

Fenn George Manville

Sweet Mace: A Sussex Legend of the Iron Times



George Fenn

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How Gil Carr Heard a Concert in Spring

“Too soon for sweet mace – a bunch for sweet Mace,” said Gil Carr as he bent down amongst the sedges to pick the bright blue scorpion grass, its delicate flowers relieved with yellow, “so she must have forget-me-not. I wonder whether she’ll keep some when I’m far away.”

He stopped and smiled and listened, for the morning concert was beginning two hundred and fifty years ago, at four o’clock in the morning and down in a Sussex valley near the sea.

A long while since? Nay, a mere instant of time in this world’s life; and spite of all some writers say, and though we now have steam and electric current to our hand, two hundred and fifty years ago men thought and spoke the same – perhaps a little more roughly than they do now.

There was the pleasant gurgle of water at Gil Carr’s feet, and as he drew back from where the stream rippled and swirled, and a trout darted into sight, saw him, and flashed away beneath the shelter of a jutting stone, he paused beneath the spreading branches of the trees, half-closed his eyes, thought of sweet Mace, and revelled, as young men of eight-and-twenty can who love to place one object in the chiefest spot of all they see.

Here is the site of Gil Carr’s musings, for untouched Nature shows little change. Overhead there is a fabric of tenderest green leaves, laced with pearly cobweb and flashing threads of sunshine, which run in and out like sheaves of glorified asbestos, and weave the whole into a wondrous shelter beneath whose delicious dream-shadow one wanders in a haze of green. For Nature’s own colour is lavishly used to decorate this glorious amphitheatre for the first concert in spring, and there it is in every shade, from the sweet pale ash-green of the opening willow to the rich hue of the dogs’ mercury and hemlock. Green everywhere, for the delicate curtains of the trees are green, the carpet is verdant, and the banks that rise tier upon tier are of the richest velvet moss. There is no uniformity here, there are no rows of seats, but a grand confusion, upon which the eye lingers restfully and which it refuses to quit.

Lest there should be too much green, Nature has been lavish with other colours. There rise up the fascines of osiers from the lowest part of the gurgling stream, light leafy smooth stems of a golden yellow; there are the oak boles creamy and grey with wondrous lichens; grey, silvery, and golden tassels hang from sallow, alder, and willow, and the carpet is dotted with delicious patches of tint. Yonder, harmoniously blended with the green, is the purple of the wild hyacinth, amidst which, and dotting the carpet everywhere with its delicate sulphur stars, is the primrose, with the burnished bullion yellow of the celandine close by, amidst which, bending gracefully over, half modest, half vain, are the silver stars of the wood anemone, displaying their outer tints of delicate violet mauve.

Talk of violets too, there they are, not the scented sweets of earliest spring, but the larger, bluer, more plentiful *Viola canina*, growing in patches with the purple orchids. Colour? There is ample to relieve the greenest green, untiring though it be, and were brighter tints wanted they are here, such as put to shame the brightest gems of our greatest jewellers’ shops. There they are, whenever the silvery arrows of the sun flash through the delicate leafage like a wondrous rain – there they are, bright, dazzling, flashing, and sparkling, the vivid transparent grouped rays of Iris herself on every pearly drop of dew, lying waiting for the sun to gather it to his bosom, and feel the daily fire of his life-giving ray. Nature has surpassed herself, and all is bright, while, bright though the decorations be, the most aesthetic critic could not find one that offends. There could be no want of finish where Nature has worked, and here, where all harmonises to the eye, she has prepared, for the grand burst of harmony for the ear, that wondrous concert that surely begins on one particular undated morning in spring,

when, as if moved by a single impulse, all bird-dom breaks forth into song – a song of praise so sweet and glorious that the heart seems to leap, ay, and does leap, back over the gulf of years, to feel as in childhood’s days, before rust, canker, and the world’s own wear had hardened it to what it is.

There are no bills issued. If there were, they would say, “Come early.” If you do not, the loss is yours. There are no programmes, for the oratorio is Nature’s song of praise. As to tickets, they are *minus* too, for the cost of entrance is the effort to drag yourself from the drowsy pillow. And seats? No, you must stand. Lean here against this mossy old bole, and listen. Nature, the great conductress of the orchestra, has arrived, and in a few moments she will raise her *baton*, and the concert will begin. Rehearsal has been going on for weeks, and various artists have been tuning up. Night after night, till quite dark, the thrush has piped; the robin has worked hard in a low subdued voice to recollect the plaintive little song he sang so well while the apples were gathered and the leaves turned to crimson and gold on the medlar tree; while every here and there, where the buds began to swell, the chaffinch – Coelebs, the bachelor – in his pretty tinted suit of grey and green and neutral hues, seemed busy day by day carrying up little buckets of silver sound, and pouring them tinkling down amidst the leafless sprays. But this morning, rehearsal is over, and the concert is to begin – the full burst from every chorister, solo singer, and instrumentalist, many of whom have been practising since the first faint grey of dawn, when the blackbird first scattered the spray from the leaves, and darted, like a streak of black velvet following a point of fire, down amidst the hazel stubbs, crying “chink, chink,” to the waking birds.

Hark! the company is all expectation for the concert to begin; there is the deep low humming buzz and murmur as of thousands speaking in a vasty hall. Tell me it is the bees and other insects honey and pollen gathering amidst the willow blossoms if you will, but I prefer to dream of being in a grand amphitheatre with an oratorio about to commence, and the whim fits me as I stand and listen here, fancy stricken, weak, if you will, but with swelling heart, dew-moistened eyes, and so wondrous a feeling of rapture pervading every sense, that, forgetful of the bitter, biting past – the cruel winter and its aches and ails, the soul seems to rise in gratitude from its very being for the wondrous sense of joy it feels, and here in the sacred stillness of the early morn to cry, “Thank God!” and compare the country with the town.

Tuning up still. There is the strange harsh, reedy, repeated, hautboy-like minor note of the wryneck – the cuckoo’s mate not long arrived; the willow-wren jerks forth two notes from its piccolo; and the black bird, dropping its alarm note, begins to flute so softly and sweetly that it needs no programme to tell that the theme is love. Up rises the lark, then, after a short chorus to sing his solo, a song of silver broken into seed, a song that the sweet bird seems to carry higher and higher, scattering as it goes, for the notes to fall here, there, and everywhere, to be wafted away by winds for the silver grains to fall into human beings’ ears, where they take root and stay, never to be forgotten; for, though the possessor roam the wide world round, the song of the lark once heard is never lost.

Another soloist, the foreign musician from over the sea, with its mellow cuckoo note; and then comes an introduction from the orchestra, where the starlings wheeze and drum, and play castanets. There are strange effects, too, introduced by the great composer, harsh trumpet brays by the blue-barred jays, answered by gentle cooings from the doves, as if tyranny and love sang duets, and then a grand chorale rises as the thrush leaves off its stirring recitative.

Again a solo, morning though it be, and you say “the thrush.” But no, those notes were somewhat like those of the great contralto *merulus*; but listen, they are sweeter far, and they are soprano, for it is Philomel herself. Hark! After those long-complaining notes there is a familiar “Weep, weep, weep, chug-chug-chug-chug-chug!” The very orchestra seems hardly to breathe and not a chorister to move as this wondrous strain of richest melody goes rising, falling, thrilling the breast, till one breathes the sweet fresh balmy air in sobs, and drinks in the sweet draught of music – a drink for the gods till it is ended, and there are no dregs. Here come the harsh notes, though, from the orchestra – a short sharp jerky recitative from the magpie, followed by the angry declamation of the jay, leading up to

those little fiddlers the chaffinches, with their seconds, the finches of green, and the linnets on the outer edge. There is a short running chorus here, followed by a short chorale that is even slow and solemn, and then there is a pause – twelve bars rest – Nature’s *baton* is suspended, and one seems to see the grand dame with her attendant train of nymphs, with Flora and Iris looking on. Then come once more the soft long thrilling notes of the nightingale, reciting the song with which at night the grove will ring. It is recitative of inexpressible sweetness, and it leads up to the grand chorus, the great song of praise from thousands of birds’ throats, beneath which seems to sigh like the murmur of the deepest pedal-pipes of an organ the low buzz of insect life, blending, supporting, and adding grandeur to that which is already great.

It is the great spring chorus of the year, when every bird seems to sing his best, and vie with his fellow in the effort to produce the sweetest sounds. Once heard never forgotten, it is a something that the greatest traveller will tell you cannot be surpassed, while there are millions year by year, who from neglect or compulsion fail to hear, though the concert is free to every one who will trouble himself to get a place and fill his heart with joy that is without a care.

When is this concert? Perhaps in April, perhaps in May. It is when the east wind ceases to dry, and the balmy south breathes sweetness over the awakened earth. It is indeed a “sensation” matchless in itself and particular to our land, though some such harmony must have greeted the senses of the first man when he opened his eyes to the flowers of the new-made earth, and drank in its sweets and joys.

“My hands are hot,” said Gil Carr, the Adam of the little Eden of a wilderness, as he thought upon his Eve; and returning to the stream once more, he dipped the bunch of forget-me-nots beneath the gurgling current, afterwards wrapping the stems round with the broad leaf of a dock, and walked away trying to imitate the piping of the nightingale, and wondering how long it would be before the glow-worms would begin to light their lamps in the soft warm evenings; while he smiled as he thought of the signals they had made upon the sloping bank that stretched up to the hedge of hawthorn fronting Mace’s casement, where the pale white roses grew.

How the King's Messenger Sought Roehurst Pool in July, and what he saw

“Sir Thomas, and if I did not feel bound to carry out my royal master's commands, I'd go no further, but sit down here on this shady bank, and bask in the sunshine of your daughter's eyes. Once more I say, is there any ending to this winding lane?”

“Patience, Sir Mark; pray have patience,” said portly Sir Thomas Beckley, baronet and justice of the peace, as he took off his sugar-loaf hat with its plume of cock's feathers, and wiped the great beads of perspiration from his pink brow. “Patience; and pray do not stuff my daughter's head with courtly phrases, or you will make her vain.”

“Patience? Why, Sir Thomas, it is for her sake I am speaking. This lane has gone up and down, and in and out, and backwards and forwards, till my heart aches more than my legs to see her pretty little feet getting wedged between stones, and her face flushed with toil.”

“Well, yes,” said Sir Thomas, “the roads are rather bad down here in Sussex.”

“Bad, man? Why, they are abominable. They are as if cursed by witches. In winter they must be sloughs and pits for unwary feet.”

“This is but a by-road, Sir Mark,” said the baronet, pompously.

“By-road, indeed! Mistress Anne, why did you not have the carriage?”

“This lane was never meant for carriages, Sir Mark,” cried Sir Thomas, hastily. “The last time I had it brought down here, my two stout horses dragged the fore wheels from the body.”

“The ruts are ready to drag my legs from my body, Sir Thomas; and, fiends and torture, what blocks! Why, what rock is that?”

“Refuse or cinder from the iron forges, Sir Mark,” replied the baronet, with the air of a guide. “In this district, sir, the finest iron is found in abundance just below the surface.”

“And you own a goodly portion of the land, Sir Thomas?” said Sir Mark, with an involuntary glance at the lady.

“Well, yes,” replied the baronet with a round look of satisfaction; “I have a fair number of acres and some wide-spread forest land for timber and charcoal-burning should I care to smelt.”

“Happy man,” said Sir Mark. “Tis a pleasant life down here in these woods. But Mistress Anne, is it not dull in winter?”

“Oh, yes, Sir Mark, so dull; and we are shut in at times for weeks.”

“No wonder with such roads as these. Sir Thomas, have you no pity for your daughter's state?”

“The weather has come in hot,” said Sir Thomas, carefully taking off his plumed hat. “But we are just there now; shall we rest awhile?”

“Ay, that we will. Mistress Anne, here is a fallen tree with waving bracken and the shining leaves of the beech to shelter you from the sun. There, am I right – is that oak – are those bracken fronds?”

“Quite right,” said the lady addressed, as, either from the action of her heart or the warmth of the sun, she blushed deeply, the red glow spreading up to the deep auburn, fuzzy hair that gathered over her freckled forehead. Then carefully spreading her skirts she seated herself upon the fallen trunk of a huge oak that had been felled the previous winter, judging by the state of the chips that still lay around, the branches having been lopped, cut into short lengths, and piled into a long low stack.

“Ah, that is restful,” said Sir Mark, smiling down at the lady, while the baronet glanced from one to the other, dabbed his face, and then pressed down the feather-stuffed breeches that puffed out his hips; also his best, put on in honour of his visitor from town, but evidently unpleasant wear in the hot and airless lane.

“May I sit by thee, sweet – or at your feet?” whispered Sir Mark, with a glance at the angular oak-chips blackened by the action of the iron-impregnated water that sometimes rushed down the lane.

For answer Mistress Anne uttered a shriek, rose quickly, and half threw herself in the young man’s arms.

“A snake – a viper – an adder,” she cried, as, raising its head and uttering a low hiss, a reptile some two feet or so long glided from beneath the tree and disappeared amidst the rustling ferns.

Sir Mark Leslie, a rather handsome, imperious-looking young man, with somewhat effeminate features, showily dressed in russet velvet, with a short stiff frill around his neck, started back a step, and clapping his hand on his sword half drew it from its sheath; but, as a hearty, hoarse roar of laughter fell upon his ear, he flushed angrily, and thrust it back to turn upon the man who had dared to laugh at him, while the reptile made its way into a shallow rabbit-burrow in the steep overhanging bank. For the rugged little path, ill-made with dark-hued, furnace-cinder, ran here deep down between two water-worn banks that looked as if the earth had cracked asunder, leaving twin sides mottled with rugged stone and yellow sandbeds, upon whose shelving slopes ferns and brambles luxuriated, and trees flourished with roots half-aerial, half-buried in the soil. The sea-breeze might be sweeping the hills above, but down here there would be hardly a breath of air, while Nature’s train held revel far and near. Freshly-turned sandy earth showed where the rabbits burrowed, high up in the soft bank the sandmartins had a colony, while night and morn the woodland was musical with the notes of blackbird and thrush, though the concert Gil Carr had listened to a month before was more subdued, and the nightingale kept his sweet lays till another year.

Just beyond where the little party had halted, the high bank displayed another rift, through which a faint track ran at right angles to the one they had pursued, apparently deep through the overhanging wood, for the way was darkened by the trees to a dim green-hued twilight, dashed and splashed and streaked with silver sunshine, which played like dazzling cobwebs amidst the sprays and twigs of hazel, dogwood, and hornbeam, or lay in glittering patches upon the clover-leaved woodsorrel, which carpeted the soil with velvet-green.

It was from the corner of the bank which formed this side-track that the hoarse laughter came, and, turning sharply, Sir Mark gazed fiercely upon a rugged-looking mahogany-faced man, who seemed to have faced storm and sunshine where these slaves of Nature work their worst. His scanty hair was grizzled, his beard rusty, half-grey, and unkempt; his hands were knotted and gnarled, and, saving his eyes, everything about him betokened wear and tear. They alone flashed, and brightly, from beneath his shaggy brows, as, leaning against the corner, he stood with crossed legs, one hand holding a little thick-stemmed, very small-bowled clay pipe, which he leisurely smoked, resting his elbow the while in his right hand.

“Who are you? how dare you look at me like that, you dog?” cried the young man imperiously.

“Who am I, my jack-a-dandy?” said the other, taking his pipe from his lips and emitting a thin fine thread of smoke. “That’s no concern of thine. Hey, halloa there! Abel Churr, ahoy!”

A responsive shout came from out of the wood, and a thin, bent, cunning-looking man, with closely set, uneasy eyes, came quickly from amidst the hazels, which he parted with his hands, as he advanced.

“Here’s what you are seeking, lad. You are just in time. A brave girt fellow for you.”

“Where, where, Mas’ Wat?”

“He’s just gone up yon bank into the bit of a coney-hole; and our gay Saint George there was whipping out his skewer to pook the dragon, and save Sir Thomas’s fair daughter from his fangs, when I laughed, and sent the steel back into his sheath.”

“Let me pass you,” said the new-comer eagerly, as stick in hand, and with a rabbit-skin wallet slung from his shoulder beneath his arm, he hastily came out into the lane, and, saluting the portly baronet and the lady, began to climb the bank.

Sir Mark scowled at the smoker with a look full of resentment, but the latter replaced his pipe and gazed full at him with so keen and unblushing a stare that the young courtier was disconcerted.

“Coarse boor!” he muttered, turning away with a contemptuous shrug.

“Jack-a-dandy!” said the smoker to himself. Then aloud, “A fine day, Mas’ Beckley. Save your worship, I beg pardon; it’s Sir Thomas, now, is it not?”

“Yes, Master Wat Kilby, it is,” said the baronet, stiffly; and he coughed aloud, and gave the large cane he carried a thump on the ground as he turned to watch the proceedings of the new-comer.

The lank rugged man took a step or two forward as well, to the great disgust of Sir Mark, who had held out his arm to the lady, to receive both her hands, as with an extensive display of alarm she stood shrinking away, while the thin, eager man went up the bank, pushing the branches and ferns aside with his stick, peering before him the while.

There was something eminently foxy or weasel-like in his sharp, quick movements, giving him the aspect of one much accustomed to dealing with animal life as a trapper; and as he went on forcing his way through the tangled growth his actions formed sufficient attraction to cause all present to watch him intently.

“I don’t think he came out of yon hole, Mas’ Churr,” said the big man, emitting another puff of smoke, as if the weed he burned were precious. “Pook him with your stick.”

“Do you say it was a neddar, Mas’ Kilby?” said the man in a harsh, husky voice; “or was it only a snake?”

“An adder, Mas’ Churr, and the bravest and biggest I’ve seen this year. That’s the spot up yonder. By all the saints, I’d like to see him tackle one o’ the girt fellows I’ve known out in the Indian Isles, long as a ship and big round as our mast.”

“Travellers’ snakes,” said Sir Mark, contemptuously.

“Yes, my gay spark,” said the old fellow, with his eyes lighting up and flashing; “or one of the great poisonous adders out in the West, with rattles in their tails, from whose bite a man dies in an hour.”

“Pish!” ejaculated the young man; and then smiling encouragement to his companion, who was not in the least alarmed, he watched the thin man as he crept up to the rabbit-burrow, peered in, and then laid down his stick.

“There’s rats at times in these holes,” he said, “and they’ll get hold of your hands and bite rare sharp.”

Going down upon his knees, he pressed back a few fronds of bracken, bent forward, thrust in his right hand, seized the little serpent by the tail, and drew it rapidly through his left hand, which closed round the creature’s neck, then after stooping to raise his stick he brought the reptile down the bank, writhing and twining about his wrist.

“Don’t – pray don’t let him come near me!” cried the lady excitedly; and she clung to the young man’s arm.

“Fear not,” said the latter, with an encouraging smile, one which seemed to give her confidence, for she sighed, cast down her eyes, and then stood firm, as the adder-hunter took a knife from his pocket, and with a sly smile opened the gaping jaws, and showed the lookers-on the little keen poison-fangs lying flat down backwards on the roof of the viper’s mouth, till he raised them up, ending by jerking them both out with the knife-point, and placing the reptile in his wallet.

“You do something with them, Churr, do you not?” said Sir Thomas, for his guests’ behoof, for he knew by heart the whole of Abel Churr’s career.

“Yes, worshipful sir,” said Churr, humbly: “the people come from far and near to get neddar’s fat from me. It cures all kinds of ills in the skin, and heals the worst of cuts.”

“I wonder whether it would heal broken hearts,” said the young man in a whisper, as his eyes met those of Mistress Anne, who cast hers down and blushed.

“That will do, Abel Churr, that will do,” said Sir Thomas, importantly; and the adder-hunter pulled the front of his hair humbly and slunk away; the big, grizzled man sat himself down on a ledge of the bank, pulled out flint and steel, and proceeded to fill and light his pipe; and, rested by the incident they had witnessed, the little party proceeded on their journey along the rugged lane.

“Now, frankly, Sir Thomas,” said the young man, “how much farther is it?”

“Not five hundred yards, Sir Mark. There, you can see the furnace-smoke over yon clump of beeches, and just to the left, there – that light patch – that’s Roehurst Pool.”

“And pray what has Roehurst Pool to do with Master Jeremiah Cobbe, may I ask?”

“To do with him, Sir Mark? Why, it is a great piece of dammed-up water that sets his wheels in motion to make the tilt-hammers beat his iron, grind his charcoal, and blow his furnaces when he casts cannon. Oh, it has everything to do with him, Sir Mark.”

“Then he really has extensive works here?”

“Not so very large; not so very small; but he has many men at work for him getting the iron out of the hills, cutting down wood, making charcoal, and tending his furnaces. He is a busy man, Sir Mark.”

“Yes?” said the visitor inquiringly; “and what does he do with his guns and powder when he makes them?”

“I cannot say,” replied the baronet; “only that they are shipped away, and go down the little river here out to sea in the same ship that brings him sulphur from Sicily and Chinese salt from the far East. That was one of the captain’s men.”

“What captain? What men?”

“That tall, stout fellow we talked with – Wat Kilby – he is the captain’s head man – Captain Carr – Culverin Carr they call him here.”

“A fine, handsome, corsair-like fellow, with the look of a Spaniard and the daring of a hero?” said the visitor mockingly.

“Yes,” said the baronet quietly; “you have just described him, Sir Mark. His father, they say, went with Sir Walter Raleigh on his ill-fated expedition. The son was in the same ship, and when old Captain Carr died he left his son to the care of his crew.”

“And they made the youth their captain,” said Mistress Anne, with heightened colour.

“Yes,” said Sir Thomas, “and he has been their captain ever since.”

“But,” said Sir Mark curiously, “what are they – buccaneers – pirates?”

“Heaven knows,” said Sir Thomas, giving a glance round. “There are matters, Sir Mark,” he continued nervously, “that it is not always wise to discuss in a place where the very trees have ears.”

“Absurd!” cried Sir Mark. “Here, in his Majesty’s dominions, all men should be able to speak freely, and you excite my curiosity, Sir Thomas. Please to bear in mind that I am his Highness’s representative,” he continued stiffly, “sent here upon a special ambassage. Reports have reached the Court of a reckless buccaneering party, of the refuse and dregs of Raleigh’s freebooters, haunting the south coast; but I knew not that it was here in Sussex.”

“For heaven’s sake, Sir Mark,” whispered the baronet, mopping his face, “be advised and say no more. The place here is haunted by them, and they do what pleases them best. I am a justice, Sir Mark, but my authority is set at naught. You heard that man Kilby, how wanting in reverence he was? He is a sample of the rest, and I pray nightly when their ship sails from here that she may never return again.”

“A noble Christian-like feeling,” cried Sir Mark. “But, tut, tut, Sir Thomas, this must not be. Rouse up, man. These knaves must be brought to book if they don’t behave. Have no fear, sir; a word from me to the King, and his Majesty’s wisdom would be brought to bear on the need of sweeping this place clear of such dregs.”

Sir Thomas was gazing uneasily around, while Mistress Anne seemed to cast off her mincing ways, and her eyes flashed eagerly as she drank in the young courtier’s words.

“I know his Highness means well to all his subjects, Sir Mark,” said the baronet, nervously. “I thank him for conferring upon me my title, and he has no more loyal subject in these parts; but pray, Sir Mark, do not be too eager to report all you see. We are very lonely here, and far from cities and their ways. There is no man in these parts, sir, who is not influenced by – by – ”

“Captain Culverin?”

“Hush – hush, pray, Sir Mark,” whispered the baronet, and then to himself, “Thank heaven we are here.”

“And is this the place?” said Sir Mark, standing pointing his moustache, as they emerged from the path upon the edge of a fine spreading sheet of water, embowered in noble woods and half covered with aquatic vegetation. In various parts clusters of water-fowl sat lightly on the glistening surface; mother-ducks sailed in safety with their downy broods in and out of the reedy water-lanes; coots and gallinules jerked themselves along the surface, while high in air a colony of black-headed gulls wheeled over the reeds, their breeding-place and sanctuary, safe from harm. Here and there along the edges, where the water was shallow, gaunt grey herons stood knee-deep, making, from time to time, a dart with their javelin-bills; and so clear, so mirror-like, was the expanse, that the noble forest-trees upon the other side were reflected plainly in the depths.

At the lower end stood a quaint, gable-ended house, and away to the right, where the waters were gathered together and rushed over a weir, were several long wooden buildings, with three or four roughly built of the sandstone of the district, two having massive chimneys, from which wreaths of pale blue smoke ascended into the soft summer air.

It was a lovely spot, and seemed to be the abode of peace and plenty, more than one where dire engines of warfare were fashioned at the furnace-mouth, and that black thunder sand, whose flash means death and destruction, was mixed by begrimed men from ingredients that left alone were innocent and secure. For the gable-ended house was white with clustering roses; the bright lattice windows sparkled in the sunshine; and the water, as it ran over the weir, made silver sounds that lulled the senses, as they whispered music to the ear.

Stretching far along the edge of the great pool there was an extensive well-kept garden, rich with flowers, pleasant with its green lawn, and made glorious now with its abundant trees; while still further along the Pool, nestling in a sheltered nook, shaded by tall trees and a mighty bank of sandstone rock, a patch of hops were rapidly nearing the tops of their poles as if climbing to get a peep at the field where the barley was springing rank and green, bridegroom and bride who should in the glowing October month be wedded well and breed strong ale.

“A very Paradise,” continued Sir Mark eagerly; “and look, Sir Thomas, over yonder. Who is the maiden? Look! Out there!”

Sir Thomas glanced nervously at his daughter, whose cheeks were very red, and whose eyes flashed no longer a soft and timid light.

“It is the founder’s daughter, Sir Mark. Sweet Mace they call her here,” and he wiped his forehead and gave his feather-padded breeches another hitch as he caught his daughter’s eyes once more.

“Sweet Mace!” said the King’s messenger, inquiringly. “Mace – nutmeg – spice!”

“Nay, Sir Mark, it was her father’s fancy, so they say. Mace or meadow-sweet, it is the same: the creamy-scented blossom that grows beside the Pool.”

“A forest fairy!” cried the young man, eagerly; “and the man, Sir Thomas?”

“Hush, pray, Sir Mark,” whispered the baronet; “the water carries sound.”

“Who is it, sir, I say?” cried the visitor, with an imperious stamp, as the object of his question turned his head.

“It’s he, himself, Sir Mark,” groaned the wretched man, glancing helplessly at the speaker; “the man of whom we spake.”

“What! Jeremiah Cobbe?”

“No; Captain Carr.”

How Jeremiah Cobbe damned his Majesty King James the First

Sir Mark Leslie was too intent upon the scene before him, or he would have seen the face of Mistress Anne undergo a complete change. The soft simpering look of girlish meekness she had assumed had passed away, and, as her gaze lit on Culverin Carr, a light seemed to flash from her eyes – a bright beam of light, which darkened as she glanced at his companion in the boat to an angry glare. If ever face spoke love to one and changed on the instant to jealous hate, it was the countenance of Anne Beckley as she gazed.

It all passed away directly, as she listened eagerly to Sir Mark.

“Why, she’s fishing,” he cried. “A fair Diana, huntress of the lake. Mistress Anne, look at her, is she not beautiful?”

“Tastes differ, Sir Mark,” said the lady, with a smile that hid her annoyance. “I have seen Mace Cobbe so often that I scarcely heed her looks.”

“But your eyes, mistress, never lit on a bonnier face than that of Sweet Mace.”

Sir Mark and Mistress Anne started with annoyance, to become aware of the fact that the grizzly old sailor, Kilby, had followed them, and was standing with his back against a tree, his pipe still between his lips.

“My good fellow, a little respect would not be out of place when you address a lady,” said Sir Mark sharply, as he drew Mistress Anne’s arm through his, and once more tried to look the old man down; but failing completely, he turned to gaze at the Pool, forgetting his annoyance in the chase before him.

For, standing up with one foot resting on the side of a little boat, which was propelled by the bronzed dark man who held the oars, head thrown back, lips slightly parted, and her soul seeming to animate her shapely face, was a young girl about eighteen, plainly clad in homely stuff; but with snowy lawn kerchief and cuffs, and a cap of the same confining her rich brown hair, she seemed to need no ornament or gay attire to make her brighter than she was, flushed with excitement and in the springtide of her youth. Her face was burned slightly by the sun, which seemed to heighten the rich red in her cheek, and, as she came nearer to where he stood, the stranger’s eyes flashed as he marked her white forehead, well-cut nose, and trembling nostrils, which expanded as their owner’s breath came more quickly, while her lips parted more and more, showing her regular teeth.

“Steady, steady,” cried her companion, as the girl raised her arm a little more, to gain greater power over the long elastic pole which did duty for a rod, now bending and quivering, as the great fish she had hooked darted here and there, and at times violently jerked the end. For there was no running line, the governor of the little skiff sending it here and there, as the fish tore through the water, even towing it at times as it made some furious dash.

The skiff came nearer and nearer, for the great pike now darted right towards the shore, running onward towards where the group were standing, and then, finding the water shallow, leaping bodily out, to fall back with a tremendous splash, for it was a monster of its kind. Then with another rush it made straight for the middle, where there were cool and shady depths beneath the water-lilies, amidst whose stout stems the strong line might be tangled and freedom found. But the effort was vain: with a quick turn of the oars the rower spun the skiff round, and urged it along, lessening the stress upon the young girl’s wrists, and, evidently well accustomed to the management of a boat, hastening or slackening its speed by the guidance of the fishing-pole – whether it was heavily or lightly bent.

The chase led the occupants of the boat far away, but Sir Mark did not stir. With one hand resting on the hilt of his sword, the other twisting the points of his moustache, he stood gazing after

the boat with a red spot burning in either cheek. He seemed to have forgotten the existence of Mistress Anne, and started when she spoke.

“You seem to admire our rustic beauty, Sir Mark,” she said lightly, but with an uneasy look.

“She is divine,” he cried. “I mean, as a picture,” he added hastily. “The surroundings are so good. And what a mighty luce she has hooked.”

“There are monsters in this pool,” said Sir Thomas, mildly, for his ordinary pomposity disappeared in the presence of his distinguished guest. “There have been great luces here any time these two hundred years, and even before, when this was one of the fish-stews of the monks of Roehurst. Shall we go on, Sir Mark?”

“Ye-es,” said the young man, with a slight hesitancy that did not escape the keen ears of Mistress Anne, whom, after a farewell glance at the distant boat, he tried to appease by a show of attention, though all the time his mind’s eye was filled with the form of Mace Cobbe, whose simple grace and youthful beauty made Anne Beckley seem dowdy and commonplace in mien.

As they went on along the edge of the great Pool, where the forget-me-nots and brooklime made blue the shallows, while the roar of a furnace and the heavy throb of hammers began to make themselves heard, Anne Beckley stole a glance at the boat, saw that they had been seen by the rower, and turned at once eagerly to Sir Mark, upon whose arm she leaned as they talked, till they reached a little swing-bridge which spanned the narrow stream of water that rushed from the great Pool down a channel formed between two walls of rough sandstone blocks. Here the confined waters sparkled and foamed as they swept on towards a great water-wheel, which they slowly turned, the drops falling glittering like diamonds from the paddles and slimy spokes. Just across the bridge was the large garden, lush with flowers, and surrounding the gabled house, from whose door now appeared a squarely-built, grey-haired man of fifty, to walk slowly towards the bridge, as if to meet the newcomers.

“Good day to you, Sir Thomas; a fair time, Mistress Anne,” he said bluffly, as he met his visitors. “You are welcome to my poor home.”

“Thank you, Cobbe,” said Sir Thomas, pompously, “but this is no visit. This noble gentleman comes to you as an ambassador from his Gracious Majesty King James, who condescends to remember that there are others in this part of his realm besides myself.”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Cobbe; “his Majesty has good cause to recollect you, Sir Thomas, for you paid him a thousand pounds for your rank.”

“I merely paid the customary fees, good Master Cobbe,” exclaimed Sir Thomas, growing purple with annoyance.

“They couldn’t be customary, Sir Thomas, as the title is a new one; but we will not argue. Come in and take a glass of muscadine, and some cakes of my daughter’s make; Mistress Anne looks faint with heat; and then we can discuss this courtly gentleman’s ambassador. Ha, ha, ha! I guess what it is. His Majesty is short of cash, and wants another thousand pounds. What do you say, Sir Thomas, shall I buy a baronetcy and become your neighbour? Ha, ha, ha! Sir Jeremiah Cobbe! What say you to that, Mistress Anne?”

“This is no jesting matter, sir,” exclaimed Sir Mark, sharply. “Sir Thomas – Mistress Anne – I must bid you adieu till evening. I will not ask you to enter here with me now, only thank you for your courtesy.”

“Shall I send a serving-man to escort you back, Sir Mark?” said Sir Thomas, removing his hat, and making the cock’s plumes *whish*, to show the bluff Sussex yeoman how great a man he was about to receive into his house. For Jeremiah Cobbe seemed in nowise abashed, but rather disposed to look with amusement upon the airs and costume of his visitor.

“No, Sir Thomas, I shall find my way,” replied the other; and, respectfully saluting Anne, who extended to him her hand as if they were about to dance a saraband upon the bridge, he escorted her and her father to the other side, and Sir Thomas walked pompously away.

“Now, Master Jeremiah Cobbe,” said Sir Mark, sharply, “if you will shew me into the house we will talk together.”

“As long as you like, sir,” was the reply; and leading the way, after giving his hat a defiant cock on one side, Jeremiah Cobbe ushered his visitor into a large, low-ceiled room, panelled with oak, and whose lattice windows were deeply embayed. The place was plainly but well furnished, with open fireplace and dogs, and large fireback of Sussex iron, the latter bearing the founder’s name; and the visitor raised his eyebrows a little to find in place of the rough homeliness of a rustic house a handsome carpet from a Turkish loom spread over the centre of the well-waxed and polished floor, a large Venetian mirror at one end, Venice glasses and a quaint timepiece on the great carved oak sideboard; and even the straight-backed, heavy oak chairs covered with brown Turkey leather. Over the high mantel-piece was a group of curious old arms, and in several places well-kept weapons hung against the panels, with curiosities from foreign lands, one tall cabinet being full of Indian and China ware.

Masculine all this; but as Sir Mark’s eye glanced quickly round he saw several traces of feminine occupation, for on a stand in one corner was a great china bowl full of rose-leaves, and in a vase a well-arranged nosegay of simple, old-fashioned flowers, the table it occupied being close beside a large tambour-frame with some design in progress. There was the odour of burnt tobacco in the room, doing battle with the fragrance from the garden, which floated in at the open window, where roses nodded and scattered their petals upon the broad oaken sill. There was a chair there too, and a basket of freshly-gathered currants shining like smooth rubies in their nest of leaves, and in an instant the visitor concluded that the deep bay by the casement opening upon the rich, old-fashioned garden, was the favourite seat of the girl he had seen engaged in fishing as they came along.

“Sit you down, sir,” cried the bluff yeoman heartily, and, opening a cupboard in the wall, he took out a couple of Venetian flasks, and some tall glasses of a pale green veined with threads of opal hue, placed them on the table, and with them a leaden box, and a couple of thick-stemmed pipes with tiny bowls.

“Now, sir,” he continued, “that’s old sherry sack, and that’s metheglin of my daughter’s make. Here, Janet,” he shouted, “bring a big jug of ale from the second cask;” and in due time a good-looking, well-shaped girl bore in upon an old silver salver a battered flagon of clear ale, whose coolness was shown by the pearly dew rapidly deposited on the bright silver sides.

“Your good health, and welcome, sir,” said the yeoman, lifting the great silver flagon, raising the lid with his thumb, and taking a hearty draught. “Hah!” he ejaculated, drawing a long breath, as he set down the vessel. “I don’t suppose you would care to drink our common ale, my own brewing, though, and strong. But you do not drink, sir. Which shall it be?” and he stretched out his hand to push the flasks towards his guest.

“Business first, Master Cobbe,” said Sir Mark haughtily, as, taking his sheathed sword from where it hung, he rested it across his knees; “I have somewhat to say.”

“Will you smoke, then?” cried the sturdy yeoman, reaching his hand to the little pipes, and pushing the leaden box towards his guest.

“I never smoke, sir; I agree with his Majesty that it is an evil, noxious, and diabolical habit.”

“I do smoke, and I don’t agree with his Majesty,” said Cobbe, gruffly, as he proceeded to fill his pipe by means of a little silver stopper, for a child’s finger would hardly have passed into the bowl.

“I must request, sir, that you will refrain from smoking until I leave your house,” said the visitor sternly.

Jeremiah Cobbe’s face grew red with anger, but he smothered his annoyance, laid down his pipe, took a fresh draught of ale, let the lid fall with a clink, and threw himself back in his chair.

“Go on then, sir,” he cried. “I shall be glad to hear what business you have to settle with me. If it is for half-a-dozen culverins for his Majesty’s army, or by the good Peter, I have it, he has got

to know about my new howitzers, and he has sent to see. Now, how the holy 'postle did he get to know about them?"

"My good fellow, have the kindness to listen to me," said Sir Mark.

"Good fellow, eh!" cried Cobbe, flushing again, and smiting the table with his fist. "But there, go on, sir, go on; you are a messenger to me from the King."

"His Majesty," said Sir Mark, leaning back in his chair, and half-closing his eyes, as he gazed imperiously at the other, "has had it brought to his knowledge that you, Jeremiah Cobbe, of Roehurst, in the county of Sussex."

"Right," said the other nodding.

" – Have for years past, and in divers manners, carried on here a forge for cannon castings."

"I have, and of the best and toughest iron ever smelted in the south. His Majesty never heard of one of my pieces bursting."

"That you also carry on some works wherein, without leave or licence, you make largely that dangerous and deadly material known as gunpowder."

"Dangerous, and deadly too," chuckled the bluff yeoman, "if it gets into foolish hands. It's true enough, and my best dogwood charcoal makes the strongest powder to be had."

"A material which his Majesty holds in utter abhorrence and detestation, ever since his devilish and malignant enemies, aided and abetted by Popish treasonable priests, essayed to destroy the Houses of Parliament and kill and slay his most sacred person."

"No wonder, sir," chuckled Cobbe. "Enough to make any man abhor powder. But hark ye, *one* barrel of mine would have been enough to shake the place about their ears."

"That this cannon and this powder of your manufacture you have for years past regularly and by your own design sold, furnished, and supplied to his sacred Majesty's enemies in various parts of the world. These treasonable practices he now wots of, at least by report, and I am his messenger to you, sir, to know if they are true. What have you to say?"

"What have I to say, boy!" cried the cannon founder, flushing angrily as he leaned forward, set his elbows on the table, and gazed full at his visitor. "What have I to say? Nothing at all. I do make cannons, and I do make powder, the best I can, and I sell them to those who'll buy. I offered to supply his Majesty with guns of which he might be proud, and some Jack-in-office refused my offer, so I sell them where I will."

"To his Majesty's enemies?"

"Hang his enemies; I know not who gets them when they are shipped away and I am paid."

"You avow then, boldly, that you do supply these munitions of warfare to other than the King's liege subjects?"

"Avow, man, yes. I sell to who will give me a good price; and look here, my gaily-feathered young Tom chick, this is not London city, and my house is not the Court. Don't speak to me as if I were one of your servants and hangers-on."

"You are insolent, sir," cried Sir Mark angrily. "If I report all this and your treasonable words, the result may be a body of his Majesty's soldiers despatched to raze your works to the ground, and march you back to London to take your trial."

"Let them come," cried the founder, now giving the fury he had pent up its full vent; "let them come, and I'll give them such a reception as will make your Powder Plot seem a trifle. Why, do you know, my velvet and silken popinjay, that we have good men and true down here, enough to tickle the ears of as many of your fellows as you like to send."

"Silence, sir!" cried Sir Mark; "do you dare to set at naught the King's."

"Damn the King!" cried the founder furiously, "damn the King for a porridge-eating, witch-hunting old fool!"

"Insolent dog," cried Sir Mark.

“What!” retorted the founder, “do you pull your blade on me? Then you shall see that we have steel as well.”

Sir Mark had risen and drawn his sword, evidently with some mad idea that it was his duty to arrest this utterer of treason on the spot; but, with an activity of which he might not have been believed capable, Jeremiah Cobbe sprang to the side of the room, snatched a sword from the wall, drew, and crossed that of the young courtier. There was a harsh grating, a few quick thrusts and parries, as the open window was slightly darkened, and Sir Mark uttered a sharp cry, for his adversary’s sword passed like lightning through his arm, and he staggered back, as an upbraiding voice exclaimed – “Oh, father, father, what have you done?”

How Sir Mark Stayed at the Park House, and jeremiah cobbe delivered a Homily on Angling

It was Mace's voice, as she ran into the room, pale with horror when she saw the red blood darken the russet velvet of the young man's sleeve.

"Done!" cried Cobbe, "What do I always do, my girl? Acted like the passionate old fool I am. Poor boy!" he ejaculated, as the sword dropped from Sir Mark's hand, and white as Mace's self the King's messenger sank fainting on his adversary's arm, to be lowered gently to the floor. "God knows, child, I'd give five hundred pounds to undo it all. He angered me, and drew, and the sight of the naked steel made the blood come into my eyes. Poor boy – poor boy! A brave youth, though he fretted and strutted and bullied me so. That's better. Hi, Janet, some cold water. Stop, child, don't rip his fine jacket or he'll break his heart. My faith on it, he'll think more of the holes in his velvet than in his skin. Steady! hold him up a little, and I'll strip off his fine coat. That's it; now, a little more; never mind the drop of blood, it won't kill him."

"I know, father," said Mace, "but put away those swords;" and she held up the wounded man's head as her father cleverly removed the velvet doublet and turned up the fine white linen shirt, whose sleeve was stained with blood. The wound could now be seen, or rather wounds – two narrow clean cuts on either side of the fleshy part of the arm, from which the blood pretty freely welled.

"Now lay his head down again, my child. No: better not. Here's Janet. Sake's girl! Don't stand staring. Put the basin here. Some strips of linen. That's right, child," he continued, as Mace snatched off her white kerchief and tore it up.

"It weighs full thirty pounds," cried a hearty voice in the entry. "Hey, hallo, what's wrong? A wounded man?"

"Ay!" cried the founder. "Quick, Gil, you are a good chirurgion;" and the new-comer – to wit, Mace's companion on the Pool – strode in, went down on one knee, and without a word dipped a portion of the linen in the cold water, removed the blood, and with the skill of an adept made a couple of pads, and cleverly bound up the wound.

"Give him a little of the strong waters," he cried, and the founder hurriedly fetched a flask and held a glass to the wounded man's lips before the new-comer said briefly, "How was it?"

"Oh, he angered and drew on me, and we had a few passes," cried the founder. "My own fault, too."

"It is a mere nothing," said the other. "Why Mace, my child, don't look so white. He is a soldier evidently, and he'll bear it like a man."

"Am I white, Gil?" said the girl, looking up and smiling sadly, as she thought of how her life seemed cast among warlike weapons and their works. "I am not frightened, only troubled. Father, dear, this is so sad."

"It is, it is, my child. I'd have given half I have sooner than it should have happened. Hush, he's coming to."

For just then the injured man sighed, opened his eyes wonderingly, gazed upwards to see who supported him, and lowered his lids again, saying softly —

"The face of an angel: is this Heaven?"

"Oh, no," cried the amateur surgeon, frowning slightly as he saw Mace colour, "and if you were here sometimes, when friend Cobbe is casting cannon, you'd think it was the other place. Come, sir, let me help you up. It is a mere flesh wound, and will only smart."

"Thank you, I can rise," said Sir Mark, reddening, as he made an effort and rose without assistance; but the room seemed to swim round, and he staggered and would have fallen, had not his

surgeon caught him by the uninjured arm, and helped him to a seat, letting him gently down into a half-reclining position.

As he did so the eyes of the two young men met, and Gilbert Carr, as he gazed into those of his patient, felt a strange sense of mistrust pass over him like a foreboding of coming trouble; while on the other side, as the smooth young courtier looked into the bright, clear grey eyes, and scanned the dark, bronzed visage bending over him, he felt that they two would be enemies for a woman's sake.

"That's it – that's better," said Gilbert Carr, quietly. "You need have no fear for the consequences, sir. It is a clean cut, and will soon heal in our pure, fresh air."

"I thank you," said Sir Mark, rather stiffly; "I do not fear. Madam, I grieve to have caused you this trouble," he continued, addressing Mace, who stood close by.

"Nay, sir; pray do not say that. It is we who are grieved – my father."

"Ay, she's right," said Cobbe, advancing. "My brave lad, I feel ashamed to face you after such a stroke."

"Ashamed!" said Sir Mark, with a quiet glance at Mace; and then, seeing his advantage, he said, smiling as he held out his uninjured hand, "Never be ashamed, sir, of so gallant a handling of your sword. They tell me in London I can fence, and that enemies who have fought make the best of friends."

"You are a brave true gentleman, sir," cried the founder, wringing the outstretched hand; "and I humbly ask your forgiveness for my choler. I was hot and angry. There, God bless the King; and I beg his Majesty's pardon for what I said."

"It is granted," said Sir Mark, smiling faintly, "for he will never know."

"Now let me say a word," said Gil, who had been uneasily looking on. "Fever may come on if he is excited. Take my advice, sir, lie back and go to sleep. Mace – no, here is Janet – fetch a pillow for this gentleman."

The girl ran out, and returned bearing one of snowy hue, which Gil adjusted beneath the wounded man's head.

"Now, sir, sleep for awhile, and you will be refreshed. Your arm is all right. I have dressed many a sword-cut in my time."

"Thanks," said Sir Mark, faintly; "but some one will stay with me in the room?"

He glanced at Mace.

"Of course," said the founder. "Mace, my child."

"Yes," said Gil, quietly, "go away, Mace; Janet will stay and watch by this gentleman's side."

Mace glanced at him wonderingly, and Janet coloured with pleasure as, frowning slightly, Sir Mark closed his eyes, and the girl half drew the blind, while, headed by the founder, after removing all traces of the conflict, Gilbert Carr and Mace went softly out, and closed the door.

"Why do you look at me like that?" said Mace, as they stood alone. "Gil, do you doubt me?"

"Doubt you?" he said softly as he bent down and kissed her white forehead. "No, I could not, for you are not as other women are. I did not wish you, though, to be 'tendant to this spark from the Court, for such he seems to be. Nay, Mace, I've no jealousy in me. But there is your pike," he added, pointing to the fish, a great fellow four feet long, which lay on the red bricks at their feet. "Here is your father, and he'll tell us how the quarrel rose."

"Quarrel! it was not worth calling a quarrel," cried the founder, shortly. "It seems that some meddling fool has been telling them in London of my works, and this gentleman has been sent down to inspect the place. He vexed me, and said something about the King, which made me rap out an oath. He drew: I drew."

"And our visitor went down," said Gil Carr, smiling. "Well, Master Cobbe, there's not much harm done."

"But I shall have to send over to the Moat, Gil, and tell Sir Thomas; he was here a piece back."

“Nay,” said Gil, “ill news flies apace, there is no need to hasten it. Leave it to the gentleman himself.”

“Perhaps you are right,” returned the founder. “Of course he will not be fit to leave for a day or two. Mace, child, get the south chamber ready for our guest: let’s try and make up for the ill that we have done.”

Gilbert Carr half-closed his eyes and stood silent till Mace left the open hall, where they were standing, to prepare the chamber for the wounded man, when he replied to the founder’s remark: —

“It depends so upon the man.”

“Eh? How?”

“Well, if you had a scratch or pin-thrust like that you would go and see to the grinding of your last batch of powder. If I had it, I should.”

“Well?” said the founder.

“I should tie it up – tightly,” replied Gil, drily. “Your guest there will make a month’s illness of it for the sake of being petted by the women and nursed.”

“That’s a pretty jealous kind of remark, Captain Gil,” said the founder sharply. “I noticed how you took me up short when I bade Mace stop in the room with the poor young man. Come down here, I want to talk to you. We may as well say it now as at any other time. Let’s walk down to the empty furnace. No one will heed us there.”

“With all my heart,” said Gil, and, with a cloud gathering on his brow, he walked after the founder, along by the side of the rushing water, past the mill-wheel, and down to a good-sized stone building, beside which was a great pile of charcoal.

“Now, Gil Carr,” said the founder, seating himself on the ledge of an open window, “I’m not going to quarrel.”

“That you are not,” said the other, smiling frankly; “and if you did you are not going to fight, for I won’t draw. One wounded man is enough for one day.”

“Tut – tut – yes,” cried the founder. “But now look here, Captain Gil – ”

“Suppose we drop the captain, and let it be plain Gil again, as it has been these many years. Master Cobbe, we are very old friends.”

“Yes, yes, of course, Gil, so we are,” said the founder, looking annoyed and puzzled. “But now, look here, tell me why did you interfere when I was going to tell my child to sit in the room with that injured gentleman. Come now, be frank.”

“I will,” said Gil, quietly. “It was because I did not think it seemly for her to stay and tend a man whose eyes had just openly bespoken admiration, and I thought that Janet would do as well.”

“Like your insolence,” cried the choleric old man.

“Gently, Master Cobbe,” said the other smiling; “too much powder again.”

“Confound it, yes,” he cried, calming down, but only to grow wroth the next moment, as he saw the smile upon his companion’s face. “You are laughing at me, Gil; and now, hark ye here, I think it is quite time we came to a proper understanding.”

“About Mace?” said Gil, quietly.

“Yes, about my child,” said the founder.

“I think so, too,” said Gil, calmly, but with the bronze hue of his cheek becoming a little more deeply tinted.

“Oh! you do,” said the founder, with a peculiar hesitancy, now it had come to the point, and an aspect of being slightly in awe of the other and his calm, firm way – the peculiar quiet assertion of one born to and accustomed to command.

“I do,” said Gil, gazing him full in the eyes; “and I am glad that you have opened a subject I wanted to discuss.”

“Then it is soon done,” said the founder; “and look here, Gil, my dear lad, after the talk is over, we go back to our old positions as good friends, and it is to be as if we had never spoken.”

“Have no fear,” said Gil, smiling; “as I told you, we shall not quarrel.”

“Well, then, look here,” said the founder, making a plunge at once into the subject. “Gil Carr, you are growing too intimate with my child.”

“Indeed!” said Gil, raising his eyebrows. “Let me see, Master Cobbe: it is sixteen years since Wat Kilby brought me, a delicate boy of twelve, low from an attack of a fever caught in the Western Isles, and you and your good wife nursed me into strength.”

“Yes, yes, quite true,” said the founder, hastily. “Poor Rachel! poor Rachel!” he muttered, and his face clouded.

“If ever woman was meet for the kingdom of heaven when she died it was Mace’s mother – my second mother!” said Gil, gravely.

“Amen to that!” said the founder. “Thank you, Gil – thank you – God bless you for those words,” he continued, with his voice trembling; and he seized and wrung the young man’s hand, which warmly pressed his in return.

“Mace was a child of four then, Master Cobbe,” said Gil, “and we have been like brother and sister ever since.”

“Yes, yes, quite true,” said the founder.

“Then why do you say that I am growing too intimate with your child?”

“Because,” said the founder, laying his hand upon the young man’s arm, “you are growing now less like brother and sister, and it is time it was stopped.”

“Why?” said Gil, gravely.

“Because, Gil Carr, the intimacy of two people like you might lead to feelings that end in marriage, and that could never be.”

“I do not see why not,” said Gil, quietly.

“No,” said the founder, “but I do! And now listen. I like you, Gil, and I’m going to give you a bit of advice, both about this matter and your ship, for we are old friends, and I should not like you and yours to come to harm.”

“Friends in home matters, but in business you always drove the hardest bargains with me that you could; and now you talk of locking Mace away.”

“Friends enough, all the same, my lad; and as to locking up my daughter from you, as you term it, if I in the future bid her always keep her room when you are home from sea and come up here, shall I not do right? Would you have me bring her out to listen to the gallant words of every buccaneering captain who comes to my place, swaggering and swearing and drinking, till he wants a man on each side to see him safe away, lest he get into the mill-race or the dam. Nay, Captain Gil Carr – Culverin Carr, if you like! – times are altered now, for Mace is a woman grown, and a girl no longer. So in the future I’ll trade with you and be the best of friends, but there we’ll stop.”

“Now, Master Cobbe,” said Gil, with a quiet, grave smile, “when did you see me overcome by strong waters, or swaggering, or using oaths? Fie! you make me worse than I am.”

Jeremiah Cobbe chuckled, and laid his finger good-humouredly upon the young man’s breast.

“It will not do, Gil lad, so we need not argue. You are as good as most men; but see here, I have Mace’s future welfare to provide for, and, above all, her happiness. I’ve been weak and neglectful, perhaps, so far, but now I’m going to be hard as the iron in those guns. There’s no harm done as yet, so let us stop in time, for we both wish the poor girl to be happy.”

“No harm?” said Gil.

“No: so we’ll stop at once. Think you I’m going to let a man like you fool the girl with fine words? You journey here, and you journey there, and you see saucy Frenchwomen, bright-eyed Spaniards, and dark-haired Portingallo dames, and those of Italy, and no one knows where beside. Court them, my lad, and marry as many of them as you like. May be you have now a wife in every port, but you must e’en leave my little white moth alone. Let her flitter and flutter about and be satisfied with the

soft light of the moon and stars; I don't want her pretty wings singed in the fierce light of a thoughtless man's love."

"Amen!" said Gil, softly.

"Amen, eh? Why, Gil, you are a fine fellow to give forth such a churchman's word as that so glibly and so pat. Master Peasegood would look fierce enough if he heard such an ungodly follower of Belial as you beginning to preach."

"In the name of all that's strange, Master Cobbe, what does this mean?" exclaimed Gil. "I have been free of your house all these years, and now this sudden change has come over you, and you treat me thus scurvily. In the name of all the saints, speak out. What have I done?"

"Been hooked by Father Bonchurch, seemingly, and gone over to see the Scarlet Lady on the Seven Hills, to hear you swearing by the saints."

"It is enough to make a man swear by anything, Master Cobbe, to meet with such treatment. Come, speak out; how have I affronted you?"

"Well, if you will know, Master Gil, I looked out across the Pool some little time back, and I saw a certain young man out there in my boat fishing. All at once he thrust his hand into a bucket of water, and seized a feckless gudgeon, which he deftly hooked, and then threw overboard for the pike to seize. And, as I looked, I saw a little hand taken and kissed, and I knew then that one Captain Culverin had hooked a second gudgeon as well, and that he might play with her for a time, as he watched her helpless struggles in his hot hands, and then he might throw her overboard too. Then the scales fell from my eyes, and I saw that I had been a fool – one who had been so wrapped-up in his cannon-making that he had forgotten to watch what went on in his own house. Gilbert Carr, you have ceased to be a brother to my child, and have made hot love to her. Come, confess."

"Confess!" cried Gil, with his face lighting up; "I have nothing, sir, to confess. If you wish me to avow that I dearly love our little Mace, I do with all my soul; and, God giving me strength, I will never do aught that shall make her shame that I love her. Yes, Master Cobbe, love has grown stronger year by year; man's love – hot love if you will, and she has been to me my one hope – the hope that has kept me a better man than I should have been. Come, be not hard upon me, Master Cobbe. You cannot mean that you disapprove of our love?"

"I do disapprove of your love!" cried the founder angrily; "and I'll have no more of such childish babble."

"But Master Cobbe – "

"I'll hear no more, I say."

"Nay, Master Cobbe, this is unreasonable."

"Call it what you will; I say I'll have no more of it. You are not the man to make my child happy, and now we understand one another. Mind, I forbid it."

"You may forbid it, Master Cobbe," said Gil quietly; "but I tell you frankly I cannot listen to your commands. Matters have gone too far."

"But they shall not have gone too far," cried the founder, flushing up, and stamping his foot with rage, "I'll hear no more. Look ye here, Captain Gil, you're in a passion now, so let me see no more of you for seven days. Then, perhaps, we can meet and talk calmly. Meantime, go and think."

As he said these words Jeremiah Cobbe, the founder of Roehurst, went into his empty furnace-house, and Gil Carr walked slowly away to think of his dismissal – now, when a man whom he already looked upon as an enemy was in the place; and the young man's face darkened as imagination began to be busy, filling his mind full of strange fancies, strongly opposed to the words he had spoken but a short time since to Mace as they parted at the house.

How the Founder set a Trap to catch a Lover

Nature seems to have ordained that the stricken ones should seek solitude to find solace for their wounds. The deer injured by the shot of the hunter plunges into the depths of the forest, and the human being cut to the heart hides away from his kind to brood and think and wait until time shall soften the pain.

So it was now with Gil Carr, for his steps led him slowly into the forest depths of the old weald, where, coming at length, by means of a cart-track, to an opening where the woodman's axe had been at work and a hollow blackened with dust and dotted with curious little fungi, showed where the charcoal burners had been busy, he seated himself upon a stump, and began to think over the past – of the days when a boy he had been his father's companion on shipboard, when he used to be shut down in the cabin below water-line when some attack was to be made upon a Spanish ship or fort in the Carib sea; of the love the stern, sun-browned, grizzled man bore him, and how he had been the rough sailors' plaything. Then of that dreadful day when lying below half wandering with fever, when the air that came through the little cabin window seemed burning hot, he had felt his head throb, and listened to the noise of cannons, wondering whether they were real or only the fancies of his aching brain. Of how he had at last with swimming head crawled from his berth and painfully climbed on deck, where his feet slid from under him, and he fell in a pool of blood, after which he crawled to pass, one after the other, half a score of dead and wounded men, to where a group was standing round one who lay upon the deck, dark with the shades of approaching death, and with his head supported by Wat Kilby, who was crying like a child.

How plainly it all came back as he sat there in the forest shades, with the glowing sunbeams that flashed through the leaves and burnished the silvery-green of the great bracken fronds, seeming like the swords that glittered under the tropic sky, and the gleaming armour that the stout adventurers wore when they made way for him to crawl to his father's side.

That pale, stern face lit up – how well he remembered it! – and one feeble hand was raised to be laid upon his head, as with his dying breath the smitten captain, one of Elizabeth's adventurous spirits, who fought the Spaniards under the English flag, half raised himself and cried —

“Brave lads – God's will – this is your captain now!”

And then, as he flung himself wildly upon his father's breast, there was a loud hurrah, for the fighting-men and crew flashed their swords over his head, and swore they would follow him to the death. Over *his* head, for he was alone upon the deck with the dead.

How it all came back – his long illness – Wat Kilby's constant care – how he was brought home, and their ship ascended the little river – how he was taken to Roehurst, to gradually win his way back to health and strength; and then there were the happy days he had spent with little Mace as his playfellow till he rejoined the ship, and was hailed by those on board as their very captain, under whom nominally, but with Wat Kilby as their head, they had sailed to east and west, trading, fighting when Spaniards were in the way, till he had really taken the helm, and led the unquiet spirits who had always chafed at the rule of James, their dislike culminating in hatred after they had joined in Raleigh's luckless venture and returned. Then had come a long time of quiet trading – the ship they sailed bearing to other shores year after year the produce of the Roehurst forges, and bringing back the old founder's needs; sulphur from Sicily or Iceland; Chinese salt, as they called it – saltpetre – from the east.

And now after all these years, when the captain's love for his little playmate had grown into the strong, absorbing passion of a man for the woman of his heart, he was suddenly called upon to give her up.

The day wore on as Gil sat there thinking! the wood-pigeons set up their mournful coo-coo, coo-coo, heedless of his presence; the blackbirds that swarmed in the low coppices, where the trees

had been cut down, uttered their alarm-notes, and then came and hunted out the wild cherries close at hand; and at last, as here and there the bright lamps of the glow-worms were lit, the rabbits came out to frisk and feed, so still and thoughtful was the occupant of the glade.

“No,” he said at last, “I will not. My life has been, rough, but I cannot blame myself for that; and I will not. I cannot give her up. Mace, my darling, if I knew that by never seeing you again I should add to your happiness, I would bear the suffering like a man. As it is, Master Cobbe, I must go against your will.”

He strode hastily away, with the wild creatures of the woods scattering right and left at his heavy tread, and, making straight for the gabled house, he began for the first time now to think upon its occupant.

Once or twice a pang shot through his breast as he thought of the gaily-dressed young officer made a welcome guest at the house whose door he was forbidden to enter; and he stopped short, with his teeth gritting together, and his brow knit, his mind agitated by the thoughts of what might be.

It was very still, and the soft balmy summer night-air bore the sounds from far away, as with a faint, piercing, shrill cry the bats wheeled around the tree beneath whose dark shadow he stood; the night-hawk chased the moths in busy circle, and a great white-breasted owl floated softly by, turned and flew beneath the tree, but on seeing Gil uttered a wild and thrilling shriek as it fled away, a sound in keeping with the words of Gil Carr, as he walked hastily on once more, exclaiming —

“I should slay him if he did.”

The object of his thoughts was Sir Mark Leslie, then lying on a couch by the open window of his room, with the sweet scents of the garden floating in, and the soft, moist, warm night-air playing pleasantly upon his forehead.

He, too, had his thoughts fixed upon Mace, and, perhaps by a subtle influence, they were drawn, too, towards him whom he had seen as her companion in the boat, the man who had played surgeon, and in whose eyes he had seemed to read no friendly feeling towards himself.

It must have been ten o'clock when Gil came in sight of the gables standing up against the soft, clear summer sky. The occupants of the neighbouring cottages were asleep, and with the exception of the beetle's drone, and the baying of some bugle-mouthed beagle, all was so silent that the ripple and rush of the water in the stone channel seemed to rise and fall with almost painful force.

There was a broad sloping bank some thirty or forty yards from the front of the house, and, taking off his hat, Gil softly walked along by it for a little distance, stooping here and there to thrust his hand in among the long dew-wet grass, and place something in his hat.

So occupied was he with his proceedings that he did not notice a figure seated beneath a tree nor heed the faint odour of tobacco which was nearly overpowered in the soft, sweet woodland scents that floated by. Neither did he notice that a window was open in one of the gables, and that the founder was seated there, gazing out upon the summer sky.

For, lover-like, Gil Carr was just then very blind, perhaps because the thoughts of Mace Cobbe filled his breast to the exclusion of everything else. Turning then to his task, he walked back to the sloping bank, and softly placed the four glow-worms he had brought diamond-wise upon the grass, where the little creatures glimmered in the darkness like the signal-lights of a ship at sea.

So thought Gil Carr, as he turned to look at them from a little distance, and then, softly walking to the little swing-bridge, he crossed it lightly in the darkness, and, leaping the fence, stood amongst the clustering roses waiting for the opening of a window ten feet above his head.

He had not long to wait, for the signal had been seen, and before many moments had elapsed there was a slight grating noise and then a soft voice that made the young man's heart throb uttered the one word — “Gil.”

“Yes, dear, I am here,” he replied, eagerly.

“How foolish!” came next from overhead. “Why, Gil, you were with me this afternoon, and yet you play the love-sick swain beneath my window now.”

“I am sick with love, sweet; even unto death.”

“Are you turning poet, Gil?”

“Yes, for I seem to live in a sphere of poesy when I think of thee.”

“You foolish boy.”

“I am,” he said. “Would I could see thine eyes.”

“And that they were glow-worms,” she said laughingly. “There, good-night, dear Gil. It is late, and I must to bed. If you are my true love, come boldly to the house by day; such meetings as this become neither thee nor me.”

“Stay awhile, sweet,” he said. “What of your guest?”

“Poor fellow! I have not seen him since.”

Gil sighed content.

“There, I must fain go now, dear Gil. Good-night.”

“Nay, nay! a moment longer,” he cried.

“Why, Gil,” she cried, laughing musically, “one would think you were a lover forsaken and forlorn, condemned to stay away – forbidden the house.”

“I am.”

“What?”

“I am, sweet; and condemned to stolen meetings.”

“Why, Gil?” she exclaimed; and in a low voice he told her all.

Meanwhile as Gil’s dark figure was seen approaching the house, the watcher at the open window drew back to ensure being unseen, and then proceeded to follow the young man’s movements, ending by going to the far end of the room, taking down a curious old Spanish matchlock from a couple of slings, and then opening an oaken cabinet, from which he took powder in a carved horn flask, and a small pouch of bullets, with which the piece was carefully charged. Then the match was cautiously lit, and, approaching the window, the barrel was laid upon the sill, as he who carried it went down on one knee, and took a careful aim at the young man where he stood.

“I could bring him down easily,” muttered the watcher. “He shall not play with me and break her heart.”

“Nay,” he growled, the next minute, “it would be cowardly, and he is a brave strong lad. But he shall not trifle with either of us, and I will not have him here.

“Shall I fire?” he said, holding the heavy piece hesitatingly; and the long barrel shook in his hand.

The hesitation was not for long. With a sigh of annoyance he placed the matchlock in the corner, and, going downstairs, he went out softly by the back, and came right round by the front of the house, as if meaning to interrupt the meeting now in progress, but instead of so doing he went down to the great mill-wheel, and crossed the water by means of its spokes and paddles. Then stealing softly along by the far edge of the deep stream, he crossed it by the bridge, and by putting a long lever in motion swung the bridge right round, leaving the way perfectly open, so that any one coming from the house would, in place of going across the bridge, walk in the darkness right into the deep water, and, however strong a swimmer he might be, he would be carried down by the force of the stream right amidst the woodwork of the wheel, perhaps past it, and down into the lower fall amongst the rocks beneath.

“He won’t drown,” muttered the founder; “and it will be a lesson to him – teach him that I don’t mean play.”

Walking softly back to the mill-wheel he crossed again, made his way into the house, and then to the window, where he once more took up his position, and began to watch the dimly-seen crossing, waiting to see the disturber, as he termed him, of his daughter’s peace, fall headlong into the channel.

Hardly had he settled himself, though, to watch, when a change came over him.

“No, hang it,” he muttered, “it is a dirty, mean trick; and Gil Carr is too good a man to treat in such a way. I’ve been hard enough upon him, and there is no need for this. I’ll go and put it back.”

The founder went down stairs once more, and out into the darkness with the full intent of replacing the bridge; but he was too late. Before he could reach the rough framework by which he had crossed, there was a step away to the right, a cry, a tremendous splash, and, as for a few moments he stood paralysed by the rushing stream, he caught a glimpse of a white face amidst the black water, and then it disappeared.

The founder’s repentance seemed to have come too late, and his trap had apparently acted but too well. For the first time, perhaps, he realised that a man’s chance of life in those rushing waters was very small. He had once helped to draw out the body of one who had been drowned in the great pool, and who had gradually been drawn down to get entangled in the mill-wheel, but he had never seen any one fall directly into the race, and he was startled at the velocity with which the figure passed.

“My poor lad!” he groaned. “What have I done? Of all the passionate fools! – ”

Here he was interrupted by a couple of figures approaching out of the darkness, one on either side of the stream, and a voice that made him start exclaimed, “Has he passed you?”

Setting a trap is one thing, catching the right bird you set it for quite another affair.

In this case Jeremiah Cobbe had calculated pretty well, but he had not foreseen all the possibilities, and the consequence was that the man for whose benefit the bridge had been drawn aside had not fallen into the stream.

For no sooner had the founder entered the house and closed the door than a tall, gaunt figure rose up from behind the thick hedge which sheltered the garden, and uttered a low peculiar signal, somewhat like the cry of a sea-bird. This he repeated twice without effect, and he was about to risk being heard in replacing the swing-bridge when a sound from another direction made him shrink back to his hiding-place, after giving another signal exactly like the seamew’s cry.

The sound he heard was a footstep, and the watcher knew in an instant that it was not Gil’s, both by its peculiarity and by its coming in a fresh direction from that in which he had heard the answer to his last signal.

“It’s Cobbe come back to slew round the bridge,” he muttered to himself, as he crouched down; and hardly had he uttered the remark than there was a slip, a loud ejaculation, and then a sharp cry and a splash.

“Then it wasn’t Cobbe,” exclaimed the watcher, as he sprang up, and, repeating his signal, he soon heard his leader’s footsteps hastily approaching. “Don’t try to cross,” he said; “the bridge has gone and some one has fallen in. Run to the wheel, or whoever it is will be there first, and take a dowsler into the lower bole.”

Gil ran along the side of the swift channel, and, directly after encountering the dimly-seen form of the founder, he exclaimed, “Has he passed you?”

“Yes; quick,” cried the old man, as he tried hard to recover from the shock he had received; “we may stop him by the wheel here. Who was it?”

“Heaven knows,” cried Gil; “don’t stop to talk.”

As he spoke he was already down on his knees beside the wheel, and made a snatch at something which was hitched on to one of the broad slimy paddles; but even as he stretched out his hand the shape glided away, and went over the fall with a shoot into the black water down below.

“For God’s sake, be quick,” cried the founder, “or he’ll be drowned, whoever he is. Drop on to the stones below; the water is only a few inches deep at the side, and you may reach him as he comes up with the eddy.”

Without a moment’s hesitation Gil lowered himself over the wood-piles, and dropped with a splash on to the water-worn pebbles below, where there was a broad shelf before the water went sheer down ten or a dozen feet into a hole caused by the washing of the heavy stream that fell from above.

Overhung as it was by willows, and enclosed by slimy piles and masses of fern-hung rock, it was a gruesome place, at mid-day, with the sun shining. By night its very aspect would have been enough to deter most men from venturing to plunge in. It, however, had no deterrent effect upon Gil, who leaned forward, peering into the darkness, to see if he could reach the drowning man; but finding that he was swept away by the stream, and being drawn round by the eddy towards the falling torrent which came over in a sheet, he plunged boldly in, caught the first part of the drowning man's garments he could seize, and swam strongly towards the lower part of the waste water, where Wat Kilby was ready to give him a helping hand, half dragging him out, and at the same time whispering a few words in his ear.

Jeremiah Cobbe was beside them directly, eagerly asking who it was they had saved.

"It looks like your guest, Master Cobbe," said Gil sourly. "There, he is not drowned, but coming-to fast. I'll leave you to take him home; and, perhaps, you had better tell him to keep in the house at night, as you have taken to the bad habit of setting traps to catch your friends."

"Not for my friends, Gil Carr, but for those who act like rats or other vermin, and steal round my place at ungodly hours," cried the founder angrily.

"Call it what you will, Master Cobbe," said Gil, coldly, "I'll say good-night;" and without another word he walked away to change his wet garments, while the founder helped his half-drowned guest back to the house.

How Wat Kilby went wooing

Sir Mark's wound was of such a nature that, being a young and healthy man, it would soon have healed up; but his imprudence in leaving the house, and his immersion, gave matters so unfavourable a turn that next morning he was unable to leave his bed, and, on a messenger arriving from the Moat with Sir Thomas Beckley's inquiries how it was Sir Mark had not returned, he was sent back with the news of the young man's accident, nothing being mentioned about the sword-wound. The result was that Gil, in the course of the morning, when he happened to be strolling in that direction, met Sir Thomas and his daughter on their way to Roehurst, followed by a servant laden with a basket.

Mistress Anne's face turned white, then rosy red, as she saw Gil approach, and as her eyes met his they were full of reproach and angry resentment, which rapidly gave place to a girlish, half-playful manner as soon as Sir Thomas mentioned the cause of his visit.

"A perilous accident has befallen my guest, Captain Carr," said the baronet, pompously – "Sir Mark Leslie, a Scottish gentleman, a special messenger from his Majesty, who has come here on important business. He was nearly drowned last even, and is now ill abed. We have brought him some simples and medicaments of Dame Beckley's own preparation, and we hope soon to have him back."

"Oh, yes," said Mistress Anne, with a sigh, and a meaning look at Gil.

"He makes you a pleasant companion, Mistress Anne," said Gil, quietly.

"Oh, yes," she cried; "he is delightful – so much Court news – such polish; it is indeed a pleasure to meet a true gentleman down here."

"Which I am not, then," thought Gil.

"Will nothing move him to jealousy?" said Anne Beckley to herself; and with her eyes flashing angrily, she laid her hand on her father's arm, and after a polite salutation they passed on.

"Poor girl!" said Gil to himself. "I am not a vain man, but if she be not ogling, and cap-setting, and trying to draw me on at her apron-string, I am an ass. Why," he continued, turning to gaze after the little party just as Mistress Anne turned her own head quickly to look after him, and, seeing that he was doing the same, snatched herself away as if in dudgeon – "one would think that she was trying to draw me on by her looks, and seeking to make me jealous of this gay lad from town. Poor lass! it is labour in vain; and she would not cause me a pang if she married him to-morrow. What's that?"

"That" was a slight rustling noise amongst the trees, followed by a "clink-clink-clink" of flint against steel; and striding out of the path and going in the direction of the sound Gil came upon Wat Kilby, seated in a mossy nook, blowing at a spark in some tinder and holding his little pipe ready in his hand.

"Hollo, Wat!" cried Gil.

The gaunt old fellow went on blowing without paying the slightest heed to the summons, then applied a rough match dipped in brimstone, whose end, on application to the glowing spark in the tinder, first melted, and then began to burn with a fluttering blue flame. This was soon communicated to the splint of wood, and the flame was then carefully held in a scarlet cap taken from Wat's grizzly half-bald head for shelter from the soft summer breeze, while he held the bowl of his little pipe to it and solemnly puffed it alight, after which he rose from his knees, took up a sitting position with his back against an old beech, gazed up in the speaker's face and replied —

"Hollo, skipper!"

"I wanted to see you Wat," said Gil. "Look here, old lad, how came you to be hanging about the house last night when you gave the signal?"

"Hah!" ejaculated Wat, exhaling a thin puff of fine blue smoke and gazing straight before him through the sun-pleached foliage of the forest.

"Do you hear me?" cried Gil, impatiently, as he stamped his heavy foot upon the moss.

"Hah!" ejaculated Wat again. "I was there on the watch."

“Yes, yes; and what did you see?”

“Mas’ Cobbe come out soon after you had gone across the little bridge and pook it out of the way.”

“Yes, yes; go on.”

“Then I give you the signal two or three times before I could make you hear, and just then I heard another step and hid away, and ’fore I had time to do more – in he went. You know.”

“Yes; but look here, Wat, how came you to be there?”

“I was there to save my skipper from being poked,” growled Wat, slowly and between puffs of his pipe. “It was as if I had been sent on purpose.”

“It’s a lie,” cried Gil, angrily. “Wat, you are an old trickster and a cheat. How dare you try to deceive me?”

“There,” said Wat, quietly addressing a beech pollard before him; “that’s gratitude for watching over and saving him from being poked.”

“Of course you saved me from danger, just as any brave man would try to save another, and more especially one of a crew, his skipper. There is no merit attached to that. Now look here, Wat, confess, for I am sure I know.”

“I don’t know about no confessing,” growled Wat; “you’re a skipper, not a priest. S’pose I asked you what you were doing there? If the captain sets such an example, what can you ’spect of the crew?”

Gil twisted his moustache angrily, and then turned sharply on his follower.

“You were not watching me?”

“I arn’t going to tell no lies. No.”

“You as good as say, then, that you were on the same errand as I?”

“I arn’t going to sail round no headlands when there’s a port right in front. I arn’t ashamed. Yes, I were.”

“Look here, Wat Kilby,” said Gil, after taking a step or two up and down in front of the old fellow, who calmly leaned back and gazed straight before him – “look here, Wat Kilby, you have been like a second father to me.”

“Hah!” And then a puff of smoke.

“And I would not willingly hurt your feelings.”

“Hah!”

“But I hold in great respect the people who dwell in yon house, and I will not have them in anyway annoyed.”

“Then I wouldn’t go coming the Spanish Don, under their windows o’ nights,” growled Wat.

“Silence, sir,” cried Gil.

As he spoke, the young man’s face flushed with shame and mortification at being twitted with his amorous passages, but there was a look of command and an imperious tone in his voice that told of one accustomed to be obeyed, and the great lank muscular man, tanned and hardened by a life of exposure, shuffled uneasily in his seat and let his little pipe go out.

“If it had been another man, Wat,” continued Gil, “I should have given him a week in irons for daring to go near the place.”

“What! after his skipper set an example?” growled Wat.

“Silence, sir,” roared Gil, catching the old fellow by the shoulder. “Bah!” he continued, calming down, “Why do you anger me, Wat?” and he loosed his hold.

“Oh, haul away, young ’un,” growled Wat, with a grim smile, “you don’t hurt me. I like to see what a sturdy young lion you’ve grown. That’s your father, every inch of him, as did that. Hah! he was a one.”

“Let him rest, Wat,” cried Gil impatiently. “My father would never have looked over an act of folly or disobedience. Neither will I.”

“You never ordered me not to go,” growled Wat.

“Then I do now, sir! Look here. What does it mean? Are you not ashamed of yourself, carrying on these gallantries? There was that Carib woman out at Essequibo.”

“Hah!” with a smokeless exhalation.

“And the flat-nosed Malayan in the Eastern Seas.”

“Hah!”

“And that Chinese, yellow, moon-faced woman.”

“Hah!”

“And the black girl on the Guinea Coast.”

“Hah!”

“And that Portingallo wench, and the Spanish lass with the dark eyes, and that great Greek, and a score beside.”

“Hah! Yes, skipper,” said Wat calmly, “I’ve got an ugly shell, but the core inside is very soft.”

“Soft? Yes.”

“But you’re going back a many years, skipper.”

“I need,” cried Gil angrily. “A man of your age, too! Why, Wat, you’re sixty, if you are a day!”

“Sixty-four,” growled Wat quietly, as he took out his flint and steel and screwed up his grim weather-beaten face.

“Then it’s a disgrace to you!”

“Disgrace? What’s being sixty-four got to do with it?”

“Why you’re an old man, sir!”

“Old man? Not I, captain. I’m as young as ever I was, and as fond of a pretty girl. I’m not old; and, if I was, I get fonder of ’em every year I live.”

“It is disgraceful, sir!” cried Gil, angrily. “You ought to be thinking of your coffin instead of pretty girls.”

That touched Wat home, and he sprang to his feet with the activity of a boy.

“No, I oughtn’t, skipper,” he cried, excitedly. “And, look here, don’t you say that there terrifying word to me again – I hate it. When it’s all over, if you don’t have me dropped overboard, just as I am, at sea, or even here at home in the little river, I’ll come back and haunt you. Coffin, indeed! Talk about such trade as that! Just as if I hadn’t sailed round the world like a man.”

He reseated himself, and began once more to use his flint and steel, but this time viciously.

“Once for all then, Wat, I will not have this sort of thing here. A man of your years hanging about after that great ugly dairy wench.”

“Who did?” cried Wat sharply. “Nay, captain, never.”

“Have I been mistaken, then?” cried Gil, eagerly. “Stop, though – you don’t mean to say that you have been casting your ancient eyes on Janet?”

“Why not?” cried Wat, leaping up once more. “She’s as pretty a creature as ever I set my ancient eyes, as you call ’em, on.”

“Why, man, she’s eighteen, and you are sixty-four.”

“All the better,” cried Wat. “Janet it is, and I’m going to wed her.”

“Does she know it?”

“Not quite, captain, not yet. Look ye here, skipper, my poor old mother had a plum grow on a tree by the cottage wall, and when I was a boy I meant to have that plum. Did I go and pick it right off and eat it there and then? Nay, I set my eyes on that plum while it was young and green, and saw it grow day by day rounder and redder, and covered with soft down and riper purple, and more rich and plump, and at last, when I picked that plum, I had a hundred times more ’joyment than if I’d plucked it when I saw it first. That’s what I’m doing with little Janet, and that’s what Master Peasegood calls a parable.”

Gil felt that he might just as well argue with a rock as with his rugged old follower, so he changed the subject.

“When will the *Golden Fleece* be fit for sea again?”

“It’ll be a month before they’ve got in the new keel, captain, and then she’s got to be well overhauled.”

“It will be two months, then, before we can load up?”

“Ay, all that,” was the reply. “Go on getting in the meal and bacon. Have it ready for placing in store. We must have everything ready there for putting on board.”

“Ay, ay, skipper.”

“Keep the men from going near. Let there be no hanging about the valley on any pretence. See to that with those two last lads.”

“Ay,” growled Wat. “The others can be trusted, of course.”

Gil nodded, and walked away, while Wat went on striking a light.

“He’s half afraid I should get in his way,” growled the old fellow, “but he needn’t be. Much better be afraid of some one finding out the store. There’s a new man come to live here, and a new cottage built. The place is getting too thick with people, and if we don’t mind we shall be found out. Who’s yonder?” he continued, shading his eyes, and gazing through the wood. “Churr and Mother Goodhugh. An’ if we’re ever found out, that Churr’s the man who will do it. And if – if – if – he – does – the captain – will – hang – him – at – th’ yard-arm – sure – as – he’s – a – sinful – soul – hah!”

There was a puff in lighting the pipe between each of these last words, ending with an expiration, after which Wat Kilby leaned back on the moss, half-closed his eyes, and lay watching the couple he had named as they stood talking in the wood.

How Mistress Anne sought a Spell

The days passed swiftly on in the lonely little valley where Jeremiah Cobbe had cast his lot. The trees flourished, and the wondrous variety of wild-flowers, for which that part of the Sussex weald has always been famed, succeeded each other, and made gay the banks and shaughs, while beneath the spreading oaks and beeches in the great forest the verdant carpet was always bright. The many streamlets went on carving their way through the yellow sandrock, and fell in a thousand tiny cascades, whose soft spray moistened the fronds of the luxuriant ferns. All was beautiful, for nature seemed there never to resent the fact that the ironmaster's workers delved ore from the hill-side, cut down the woods and burned them to charcoal, and then melted the iron to run in orange streams in the deftly-formed moulds for howitzer, culverin, or simple gun. There had been accidents, when, with a sudden roar, some powder-shed had blown up, blasting the herbage and leaves around; but a few showers and the bright hot sun soon restored all to its pristine state, and, embowered in trees, the works sent up their charcoal fumes without poisoning the air, or doing more harm than the saline breezes that swept over the hills from off the sea.

Mistress Anne Beckley, with Sir Thomas, and at times with Dame Beckley herself, was a constant attendant at the Pool with simples and wonderful decoctions of camomile, agrimony, balm, and bitter cress, all of which the dame declared were certain to subdue the fever in Sir Mark's brain; but somehow they did not, and he lingered on at the Pool-house, listening to the nightingales, gathering wild-flowers, refusing to see a leech, and declaring that he only wanted time.

He was not confined to his bed, but lounged on couch and easy chair, or walked slowly in the garden, languid and pale, with his arm supported in a sling, receiving with a patient smile the sympathising glances of Mistress Anne, who fawned upon him and tenderly watched his every change.

But he could not leave the Pool-house, and shook his head sadly when, urged by his daughter, Sir Thomas protested that the invalid ought to be brought back to the Moat.

Dame Beckley's preparations did not seem to do the good she anticipated; still they did some, for, being composed of so much water and vegetable juices, they must have had beneficial effects upon the roses and other plants around his bedroom window – plants which the young courtier duly moistened from the vessel sent to him. Otherwise fared the wine, for of that he partook liberally, as well as of Jeremiah Cobbe's strong drinks.

It must have been from dissatisfaction with her mother's treatment of the patient that one day, – after a visit to the Pool-house, in whose quiet cool parlour she had found Sir Mark lying back in an easy chair with a snowy pillow beneath his head, and with Mace seated near reading to him at his wish from a little book of ballads written by one Sir Thomas Wyatt, – Mistress Anne, instead of going straight back home, sent the serving-man, who was her guardian, to spend an hour with the men at the mill, and herself turned down a narrow winding track almost overgrown with bearbind, briony, and grass.

"I hate her," she said to herself, as she set her teeth and drove her nails into her palms. "I saw – I saw her looking at me with triumph flashing out of her wicked eyes; and I'll kill her, I'll poison her, before she shall beat me again. If he would only get well – if he would only get well."

A slight rustle on her left made her start, but it was only a blackbird bursting through the dense mass of tangled growth that rose like a vast hedge on either side of the winding track, from which the wanton brambles and lithe boughs kept thrusting across young shoots like friendly hands to grasp each other and join in claiming the rugged lane as their own by conquest's right.

A little further on a snake that had been sunning itself on a stump raised its head, uttered a low hiss, and glided rapidly away amidst the dense undergrowth; while again, a few yards further on, she came upon a short thick adder, lying right in her path, and apparently very careless about leaving it.

It was remarkable now that Anne Beckley displayed no fear of the wild animals she met. She had started at the blackbird's rustle, believing that she was watched, but on seeing the reptiles, now that there was no Sir Mark to whom she might cling for support, she broke off a slight hazel branch, and cut sharply at the adder where it lay; and as it raised its head and struck at her she cut it again and again till she had disabled it, and ended by crushing its head in the earth.

Then throwing aside her stick she hastened on, but the exertion had made her warm, and seating herself upon a mossy part of the bank she stayed to rest in the cool damp shade, beneath a great oak-tree.

Before she had been seated there many minutes she became aware of a slight movement in the grass, and, as she watched, a long lithe weasel bounded into sight, stopped, with its neck stretched up and head erect, watching her; but as she did not move the animal ran up the bank and crept down a mouse-hole, so small that it seemed impossible for it to have passed.

There was something about that weasel that attracted Anne, who remained watching the little hole, till all at once a mouse in an apparent state of collapse was thrust out, the neck and body of the weasel followed, and away the long thin creature bounded into the thick grass and disappeared.

A minute later there came a robin to settle upon a twig, and watch her with its great round eyes, but the loud *chink-chink* of a blackbird sent the robin away, and the orange-billed bird hopped down into the lane and began poking and peering about among the leaves till it secured a snail, in the dampest, darkest, spot, which unfortunate it bore into the path and hammered upon a stone till the shell was broken, when the soft-bodied snail was daintily picked out, swallowed, and the blackbird flew away.

Almost before Mistress Anne had noticed that the blackbird was gone, the robin came back to gaze at the intruder, with its head on one side, and then made a flit to where the leaves upon the moist bank had been disturbed by the blackbird. Here the robin's quick eyes had spied out a large lobworm hastily making its escape, under the impression that there was danger below.

This long worm the robin seized and bore, writhing and twining, in its bill to the path, where it set down its prize, but only to seize it again and give it a series of fierce nips from end to end, accompanying each nip with a sharp shake to stop the twining, which, however, was not entirely done, for when the little redbreast seized its victim by the head there was a slight undulating motion going on – a movement continued as the bird began rapidly to gulp it down.

This feat seemed to fascinate Mistress Anne, who watched the last bit of tail disappear, the robin having succeeded in taking down a worm nearly twice its own length; such a feat, indeed, as a man would have accomplished had he made a meal of a serpent some ten or eleven feet long, swallowing it, writhing and twisting, whole.

“How cruel Nature is!” said Mistress Anne, in a low thoughtful voice, and as she spoke there was a strange light in her eyes. “Everything for its own pleasure seems to kill what it wills. Why should I not be cruel too?”

She laughed then – a curious unpleasant laugh; and rising, the robin flitted away over the low undergrowth, apparently none the heavier for its meal, and there was a sharp rustle and a bound in the grass.

Mistress Anne Beckley seemed now to be too much occupied by her thoughts to pay much heed to the objects she passed as she walked slowly on.

Once more she said softly, “Why should not I be cruel too?” Then she laughed in a very unpleasant way, and half-closed her eyes.

About a mile farther, and in a very solitary place by an opening in the sandstone rock that rose in front, she stopped before a low, thatched cottage, glanced to right and left hastily, and then opening the rough gate, passed between a couple of rows of old-fashioned flowers, pushed the door, and entered the low-ceiled, homely room, with its bricked floor and open fireplace, where, in spite of the heat, a few sticks of wood were smouldering between the firedogs.

Quite in the chimney-corner, and seated upon a stool so low that her chin was brought in close proximity to her knees, was a hard-featured gaunt woman of sixty, dressed in widow's weeds of a very homely kind, but scrupulously clean. The muslin kerchief and cap she wore were white as snow, and her grey hair was tidily smoothed back. But, in spite of her neat look, there was something repulsive about the woman's face – a look of low cunning that played about her thin lips, which were drawn in at the corners, while she had a habit of bringing her thick grey eyebrows down over her eyes so as almost to conceal them, though, as you looked at her, you felt that she was scrutinising you severely from behind the shaggy grey fringe, and judging you from a hidden point of view.

She rose from her seat as Mistress Anne entered, and welcomed her with a smile, half defiant, half fawning.

"I'm so glad to see thee again, dearie," she said, in a harsh voice. "What can I do for thee now?"

"I don't know," cried the visitor, sharply; "but look here, Mother Goodhugh, mind this: my father is a justice, and if you play foul games with me I have only to complain to have you seized and punished as a witch."

"Me a witch, dearie? Oh, fie! I never pretended to be, only helped you to a little of my knowledge when you came to me."

"I believe your knowledge is all nonsense," cried the girl, angrily. "What good has it done?"

"Ah, it is impossible to say," replied the woman, looking furtively at her visitor; "and you may not have given him the potion at a lucky time. I know it was right, my dear," she added, in a low, mysterious whisper. "I gathered the herbs myself, and distilled them every one. You don't know: you can't tell. He may love you very dearly, and only be holding back from fear of your high place. Was not your father made a titled man just then?"

"Yes," replied the visitor. "Then that was it," cried the woman, triumphantly. "Depend upon it, mistress, you have him safe."

"But he is always with her – always, Mother Goodhugh; and when we meet he has only a contemptuous kind of laugh for me."

"That means nothing, dearie. It may be only the man's spirit fighting against his heart. I can't think, lovey, but what you have him safe. How many times has he had the drink?"

"Nine."

"And nine drops each time?"

"Yes, as nearly as I could drop them. My hand shook so."

"Ah," cried the woman, eagerly, "what did I tell thee? Nine drops nine times dropped make eighty-one, and eight and one are nine."

"Yes," said Anne Beckley.

"Did I not warn thee that any mistake would spoil the spell?"

"Yes, but that could not matter."

"Ah, that is not for me to say," replied the woman. "But there, sit ye down, dearie, and I'll do what I can for you. If it wasn't that you love him I'd say to you let him go on in his terrifying ways, and wed her if he will. She belongs to an accursed race, and would bring him never good."

"But she shan't marry him!" cried Anne, with flashing eyes. "I hate her, Mother Goodhugh, and would sooner see her dead. She's a witch. I'm sure she's a witch."

"And why are you sure, lovey?"

"Because – because – she bewitches men to her, and holds them by her side. I have tried, oh, so hard, but I cannot."

"Nay, child, nay, but you can, though not so strongly; for you do it by good, while she does it by ill."

"But I can't, Mother Goodhugh," cried the girl, petulantly.

“Ah, but you do,” said the woman, who began to walk up and down the brick floor, muttering and talking as if to herself. “She must, she must, for she is very beautiful and good. She has but to wish it over the nine drops to win the hearts of as many lovers as her heart desires.”

“But, Mother Goodhugh,” whispered Anne, whose heart was open enough to a little insidious flattery, “I did try so hard, and it seemed to do no good; and now a great officer has come to the Moat, and he had to go down to the Pool-house.”

“Yes, yes, I know, I know,” said Mother Goodhugh, “and she has witched him, too. Yes; she sits with him and reads to him, and smiles softly in his face, and she’ll win him to her ways, no doubt. But you don’t care for that, child. Let her win him, and it will settle the love, and leave brave, stout Captain Gil for you.”

“But I do care, mother; – I won’t have it – I can’t bear it. She does all this to spite me, and it drives me nearly mad. You must give me something that shall bring him back. Oh, pray, pray, help me.”

“Nay, nay, child, you threatened me just now, and talked of your father, and punishing me as a witch. Ah, ah! I didn’t deserve it.”

“That was only because I was peevish and fretful, Mother Goodhugh,” cried the girl appealingly; “for it is so hard to find both the men of your heart go to her straight, and leave you behind as a thing of naught.”

“Both the men – both?” cried Mother Goodhugh, with a hoarse chuckle, “Go to, go to, wicked girl; will not one suffice?”

“Oh, yes, yes, I’d give up Captain Gil, mother, but I cannot bear to see this new one go over to her too. You must help me – you shall.”

“Heyday, my dearie, what can I do? And besides, you laugh at my potions. I am not a witch, child, only a wise woman, who works hard to find out what herbs gathered at vital times can do. But I know nothing at all – nothing at all. Try something mixed by good Dame Beckley, thy mother; she can distil you something, I’ll warrant ye.”

“No, no, Mother Goodhugh; how can I tell her of my fainting heart, and my sighs for a loving man. Fie! Who tells her mother of such things? Come, help me.”

“Nay, child, it is of no use. Go to some one else.”

“But you must help me, mother,” cried the girl, appealingly.

“Nay, child, I cannot; and besides, to do what you will is costly. Many’s the long and weary time Master Abel Churr has spent in watching to get for me the toadweed when it blossomed at midnight, just at the moment when its flowers opened, and before the dew had time to wet it once. And heavily have I paid him for the earliest shoots of dog’s mercury, and the roots of the peavetch grown in a dripping rill. Nay, child, I lose by thy coming here. Go ask some one else to help thee. I can do no more.”

“Yes, yes, you will help me, Mother Goodhugh,” cried the girl, thrusting a small gold piece into her hand. “Come, haste and prepare me something.”

“Nay, child, I’m weary of it all,” said Mother Goodhugh, making an offer to return the piece. “The toil to my brain is terrifying, and I lay awake o’ nights after thinking of it all, and wondering whether it be wicked, and what’s to become afterward of my sinful soul, for doing such things. Suppose through helping you to your lovers I am kept from joining my poor dear husband who’s now in Heaven. Ah, no, I’ll have no more to do with thee.”

For answer Anne Beckley gave her foot an impatient stamp, and sought for and found a couple of silver crowns, which she added to the gold piece, and pressed into the old woman’s hand, which closed upon them like a hawk’s claw upon some tiny partridge chick; and a grim smile of satisfaction came upon her face.

“Well, well, well, I suppose I must, dearie; and if I go to perdition for it all you’ll have to pay for getting me prayed for when I’m dead. Now, then, what be I to do?”

“Give me the nine-drop distilment again, mother, and I will try it; but, if it fails this time, I’ll never trust thee more. I’ll, I’ll – there, I’ll have thee put in prison for a witch.”

“Then not a drop will I give thee,” cried the old woman, passionately. “Go, get your own lovers as you can. Ah! you cannot; for if I be punished as a witch I’ll ill-wish you; I’ll put such a spell upon you that men shall avoid you to the end of your days. You shall grow thin and old, and dry and yellow, and shall never know the joys of a pair of manly arms pressing you to a throbbing breast; you shall never taste the sweet kisses of love; and, instead of your lips pouting red and warm for more, they shall grow thin, and dry, and white, and cracked in your lonely, childless old age. I’ll curse you – I’ll –”

“No, no, Mother Goodhugh, dear Mother Goodhugh,” cried the girl, catching at her arm. “I did but jest. I’ll never say word to a soul, but keep all your secrets, and you shall have money and presents from the Moat; only help me, mother – only give me the means to win him.”

“Him? – Whom?” cried Mother Goodhugh, sharply.

“Sir Mark,” faltered Anne, with her face growing crimson.

“Why not Captain Gil Carr?” replied Mother Goodhugh. “But there,” she continued, going into an inner room, and keeping on talking aloud till she returned with a little clumsily shaped phial, which she held with great care and reverence as she passed it to her visitor. “There, take care of it, child; every drop is worth a gold piece; but you have been disappointed, and I want to make thee happy.”

The visitor, while professing utter disbelief in such matters, snatched eagerly at the little phial, and hid it in her bosom.

“Now something else,” she cried. “You are so close and hard to deal with. Do something more.”

“What would you have me to do?” said the woman. “Shall I tell you of your future?”

“Yes, yes,” cried the girl.

“Sit on the stool then, there in the centre of the room,” said the old woman; “and whatever you see or hear do not speak or move, or I would not answer for the consequences; it might be dumbness, or craziness, or even death.”

Smiling scornfully, to hide a shudder, Anne Beckley did as she was bid; and as she seated herself the old woman closed and drew a rough curtain across the door, and over the little window, leaving only a few silver streaks of light to penetrate; and then, as there was utter silence as well, her visitor heard a voice that came apparently from a great distance say softly: —

“Things to come – things of the future – things of the many years. I see a house in its bright garden burned up and destroyed, the blast of powder, and the shrieks of the wounded; and I see a church, with a wedding-party coming away, and the face of the man is hidden, but the garb is that of an officer, and the face of the maid is that of Sir Thomas Beckley’s child.”

The voice ceased, and Mistress Anne, whose eyes had been tightly closed, opened them again, and saw that the cottage was light once more, and that Mother Goodhugh was by her side.

“Whose face was it?” whispered the girl, half scornfully, half in awe.

“The voice spake not,” said the woman, solemnly. “Come and see.”

Anne Beckley felt a slight shrinking, but she rose directly, and followed the old woman, who led her out at the back of the cottage, plunging directly into the thick forest, and leading her by an overgrown track farther and farther into its depths. Every now and then the girl had to pause to free her dress from some briar or thorn which held her tightly, and for the most part she had to proceed at a slow walk, stooping the while to avoid the leaf-laden branches which in their wealth of summer foliage bowed down to bar her way.

With intervals of stopping, Anne Beckley followed her guide for quite an hour, during which time the old woman had kept on, evidently following certain marks on trees which she carefully scanned.

“I will go no further, mother,” cried Anne, throwing herself on a great mossy block of stone which overhung a tiny, trickling stream, and wiping her dewy forehead.

“Yes, you will, dearie,” said the old woman, with a meaning smile. “You’d go further than this to meet your love. You are hot and tired now. Come down here and have a drink.”

She dragged the branches aside with tender hand, and lightly bent back the tall bracken, so as to make a way for the girl, who rose wearily, and, following the old woman, found herself in a shady hollow between the rocks which rose far above her head, while at her feet lay a clear pool of cool delicious water, over which she bent, and was in the very act of dipping in her hand to fill her soft white palm, and drink, when she fancied she saw in the mirror-like surface the old woman’s fingers extended to thrust her in, and in a flash she seemed to see her object, namely, to murder her for her money and trinkets.

She started up, but only to see Mother Goodhugh smiling at her, and, ashamed of her fears, she drank, and turned to proceed. At the same time she felt, though, how completely she was at her companion’s mercy. No one knew where she had come, or had seen her enter the cottage; and now in the depths of the forest, did the old woman wish her evil, the thick bushes and brambles would conceal her body, and the rapid growth soon hide all signs of footsteps that might be tracked.

“Now, lovey,” said the old woman, “I am going to trust you to have sense to do as you are bid. You must shut your eyes tightly, and neither look nor speak till you hear his voice.”

“Shall I hear it?” faltered Anne.

“Yes, for sure,” cried the old woman, imperiously. “Now close your eyes and obey me in all I say. If you do not, I will not answer for what may happen.”

“I – I’ll go back now. I am weary,” faltered Anne.

“Too late,” cried the old woman, clutching her hand tightly. “Shut your eyes. There, now not a word.”

Anne obeyed to the letter, and for fully half-an-hour felt herself half dragged up and down rugged ground, past masses of stone, and through bushes; and more than once her fears nearly made her open her eyes.

At last, when she could bear the suspense no longer, there was a pause, and Mother Goodhugh placed her hands upon her shoulders, pressed her down upon a block of stone, and whispered in her ear: —

“Keep your eyes close; do not speak or move, and you will hear his steps ere long, and he will speak to thee.”

“In the flesh?” whispered the girl, hoarsely.

“How can I tell in or out of the flesh, but he will come.”

“But who, Mother Goodhugh, who?” whispered the girl.

“I know not. It may be Captain Gil: it may be the gallant at the Pool: all I know and can tell is that the man who touches you – ”

“Touches?”

“Yes, touches you, is or will be your lover. Hush! Not a word.”

Anne half made a spring to rise, but something seemed to hold her back in her seat, and with palpitating heart she sat trembling as she heard a faint rustling noise indicating that Mother Goodhugh was going back into the forest; and, unable at last to combat the feeling of lonesomeness and dread, but at the same time unwilling to break what she felt was a spell by opening her eyes, she whispered hastily – “Mother – mother, are you there?” She sank back the next moment bedewed with cold clammy perspiration, for there seemed to arise a strange low whispering of many voices, which passed, came back, and died away in the distance, leaving her in the midst of a silence that was profound.

How the Spell began to work

It was terrible work to sit there in that profound silence, listening and wondering where she was; and at last it was with a feeling of relief that Anne awoke to the fact that she must be out in the daylight; for suddenly the mournful caw of a rook passing far overhead fell upon her ear.

Then the place did not seem so solitary, for a wandering wind swept softly by her, stirring the leaves which rustled together, as it cooled her cheek, and soon after there was the pleasant chirp of a woodland bird, followed by the familiar little prattle of the yellow-hammer.

She began now to realise that she must be in some deep ravine, one of the many that gashed the primeval forest, and felt half ready to laugh at her fears, as she uttered a short cough, which came back repeated strangely from the opposite wall of the rock.

“Frightened by an echo,” she muttered, “and – oh, what a weak-pated fool am I, and how I do let that wicked old beldame play upon me. It is absurd. She has no such power as she pretends; and here have I let her bring me here to sit like a shallow-brained, love-sick girl, with my eyes shut, waiting to see my lover. Eyes shut! How can I see my love. I’ll open them. Nay; there may be truth in the spell after all, and, if there is, why should I spoil it when I have gone so far. I wonder whether he will come. How my poor heart beats!”

“Coo – coo – oo – oo. Coo – coo – coo – coo – coo – oo,” came from somewhere far below.

“That’s a lover’s cry,” she said, half laughing, to herself; “but he will not come to me in the form of a dove, unless my heart’s set on Jupiter himself. How absurd I am.”

Quite a quarter of an hour passed away, and still with a wonderful power over her desires she sat upon the piece of sandrock waiting for the fulfilment of Mother Goodhugh’s promises.

“I’ll wait no longer,” she cried at last, petulantly. “I cannot keep my eyes closed like this. Where am I? How am I to find my way back home? Oh, what a sorry idiot am I! I’ll open my eyes at once, and put an end to this mystery. Hark, what’s that?”

A low doleful wail was heard overhead, and as she listened it was repeated.

“It was a seamew,” she whispered, “and that wicked hag must have brought me nearer the shore. What’s that?”

She bent down a little, listening, for she fancied that she heard a voice, but the sound was not repeated. Then there was a gentle rustle of a leaf, as if some rabbit had passed by, but still she kept her eyes closed, with a lingering faith that the old woman’s words might prove true, and all the while her heart went throb throb against the flask containing the love philtre in her bosom.

All silent as the grave once more, and she trembled as she heard her own voice.

“I’ll count a hundred,” she whispered to herself, “and then – ”

She did not finish her sentence, but began slowly under her breath to count one, two, three, four, five, six, and so on right away, heedless of a faint rustle repeated again and again, close at hand, and she went on getting slower and slower in a disappointed manner, as she reluctantly felt that she must keep her word, and open her eyes; and at last it was, “Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred, and – Help, help, help! Oh!”

Mistress Anne’s voice was smothered, and she felt herself tightly held by strong hands. For as she came to the end of her counting task, and sharply opened her eyes, it was to gaze at a broad handkerchief held by two brown hands, drawn tightly across the next moment and secured behind her head, while a second stifled her cries as it was tied over her mouth.

“There, my little birdie,” said a rough voice, “that will stop your singing for the present. If you can’t breathe, give a kick, and we’ll ease it off. There, there, don’t struggle like that, or you’ll rumple your plumage.”

“Got her, lads?” said another voice.

“Got her, ah! I see her sitting on the stone there, fast asleep, crope up the bank, and off with my handkerchief, and clapped it over her eyes, while Morgan covered her mouth.”

“What are you going to do with her?”

“Help her to old Wat, I think,” said the first voice. “He always wants a wife.”

“Nay, lads; I shall keep her myself. Steady, lass! it’s no use to struggle.”

Anne Beckley’s heart sank within her breast as she wondered into whose hands she had fallen, and she trembled so that she could scarcely stand. The conversation that ensued the next moment, though, served as a stimulus, and she waited with bated breath, and without struggling, as the principal speaker considered the question, holding her tightly the while by the arm.

“Where be going to take her?” said a fresh voice.

“Oh, up yonder,” was the reply.

“Nay, nay; that won’t do. The skipper won’t stand these games, my lad.”

“The skipper!”

Those two words sent a thrill of hope through the heart of the girl as she asked herself could it be Captain Gil.

“Yes, yes; it must be,” she thought directly after; and these were some of the rough, adventurous men of whom she heard whispers at the Moat – the crew of bold, daring fellows, who sailed round the world and braved all dangers, even laughing at the laws; for one of Captain Gil’s men had been taken before her father for some offence, and when the worthy baronet was about to condemn him to fine and imprisonment, amercing him in coin as well as time, he had leaned forward and whispered that in the justice’s ears which had made him reconsider the case and dismiss the prisoner in the end.

It was into the hands of these men she had fallen she felt sure, and should Captain Gil find out what was done she knew she had nothing to fear, unless, finding her in his power, he should carry her off to his ship somewhere in the little river and bear her away to be a rover’s bride.

The silly little heart of Anne Beckley, full as it was of trouble, was ready to make room for this romantic notion, and she gave up all thought of resistance as her captors led her away, merely pointing to the bandage across her mouth, which half stifled her.

“Ah, you shall have that off, my dear, if you will not squeal,” said the same voice; and the girl breathed more freely as the wrapper was taken away.

“Now, be careful how you come or you’ll break your pretty neck, and then – Curse it, here be the skipper.”

“What’s this?” cried a well-known voice. “Whom have you here? Mistress Anne Beckley?”

“Oh, Captain Gil, save me – save me,” cried the girl, stretching out her hands in the direction of the voice, and nestling close to him as his strong arm was thrown round her.

“You dogs, how dare you?” roared Gil, while, with a sense of indescribable joy, Mistress Anne held her head against his broad breast, heard the resonant utterances which seemed to echo in his chest, and listened to the firm, strong beating of his heart. She never for a moment thought of tearing away the bandage; but, when she did raise her fingers, Gil’s stout hand prisoned both of hers and held them tightly, where they stayed without resistance, nothing loth.

“We couldn’t help it, captain,” said a voice. “I be coming along here, and I see my young mistress there seated on yon stone, with her head bent down, asleep.”

“Mother Goodhugh has spoken truth, then,” whispered Anne to herself; “I have not seen, but I have felt, and feel the touch of my future lord.”

“Is this truth?” cried Gil, gazing round at his men, who one and all shrank from his angry eye.

“True, captain? It be true enough,” was chorused. “Jack Bray then went softly behind her and clapped a kerchief over her eyes and mouth, and we were taking her yonder when you come.”

“But how came she here?” exclaimed Gil, looking round at his men, who stared at one another, but made no reply till their leader angrily repeated his question.

“Don’t know, captain,” said the man Anne had first heard speak; “she was sitting on yonder stone.”

“Was no one near? But that will do. Tell me one thing,” he said aside to one of his men, “where were you coming from?”

“We’d been down to the river, captain, and were on the look-out for Mas’ Wat, when – ”

“That will do,” said Gil sternly. “Now stand aside.”

As he spoke he placed his left arm round Anne, and took her hand with his right.

“Let me lead you back to the path from which you have strayed, Mistress Beckley,” he said. “You are quite safe now. Nay – nay, let that bandage rest for awhile. The sight of these rough seamen here might startle you afresh,” he added, as the late prisoner raised her hand that was at liberty to her face.

She lowered it directly with a satisfied sigh, and, leaning heavily upon her protector’s arm, she suffered him to lead her down what seemed to be a rugged slope, and then amidst trees and bushes, and up one ascent, down another, and all the while with the bandage upon her eyes, while Gil looked down at her, half-puzzled, half-amused, and at times annoyed at the timid, trusting way in which she seemed to have thrown herself upon him.

He was debating within himself as to whether he should ask her how she came to be where she was found, little thinking that she had been taken there almost as thoroughly blindfolded as she had been when brought away. But Gilbert Carr’s heart told him plainly enough without vanity that he had been the attraction that had drawn her thither, and he bit his lip with vexation as he heard his companion sigh, and felt her hang more heavily upon his arm.

Finally he decided that he would say nothing upon the subject, but trust that she had made no discoveries, though he could not help arguing that if she had, and he gave her offence, he might find her an angry woman who would do him a serious ill.

At last by many a devious track he had taken her to where the lane leading from the Pool-house led through the scattered cottages of the workers at the furnaces and foundries towards the Moat, and here Gil paused.

“That thick bandage must be hot and comfortless, Mistress Beckley,” he said; “let me remove it now.”

“Oh! no!” she cried quickly, “pray don’t take it away. I feel quite safe with you, Captain Carr;” and she sighed again, and laid her other hand upon his.

“But you are safe now,” he said, smiling, “and close to the lane. There is nothing more to fear. My unmannerly lads shall be punished for all this.”

“No, no,” she said softly, “don’t punish them – for my sake. Say you will forgive them. I beg – I entreat.”

“If it is your wish, the punishment shall not take place,” he said. “There, let me remove the kerchief.”

Anne would gladly have resisted, for it was very sweet to be so dependent on Gil Carr. He had been so gentle and kindly towards her that her heart was filled to bursting with hope that she would win him after all, though her siege had now lasted for months without avail, and she had been ready to raise it in favour of the new-comer, Sir Mark.

She felt, though, that she might not be serving her cause by making any objections, and, resigning herself to her protector’s will, she suffered him to remove the kerchief, but uttered a quick cry of pain, as she opened and then closed her eyes.

“My poor girl,” he cried, holding her tightly, as she clung to him, “are you injured? Tell me; what is it?”

“It is nothing,” said Anne, faintly; “a sudden pang – the intense light – I shall be well anon.”

It did not occur to Gil that the position he occupied was a strange one, if seen by a looker-on, for he was too much concerned by the apparent suffering of his charge, and, as her fright had

been caused by his followers, he felt in duty bound to try and make up for their insolence by his consideration for her weakness. He stood, then, supporting her as she held her hands pressed to her aching eyes, and smiled encouragement as she at last looked timidly up at him with a very pitiful expression of countenance, and ended by catching his hand in hers in the excess of her gratitude for her deliverance, and kissing it passionately, as she burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

“Why, come, come, Mistress Timidity,” he said, playfully, “where is your brave little heart? One would think I had been some brave hero of old, who had rescued you from an angry dragon, instead of a poor sea-captain, who did nothing but order some insolent mariners to – ”

Gil stopped short, his eyes fixed, and a sense of the awkwardness of his position coming fully upon him, as at the distance of some twenty or thirty yards there passed Mace Cobbe, leading Sir Mark by the hand.

He saw her only for a few moments, but he knew that Mace had seen him too, and that Anne Beckley had followed the direction of his eyes, for he had felt her start, and a red glow had come upon her cheeks.

In his angry excitement he felt ready to dash her from him, but his better feelings prevailed, and he stood with knitted brow thinking, while Anne felt careless of having been seen by Sir Mark, since Mace had seen her too, and reclining in her lover’s arms.

How Mother Goodhugh played the Part of Shimei of Old

“Better, Master Cobbe; I am growing stronger,” said Sir Mark, as he returned to the Pool-house with his silent companion, for, after their encounter with Gil and Mistress Anne, Mace had not spoken a word.

“That’s well,” said the bluff founder. “Take a good long walk every day, my lad, and that will soon give you strength.”

“I will, Master Cobbe, and relieve you of so untoward a visitor as quickly as I can.”

“See here, my brave lad,” said the founder, hastily; “no more of that. I am a hot-tempered, hasty man, ready to strike with staff or sword, but I am no niggard. You are my guest – a honoured, welcome guest – and when you go from the shelter of my roof it will be at your own wish, not mine. For look here, Sir Mark, I am a rough man, but pretty well to do.”

“But I impose upon you, Master Cobbe.”

“My dear lad, go on then, impose away. Tut, tut, what folly! Did you eat and drink at my table for ten years, I should never know or feel the cost. Come along with me, and see in my shed here we are going to cast a big culverin. The furnace is ready Mr tapping. You, being a man of war, will like to see.”

Sir Mark gave his assent, and, being to all appearances still very weak, he leaned heavily upon his stick, and they together crossed the interval between them and the large stone shed, from out of whose unglazed windows a vivid glow of light made itself plain, even in the afternoon sun.

“Ah, Mother Goodhugh, you here?” said the founder, quietly, as the owner of the name came along using a crutch-stick in good old witch-like fashion; and, thumping it down upon the ground, she stood leaning upon it with both hands, or raising it and pointing with it viciously as she began gesticulating and talking vehemently.

“Yes,” she cried, “I be here; and I keep coming, and watching, and waiting for the day when the curse shall work. It is planted and growing, for I water it with my widow’s tears, and, in due time, it will blossom and shower down seed upon you and your accursed house. Ha! ha! ha! You think to escape it,” she cried, with her voice increasing in shrillness, to attract the attention of the workpeople; “but mark my words – mark it all of you at the windows there – the great curse will overshadow him and his, and he will feel it sore, though he hopes to escape it all.”

“Nay, good mother,” said the founder mildly, and speaking in a sad, pitying voice, to the surprise of Sir Mark, who expected to see him burst into a passion. “Nay, nay, I think to ’scape no share of my troubles, such as the good Lord shall put upon me and mine.”

“The good Lord!” cried Mother Goodhugh, shrilly; “the good devil you mean, who watches over thee and thy Satanic plots and plans.”

“Well, there, there, mother,” said the founder, “go your way. I have company here to-day. You can come another time when I am alone, and curse me till you are hoarse,” he added, with a twinkle of the eye.

“Nay, but I’ll curse thee now,” said the old woman excitedly, as her eyes glistened, her wrinkled cheeks flushed, and her grey hair seemed to stand right away from her temples. “Let him hear me curse thee for an ungodly man with all his trade, a maker of devilish engines, and hellish thunder and lightning in barrels, in which he shall some day pass away in a storm of fire and smoke and brimstone fumes.”

“Is she mad?” whispered Sir Mark, plucking the founder by the sleeve.

“No,” said the founder sadly. “Poor soul; but she has had troubles enough to make her.”

“How dare you pity me, wretch, demon, hellhound?” cried the old woman. “Murderer that you are, you shall yet suffer for your crimes.”

“Let us walk on,” whispered Sir Mark, as a group of smoke-begrimed workmen came out and gathered at the windows to listen.

“Nay, I’ll let her say her say,” replied the founder, grimly. “If I go, she will follow me, and cast cinders at me, like a she Shimei, and I’ve got a big founding to make, my lad, which might come out badly if she stood in the window cursing me all in heaps.”

“What!” cried Mother Goodhugh, turning on Sir Mark. “You, do you think me mad? Nay, though I might have been, through his sins. Hear, young man, and judge between us. I was a prosperous, happy woman, with a loving husband and a dear son, who led a peaceful life till yon demon deluded both into coming and helping him in his devilish trade. I knew how it would be and prophesied to them that ill would come; but he fought against me, and gained them over. First my poor boy was brought home to me stiff and cold – stiff and cold, alas! – drowned in the Pool, and swept beneath yon devil’s engine of a wheel. A year later, and, with a rush and a whirlwind of fire, the great powder-barn was swept into the air with a roar of thunder. I heard it, and came running, for I knew ill had come, and I was in time to fall on my knees by the blackened corpse of my dead husband – scarred, torn, shocking to behold; and in my widowed agony I raised my hands to Heaven to call down vengeance, and cursed his destroyer as I curse him now.”

“Shame on you, Mother Goodhugh, shame!” cried a voice; and pale, and with eyes red with recent weeping, Mace Cobbe ran forward to throw one arm across her father’s breast, and stand between him and the old woman, as if to shield him from her anger, as, advancing with upraised stick and her eyes flashing with excitement, she seemed no inapt representative of a modern sibyl.

“Ah, you here, young Jezebel?” cried the woman, beside herself now, as she worked herself into a fierce rage. “Listen, good people; listen once more, as I tell you that the day will come when Jeremiah Cobbe shall curse the hour when he was born, when he shall gaze down upon the blackened corpse of this his miserable spawn, even as I gazed upon the burned and fire-scarred body of my dear; and I tell you that the day shall come when in his misery and God-forgotten despair he shall hurl himself into yonder Pool, and be swept down beneath his devilish wheel to be taken out dead – dead, do you hear? – as they drew out my boy.”

“Oh, shame, Mother Goodhugh, shame!” cried Mace again. “Come away, father, come away.”

“Nay, child,” he said, calmly. “I’ll face the storm like a man. It will be the sooner over.”

“Never!” cried the old woman, with the foam gathering on her dry lips, as she rolled her red and bloodshot eyes. “I’ll pursue you to your death. Curse you! curse you!”

“Oh, shame, old woman,” said Sir Mark, angrily. “Think of your own end, and how curses come home to roost.”

“Ah, yes,” cried the old woman, turning upon him. “I had forgotten you, poor showy dunghill Tom, in your feathers and spurs. You are to be caught, I suppose, for a husband for Miss Jezebel there. But keep away; go while your life is safe. There be death and destruction and misery there. Flee from the wrath to come, for in wedding that dressed-up-doll you tie yourself to the cursed, and may die as well. Hear me, good people, and judge between us; mark me that it will all come true.”

“Shame on you, Mother Goodhugh,” cried Mace, with her pale cheeks flushing; “and judge between them, all of you,” she said, addressing the little crowd of workmen and their wives who had gradually gathered round. “You all know how it was an accident when poor Luke Goodhugh fell into the Pool, when fishing against my dear father’s orders, and was drowned.”

“Yes, yes, that be a true word, mistress,” rose in chorus.

“And how my dear father grieved when that sad explosion came which killed poor Goodhugh, our best workman, through the folly of one who would smoke.”

“That be true enough. Yes, it be true, Mother Goodhugh.”

“You know all that,” cried Mace, with her handsome young face lighting up more and more, ignorant the while of Sir Mark’s admiring gaze. “You know all that,” she repeated, “but you don’t know that ever since that luckless day – ”

“There, there, child, enough said,” cried the founder, as Mother Goodhugh stood muttering and mouthing in impotent malice at the speaker, who had robbed her of her audience for the time.

“Nay, father, dear, but they shall hear now,” cried Mace, speaking with energy, and her face flushing up with pride. “Judge between them all of you, when I tell you that from that dreadful day my father’s hand has always been open to this woman; his is the hand that has fed and clothed and sheltered her, when otherwise she must have gone forth a wanderer and a beggar upon the face of the earth.”

“Tut, tut, child!” cried the founder; “be silent.”

“Not yet, dear father,” cried Mace. “And for this,” she continued, “while he has fed her with bread, and had his heart sore with pity for her solitary fate, she has never ceased to shower down curses on his head.”

“Yes,” cried the old woman, breaking in again, “gives me bread to smother my curses,” and she shook her stick menacingly, “and I curse again. Give me back my boy – give me back my dear. When he does that, I will take back my curses and ill-wishings to myself, and bury them beneath the earth. Till then they will cling to him; and mark me, all, ill will come to this roof. It is builded on the sandrock,” she cried, pointing to how the house stood in a niche of the scarpd rock, which ran right behind the building, towering up with the broom and gorse and purple heather, dotting the open spaces where the pine and hornbeam ceased to grow, a pleasant-timbered gabled house, where it seemed, with its climbing roses and blushing flowers, that sorrow could never come – “it is builded on the sandrock, but it shall be rent asunder, and dissolve in flame, and smoke, and ruin, and destruction, and then – then” – she cried hoarsely.

“Why then, Mother Goodhugh,” said the founder, “we’ll build it up afresh, for there’s stone and timber enough about for a dozen such houses, and close at hand.”

“Nay,” cried the old woman, “nay,” she croaked, for her voice had gone, and she spoke now in a hoarse whisper; “listen, all of you: the very stones of the ruins will be cursed, and all the trade, and no man shall lay hands upon them to build again, lest he be accursed himself.”

In spite of her brave true heart, Mace felt a chill strike through her as the old woman walked hurriedly away, thumping her crutch-stick on the ground, and stopping to turn and shake it threateningly at the Pool-house – even stopping by the gate to spit towards the door before she went on muttering and gesticulating, with her grey hood thrown back on her shoulders, her linen cap in her hand, and her hair streaming in the soft summer breeze, which came to the little crowd standing gazing after her as she went.

“Poor old girl!” cried the founder, with his face lighting up once more. “Come, lads, the storm’s over; back to work.”

The men looked at one another, and walked away with shaking head and pursed-up lip, while the women stole off in silence, to gather together at one of the cottages and talk over the wise woman’s words.

“Poor souls!” cried the founder, cheerily; “they believe her to the bottom of their hearts. Why, hey, here’s Master Peasegood, to bear me out. I say, Master Peasegood, that if an old and ugly woman chooses to set up for a witch, and only curses hard enough, she’ll find plenty to believe in her.”

“Ay, and as you say, Master Cobbe, if she only curse hard enough, and only prophesy, like David danced, with all his might, some of the stones are sure to hit the mark. Your servant, sir; Mace, my pretty flower, how is it with you? Bless you, my child, bless you!”

This in a thick unctuous voice, as the speaker, an enormously fat, heavy man, in rather shabby clerical habiliments, rolled up to the group, and, taking Mace in his arms, kissed her roundly on both her cheeks, while, to Sir Mark’s hot indignation and surprise, the maiden laid her hands upon the parson’s broad breast, and kissed him in return.

“I was coming to pay my respects to you – Sir Mark Leslie, I believe.”

The knight bowed stiffly, with his countenance full of displeasure.

“Sir Thomas Beckley told me of your illness, and begged me to call,” continued Master Peasegood, whose heavy cheeks wobbled as he spoke. “Aha, that’s one of the privileges of being an old, an ugly, and a horribly fat man. I may kiss my pretty little Mace here when and where I will. Master Cobbe,” he continued, as he held and patted the maiden’s soft white little hand, “if you do not place the key in these fingers, and bid our little blossom go fetch me a tankard of the coolest, brownest, beadiest ale in that rock-hewn cellar of thine, this man-mountain will lie down in the shade and faint. Zooks, gentlemen, but the sun is hot.”

He took off his broad-brimmed soft hat, and wiped his brow as he looked at both in turn, while Mace went off for the ale.

“Ay, it is hot, Master Peasegood; but it will be hotter in yonder directly. Come and see the casting.”

“Not I,” said the new-comer: “I’ll go and sit in the shady room, and hold discourse with fair little Mace, and the ale. I shall stay to the next meal, so you need not hurry,” he added, to Sir Mark’s disgust.

“You’re welcome,” said the founder. “How is the holy father? Why didn’t you bring him?”

“Out on the malignant! I’ve done with him,” cried Master Peasegood, with much severity. “He’s all purgatory and absolution and curse. Ah, talk about cursing! So Mother Goodhugh has been at work again.”

“Ay, with all her might.”

“Hah! I like being cursed,” said the parson, drawing a long breath. “I’ve been cursed more than any man living, sir,” he continued, turning to Sir Mark. “Ha, ha, ha, ha! see how I flourish upon it. I like being cursed.”

“But you don’t like cursing,” said the founder.

“Nay, not at all,” said the parson. “Well, I’ll in to my draught of ale. Go and get you dope, and come and join me,” and, saluting Sir Mark, he, to that gentleman’s great relief, rolled slowly towards the porch, while the founder led his guest through the low arched doorway into the furnace-house, whose interior was now aglow.

Mace awaited her stout visitor in the cool, shady parlour, with the silver flagon in her hands, then lifted the lid, and held it out to him with a smile.

He took it, sniffed the aromatic scent, and raised it to his lips, with his eyes on Mace, but set the vessel down again, and took the maiden’s hands.

“Give me another kiss, child, before I defile my lips with strong liquor. Hah,” he added, after the salute, “that was as fresh as the touch of a dewy blossom at early morn. God’s blessing be on the man who wins thy love, my child, and may he make thee a very, very happy wife. Nay, nay, don’t blush, child,” he continued, patting the hand he still retained. “I am a confirmed old bachelor, and shall never wed; but I hold, as opposed to Father Brisdone – the devil take him! – that there is no purer and no holier thing in life than the love of a good man for a sweet, pure woman, unless it be the love of the woman for the man.”

“You do not drink your ale, Master Peasegood;” said Mace, blushing, and looking pained.

“Nay, my child, that can rest, for now we are on this topic of love I want to talk to thee. Come, come, look not so angered with me. You’ve grown a beautiful woman, Mace: but I seem always to be looking at my pretty, prattling babe, who brought me flowers every Sabbath day. Ah! my child, time flies apace — *tempus edax rerum*, as Father Brisdone would say. But hearken to me, child, I am no father confessor, but if my little Maybud did not open her sweet young heart to me ’twould grieve me sore.”

“Oh, Master Peasegood,” cried Mace, enlacing her hands, and resting them on his shoulder, as he seated himself on a chair, which groaned beneath his weight, “I have not a thought that I would keep from thee.”

“I know thou hast not,” he said. “So tell me – this courtly spark, has he said words of love?”

“Nay, Master Peasegood, but he sighs and gazes at me pensively, and lingers here as if he wished me to believe he was in love.”

“And you? What of this little heart? What think you of his gay clothes and courtly ways, and smooth manners and gentle words?”

“I think him a good-looking, pleasant-spoken gentleman enough,” said Mace.

“Ah! that will do,” cried the parson, smiling, as he gazed into the maiden’s clear, bright eyes. “That will do, my rosebud; not a quiver of the eyelids; not a blush; not a trembling of the lips. Faith, child, you’ve set my heart at ease. There, keep thine own fast locked till the good, true man shall come and knock, and ask for entrance. Then, child, open it wide, and shut it, and lock him in, never to set him free.”

Mace nodded and smiled.

“That’s only part of my errand, child; the other is about Culverin Carr, our bold captain. What of him? Aha! does that prick?”

He held the girl’s hand tightly, for she turned half away, with a pained look in her face, and the tears rose to her eyes.

“Well, and ill,” cried Master Peasegood, shaking his head. “What does it mean, child? You care for him, I think?”

“I hardly know,” sighed Mace.

“Then you do,” said Master Peasegood, nodding his big head. “There’s no doubt about such matters, child. But tell me all – you may trust me – does he know you like him?”

“Oh, yes,” cried Mace, “and my father has forbidden him to come to the house.”

“Then he has good reason for it. Jeremiah Cobbe is hot, passionate, and excited enough to carry him to perdition, but he is just. Now, look here, Mace, do you think Captain Gil is the true, good man who should be locked up in your little heart?”

“Have – have you ill news of him?” faltered Mace, who a few hours before would have scornfully rebutted any charge against the choice of her heart.

“I am no tale-bearer, child,” said the parson, sternly. “My mission is to make peace, not war. Tell me, have you doubted friend Gil’s truth?”

For answer Mace sank upon her knees, and covered her face with her hands.

“Poor child, poor child!” muttered the parson, as he laid his hand upon her glossy hair. The next instant she had started with him to her feet, for there was a sharp crash as of some explosion, and, after a moment’s pause, a bellowing, rumbling roar, which shook the building to its foundations, and then seemed to roll into the distance and die away.

How Tom Croftly took his Chastisement

Sir Mark felt in anything but the best of tempers upon finding how thoroughly at home the stout parson of Roehurst was at the Pool-house. He had taken a dislike to him from the first, and the idea of his sharing the table with them at the next meal filled him with disgust.

However, with all a courtier's skill in hiding his own feelings, he smiled in reply to the founder's remarks, and tried to interest himself in the process before him.

It needed little effort, for, as a soldier, he could readily appreciate the shape and make of a good piece of artillery; and, setting aside all thought of Mace for the time being, he eagerly scanned the interior of the furnace-house.

"What do you mean by all this, Master Cobbe?" he said, pleasantly. "I am sent down here to reprimand you, and give an ample report on what I see, and, after the first sharp encounter, I find you treat me as the best of friends. You give me your daughter's society; you talk to me of your works; and now you are about to show me the secrets of your trade."

"And welcome," cried the founder, bluffly. "See all, learn all, and tell all, for I have nought to conceal. My powder is good, and my guns are good; but that is from skill, of which no one can rob me, or take away. Any man can make powder or cast cannon, but few can do these things well. There, my lad, once for all, don't you shrink from making what report you will. You will not offend me. But come, we are about to begin."

Sir Mark glanced round at the bright glow which lit up the whole place, and then at the furnace-mouth, from whose chinks a dazzling white light shone out, seeming to cut the darkness with long, thin rays, which struck the wall and the smoke-blackened, oaken beams that supported the roof, while it illumined the floor sufficiently to enable the visitor to see the dim figures of a couple of men, who were busy stooping over something in the middle of the building.

This he felt was the mould, and into it he knew that ere long the furnace-door would be vomiting the molten metal in a dazzling state, so bright that his eyes would hardly be able to bear the glare. He did not speak, for the roar made by the vast bellows, whose air was burning away the impurities of the iron, was almost deafening, and he could see that a good deal of the work was earned on by signs.

"A good time for a *tête-à-tête* with little Mace," he muttered, as he saw the founder slip off his doublet and roll the linen shirt up over his muscular arms. Then the knight took the place pointed out to him as one likely to be out of harm's way, and watched with eager interest the busy scene around.

Now the furnace was being urged to greater heat, and the vivid flames and sparks rushed out into the sunshine; then the founder was seen to stand right in the intense glare, and evidently throw in some ingredient upon the molten metal which seemed to seethe and bubble, and rise in the furnace as if about to overflow, while dazzling flames of violet, orange, and silver-white danced over the molten mass, and formed, with the silvery scintillations, a scene that riveted the courtier's eye.

As he gazed upon the weird-looking figures, half glowing in the light, half-hidden in the darkness, or others whose heads or bodies alone were seen in the strong glow of the furnaces, there was an unreality in the scene that sent a thrill through him.

"I would that big-tongued Jamie were here," he muttered, "coming upon it all by night and gazing in at yon window; he'd think he had come upon a demon's feast, and that the saints of Pandemonium were cooking hell-broth for all the witches and wizards of the land."

A shout from the founder roused him from his musings, and he shaded his eyes with his hands, and watched the furnace, whose light now grew more silvery every moment, and whose fluttering flames seemed to be more full of wondrous dyes. The light was sharper and more defined, and in the darkness below, where there were tiny points of light, shewing that there were crevices in the firebricks, Sir Mark could make out the figure of the founder standing with a great iron bar in his hands.

Suddenly a door was opened, and the founder was seen to be plunging the long bar into the molten metal, when once more vivid beams of light flashed out, mingled with coruscations of sparks, which darted here and there in fierce battle as if contending together, exploding with a loud crackling noise as they met.

Then once more the door was shut, and Sir Mark closed his eyes, which ached with the glare. The moment after he opened them to gaze upon the weird scene, as one after the other there came a series of loud strokes as of iron upon iron, and then from a bright star in the middle of the darkness, low down near the floor, a stream of pure liquid silver seemed to run, passing rapidly along the floor and suddenly disappearing.

Quicker and quicker it seemed to gush out, with dazzling flames dancing over it as it sped along. The whole building now was glorious with light, and seemed transformed; beams, rugged stone walls, flooring, all were glistening as if suddenly coated with silver and gold; and as, with parted lips and eager eyes, the founder's guest gazed upon the scene, and thought of how glorious was a cannon's birth, there was a sudden crash as if heaven and earth had come together; he was struck backwards, hurled as it were against the wall behind, and then, finding himself close to a window-opening, half fell, half dropped out into the open air to stagger away amidst the *débris* of broken tiles and wood that had fallen around.

He knew he was not hurt, but he felt confused and dazed as men from various parts ran up, women from the distant cottages came shrieking, and the occupants of the furnace-house, now roofless and smoking, staggered out panting and blackened, to look eagerly round at one another.

"My father – where is my father?" cried Mace, running up wild-eyed and pale.

There was no reply, and, without a moment's hesitation, she ran over the broken fragments of stone and wood lying about, to the arched door, and stepped in amidst the blinding smoke and reeking steam.

"Stop! oh, stop," cried Sir Mark. "Good heavens, men, she will lose her life."

Roused by his words, a couple of the men ran after the excited girl, but only reached the door as the founder came out looking blackened and half stunned, leaning upon his daughter's arm.

"I can't see any one there," he cried, as soon as he was out, and he began looking round at his men. "Are you all here, my lads?"

The men gazed at one another as if for the first time it had occurred to them that they ought to count their number, and at last, as Master Peasegood repeated the question, out of breath with his exertions to get there, some one exclaimed:

"We be all here, Master."

"Then help me to a flagon of ale, Mace," cried the founder.

"But father, dear, you are hurt; you are burned. Quick, some one, help get him to the house."

"Nay, nay, child, I'm not much hurt, and, as no one else is, loose my arm. Where's that Tom Croftly?"

"Here I be, master," said a gruff voice, and a grim, half-naked man, with the chest of a giant, came trembling forward, wiping the reek and sweat from his brow.

"You clumsy, bull-headed fool," roared the founder, dashing at him and delivering so sturdy a blow from his stalwart arm that the man staggered back, tried to recover himself, and then fell heavily, to sit up slowly the next moment, applying his hand to his cut forehead and gazing meditatively at the blood.

"You bean't going to stand that, Tom Croftly," whispered one who was bending over him. "Get up and pook him well, if you bean't a coward."

The foundryman gazed in Abel Churr's foxy eyes, and shook his head.

"Nay, nay, the master's right enough, though he did hit hard. I ought to ha' looked after the trade."

“What are you doing there, Abel Churr?” cried the ironfounder. “Here, Mace, lass, fetch me that ale.”

“What am I doing here, Mas’ Cobbe?” said the adder-hunter, as Mace ran off, satisfied now that her father was not hurt. “I heard the blowing up, and I knew some one would be burned, so I came. You’ll want a bit of adder’s fat for them burns, Mas’ Cobbe.”

“Out with thy trash!” cried the founder, angrily. “Here, you Tom Croftly, rise up and I’ll smite you down again.”

The great fellow began to rise slowly, with the obedience of a dog, but the parson interposed: —
“Nay, nay, Master Cobbe; thou hast done enough beating.”

“The master’s quite right,” said the foundryman; “I ought to have looked after the trade.”

“Right! Yes, you dolt!” cried Cobbe, angrily. “Have I not told you all a hundred times that every mould must be quite dry? and here you let me run the iron into one that must be half full of water.”

“I see to it all two hours ago, master,” said the foundryman; “and it was bravely dry, but I ought to have looked again, only somehow Mother Goodhugh coming put it out of my head.”

“And what did Mother Goodhugh come to you for?” said the founder, angrily.

“She come to help me to something for my little one who’s a bit weak this last month, master.”

“If you want to see Mother Goodhugh, you go to her,” cried the founder. “But for a chance, half of us might be lying stiff and cold – nay, parson, stiff and hot, roasted and scalded, and cooked by the iron and steam. There, get to work and clear up, and we must have all put to rights again. Tom Croftly, you’ve put a hundred good pounds out of my pouch through not seeing to that mould.”

The great foundryman rose up now, nodding and shaking his head, while his master turned to his guest.

“I never thought any more about you, Sir Mark,” he said. “Not hurt, I hope,” he continued, taking the flagon from Mace, and drawing up the lid with a clink; “Here, take a draught of this.”

“More frightened than hurt,” said Sir Mark, taking the flagon, bowing to Mace, and raising it to his lips.

“It was startling,” said the founder, grimly. “I say, squire, you can put that in the report to His Majesty. Ha, ha, ha!” he continued, after a pull at the ale. “If he had been here he’d have thought all the witches in Christendom had come about his ears, and here’s Mother Goodhugh again.”

There was a buzz in the little crowd, as the old woman came near to climb upon a heap of furnace-cinder, and stand pointing to the disroofed shed, mouthing and grinning maliciously.

“Cursed,” she cried; “cursed, all cursed. Bide and rest, all of you, and see how all I say will be fulfilled. Ha, ha, ha! How the wicked fall!”

“Nay, they don’t,” cried the founder, “or thou’d’st come down off that furnace-glass. Get thee home for a foul venom-spitting toad,” he added, angrily. “Come, Mace; come, Sir Mark, I can’t contain myself to-day if she begins to play Shimei and throw her stones.”

As he spoke, he took his daughter’s hand, and walked away, leaving Mother Goodhugh gesticulating, talking to the workpeople, and prophesying evil against the house of Cobbe.

Master Peasegood stood listening to her for a few moments, and then turned to the knight.

“As well try to stop a running stream, sir,” he said, quietly. “If I dam it in one place it will break out elsewhere. She must run until she’s dry:” and he followed the founder into the house.

How Gil signalled in vain

Gil Carr proved to be a sorry companion to fair, weak, amorous Mistress Anne after the encounter with Mace Cobbe; but it troubled the maiden very little, for she was in a kind of ecstasy. She had gone, half doubting, to Mother Goodhugh, and the old dame's teachings had proved a great success. For long enough her heart had been set on bringing the captain to her feet, for there was something romantic and dashing in his career. To her he was a perfect hero of romance, and she dwelt in her privacy upon his exploits, of which she had often heard. Then her jealous torments had been unbearable; and half in despair, half in harmony with her superstitious nature, she had had resort to the wise woman, and ended by abusing her for her want of success.

The coming of Sir Mark had turned her thoughts into a different channel, and she felt ready to oust Gil Carr from her heart. Then to her dismay she found even him gradually being drawn beneath Mace's influence; but now all had turned in her favour: Gil had wooed her, held her in his arms, and, better still, been seen in this position, while Mace was with Sir Mark.

"She may have him and welcome," cried Anne, with her old passion for Gil reviving moment by moment, as she felt now sure of gaining the dearest object of her heart. It was to her, then, nothing that Gil seemed cold and distant when he parted from her near her father's house, that must needs be she felt as she warmly pressed his hand; and then with cheeks flushed with hope, and joy in her heart, she hurried home full of faith in Mother Goodhugh, and ready again to seek her aid.

Gil was in a very different frame of mind as he strode away, and had not gone far before he saw before him the broad proportions of Parson Peasegood, whom he remembered now to have seen crossing one of the fields as he was walking with Mistress Anne.

"Ah, Master Peasegood," he cried, glad of something to divert his thoughts for the time being. "Well met. Here is what I promised you." As he spoke he took from his pocket a couple of short, clay pipes, and a little linen bag. "Use them with care, and don't become tobacco's slave."

"I thank you, captain," said the stout parson. "I will become no slave, but since his Majesty has written so much about the Indian weed it has begotten an itching in my sinful soul to know what it is like."

"I see," said Gil, smiling. "Well, that is Indian weed from Virginia. Shred it up fine with your knife, press it into the pipe, and then hold to it a light, and draw the smoke through thy lips, swallow it if thou canst, and then drive it forth through thy nostrils."

"Hold there!" said the parson, with his eyes twinkling. "I've watched it all, my good lad. I've seen Master Wat Kilby smoking away like one of friend Cobbe's furnace-chimneys, and I've seen Master Cobbe himself lie back in his chair and fume and dream, and I would fain have tried myself, for how can I condemn the sin with a good conscience if I do not know how evil it may be?"

"True, sir," said Gil, laughing; "and we all have our weak points."

"Even to playing fast and loose with ladies' hearts, Captain Gil," said the parson, with a peculiar look.

Gil's eyes flashed as he turned sharply round and faced his companion, who was about to lay one of his fat hands upon his arm; but the young man felt so irritable and unfit to listen to the other's words that he drew back, ran up the bank, and plunged at once into the forest, crashing through the undergrowth until he struck a faint track, and then winding in and out through the dark arcades for a good hour till he reached a deep ravine, down whose bottom he made his way, along the border of a little stream which trickled over the huge masses of sandstone from pool to pool, each of which held its half-score of trout ready to dart beneath the overhanging stones and under the roots of trees, to their little havens of refuge, till the interrupter of their solitude had passed.

After an hour's walking he came to a spot where the stream widened out a little, and he gave a nod of satisfaction as, fifty yards in front, he saw the tall gaunt form of Wat Kilby wading in the

pools, and stooping down from time to time beneath the overhanging stony banks to thrust in his hand, and more than once retire it with a glistening speckled trout, which he thrust into a satchel hanging beneath his arm.

The old fellow straightened his back and nodded, as the captain came up to seat himself upon a stone.

“Well, skipper,” said Wat, counting the trout through the canvas of his wallet.

“Well,” said the other. “I am afraid some folk have found out the store.”

“Not they,” growled the old fellow. “How could they?”

“I went up awhile ago, and saw half-a-dozen of the men with a lady whom they had found sitting on a stone in the narrows.”

“Yes, I know,” said Wat.

“You know?”

“Yes; I saw Mother Goodhugh take her up there with her eyes shut, and leave her on the stone.”

“You saw her?”

“To be sure,” growled the old fellow; “and I watched her till the lads come and took her, and you ran up.”

“And you didn’t interfere?”

“There was nothing to interfere about, skipper, and I thought it best for her to be frightened. Keep her from going again.”

“Did she go up higher?”

“Not a step.”

“Nor Mother Goodhugh?”

“Not half a step.”

“Why did she bring her there?”

“Hocus pocus. To scare her, to make her mutter charms or something. It was the out-of-the-way-est, ugliest place the old woman knew, so she took her there.”

“Do you think that’s the case?”

“To be sure. Mind you, I shouldn’t be surprised if Mother Goodhugh did get to know about it, either hunting herself or through that long, lanky, lizardly fellow, Abel Churr.”

“If Abel Churr did find out, and tell tales, I’d hang him to the yard-arm of our ship.”

“And bless the world by so doing,” said Wat, grimly. “Twenty-one,” he added, softly.

“What’s twenty-one?” said Gil, sharply.

“One-and-twenty trout,” replied Wat, who had finished his counting.

“Hang your trout!” cried Gil, impatiently.

“No; hang Abel Churr,” said Wat; “for he’s a lazy, sneaking, mischief-loving reptile. I’d like to put the rope around his neck.”

“Now go,” said Gil, sharply. “See the lads and get them together. We’ll have those stores up to-night.”

“The flour and all?”

“Everything. The sooner it is under cover the better. You can land all by the beeches at once, and to-night we’ll get it up.”

“What time shall we begin?”

“Leave the river at twelve. It will be two before we get all to the store, and we can be back soon after three.”

Wat nodded, and turned upon his heel; while Gil sat down beneath a shady tree, where he dreamily went over his position with respect to Mace, till evening was giving place to night, when he made his way back towards the foundry.

As he rose and left the stone where he had been sitting thinking so long, there was a slight rustle close at hand, such as might have been made by a snake or a lizard; but it was caused by no reptile,

for a human head rose slowly from out a clump of bracken, and, after waiting patiently and listening with all the caution of some wild animal, the head was lowered again. A low rustling noise followed, the grass and ferns quivering as something passed beneath them, and the track by which the owner of the head was slowly creeping away could be traced along the side of the ravine in the dim light, as if some hare or fox were cautiously working its way.

Quite half-a-mile was passed over in this wild-animal fashion before the bushes were parted, and Abel Churr rose up with a grim satisfied smile upon his face, to walk slowly away, rubbing his hands together, and evidently in high glee with something upon his mind.

Meanwhile, after waiting till the lights in the Pool-house began to go out one by one, Gil betook himself to his old tactics with the signal-sparks, for he argued that, after the serious result of Master Cobbe's last hindrance to his coming, the founder would try traps no more.

The night was again close and heavy, and he had no difficulty in obtaining four glow-worms, whose bright tails shed their liquid golden light, as he carefully raised them, bore them to the bank, and placed them diamond-wise, as of old. Then going cautiously to the edge of the river, he saw the bridge was in its place; crossed, listened, found all perfectly still, and went on to the open space beneath the projecting gable where Mace's window looked out from its clustering roses.

The light was out and the casement closed, and, though he waited, she made no sign.

To have called to her or whistled would have been to give notice of his presence to the founder, who might in his choler open a window and fire upon him. He did, however, venture to throw up a few tiny pebbles, which rattled loudly upon the glass, but that was all.

There was still no reply, not that Mace had not seen the glow-worms nor heard the other signals, but she felt that she could not respond to him that night. Her heart was sore within her, and, think of what she would, there ever before her was the little scene in the lane, with Mistress Anne leaning so lovingly upon Gil, and in spite of all that had passed – words, protestations, and the like – there was always the feeling upon her that Gil must have spoken tender words to Anne Beckley, or she would never have behaved to him as she did.

Then came other, older troubles, the thoughts of Mother Goodhugh and her curses on her father's trade – the trade that gave her many an aching heart – for living in that sylvan home it seemed so terrible and sad that all her father's works should be given to that one aim, the making of weapons of war, and the powder that should be used therein. Great pieces of artillery cast and finished with such care – the black shiny grains of powder, and for what? Solely to crush out life, to wage war, with misery, suffering, and pain. It seemed so terrible, and strange, and wrong, that those she loved should treat this trade so lightly, and readily distribute all that could be made.

Sweet Mace sighed, for her spirits were low indeed, and the thoughts that had haunted her these many years, even from childhood, came stronger than ever. Death, shadowy death, seemed to follow all her father's works, so that she asked herself was she not guilty in being there a participator as it were in all her father's acts, and whether she ought not to protest against his trade, and pray him to change his forges to the furtherance of a more peaceful end?

Close upon a couple of hours passed away, during which time Mace's heart went out to her lover, for she could not control it; but she herself sat silently sobbing in the corner of her room behind the snowy window curtains, whence she could dimly see the figure of Gil gazing up, the misty starry light of the summer night making it just visible, till tired out and heart-sick she saw it gradually melt away as he went back across the bridge to keep the appointment arranged with Wat Kilby.

How Master Peasegood entertained his Friend

Master Joseph Peasegood's little parsonage was a humble quiet spot, and accorded well with the moderate income he received as clerk of Roehurst. There were four rooms, and the roof was thatched over the bedchamber casements, which looked like two bright eyes peering from beneath a pair of overhanging brows. There was a pretty garden, in which the parson often worked, sheltered from the lane by a thick hedge, beneath which was his favourite seat, where he sat and read, with a rustic table before him, and a cherry-tree overhead to shade him from the sun. It was a noble cherry-tree, that bore the blackest and juiciest of fruit, though the parson never ate it, the birds taking all the trouble off his hands.

Master Peasegood was standing at his door, looking very red and warm, for he had been having a verbal encounter with Mistress Hilberry, his thin acid housekeeper and general servant in one.

It began in this wise, the lady being, according to her own account, the most humble and unpresuming of women, but all the same taking upon herself to say things that a less unpresuming person would not have dared.

"I don't say anything master," she had exclaimed sharply, "because it would be impertinence in me, but I can't help thinking that Sir Thomas and Master Cobbe, and all the principal people, will be annoyed to see you back-sliding in this way."

"Tut – tut – thou silly woman," said the parson. "Father Brisdone is a good and worthy man, and I may convert him to the right faith."

"Mind he does not convert thee, master," said the housekeeper. "These priests are as cunning as old sin. Why, I know on good authority that he's made very welcome at the Pool-house, and if they don't mind he'll carry 'em all to Rome."

"Not this hot weather, poor things, I hope," said Master Peasegood. "It's warm enough here; I don't know what it would be there."

"Much hotter, I know," said the woman, meaningly, as she went on spreading the table with the requisites for a meal – cold pink bacon, a tempting loaf, rich yellow butter, and a couple of ale-horns, with other requisites for the evening repast.

Master Peasegood had an angry reply upon his lips, but he wiped it off with his handkerchief, and walked to the window to see if his expected guest was on the way, while Mistress Hilberry went on talking.

"They've seen the lights again, Master Peasegood."

"Tut, woman: fie on thee! How can you believe such things."

"Because I've seen them myself, sir," said the woman, tartly. "Strange ungodly lights dancing up and down, and moving through the forest, and Mistress Croftly and others have seen them since."

"Marshy exhalations, luminous vapours, terrestrial lamps, Mistress Hilberry."

"I daresay they be, sir," said the woman with asperity. "It don't matter to me what you call them, but they're spirits, and just a year ago, about this time, Martin Lee was struck down by one of them with a noise like thunder. He was an ailing man for a twelvemonth after, shivering regularly at times when he should have been sound and well."

"Yes, I dare say," said Master Peasegood. "Hah! here he is."

He waddled down to the garden-gate, to open it for a thin, pale, grey man in a priest's cassock, who grasped his hand warmly, and then with a scared, hunted look in his eye, which made him glance uneasily around, as if in search of danger, he accompanied Master Peasegood into the parlour, where Mistress Hilberry received them with a portentous sniff.

"Peace be with thee, my daughter," the new-comer said, softly; but Mistress Hilberry seemed disposed to declare war, for she snorted, turned on her heel, and left the room with a good deal of rustling and noise.

The visitor looked pained as his eyes sought those of his host in an inquiring way.

“Only the weaker vessel,” said Master Peasegood, laughing. “Never heed her, Father Francis. She tells me thou wilt convert me, and I tell her I am going to convert thee. I’m glad to see you; but, ah!” he cried, holding up a warning finger, “thou hast been fasting over much. Quelling the spirit in us is one thing, making the body weak and sick another. Sit down, man, and fall to. We’ll have a long and cosy evening, and discuss politics and the matters of the world.”

He placed a chair for his guest, smiling pleasantly upon him the while, and then a goodly jug of ale being brought in by Mistress Hilberry, the two clerical friends made a hearty meal, after Father Brisdone had blessed the food.

“I ought not to eat this after your blessing,” said Master Peasegood, laughing, “but I shall. And now, good Father Francis, before we shelve religious matters for the evening, tell me outright, now, have you been trying to win over my little woman yonder at the Pool?”

For answer, Father Francis held out his hand.

“Nor the Captain?”

“Nay, not a word has passed my lips to him on the subject of religion.”

“Then it is agreed that there is to be a good and honest truce between us. Neither one nor the other is to play wolf round his neighbour’s sheepfold.”

“Brother Joseph,” said the guest, rising, taking a step forward, and laying his hands upon the other’s broad shoulder, “shame has kept me silent heretofore. Now, dear friend, I will confess.”

“Forbidden subject,” said Master Peasegood.

“Nay, nay, it is not. Your suspicions were right. I was starving when you came to me, and the fastings were enforced. I could not dig, to beg I was ashamed. The few poor people of my faith I could not trouble; and it had come to this, that I felt ready to lie down and die in the land where once our Church was wealthy, when I found that the age of miracles was, after all, not passed, for the last man of whom I could expect such a service brought me aid.”

“Bah, stuff! Sit down, man, and have some more bread and some of that good yellow butter. You’d have done as much for me;” and, half forcing his visitor into a chair, the host watched until he had made a hearty meal. “No more? Well, then, Mistress Hilberry shall clear away, and then I have a surprise for thee.”

Going to the door, and summoning the housekeeper, that lady quickly cleared the table, a lamp was lit, another jug of ale was placed upon the board, and then, as soon as they were alone, Master Joseph Peasegood went to an old-fashioned cupboard, and tenderly taking out the pipes and bag of tobacco he had received from Gil, he placed them on the table with a smile.

“Pipes? tobacco?” exclaimed Father Brisdone, drawing back his heavy chair.

“Yes; do they frighten thee?” said Master Peasegood.

“You do not mean to smoke?” said Father Brisdone, earnestly.

“I mean for both of us to smoke,” said Master Peasegood.

“Would it not be a sin?”

“Nay, I think not; though our Solomon Jamie says it is. But how can we know whether we ought to forbid or no if we have not proved smoking to be a sin?”

“A fallacious argument, Brother Joseph,” said the father, smiling. “We ought, then, to rob and slay and covet, to try whether they are sins before we condemn?”

“Nay,” said Master Peasegood, taking up a pipe, and beginning to open the little linen bag of weed, taking some out, and carefully shredding it with a knife. “Those have all been proved to be sins. This has not.”

“If you wish, I will try it, then,” said the father; and, as the tobacco was passed to him, he filled the little pipe before him, took the light provided by his friend, held it to the bowl, and puffed, while Master Joseph Peasegood did the same.

One little pipeful was smoked in silence, the ashes tapped from the bowl, and they smoked another pipeful, staring stolidly one at the other, as they sat on opposite sides of the table, till they had done, when there was a pause.

“What do you think of it?” said Master Peasegood, who, after several paroxysms of coughing, had refrained from trying to swallow the smoke, and contented himself with taking it into his mouth, and puffing it out.

“I feel more sick than sinful,” said the father, quietly. “And you?”

“I have a peculiar tightness of the brain, and a tendency to fancy I am as thin as thee, instead of as fat as I. Father Brisdone, in my present state, I think the greatest sin I should commit would be to go to my couch. Wilt try another pipe?”

“Nay,” said Father Brisdone, “I think two will suffice. King James must have felt like I when he wrote his work on this wondrous weed. It strikes me as strange that man should care to burn this herb when it is so medical in its effects.”

“Ay, it is,” said Master Peasegood. “It reminds me of my sensations when I was once prevailed upon by Dame – nay, she was Mistress Beckley then, for Sir Thomas had not paid a thousand pounds for his title – by Mistress Beckley to drink of a wonderful decoction of hers, made of sundry simples – agrimony, rue, marshmallow, and dandelion. It has always been my custom to drink heartily, Father Brisdone, so I drank lustily from the silver mug in which it was placed. Poor mug, it was an insult to the silver to put such villainous stuff therein. The very swine would have turned up their noses and screwed their tails; and I forsooth, for good manners’ sake, gulped it down. Here, father, drink some of this honest ale, and let us take the taste of the Indian weed from our lips.”

He passed the big mug to his friend, and he drank and returned it to Master Peasegood, who quaffed most heartily; and then, with doleful visages, the two friends sat and gazed in each other’s eyes.

“I don’t feel any better, Father Brisdone,” said Master Peasegood at last. “If this be a sin, this smoking, it carries its own punishment. Let us out into the open air.”

“Yes,” said his visitor, “the fresh night wind may revive us. But where got you this tobacco, did you say?”

“From Captain Gil,” replied Master Peasegood; and then, as they strolled out of the gate into the soft night-air, he continued, “My mind misgives me about that lad, father. What are we to do about him?”

“Warn him if he be in the way of ill, which I hope is not the case, for he is a brave, true lad, ready to help one of my faith in trouble. Many is the fugitive he has taken across to peace and safety in his ship.”

“For which, were it known, he would be most surely hanged or shot.”

Father Brisdone sighed.

“It is strange,” he said, “that we should become such Mends, Master Peasegood.”

“Ay, it is strange,” said the other; and feeling refreshed by the night-air they walked softly up and down conversing upon the political state of the country, the coming of King James’s messenger, and his stay at the Pool-house, till suddenly Master Peasegood drew his companion’s attention to a sound.

They were standing in a narrow path, running at right angles from a well-marked track; and as Master Peasegood spoke there was the snort of a horse and the rattle of harness, followed by much trampling; and, going a little forward, they could dimly see the figures of armed men by the light of lanterns which two of the horses carried at their head-stalls.

“Why, they are loaded with something, father,” said the stout clerk. “And, good – ”

He was going to say “gracious,” but the words were checked upon his lips as a couple of heavy blankets were thrown over his and Father Brisdone’s heads and they were dragged heavily to the ground.

How the Forest Spirits paid their Debts

At the appointed time, Captain Gil made his way to where, some twenty strong, his crew were sitting and standing beneath a wide-spreading tree, with some forty horses grouped around, one and all heavily laden with sacks, barrels slung on either side, heavy boxes, and rolls of sailcloth. Some of the men were smoking, some minding the horses, while others lolled about, half-asleep, upon the ground.

If by chance any of the few rustic people, whose houses were scattered here and there, could have seen them in the shadow of the trees, they might very well have been excused for taking them for occupants of some nether region; while those whose horses did duty for the night, if they found them wet and weary, said nothing, but took it all as a matter of course, feeling as they did sure of encountering trouble if they made a stir, and being satisfied that their silence would be paid for in some indirect manner.

Farmer Goodsell's team was taken several times over; and one morning he went into the stables to find the horses so weary and dirty that he swore he would stand it no longer, and fetched his wife to see.

She held up her hands and opened her eyes wide.

"It be witchcraft, Jarge," she exclaimed.

"Nay – nay, girl," he cried; "it be somebody else's craft, and what's that on the bin?"

Mrs Farmer Goodsell took up a packet, opened, looked at it, and her eyes brightened as she ran to the light.

"As fine a bit of silk as I ever see," she said, with sparkling eyes; "and look, what's this?"

"Indian weed, my lass – tobacky," said the farmer, with his face growing smooth. "Hi! Harry, feed these horses and give them a rub down."

This was a sample of the treatment the owners received, so as the years glided on it grew to be the custom to say nothing whatever when horses were taken, for a present of some kind was certain to follow – strangely-shaped flasks of strong waters, pieces of velvet from Italy, curious bits of silk from India and China; and, for the use of horses taken from the Pool-house, Master Cobbe, just when he had rather angrily told his daughter that he should keep the stable locked, found a heavy bale in the porch one morning, wet with dew, and on opening it he found himself the possessor of a soft carpet from the land of the Turk.

It was well known that some kind of secret business was carried on, but the more sage people shut their eyes and said nothing, while the weak talked of witches and the like, and laid the strange proceedings at Mother Goodhugh's door. For the greater the ignorance, the deeper the love of the mysterious and weird; and hence, with a monarch on the throne whose wisdom was developing itself in literary crusades against the sin of spiritual commerce, it was no wonder that when distorted verbal versions of the British Solomon's utterances reached Roehurst they should tend to strengthen the simple-minded people's belief in witchcraft and wise-womanry, evil spirits, and visions of the night.

The appearance of Gil amongst the resting men acted like magic. A few short orders, and without a word a couple of lanterns were lit, attached to the foremost horses, and, well-armed, silent, and watchful, the little party set off in single file right through the forest, Wat Kilby taking the lead and the captain walking with the rear.

Once or twice there were short halts to readjust some pack or tighten the ropes that slung some cask; but otherwise there was the quiet tread of the horses' hoofs and an occasional snort to break the silence of the night. Not a man spoke save the gaunt old sailor Wat, who gruffly gave an order or two, and perhaps changed the direction of the convoy.

Trees switched and rustled their branches as the heavy horseloads brushed against them; the wild animals of the wood scampered off at the sight of the dim lanterns; but they had been journeying

on for quite an hour before a faint whistle placed Wat Kilby on the *qui vive*, when, seeing what was wrong, he and a couple more men stole off amongst the trees to get to the rear of those who were watching the strange file, and directly after the two clerks were struggling on the ground in utter darkness, while the horses passed on, and Gil came abreast.

“What is it?” he asked, in a low voice.

“We’ve made a mistake, skipper,” growled Wat Kilby. “It’s the parson and the holy father.”

“What were they doing here?”

“Watching,” growled Wat.

“Pass on, every one,” said Gil, quietly. “I will speak to them. I’ll join you at the mouth.”

The sound of the horses’ hoofs was already dying away in the distance, and Wat and his companions seemed to melt softly into the darkness, while, quietly going down on one knee, the captain drew off the rough pieces of cloth from the faces of the prostrate clerks, who, finding themselves at liberty, sat up.

“I hope you are not hurt, father,” said Gil to Father Brisdone.

“Ah, my son, is it you?” was the reply. “Nay, I am not hurt, though the men were rough.”

“But I am hurt,” cried Master Peasegood, angrily. “I thought it was one of your games, Captain Gil Carr. Zounds, sir, Sir Thomas Beckley shall know of it, and constables and fighting-men shall come and clear your nest of hornets away. Zounds, father, if I were of your faith, I’d excommunicate him.”

“You are hasty, Master Peasegood,” said Gil, quietly. “Do not rail at me. I have done nothing but set you at liberty.”

“But you had us seized.”

“Nay, indeed, I knew nothing until I came upon you here, and I have set you at liberty. You are quite free; go in peace.”

“Quite free; go in peace!” cried Master Peasegood. “Zounds, sir, is this a free country – is this his Majesty’s high-way, or are you the lord of it all! I’ll have it stopped.”

“Nay, nay, Master Peasegood, you are angry, and you will stop nothing. You must have seen the forest spirits, and they interfered with you.”

“Bah! away with thy trash.”

“Ah, well, call it what you like. Good-night, Master Peasegood; good-night, Father Brisdone; can I do anything for you? I must go. I shall tell the forest spirits that they need fear nothing from you, Master Peasegood. They must have thought they had captured the doughty knight Sir Mark. Good-night.”

“The impudent dog! to compare my figure with that of a spindle of a knight. Bah! tush! rubbish! Come, Father Brisdone, we will get indoors; the night-air is unwholesome with these spirits about. But he’s right; I shall say nothing, and I’m sure that nothing will fall from thee.”

The two friends turned and went back towards the parson’s cottage, while Gil hurried on to overtake his party of well-armed men.

He was not long in reaching the last horse, and walked steadily by its side; he came to a halt in the dark ravine just below where Mistress Anne had been seated for so long upon the stone, and here a busy scene took place, the horses being rapidly unladen, and pack, chest, and barrel being carried or rolled along a shelf of rock beneath an overhanging ledge of sandstone, where the little gorge seemed to come to a sudden stop before branching out in a fresh direction.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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