is like the sword which is worn not merely for ornament, but for defence. Vinegar is my remedy against the plague. It is a simple remedy, but an effectual one. I have cured a thousand patients with it, and hope to cure a thousand more. Take vinegar with all you eat, and flavour all you drink with it. Has the plague taken away your appetite, vinegar will renew it. Is your throat ulcerated, use vinegar as a gargle. Are you disturbed with phlegmatic humours, vinegar will remove them. Is your brain laden with vapours, throw vinegar on a hot shovel, and inhale its fumes, and you will obtain instantaneous relief. Have you the headache, wet a napkin in vinegar, and apply it to your temples, and the pain will cease. In short, there is no ailment that vinegar will not cure. It is the grand panacea; and may be termed the elixir of long life."

"I wonder its virtues have not been found out before," observed Blaize, innocently.

"It is surprising how slow men are in discovering the most obvious truths," replied Bottesham. "But take my advice, and never be without it."

"I never will," returned Blaize. "Heaven be praised, my master has just ordered in three tuns. I'll tap one of them directly."

"That idea of the vinegar remedy is borrowed from Kemp's late treatise on the pestilence and its cure," muttered Furbisher. "Before you enter upon the new system, young man," he added aloud to Blaize, "let me recommend you to fortify your stomach with a glass of canary."

And pouring out a bumper, he handed it to the porter, who swallowed it at a draught.

"And now," said Bottesham, "to return to this mad scheme of your master's—is there no way of preventing it?"

"I am aware of none," replied Blaize.

"Bolts and bars!" cried Furbisher, "something must be done for the fair Amabel. We owe it to society not to permit so lovely a creature to be thus immured. What say you, Hawkswood?" he added to the gallant by his side, who had not hitherto spoken.

"It would be unpardonable to permit it—quite unpardonable," replied this person.

"Might not some plan be devised to remove her for a short time, and frighten him out of his project?" said Bottesham. "I would willingly assist in such a scheme. I pledge you in a bumper, young man. You appear a trusty servant."

"I am so accounted, learned sir," replied Blaize, upon whose brain the wine thus plentifully bestowed began to operate—"and I may add, justly so."

"You really will be doing your master a service if you can prevent him from committing this folly," rejoined Bottesham.

"Let us have a bottle of burnt malmsey, with a few bruised raisins in it, Mr. Parkhurst. This poor young man requires support. Be seated, friend."

With some hesitation, Blaize complied, and while the apothecary went in search of the wine, he observed to Bottesham, "I would gladly comply with your suggestion, learned sir, if I saw any means of doing so."

"Could you not pretend to have the plague?" said Bottesham. "I could then attend you."

"I should be afraid of playing such a trick as that," replied Blaize.

"Besides, I do not see what purpose it would answer."

"It would enable me to get into the house," returned Bottesham, "and then I might take measures for Amabel's deliverance."

"If you merely wish to get into the house," replied Blaize, "that can be easily managed. I will admit you this evening."

"Without your master's knowledge?" asked Bottesham, eagerly.

"Of course," returned Blaize.

"But he has an apprentice?" said the doctor.

"Oh! you mean Leonard Holt," replied Blaize. "Yes, we must take care he doesn't see you. If you come about nine o'clock, he will be engaged with my master in putting away the things in the shop."

"I will be punctual," replied Bottesham, "and will bring Doctor Furbisher with me. We will only stay a few minutes. But here comes the burnt malmsey. Fill the young man's glass, Parkhurst. I will insure you against the plague, if you will follow my advice."

"But will you insure me against my master's displeasure, if he finds me out?" said Blaize.

"I will provide you with a new one," returned Bottesham. "You shall serve me if you wish to change your place."

"That would answer my purpose exactly," thought Blaize. "I need never be afraid of the plague if I live with him. I will turn over your proposal, learned sir," he added, aloud.

After priming him with another bumper of malmsey, Blaise's new friends suffered him to depart. On returning home, he proceeded to his own room, and feeling unusually drowsy, he threw himself on the bed, and almost instantly dropped asleep. When he awoke, the fumes of the liquor

had, in a great degree, evaporated, and he recalled, with considerable self-reproach, the promise he had given, and would gladly have recalled it, if it had been possible. But it was now not far from the appointed hour, and he momentarily expected the arrival of the two doctors. The only thing that consoled him was the store of medicine he had obtained, and, locking it up in his cupboard, he descended to the kitchen. Fortunately, his mother was from home, so that he ran no risk from her; and, finding Patience alone, after some hesitation, he let her into the secret of his anticipated visitors. She was greatly surprised, and expressed much uneasiness lest they should be discovered; as, if they were so, it would be sure to bring them both into trouble.

"What can they want with Mistress Amabel?" she cried. "I should not wonder if Doctor Calixtus Bottesham, as you call him, turns out a lover in disguise."

"A lover!" exclaimed Blaize. "Your silly head is always running upon lovers. He's an old man —old enough to be your grandfather, with a long white beard, reaching to his waist. He a lover! Mr. Bloundel is much more like one."

"For all that, it looks suspicious," returned Patience; "and I shall have my eyes about me on their arrival."

Shortly after this, Blaize crept cautiously up to the back yard, and, opening the door, found, as he expected, Bottesham and his companion. Motioning them to follow him, he led the way to the kitchen, where they arrived without observation. Patience eyed the new-comers narrowly, and felt almost certain, from their appearance and manner, that her suspicions were correct. All doubts were removed when Bottesham, slipping a purse into her hand, entreated her, on some plea or other, to induce Amabel to come into the kitchen. At first she hesitated; but having a tender heart, inclining her to assist rather than oppose the course of any love-affair, her scruples were soon overcome. Accordingly she hurried upstairs, and chancing to meet with her young mistress, who was about to retire to her own chamber, entreated her to come down with her for a moment in the kitchen. Thinking it some unimportant matter, but yet wondering why Patience should appear so urgent, Amabel complied. She was still more perplexed when she saw the two strangers, and would have instantly retired if Bottesham had not detained her.

"You will pardon the liberty I have taken in sending for you," he said, "when I explain that I have done so to offer you counsel."

"I am as much at a loss to understand what counsel you can have to offer, sir, as to guess why you are here," she replied.

"Amabel," returned Bottesham, in a low tone, but altering his voice, and slightly raising his spectacles so as to disclose his features; "it is I—Maurice Wyvil."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, in the utmost astonishment.

"I told you we should meet again," he rejoined; "and I have kept my word."

"Think not to deceive me, my lord," she returned, controlling her emotion by a powerful effort. "I am aware you are not Maurice Wyvil, but the Earl of Rochester. Your love is as false as your character. Mistress Mallet is the real object of your regards. You see I am acquainted with your perfidy."

"Amabel, you are deceived," replied Rochester. "On my soul, you are. When I have an opportunity of explaining myself more fully, I will prove to you that I was induced by the king, for an especial purpose, to pay feigned addresses to the lady you have named. But I never loved her. You alone are the possessor of my heart, and shall be the sharer of my title. You shall be Countess of Rochester."

"Could I believe you?" she cried.

"You *may* believe me," he answered. "Do not blight my hopes and your own happiness a second time. Your father is about to shut up his house for a twelvemonth, if the plague lasts so long. This done, we shall meet no more, for access to you will be impossible. Do not hesitate, or you will for ever rue your irresolution."

"I know not what to do," cried Amabel, distractedly.

"Then I will decide for you," replied the earl, grasping her hand.

"Come!"

While this was passing, Furbisher, or rather, as will be surmised, Pillichody, had taken Blaize aside, and engaged his attention by dilating upon the efficacy of a roasted onion filled with treacle in the expulsion of the plague. Patience stationed herself near the door, not with a view of interfering with the lovers, but rather of assisting them; and at the very moment that the earl seized his mistress's hand, and would have drawn her forward, she ran towards them, and hastily whispered, "Leonard Holt is coming downstairs."

"Ah! I am lost!" cried Amabel.

"Fear nothing," said the earl. "Keep near me, and I will soon dispose of him."

As he spoke, the apprentice entered the kitchen, and, greatly surprised by the appearance of the strangers, angrily demanded from Blaize who they were.

"They are two doctors come to give me advice respecting the plague," stammered the porter.

"How did they get into the house?" inquired Leonard.

"I let them in through the back door," replied Blaize.

"Then let them out by the same way," rejoined the apprentice. "May I ask what you are doing here?" he added, to Amabel.

"What is that to you, fellow?" cried Rochester, in his assumed voice.

"Much, as you shall find, my lord," replied the apprentice; "for, in spite of your disguise, I know you. Quit the house instantly with your companion, or I will give the alarm, and Amabel well knows what the consequences will be."

"You must go, my lord," she replied.

"I will not stir unless you accompany me," said Rochester.

"Then I have no alternative," rejoined Leonard. "You know your father's determination—I would willingly spare you, Amabel."

"Oh, goodness! what *will* become of us?" cried Patience—"if there isn't Mr. Bloundel coming downstairs."

"Amabel," said Leonard, sternly, "the next moment decides your fate. If the earl departs, I will keep your secret."

"You hear that, my lord," she cried; "I command you to leave me."

And disengaging herself from him, and hastily passing her father, who at that moment entered the kitchen, she rushed upstairs.

On hearing the alarm of the grocer's approach, Pillichody took refuge in a cupboard, the door of which stood invitingly open, so that Bloundel only perceived the earl.

"What is the matter?" he cried, gazing around him. "Whom have we here?"

"It is a quack doctor, whom Blaize has been consulting about the plague," returned Leonard.

"See him instantly out of the house," rejoined the grocer, angrily, "and take care he never enters it again. I will have no such charlatans here."

Leonard motioned Rochester to follow him, and the latter reluctantly obeyed.

As soon as Bloundel had retired, Leonard, who had meanwhile provided himself with his cudgel, descended to the kitchen, where he dragged Pillichody from his hiding-place, and conducted him to the back door. But he did not suffer him to depart without belabouring him soundly. Locking the door, he then went in search of Blaize, and administered a similar chastisement to him.

IV.
THE TWO WATCHMEN

On the day following the events last related, as Leonard Holt was standing at the door of the shop,—his master having just been called out by some important business,—a man in the dress of a watchman, with a halberd in his hand, approached him, and inquired if he was Mr. Bloundel's apprentice.

Before returning an answer, Leonard looked hard at the newcomer, and thought he had never beheld so ill-favoured a person before. Every feature in his face was distorted. His mouth was twisted on one side, his nose on the other, while his right eyebrow was elevated more than an inch above the left; added to which he squinted intolerably, had a long fell of straight sandy hair, a sandy beard and moustache, and a complexion of the colour of brickdust.

"An ugly dog," muttered Leonard to himself, as he finished his scrutiny; "what can he want with me? Suppose I should be Mr. Bloundel's apprentice," he added, aloud, "what then, friend?"

"Your master has a beautiful daughter, has he not?" asked the ill-favoured watchman.

"I answer no idle questions," rejoined Leonard, coldly.

"As you please," returned the other, in an offended tone. "A plan to carry her off has accidentally come to my knowledge. But, since incivility is all I am likely to get for my pains in coming to acquaint you with it, e'en find it out yourself."

"Hold!" cried the apprentice, detaining him; "I meant no offence. Step indoors for a moment. We can converse there more freely."

The watchman, who, notwithstanding his ill-looks, appeared to be a good-natured fellow, was easily appeased. Following the apprentice into the shop, on the promise of a handsome reward, he instantly commenced his relation.

"Last night," he said, "I was keeping watch at the door of Mr. Brackley, a saddler in Aldermanbury, whose house having been attacked by the pestilence is now shut up, when I observed two persons, rather singularly attired, pass me. Both were dressed like old men, but neither their gait nor tone of voice corresponded with their garb."

"It must have been the Earl of Rochester and his companion," remarked Leonard.

"You are right," replied the other; "for I afterwards heard one of them addressed by that title. But to proceed. I was so much struck by the strangeness of their appearance, that I left my post for a few minutes, and followed them. They halted beneath a gateway, and, as they conversed together very earnestly, and in a loud tone, I could distinctly hear what they said. One of them, the stoutest of the two, complained bitterly of the indignities he had received from Mr. Bloundel's apprentice (meaning you, of course), averring that nothing but his devotion to his companion had induced him to submit to them; and affirming, with many tremendous oaths, that he would certainly cut the young man's throat the very first opportunity."

"He shall not want it then," replied Leonard contemptuously; "neither shall he lack a second application of my cudgel when we meet. But what of his companion? What did he say?"

"He laughed heartily at the other's complaints," returned the watchman, "and told him to make himself easy, for he should soon have his revenge. 'To-morrow night,' he said, 'we will carry off Amabel, in spite of the apprentice or her father; and, as I am equally indebted with yourself to the latter, we will pay off old scores with him.'"

"How do they intend to effect their purpose?" demanded Leonard.

"That I cannot precisely tell," replied the watchman. "All I could hear was, that they meant to enter the house by the back yard about midnight. And now, if you will make it worth my while, I will help you to catch them in their own trap."

"Hum!" said Leonard. "What is your name?"

"Gregory Swindlehurst," replied the other.

"To help me, you must keep watch with me to-night," rejoined Leonard.

"Can you do so?"

"I see nothing to hinder me, provided I am paid for my trouble," replied Gregory. "I will find some one to take my place at Mr. Brackley's. At what hour shall I come?"

"Soon after ten," said Leonard. "Be at the shop-door, and I will let you in."

"Count upon me," rejoined Gregory, a smile of satisfaction illumining his ill-favoured countenance. "Shall I bring a comrade with me? I know a trusty fellow who would like the job. If Lord Rochester should have his companions with him, assistance will be required."

"True," replied Leonard. "Is your comrade a watchman, like yourself?"

"He is an old soldier, who has been lately employed to keep guard over infected houses," replied Gregory. "We must take care his lordship does not overreach us."

"If he gets into the house without my knowledge, I will forgive him," replied the apprentice.

"He won't get into it without mine," muttered Gregory, significantly.

"But do you not mean to warn Mistress Amabel of her danger?"

"I shall consider of it," replied the apprentice.

At this moment Mr. Bloundel entered the shop, and Leonard, feigning to supply his companion with a small packet of grocery, desired him, in a low tone, to be punctual to his appointment, and dismissed him. In justice to the apprentice, it must be stated that he had no wish for concealment, but was most anxious to acquaint his master with the information he had just obtained, and was only deterred from doing so by a dread of the consequences it might produce to Amabel.

The evening passed off much as usual. The family assembled at prayer; and Blaize, whose shoulders still ached with the chastisement he had received, eyed the apprentice with sullen and revengeful looks. Patience, too, was equally angry, and her indignation was evinced in a manner so droll, that at another season it would have drawn a smile from Leonard.

Supper over, Amabel left the room. Leonard followed her, and overtook her on the landing of the stairs.

"Amabel," he said, "I have received certain intelligence that the Earl of Rochester will make another attempt to enter the house, and carry you off to-night."

"Oh! when will he cease from persecuting me?" she cried.

"When you cease to encourage him," replied the apprentice, bitterly.

"I do *not* encourage him, Leonard," she rejoined, "and to prove that I do not, I will act in any way you think proper tonight."

"If I could trust you," said Leonard, you might be of the greatest service in convincing the earl that his efforts are fruitless."

"You *may* trust me," she rejoined.

"Well, then," returned Leonard, "when the family have retired to rest, come downstairs, and I will tell you what to do."

Hastily promising compliance, Amabel disappeared; and Leonard ran down the stairs, at the foot of which he encountered Mrs. Bloundel.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing—nothing," replied the apprentice, evasively.

"That-will not serve my turn," she rejoined. "Something, I am certain, troubles you, though you do not choose to confess it. Heaven grant your anxiety is not occasioned by aught relating to that wicked Earl of Rochester! I cannot sleep in my bed for thinking of him. I noticed that you followed Amabel out of the room. I hope you do not suspect anything."

"Do not question me further, madam, I entreat," returned the apprentice. "Whatever I may suspect, I have taken all needful precautions. Rest easy, and sleep soundly, if you can. All will go well."

"I shall never rest easy, Leonard," rejoined Mrs. Bloundel, "till you are wedded to my daughter. Then, indeed, I shall feel happy. My poor child, I am sure, is fully aware how indiscreet her conduct has been; and when this noble libertine desists from annoying her—or rather, when he is effectually shut out—we may hope for a return of her regard for you."

"It is a vain hope, madam," replied Leonard; "there will be no such return. I neither expect it nor desire it."

"Have you ceased to love her?" asked Mrs. Bloundel, in surprise.

"Ceased to love her!" echoed Leonard, fiercely. "Would I had done so!—would I *could* do so! I love her too well—too well."

And repeating the words to himself with great bitterness, he hurried away.

"His passion has disturbed his brain," sighed Mrs. Bloundel, as she proceeded to her chamber. "I must try to reason him into calmness to-morrow."

Half an hour after this, the grocer retired for the night; and Leonard, who had gone to his own room, cautiously opened the door, and repaired to the shop. On the way he met Amabel. She looked pale as death, and trembled so violently, that she could scarcely support herself.

"I hope you do not mean to use any violence towards the earl, Leonard?" she said in a supplicating voice.

"He will never repeat his visit," rejoined the apprentice, gloomily.

"Your looks terrify me," cried Amabel, gazing with great uneasiness at his stern and determined countenance. "I will remain by you. He will depart at my bidding."

"Did he depart at your bidding before?" demanded Leonard, sarcastically.

"He did not, I grant," she replied, more supplicatingly than before. "But do not harm him—for mercy's sake, do not—take my life sooner. I alone have offended you."

The apprentice made no reply, but, unlocking a box, took out a brace of large horse-pistols and a sword, and thrust them into his girdle.

"You do not mean to use those murderous weapons?" cried Amabel.

"It depends on circumstances," replied Leonard. "Force must be met by force."

"Nay, then," she rejoined, "the affair assumes too serious an aspect to be trifled with. I will instantly alarm my father."

"Do so," retorted Leonard, "and he will cast you off for ever."

"Better that, than be the cause of bloodshed," she returned. "But is there nothing I can do to prevent this fatal result?"

"Yes," replied Leonard. "Make your lover understand he is unwelcome to you. Dismiss him for ever. On that condition, he shall depart unharmed and freely."

"I will do so," she rejoined.

Nothing more was then said. Amabel seated herself and kept her eyes fixed on Leonard, who, avoiding her regards, stationed himself near the door.

By-and-by a slight tap was heard without, and the apprentice cautiously admitted Gregory Swindlehurst and his comrade. The latter was habited like the other watchman, in a blue night-rail, and was armed with a halberd. He appeared much stouter, much older, and, so far as could be discovered of his features—for a large handkerchief muffled his face—much uglier (if that were possible) than his companion. He answered to the name of Bernard Boutefeu. They had no sooner entered the shop, than Leonard locked the door.

"Who are these persons?" asked Amabel, rising in great alarm.

"Two watchmen whom I have hired to guard the house," replied Leonard.

"We are come to protect you, fair mistress," said Gregory, "and, if need be, to cut the Earl of Rochester's throat."

"Oh heavens!" exclaimed Amabel.

"Ghost of Tarquin!" cried Boutefeu, "we'll teach him to break into the houses of quiet citizens, and attempt to carry off their daughters against their will. By the soul of Dick Whittington, Lord Mayor of London! we'll maul and mangle him."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.