THE ADVENTURES OF HARRY ROCHESTER

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A Tale of the Days of Marlborough and Eugene

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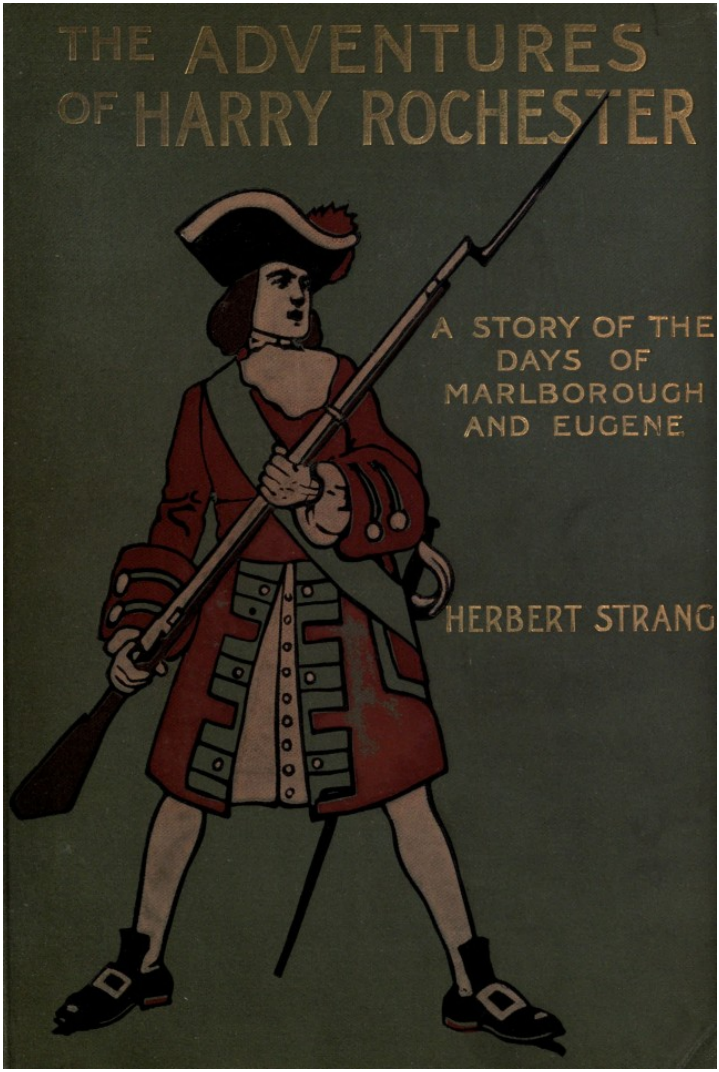
The Adventures of Harry Rochester

A Tale of the Days of Marlborough and Eugene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HERBERT STRANG

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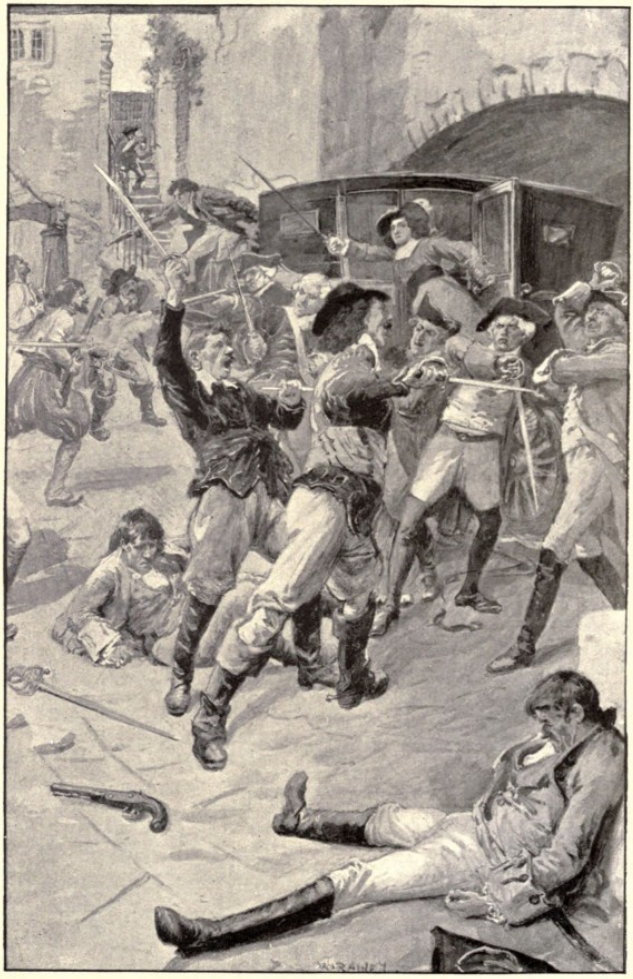

The Fight in the Castle Yard

The Fight in the Castle Yard

BY

HERBERT STRANG

AUTHOR OF "TOM BURNABY" "BOYS OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE"
"KOBO: A STORY OF THE RUSSO-JAPANESE WAR"

Illustrated by William Rainey, R.I.

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"Honour hath three things in it: the vantage-ground to do good; the approach to kings and principal persons; and the raising of a man's own fortunes."
—*Bacon.*

My dear Tom,

You received my former books so kindly that I feel assured you will not object to have this volume inscribed with your name. I am not the less convinced of this because you know well the country in which my opening scenes are laid, and I had the pleasure last year of playing cricket with you within a few miles of the village here disguised as Winton St. Mary.

I hope you will bear with me for one minute while I explain that in writing this book I had three aims. First, to tell a good story: that of course. Secondly, to give some account of the operations that resulted in one of the most brilliant victories ever gained by our British arms. Thirdly, to throw some light—fitful, it may be, but as clear as the circumstances of my story admitted—on life and manners two hundred years ago. History, as you have no doubt already learnt, is not merely campaigning; and I shall be well pleased if these pages enlarge your knowledge, in ever so slight

a degree, of an interesting period in our country's annals. And if you, or any other Christ's Hospital boy, should convict me of borrowing a week from the life of a great personage, or of antedating by a little a development in our national pastime—well, I shall feel complimented by such evidence of careful reading, and not be in the least abashed.

I take the opportunity of this open letter to acknowledge my indebtedness to the monumental "Mémoires militaires rélatifs à la succession d'Espagne" issued by the French General Staff; to Mr. Austin Dobson for a detail which only his perfect knowledge of the 18th century could so readily have supplied; and to Lord Wolseley's brilliant life of Marlborough, which every student of military history must hope so competent a hand will continue and complete.

Yours very sincerely, *HERBERT STRANG.*

Michaelmas Day, 1905.

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CHAPTER I
The Queen’s Purse-Bearer

Winton St. Mary—Cricket: Old Style—Last Man In—Bowled—The Gaffer Explains—More Explanations—Parson Rochester—”The Boy”—Cambridge in the Field—Village Batsmen—Old Everlasting makes One—The Squire—An Invitation—Lord Godolphin is Interested—An Uphill Game—Young Pa’son—The Winning Hit

”Stap me, Frank, if ever I rattle my old bones over these roads again! Every joint in me aches; every wrinkle—and I’ve too many—is filled with dust; and my wig—plague on it, Frank, my wig’s a doormat. Look at it—whew!”

My lord Godolphin took off his cocked hat, removed his full periwig, and shook it over the side of the calash, wrying his lips as the horse of one of his escort started at the sudden cloud. My lord had good excuse for his petulance. It was a brilliant June day, in a summer of glorious weather, and the Wiltshire

roads, no better nor worse than other English highways in the year 1702, were thick with white dust, which the autumn rains would by and by transform into the stickiest of clinging mud. The Lord High Treasurer, as he lay back wearily on his cushions, looked, with his lean, lined, swarthy face and close-cropt grizzled poll, every day of his fifty-eight years. He was returning with his son Francis, now nearly twenty-three, from a visit to his estates in Cornwall. Had he been a younger man he would no doubt have ridden his own horse; had he been of lower rank he might have travelled by the public coach; but being near sixty, a baron, and lord of the Treasury to boot, he drove in his private four-horsed calash, with two red-coated postilions, and four sturdy liveried henchmen on horseback, all well armed against the perils of footpads and highwaymen.

It was nearing noon on this bright, hot morning, and my lord had begun to acknowledge to himself that he would barely complete his journey to London that day.

"Where are we now, Dickory?" he asked languidly of the nearest rider on the off-side.

"Nigh Winton St. Mary, my lord," replied the man. "Down the avenue yonder, my lord; then the common, and the church on the right, and the village here and there bearing to the left, as you might say, my lord."

"Look 'ee, Frank, we'll draw up at Winton St. Mary and wet our whistles. My lady Marlborough expects us in town to-night, to be sure; but she must e'en be content to wait. Time was——eh, my boy?—but now, egad, I'll not kill myself for her or any woman."

"'Twould be a calamity—for the nation, sir," said Frank Godolphin with a grin.

"So it would, i' faith. Never fear, Frank, I'll not make way for you for ten years to come. But what's afoot yonder? A fair, eh?"

The carriage had threaded a fine avenue of elms, and come within sight of the village common, which stretched away beyond and behind the church, an expanse of rough turf now somewhat parched and browned, broken here by a patch of shrub, there by a dwindling pond, and bounded in the distance by the thick coverts of the manor-house. My lord's exclamation had been called forth by the bright spectacle that met his eyes. At the side of the road, and encroaching also on the grass, were ranged a number of vehicles of various sizes and descriptions, from the humble donkey-cart of a sherbet seller to the lofty coach of some county magnate. Between the carriages the travellers caught glimpses of a crowd; and indeed, as they drew nearer to the scene, their ears were assailed by sundry shoutings and clappings that seemed to betoken incidents of sport or pastime. My lord Godolphin, for all his coldness and reserve in his official dealings, was in his moments a keen sportsman; from a horse-race to a main of cock-fighting

or a sword-match, nothing that had in it the element of sport came amiss to him; and as he replaced his wig and settled his hat upon it his eyes lit up with an anticipation vastly different from his air of weary discontent.

"Split me, Frank," he cried in a more animated tone than was usual with him; "whatever it is, 'twill cheer us up. John," he added to the postilion, "drive on to the grass, and stop at the first opening you find in the ring. Odsbodikins, 'tis a game at cricket; we'll make an afternoon of it, Frank, and brave your mother-in-law's anger, come what may."

The postilions whipped up their horses, wheeled to the right, and drove with many a jolt on to the common, passing behind the row of vehicles until they came to an interval between one of the larger sort and a dray heaped with barrels of cider. There they pulled up sideways to the crowd, over whose heads the occupants of the calash looked curiously towards the scene of the game. It was clearly an exciting moment, for beyond a casual turning of the head the nearest spectators gave no heed to the new-comers. A space was roped in at some distance in front of the church, and within the ring the wickets were pitched—very primitive compared with the well-turned polished apparatus of to-day. The stumps were two short sticks forked at the top, stuck at a backward slant into the turf about a foot apart, with one long bail across them. Nothing had been done to prepare the pitch; the grass was short and dry and stubby, with a tuft here and there likely to trip an unwary fielder headlong. There was no crease, but a hole in the ground. Nor was there any uniformity of attire among the players: all had the stockings and pantaloons of daily wear, and if there was any difference in their shirts, it was due merely to their difference in rank and wealth.

"Over" had just been called as Lord Godolphin and his son drove up, and something in the attitude of the crowd seemed to show that the game was at a crisis. The umpires, armed with rough curved bats somewhat like long spoons, had just taken their new places, and the batsman who was to receive the first ball of the new over was taking his block. A tall, loose-limbed young fellow, he held his bat with an air of easy confidence.

"Egad, sir, 'tis Gilbert Young," said Frank Godolphin to his father. "I knew him at Cambridge: a sticker. Who's the bowler? I don't know him."

The bowler was a youth, a mere stripling of some sixteen or seventeen years, who stood at his end of the wicket, ball in hand, awaiting the word to "play". His loose shirt was open at the neck; his black hair, not yet cropt for a wig, fell in a strong thick mass over his brow; and as he waited for the batsman to complete his somewhat fastidious preparations, he once or twice pushed up the heavy cluster with his left hand.

"Gibs was ever a tantalising beast," said Frank aside. "Hi, you fellow!" he shouted to a broad-shouldered yokel who stood just in front of him by the rope,

”how stands the score?”

The man addressed looked over his shoulder, and seeing that the speaker was one of the ”quality” he doffed his cap and replied:

”’Tis ninety-four notches, your honour, and last man in. Has a’ready twenty-vive to hisself, and the Winton boys can’t get un out.”

”Play!” cried the umpire. The batsman stood to his block, and looked round the field with a smile of confidence. The bowler gave a quick glance around, took a light run of some three yards, and delivered the ball—underhand, for round-arm bowling was not yet invented. The ball travelled swiftly, no more than two or three feet above the ground, pitched in front of the block-hole, and was driven hard to the off towards a thick-set, grimy-looking individual—the village smith. He, bending to field the ball, missed it, swung round to run after it, and fell sprawling over a tussock of grass, amid yells of mingled derision and disappointment.

”Pick theeself up, Lumpy!” roared the man to whom Frank Godolphin had spoken. But the ball had already been fielded by Long Robin the tanner, running round from long-on. Sir Gilbert meanwhile had got back to his end of the wicket, and the scorer, seated near the umpire, had cut two notches in the scoring stick.

Again the ball was bowled, with an even lower delivery than before. The batsman stepped a yard out of his ground and caught the ball on the rise; it flew high over the head of the remotest fieldsman, over the rope, over the crowd, and dropped within a foot of the lych-gate of the church. Loud cheers from a party of gentlemen mounted on coaches in front of a tent greeted this stroke; four notches were cut to the credit of the side, bringing the score to a hundred. There was dead silence among the crowd now; it was plain that their sympathies lay with the out side, and this ominous opening of the new bowler’s over was a check upon their enjoyment.

Sir Gilbert once more stood to his block. For his third ball the bowler took his run on the other side of the wicket. His delivery this time was a little higher: the ball pitched awkwardly, and the batsman seemed to be in two minds what to do with it. His hesitation was fatal. With a perplexing twist the ball slid along the ground past his bat, hit the off stump, and just dislodged the bail, which fell perpendicularly and lay across between the sticks. Sir Gilbert looked at it for a moment with rueful countenance, then marched towards the tent, while the crowd cheered and, the innings being over, made for the stalls and carts, at which ale and cider and gingerbread were to be had.

”Egad, ’twas well bowled,” ejaculated Lord Godolphin; ”a cunning ball, a most teasing twist; capital, capital!”

”I’ll go and speak to Gibs,” said Frank. ”Will you come, sir?”

”Not I, i’ faith. ’Tis too hot. Bring him to me. I’ll drink a glass of cider here

and wait your return."

There was a cider cart near at hand, and his man Dickory brought my lord a brimming bumper drawn from the wood. He winced as the tart liquor touched his palate, unaccustomed to such homely drink; but it was at least cool and refreshing, and he finished the bumper. As he gave it back he noticed an old man slowly approaching, leaning with one hand upon a stout knobby stick of oak, and holding in the other a rough three-legged stool, which he placed between my lord's calash and the rope. He was a fine-looking old man, dressed in plain country homespun; his cheeks were seamed and weather-beaten, but there was still a brightness in his eyes and an erectness in his figure that bespoke health and the joy of life. He sat down on the stool, took off his hat and wiped his brow, then, resting both hands on his stick, looked placidly around him. There was no one near to him; the space was clear, for players and spectators had all flocked their several ways to get refreshment, and for some minutes the old man sat alone. Then Lord Godolphin, to ease his limbs and kill time, stepped out of his carriage and went towards the veteran.

"Well, gaffer," he said, "have ye come out to get a sunning?"

The old man looked up.

"Ay sure, your honour," he said, "and to zee the match. You med think me too old; true, I be gone eighty; come Martinmas I shall be eighty-one, and I ha'n't a wamblen tooth in my head—not one, old as I be. A man's as old as he feels, says my boy—one o' the wise sayens he has: I ha'n't felt no older this twenty year, nay, nor twenty-vive year neither."

"By George! I wish I could say the same. What's the match, gaffer?"

"Well, they do say 'tis for a wager; 'tis all 'I'll lay ye this' and 'I'll lay ye that' in these days. I don't know the rights on't, but 'tis said it all come about at a supper up at Squire's.—Do 'ee know Squire? Eh well, there be the house, yonder among the trees. Squire's son be hot wi' his tongue, and at this same supper—I tell 'ee as I yeard it—he wagered young Master Godfrey of the Grange he'd bring eleven young gen'lmen from Cambridge college as would beat our village players at the cricket. A hunnerd guineas was the wager, so 'tis said. Master Godfrey he ups and says 'Done wi' 'ee', and so 'tis come about. The Cambridge younkers be all high gentry, every man on 'em; our folks, as your honour med see, be just or'nary folks in the main: there's Long Robin the tanner and Lumpy the smith—he that turned topsy-turvy a-hunten the ball by there; and Honest John the miller: Old Everlasten they calls un, 'cause he never gets cotched out nor bowled neither: ay, a good stick is Old Everlasten, wi' a tough skin of his own. And there be Soapy Dick the barber, and Tom cobbler, and more of the village folk; and the only gentry among 'em is Master Godfrey hisself and pa'son's son, and he don't count for gentry wi' some. Do 'ee know pa'son? a good man, saven

your honour, ay, a right good man is Pa'son Rochester, and stands up to old Squire like a game-cock, so he do—a right good man is pa'son, ay sure. And his son Harry—well, to tell 'ee the truth, I'm main fond of the lad; main fond; 'tis a well-favoured lad, well spoken too, and he thinks a deal o' me, he do, and I thinks a deal o' he. Why, 'twas he bowled that artful ball as put out t' last man from Cambridge college.—There, my old tongue runs on; I don't offend your honour?"

"Not a whit," said my lord. "The young bowler is the parson's son, eh? Bred for a parson too, I suppose?"

"He's over young yet, your honour, but a month gone seventeen. He said to me only yesterday: 'Gaffer,' says he, 'what'll 'ee do 'ithout me when I go up to Oxford?' He be gwine come October, a' believe. 'Twas at Oxford college they made his feyther a pa'son, so belike the lad'll put on the petticoats too, though sure he's fit for summat better. But he'll make a good pa'son if he takes arter his feyther. Bless 'ee, Pa'son Rochester be the only man in the parish as a'n't afeard o' Squire. I be afeard o' Squire, I be, though 'ee med not think it. Ah! he's a hard man, is Squire. A' fell out with pa'son first 'cause he wouldn't be his chaplain—goo up t' hall an' say grace and eat the mutton and turmuts, an' come away wi'out pudden. Wi'out pudden!—I wouldn't goo wi'out pudden for no man; that's why I first took a fancy for pa'son. Then Squire, he wanted to fence in a big slice of this common land, as ha' belonged to the folks of Winton Simmary time wi'out mind; and pa'son stood up to 'n, and told 'n flat to his face 'twas agen the law, an' he had the law on 'm, he did; an' the wise judges up in Lun'on town said as how Squire were wrong. But Lor' bless 'ee, Squire be as obstinate as a pig; he don't care nowt for judges; he ups and 'peals to King Willum hisself. Then King Willum dies, poor feller, an' Queen Anne sits proud on the gold throne, an' there 'tis; 'twill take a time for her poor woman's mind to understand the rights o' the matter; her don't know pa'son so well as we."

"Or she might make him a bishop, eh? Perhaps I can put in a word for him," said my lord jestingly.

The old man stared.

"And who med 'ee be, your honour, if I mebbe so bold to axe?" he said slowly.

"I? Oh—well, I have care of the Queen's purse."

"There now, and I've been talken to 'ee just as if 'ee were a knight or squire, when I med ha' known 'ee by your cut for one of the mighty o' the earth. But 'ee'll forgive a old man—ay, gone eighty year. I was born three year afore Scotch Jamie died; no sart of a king was Jamie, a wamblen loon, so I've yeard tell. And Charles One, he was well-favoured before the Lord, true, but not a man of his word. Nay, Noll Crum'ell was the right sart o' king; I mind un well. I was a trooper in his regiment, and we was as fine a set o' men as ever trod neat's leather, true, we was.

I rode wi' un to Marston Moor in '44, nigh zixty year back. Ay, a right king was old Noll. And I fought in Flanders when Noll was friends with the French king; but I left that line o' life when Charles Two come back with his French madams; and now we be a-fighten the French, so 'tis said; 'twas what us Englishmen was born for, to be sure; ay, that 'tis."

Here my lord's attention was attracted towards a group of villagers approaching. They were led by a short well-set-up fellow with a humorous cast of face; his thumbs were stuck into his arm-pits, and as he walked he was singing to the accompaniment of a flute played by the man at his side. The old man looked towards him and smiled affectionately.

"'Tis my boy a-comen," he said. "Was born in '59, your honour, the year afore Charles Two coom back; and I chrisomed un Sherebiah Stand-up-and-bless out of Nehemiah nine; a good boy, though wilful."

The boy of forty-three was singing lustily:

"'Twas on a jolly summer's morn, the twenty-first of May,
Giles Scroggins took his turmut-hoe, and with it trudged away.
For some delights in hay-makin', and some they fancies mowin',
But of all the trades as I likes best, give I the turmut hoein'.
For the fly, the fly, the fly is on the turmut;
And 'tis all my eye for we to try, to keep fly off the turmut."

"Mum, boy, mum!" said his father. "The boy has a sweet breast, your honour," he added, turning to Godolphin, "and 'tis my belief 'twill lead un into bad company in the days o' his youth. He *will* sing 'Sir Simon the King' and 'Bobbing Joan', and other sinful ditties. Ah! I had a good breast in my time; and you should ha' yeard Noll's men sing as we marched into Preston fight; I could sing counter to any man.—Boy, doff your hat to the Queen's purse-bearer.—Ay, 'twas psa'ms an' hymns an' speritual songs in my time, as the Book says."

"Sarvant, yer honour," said the new-comer, bobbing to Godolphin. "Feyther been taken away my good name? 'Tis a wise feyther knows his own child; feyther o' mine forgot that when he named me Sherebiah Stand-up-and-bless. Beant the fault o' my name I ha'n't took to bad courses. But there, he's a old ancient man, nigh ready for churchyard—bean't 'ee, dad?"

"Not till I make a man on 'ee, boy."

"May I present my friend Sir Gilbert Young, sir?" said Frank Godolphin, coming up at this moment through the gathering crowd.

My lord bowed and swept off his hat in the courtly fashion of the day, in response to a still lower salutation from the young Cambridge man.

"I am honoured, my lord," said Sir Gilbert.

"My lard, i' fecks!" ejaculated Sherebiah's father, with a startled look. "My lard,—an' I ha'n't even pulled my forelock! Boy, doff your cap to my lard! And the Book says, 'They shall stand afore princes', and I'm a-sitten!"

The old fellow began to struggle to his feet with the aid of his staff, but Godolphin laid his hand on his arm, and pressed him down.

"Sit fast, gaffer," he said. "See, the players are coming out again. I am pleased to have met one of Noll's veterans so hale and hearty, and I hope your son will turn out as great a comfort to you as mine."

He put his arm fondly through Frank's, and returned to his carriage. The crowd was collecting about the rope, and the Cambridge men were already taking their places in the field. Their score of a hundred was higher than the average in those days, and the villagers were eagerly discussing the chances of their team excelling it. They had seen nothing of the other side's bowling powers, but as they compared notes on the various merits as batsmen of Honest John, and Long Robin, and Lumpy, and the rest, many of them shook their heads and looked rather down in the mouth.

The first pair of batsmen came to the wickets. They were Old Everlasting and Soapy Dick. The former took the first over, bowled by Gilbert Young, the captain of the team, and calmly blocked every ball of the four, giving a wink to his friends in the crowd when over was called. Soapy Dick, at the other wicket, was a little man with very red hair brushed up into a sort of top-knot in front. He handled his bat in a nervous manner, and was made still more nervous by the cries of the crowd.

"Hit un, Soapy!" cried one yokel. "Doan't be afeard, man."

"Gi't lather, Soapy!" shouted another, whose cheeks cried out for the barber's attentions.

Dick grinned mirthlessly, and fixed his eyes on the bowler at the other end. The ball came towards him—a slow, tempting lob that was too easy to let pass. Dick lifted his bat and smote; the ball returned gently to the bowler's hands, and a roar of derision sped the shame-faced little barber back to the tent. One wicket down, and no notches!—a bad beginning for Winton St. Mary.

Lumpy was the next to appear. He waddled across the grass turning up his sleeves—a fat little fellow with bandy legs, and arms as thick as most men's thighs. As he stood to take his block, he seemed to handle the bat with contemptuous surprise, as though wondering what use that was to a man accustomed to wield the sledgehammer at the anvil. Satisfied with his position, he planted his feet firmly, drew his left hand across his mouth, and glared fiercely at the bowler. He was not to be so easily tempted as poor Soapy Dick had been. He waited for the ball, and as it rose brought his bat down upon it with a perpendicular blow

that appeared to drive it into the turf, where it lay dead. The Cambridge men roared with laughter, the crowd applauded vigorously, and Lumpy once more wiped his mouth on the back of his hand. The third ball of the over came, pitching slightly to leg. Lumpy jumped completely round as the ball reached him, and with a tremendous swipe sent it high over long-stop's head into a patch of gorse, whence it was not recovered until he had had three notches cut to his credit. The last ball of the over thus came to Old Everlasting, who solemnly blocked it, and beamed upon the spectators with his usual smug smile.

Lumpy had but a short life, after all. There was no cunning about him; if he hit a ball it was bound to travel far, but he struck out every time with the same violence, and when he missed could hardly recover his balance. In twenty minutes he had scored eleven notches, Old Everlasting having consistently done nothing but block the balls that fell to him; then, in hitting out, Lumpy, never too steady on his bow leg's, overbalanced himself and fell flat, and the long bail was promptly knocked off by the wicket-keeper. Two wickets down for eleven.

After this, disaster followed disaster in such rapid succession that the villagers looked blue. Long Robin the tanner was caught second ball, and was afterwards heard complaining bitterly of the bad leather the ball was made of. Tom the cobbler came to the wicket with a bat of his own—one that he kept hanging behind his kitchen door, and took down every week for a thorough greasing. He scored six notches, then hit a ball into his wicket, and in the tent afterwards explained to his cronies that another week's greasing would have prevented the accident. Four wickets were now down for seventeen, and Godfrey Fanshawe himself came in, amid a great outburst of cheers from the crowd, with whom he was very popular, and who looked to him, as the originator of the match and the captain of the team, to retrieve the fortunes of the day. He snicked his first ball for one; then Old Everlasting evoked intense enthusiasm by poking a ball between slip and point, and scoring his first notch. The score rose slowly to thirty-one, Fanshawe making all the runs, and then he ran himself out in trying to snatch an extra from an overthrow. The fifth wicket was down. Fanshawe was reputed the best batsman in the team, and Winton St. Mary was still sixty-nine behind. There was much shaking of the head among the villagers, and they waited in glum silence for the next man to appear.

"Look 'ee!" exclaimed the old trooper suddenly, "beant that old Squire a-comen down-along by covert fence?"

"True, Gaffer Minshull," said a by-stander; "what eyes 'ee've got, for a old ancient soul! 'Tis old Squire sure enough, and young Squire and the Cap'n wi' un."

Old Minshull leant forward on his stick, and with pursed lips peered at the three figures approaching. One was a burly man in the prime of life, dressed in

semi-military garb—a feathered hat, long red coat marked with many stains and wanting some buttons, leather breeches, and spurred boots. His features were coarse and red, his eyes prominent and blood-shot; he walked with a swagger, his left hand on his sword-hilt. The second was a youth of some twenty years, dressed in the extremity of foppishness. A black hat, looped up and cocked over one eye, crowned a full auburn wig fastidiously curled. The coat was blue, the waistcoat purple, open to display a fine holland shirt. A laced steinkirk was tucked in at the breast. The breeches matched the vest, the stockings were of red silk, the shoes had high red heels and large silver buckles. In Mr. Piers Berkeley's mouth was a toothpick; from one of the buttons of his coat dangled an amber-headed cane.

The third figure was a striking contrast to the others. He was tall and thin and bent, with pale wrinkled cheeks and bushy white eyebrows that ill matched his dark wig. He scarcely lifted his eyes from the ground as he moved slowly along, leaning heavily upon a silver-knobbed stick. His dress was fusty and of a bygone mode; to a Londoner the old man must have resembled a figure out of a picture of Charles the Second's time.

"Who's this queer old put ambling along, Frank?" asked my lord. "The rascals there avoid him as he had the plague."

"On my life I don't know, sir," replied Mr. Godolphin. "The fellow with him might stand for Bobadil himself."

"Or for Captain Bluffe in Mr. Congreve's play."

"And the young sprig wants a kicking."

"Sarvant, my lord," put in Sherebiah, who was standing by; "'tis old Squire, and young Squire, and—— No, I won't say 't; a wise head keeps a still tongue; I won't say 't, leastways when a fowl o' the air med carry it where 'twould do me and feyther o' mine no manner o' good."

The crowd parted with a kind of sullen unwilling respect to make way for the new-comers. Suddenly the squire paused, as the elder of his two companions addressed him; flashing an angry glance at him, he said a few vehement words in a low tone that no one else could hear. Captain Ralph Aglionby laughed aloud, shrugged carelessly, and sauntered across the common towards the tent. The squire followed him with a dark glance for a moment, then resumed his slow progress with his son, and came to within a few feet of Lord Godolphin's carriage.

"Your lordship's servant," he said with a profound bow, copied with elaborate elegance by his son. His voice was thin and hard, a voice that set the teeth on edge. "I heard your lordship was on the ground, and made bold to come and pay my duty to your lordship."

"I am vastly beholden to you, Mr.——"

"Berkeley, my lord, Nicolas Berkeley of Winton Hall; and would your lord-

ship but favour me, I should be proud, when the match is over, to offer your lordship a cover at my table—poor country fare, I fear, but such as it is, freely at your lordship's disposal."

"'Tis handsome of you, Mr. Berkeley, but I fear our business will not permit us to accept of your hospitality.—Ah! I perceive the next batsman is coming to the wicket. I hope you're as keen a sportsman as I am myself, and will forgive me if I fix my attention on the game."

Mr. Berkeley bowed again with expressionless face, and after a moment's irresolution moved away. Gaffer Minshull might have been observed to lick his old lips with appreciation at this the very courtliest of cold shoulders. Piers Berkeley, the young squire, stayed for a minute or two, gazing with silly face at my lord; then, finding that he remained unnoticed, he stuck the head of his cane into his mouth and walked away sucking it.

The game was resumed. For an hour it was tedious watching. The new batsman snatched a run now and then, while Old Everlasting blocked every ball that came to him with the same want of enterprise and the same boundless self-satisfaction. At length his partner was caught in the long field; the sixth wicket had fallen, and the score was no more than forty-five.

"Give you three to one against the rustics, Frank," said Lord Godolphin.

"I'll take you, sir, though 'tis a risk. Who's our next man?"

"'Tis our bowler friend, the young sprig of a parson, unless I mistake," said my lord. "What's the lad's name, gaffer?"

"'Tis Henry Winterborne Rochester, my lard, by the water o' baptism; too rich a name for poor folks like we. Young pa'son we calls un mostly."

"A limber youth. I like his looks, eh, Frank? Does he bat as well as he bowls?"

"Middlen, my lord, middlen," said Sherebiah. "Has a good eye, but a deal o' growen to do afore he can smite the ball as it should. But there, my lord, he as can't do what he would must do what he can, as you med say."

"Nothen truer, boy," said his father approvingly. "Ay, 'tis a pretty lad. Gi' un a cheer, souls."

"Mum, feyther," expostulated Sherebiah. "Old Squire's comen back-along this way; little sticks kindle fires, as you med say."

"True. I be a timbersome man, afeard o' Squire, though you med n't think it. Well!"

But though Gaffer Minshull forbore to cheer, the rest of the crowd had no scruples, and the warmth of their greeting brought a flush to the new batsman's honest face. He stood at the wicket with quiet ease and watched Old Everlasting block the last ball of the over; then he glanced around, stooped to his bat, and fixed his gray eyes steadily on the bowler.

The rest of the afternoon provided an unfailing subject for gossip in the village for six months afterwards. Playing at first with patient wariness, Harry never let a ball pass his bat, but treated all with a respectful consideration that was as noticeable as his graceful style. He played two overs without getting a notch; then, after another excellent blocking performance by his partner, came a change. The first ball of the next over was rather loose; Lord Godolphin, who, perhaps alone of the spectators, kept his gaze fixed on the batsman's face, saw his lips come together with a slight pressure and his eyes suddenly gleam—and there was the ball, flying straight over the bowler's head, passing between two coaches into the road. Gaffer Minshull was on the point of raising his stick to wave it, but was stopped by his son with a "Mind old Squire, feyther o' mine."

"Varty-vive and vour makes varty-nine," muttered the old man. "I could do a bit o' cipheren in my time. Ay, varty-nine."

Nothing came of the next ball, but the third rose most happily to Harry's bat, and with a neat little cut he sent it under the rope among the crowd, who nimbly parted to let it roll. Three notches were cut to his credit. Old Everlasting complacently blocked the next ball, and Harry treated the bowler at the other end with great respect till the fourth ball, which he snicked away for a single. Getting back thus to the wicket at which he had started, he delighted the spectators by driving every ball of the over, at the close of which the score had risen to sixty-three.

"'Tis the eye doos it," said the old man delightedly; "Master Harry has'n clear an' steady. Ay sure, a' would ha' made a good captain for Noll Crum'ell; if so be he's a pa'son, all the use he can make o' his eye, 'twill be to tarrify poor sinners like you an' me, my lard."

But misfortune was in store for the Winton St. Mary men. Old Everlasting had the first ball of the next over, delivered by a new bowler, a lanky fellow with a tremendous pace, for whom two long-stops were placed. The batsman was taken by surprise; he missed the ball, the stumps went flying, and Old Everlasting walked away scratching his poll, rejoicing in the magnificent score of one. Harry accompanied him to the tent, and held a short conversation with the next man. The fruit of this was seen as soon as they reached the wickets. The first ball missed bat, stumps, wicket-keeper, and both long-stops; Harry called his partner for a bye, and though there was plenty of time for a second run he was contented with a single, thus securing the next ball. This he hit round to leg, a stroke that ought to have made two, but his partner was somewhat bulky, and suffered for his misfortune by being promptly run out after one run had been scored.

Eight wickets were now down, and the score was sixty-five—thirty-five behind that of the Cambridge eleven. A restlessness was observable in the crowd; it seemed impossible that the home team could win; and there was general de-

spondency when it was noticed that the incoming batsman was a spindle-legged fellow known as Soft Jemmy, who did odd jobs about the village. Only Sherebiah still appeared full of confidence.

"A fight bean't lost till it be won," he said. "Keep up your sperits, souls."

Soft Jemmy never got a chance to miss the ball. Such scheming was never seen on a cricket-field before. Harry had privately instructed Jemmy to do just as he was told, and the half-witted youth at least knew how to obey. When Harry called him he ran; when told to stand in his ground he remained fixed like a post; and so, snatching byes, blocking, hitting when it was safe, Harry defied all the bowling, and the score rose by ones and twos and threes. A change came over the attitude of the spectators. From dejection they passed to almost delirious joy. Every hit was cheered to the echo; every little manoeuvre of "young pa'son" added to their delight. The effect on the out side was equal and opposite. They became irritated at the altered aspect of the game. Bowlers bowled wildly; fieldsmen fielded loosely, and got in one another's way; and the more agitated they became, the more coolly and confidently did Harry ply his bat. At last, stepping out to a full pitch, he made a magnificent drive over the bowler's head, and brought the total to a hundred and two.

The cheer that rose from the crowd might have been heard a mile away. Some of the men made a rush for Harry, and bore him shoulder-high to the tent. Others flew to secure their winnings, and celebrate the famous victory in cider or home-brewed ale. Gaffer Minshull was with difficulty dissuaded from whirling his hat round on the top of his stick, and nothing could check his gleeful exclamation:

"A flick to young Squire; a terrible douse, ay sure!"

"By George, a notable match!" said Godolphin. "Your young parson is a lad of mettle, gaffer; he'll be a sportsman an he lives long enough. Here, man, drink his health, and tell him from me that the Lord Treasurer loves pretty play. Come, Frank, we'll drive on."

He flung a coin to the old man, remounted his carriage, and drove off. Gaffer looked at the money, then after the calash.

"Ah, 'tis a mighty fine thing to hold the Queen's purse, my lads, mighty fine! There be a power o' these same shinen bright ones in the Queen's purse; eh, lads?"

A shout came from the distance, and the eyes of the small group around old Minshull were turned towards the road. Lord Godolphin's carriage had broken down. The axle had snapped in two; the horses were plunging, and my lord and his son were clinging to the sides of the vehicle. A score of sturdy fellows rushed

to lend a hand, and Gaffer Minshull was left to himself.

CHAPTER II
Sherebiah Shouts

An Angling Story—Old Izaak—Landed—Breakfast—Marlborough's Smile—The Story of a Potticary—Dosed—On the Horizon—Highwaymen—A Man of Peace—Behind the Scenes—Nos Duo—Promises—Black John Simmons—Sherebiah is Troubled

"'Tis here or hereabouts, baten years ha'n't tooken my memory. True, feyther o' mine calls me boy, and so I be to a old aged man like him; but when a man's comen on forty-four, and ha' seen summat o' the world—well,

"'Man's life is but vain, for 'tis subject to pain
An' sorrow, an' short as a bubble;
'Tis a hodge-podge o' business, an' money, an' care,
An' care, an' money, an' trouble.'

Ay, 'tis so, 'tis so!"

Sherebiah sighed, but the sigh ill became his round, jolly face; it was merely to chime with the words of the song. He was walking, about six o'clock on the morning after the cricket-match, along the bank of a little hill-stream, rod in hand, yet not expecting to halt for a while, for he took no pains to moderate his voice. He was not alone. His companion was the youth who had won the match for Winton St. Mary on the previous day—Harry Rochester, the parson's son. Each carried a rod—the huge clumsy rod of those days, nearly seventeen feet in length; each was laden with wallet, landing-net, and other apparatus; and in fact they had already had an hour's sport with ground-bait, having risen from their beds soon after three on this ideal angler's morning. A haze lay over the ground, and a light rain was falling.

Sherebiah was several yards ahead, scanning the banks. His voice sank a little as he repeated the lines:

"'Tis a hodge-podge o' business, an' money, an' care,

An' care, an' money, an' trouble."

"Cheer up!" said Harry, behind him. "I like the second verse best, Sherry:

"'But we'll take no care when the weather proves fair,
Nor will we vex now though it rain—

He was interrupted by the sudden halt of Sherebiah. The man had swung round; his lips were shot out in the motion of shooing, a warning finger was held up. Harry's voice died away, and he hastened to his companion's side.

"Yonder's the spot," said Sherebiah in a whisper, pointing to a large pool, shaded with willows, some thirty yards ahead. "Mum's the word! They be sharp-eared, they trouts. 'Tis there I took ten lusty nibblers, ten year agoo come Michaelmas. Faith, 'twas all I could do to carry 'em; ay, and I shouldn' ha' got 'em home but for Tom Dorrell, t' carrier from Salisbury, who came trundlen along in his wagon. He be dead an' gone, poor soul, as must we all."

"And what did you do with them?" asked Harry with a smile.

Sherebiah was famous for his angling stories, and they had perhaps as much foundation as most. No one in the country-side knew the ways of the trout as he did; but he was equally at home in trolling for jack or pike, roving for perch, and sniggling for eels. None could match his knowledge of the flies in their several seasons: the hour of the day at which each is most killing; the merits of the silver twist hackle and the lady-fly, whether for dapping or whipping; when to use the black gnat, when the blue; under what conditions of the evening sky the shyest trout will rise to a red spinner. And who could tie a fly like Sherebiah Minshull? Many a time Harry had examined his rich store of materials—as varied as the contents of a witch's cauldron: feathers of every bird that flies, manifold silks and wires and hooks, wax and needles, hog's down and squirrel's fur. Many a time had he watched him dress a fly and thread a bait, and admired his dexterous whipping of the streams.

"What did I do wi' 'em?" Sherebiah had sat down with legs far apart, and was carefully selecting a fly from his case. He spoke always in a whisper. "Well, 'tis ten year since, and my memory bean't what it was; but now I mind on't, I gi' one to Tom carrier for his lift, and a couple to miller up by Odbury, and one to Susan Poorgrass at Sir Godfrey's—I was a-courten then; her wouldn't ha' me, thank the Lord!—and a couple to Ned Greenhay, Sir Godfrey's keeper as was, for a brace o' leverets; and to please feyther o' mine I took three up to the Hall. Zooks! and small thanks I got, for old Squire hisself come to the door, and gi'

me a douse, he did; said if I didn't find summat better to do than go traipsen the country-side, poachen or wuss, he'd commit me for a rogue and vagabond. An' th' old curmudgeon kept the fish; ay, he did so!—Ah! ha' got it; 'tis a fly that cost me more time in the maken than a dozen others; a beauty, to be sure; eh, Master Harry?"

He proceeded to put it on his hook. It was an artificial oak-fly, blue, green, brown, and orange so cunningly mingled that no trout could fail to be deceived.

"We'll now see some sport," continued Sherebiah, still in a whisper, as he prepared to cast. "I can't abide bait-fishen; sport, i' faith! 'tis mere bludgeon-play. True, it fills the pot, but there's no pleasure in 't. 'Tis no pastime for a true bob."

"Why, Sherry, 'twas only yestere'en I was reading in a most excellent book of angling by Master Izaak Walton, and he, it seems, held little to the fly. His discourse is in the main of bait."

"Why, there 'tis. I met Master Walton once, a-fishen in the Itchen above Winchester—a quaint man, with a good breast for a song, for all he was ripe for the grave. Myself I was but twenty or so, he a man of fourscore and upward; ay, a fine hale old man, wi' a store o' memories. We fell into talk; a' told me how a' once rid to Lunnon wi' a rich jewel o' King Charles's in his doublet; ay, he was a royal man, wi' a jolly red face, but no harm in un, not a whit; and learned, too—but no angler. No, faith, no angler, for a' talked o' fishen down stream, a' did, when ne'er a child but knows fish lie wi' their heads up stream. Ye cotch fish as 'ee do Frenchmen, from behind! Now, hook's ready. Mum, Master Harry, while I cast."

He dropped his fly deftly into the still pool, watching it with keen eyes and pursed lips. Meanwhile Harry had chosen an orle fly, and made his cast a little lower down. The anglers were silent for some minutes.

"What's that?" asked Harry suddenly, looking up as a distant sound of wood-chopping reached his ears.

"Mum, boy!" whispered Sherebiah in reply. "There, I beg pardon, Master Harry, but you've scared away a samlet just as he opened his jaws. That? 'Tis Simon forester, belike, fellen Sir Godfrey's timber. Now, a still tongue——"

He broke off, rose, and followed his line stealthily for a yard or two. The surface of the water was disturbed, and Harry caught a glimpse of a gleaming side. There was a splash; the rod bent; then Sherebiah hastened his steps as the fish went away with a rush.

"He's a-showen fight," whispered Sherry. "Whoa! he's sounded, Master Harry; a big un. Pray the tackle may hold! Ah! he's clear, and off again! Whoa! whoa! Nay, my pretty, 'ee may fight, but I'll land 'ee."

For ten minutes the contest continued; then the angler got in his line slowly, and beckoned to Harry to assist him. The fish was carefully drawn in; Harry

stooped with his net at the critical moment, and with a sudden heave landed a fine four-pounder, which he slipped into Sherebiah's creel.

"That's the way on't, Master Harry," said Sherebiah contentedly. "Had no luck yourself, eh? What be 'ee a-fishen wi'?"

"An orle."

"Ah, 'tis an hour or two too early in the day for that, mebbe. Still, these waters of Sir Godfrey bean't often fished since young Master Godfrey went to Cambridge college, and the trout mayn't be over squeamish. Stick to 't!"

An hour passed, and both anglers were well satisfied. Sherebiah's fly proved irresistible, either from its cunning make or the wary skill with which he whipped the stream. Four fat trout had joined the first in his basket; two had rewarded Harry's persistence; then he laid down his rod and watched with admiration the delicate casts of his companion. Sherebiah landed his sixth. The haze having now disappeared, and the sun growing hot, he wound up his line and said:

"Rain afore seven, fine afore 'leven. I be mortal peckish, Master Harry; what may 'ee have in your basket, now?"

"Powdered beef, I think, Sherry; and Polly put in a cate or two and some radishes, and a bottle of cider; plain fare, you see."

"Well, hunger's the best saace, I b'lieve. We poor folks don't need to perk up our appetites. I warrant, now, that mighty lord we saw yesterday would turn up his nose at powdered beef. Fine kickshawses a' had at Sir Godfrey's, no doubt. To think o' such a mighty lord, the Queen's purse-bearer an' all, bein' kept in a little small village by rust or dry-rot, just like a ordinary man! Old Squire would ha' liked to gi' him a bed, I reckon; but Sir Godfrey were aforehand, an' there he lies till this mornen: axle was to be mended by six, if Lumpy had to work all night to finish the job. Med I axe 'ee a question, Master Harry? Do 'ee think that shinen piece a' flung to feyther were his own, or out o' Queen's purse?"

Harry laughed.

"Lord Godolphin doesn't go about the country with the Queen's purse slung at his waist, Sherry. What he meant was that he was Lord Treasurer, the Queen's chief minister, the man who rules the country, you know."

"Well, now, if I didn't think it'd be folly to carry the Queen's purse loose about the country! Then 'tis Lord Godolphin says we're to fight the French?"

"Yes, he and my lord Marlborough between them."

"Ah! there 'tis. My lord Marlborough bean't free with his money like t'other lord. *He* wouldn't ha' given old feyther o' mine nothen. Why, I was at Salisbury in '88 when my lord—Lord Churchill he was then, to be sure—was there to meet King Willum, and I held his horse for 'n, and he gi' me—what do 'ee think he gi' me, Master Harry?"

"Well?"

"Nowt but a smile! What med 'ee think o' that for a lord? 'Thank 'ee, my man,' says he, and puts his foot in the stirrup and shows his teeth at me, and rides off! Lord! Now t'other one, the Lord Godolphin, he is a lord, to be sure, a fine free-handed gentleman, though he ha'n't got such fine teeth. I like a lord to be a lord, I do."

"My lord Marlborough is indeed rather close-fisted, they say."

"Ay, but I ha' knowed a wuss. Did ever I tell 'ee of Jacob Spinney the potticary? I was a growen lad, and feyther o' mine wanted to put me to a trade. So he bound me prentice to Jacob Spinney, that kept a potticary's shop by Bargate at S'thampton. Zooks! Jacob was a deceiver, like his namesake in the Book. A' promised feyther he'd gi' me good vittles and plenty on 'em, bein' a growen lad; but sakes, I never got no meat save at third boilen; 'twas like eatin' leather. A' said I was growen too fast, a' did, and he'd keep me down. Pudden—I never put my lips to pudden for two year, not once. I took down shutters at zix i' the mornen, and put 'em up at eight o' nights; betwixt and between I was pounden away at drugs, and carryen parcels, and scrubben floors and nussen mistress' babby: ay, what med 'ee think o' that? If so happened I broke a bottle, or overslept five minutes—oons! there was master a-strappen me to a hook in the wall he kept o' purpose, and layen a birch over my shoulders and keepen me on bread and water or turmuts not fit for a ox. I dwindled crossways to a shadder, Master Harry, I did so, and every week th' old villain made me write a letter to feyther, sayen as how I was fat and flourishen like a green bay tree. Do what a' would, however, I growed and growed, at fourteen a long slip of a feller all arms and legs. Two mortal year I put up wi' un; then I got tired. One day, mistress was out, and I was rollen pills in the little back shop, when master come in. He was in a terrible passion, goodness alone knows what about. He pitched into me for wasten his drugs and eatin' up all his profits, and hit me with his cane, and sent me spinnen agen the table, and knocked off his best chiney mortar, and there 'twas on the floor, smashed to atomies. Bein' his own doen, it made his temper wuss, it did, and he caught me by the hair and said he'd skin me. I' fecks, I were always a man o' peace, even as a boy, but I'd had long sufferen enough, and now my peaceful blood was up. I wriggled myself free—and there he was, flat on the floor, and me a-sitten on him. He hollered and cussed, for all he was a Puritan; and, haven respect unto my neighbours, I stuffed a handkercher into his mouth. There I sits, a-thinken what to do wi' un. 'Twas in for a penny in for a pound wi' me then; I'd have to run, 'dentures or no 'dentures, and it seemed fair to have my pen'orth afore I went. There was that hook I knowed so well, and that strap hangen still and loose: 'I'll gi' un a taste o' the birch he be so uncommon fond on,' thinks I. So I hoists un up, and soon has un strapped ready; but looken at un I thinks to

myself: 'You be a poor wamblen mortal arter all, skinny for all the pudden you eat. I'll ha' mercy on your poor weak flesh.' Besides, I had another notion. So I casts un loose and sits un on a chair and straps un to chair-back, hands to sides.

"You med have heard of Jacob Spinney's famous mixture for pimples? Well, 'twas knowed all over Hants and Wilts. 'Twas a rare sight o' market days to see the farmers' wives a-troopen into the shop for bottles o' the mixture. But th' odd thing was, Spinney hisself was owner of a fair pimpled face, yet never did I know un take a dose o' his own firm cure. 'I pity 'ee,' says I to un, as he sat strapped to the chair; 'poor feller, wi' all those pimples. Shall have a dose, poor soul.' Many's the bottle I'd made up: 'twas brimstone and powder o' crab and gentian root in syrup. Well, I mixed a dose all fresh afore his eyes, and got a long wooden spoon, and slipped the handkercher out o' his mouth and the dose in. The ungrateful feller spets it out and begins to holler again; so in goes the handkercher, and says I: 'Ye don't know what's for your own good. Bean't it tasty enough? Ah, Master Spinney, often and often 'ee've physicked me; what's good for me without pudden will be better for 'ee with; you shall have a dose.' So I made un a dose o' senna and jalap and ipecacuan, but I was slow with the handkercher, and afore I could get the spoon in he had his teeth clinched tight. But I hadn't nussed the babby for nothen. I ups with finger and thumb and pinches his nose; he opens his mouth for breath, and in goes spoon, and sputter as he med he had to swaller, he did.

"Ah, I was wild and headstrong in they young coltish days. I bean't so fond o' pudden now. Not but what they mixtures did Jacob Spinney a world o' good, for his next prentice had a easier time nor me, steppen into his master's business when he was laid in churchyard. *I* got no good on 'em, to be sure, for I had to run away and try another line o' life, and ha' been a rollen-stone ever since. Ay well, 'tis all one to a man o' peace."

During his narrative the breakfast had been finished.

"Well, Sherry, when I'm out of sorts I'll come to you," said Harry, rising. "Now, while you pack up, I'll go a stroll up the hillside; there'll be a good view now the day is clearing, and maybe I'll get a glimpse of Salisbury spire."

He left the river-bank and strolled leisurely up a gentle ascent, which gradually became steeper until it terminated somewhat suddenly in a stretch of level ground. Fifty yards from the edge rose a long grassy mound, a well-known landmark in the neighbourhood. It was, in fact, a barrow, dating centuries back into the dim ages—the burial place, perhaps, of British warriors who had fought and fallen in defence of their country against the Roman invader. Harry had always felt a romantic interest in these memorials of the past, and more than once had stood by such a barrow, alone in the moonlight of a summer night, while his imagination called up visions of far-off forgotten things.

He sat down now with his back to the mound, and allowed his eyes to rove over the prospect. Tradition said that three counties were visible from this elevated spot, and on a clear morning like this it seemed likely enough that report said true. Far to the left, peeping over the bare contour of Harnham Hill, rose the graceful spire of Salisbury Cathedral, at least fifteen miles away as the crow flies. His eye followed the winding course of the little stream below him, losing it here and there behind some copse or knoll, tracing it again to its junction with a larger stream, till this in its turn was lost to view amid the distant elm-bordered meadows. Nearer at hand he saw the old Roman road, grass-grown and silent now, bounding the park of Sir Godfrey Fanshawe, crossing the stream by an ancient bridge, and running into the London road at some invisible point to the right. It was a very pleasing prospect, brilliant beneath the cloudless sky, and freshened by the early morning showers.

As he looked along the forsaken highway, once trodden perhaps by the legions of Constantine the Great, his glance was momentarily arrested by a small moving speck in the distance. "Some wagon from one of Sir Godfrey's home farms," he thought. It was approaching him, for it passed out of sight into a clump of trees, then reappeared, and was again hidden by an intercepting ridge. The road was downhill; in fifteen or twenty minutes, perhaps, the wagon would pass beneath him, at a point nearly three-quarters of a mile away, where the highway skirted a belt of trees perched on the side of a steep declivity. Between him and the road lay a ditch which, as he knew, was apt in winter-time to overflow on to the meadows and the lower parts of the track, making a sticky swamp of the chalky soil. But it was dry now, and the floodings were only indicated by the more vivid green of the grass and the tall reeds that filled the hollow on this side. On the other side a strong stone wall edged the road, marking the boundary of Sir Godfrey's park; it was overhung with elms, from which at this moment Harry saw a congregation of rooks soar away.

Thus idly scanning the roadway, all at once his eye lit upon the figure of a horseman half concealed by the belt of reeds in the hollow. He was motionless; his back was towards Harry, his horse's head pointing towards the road, from which he was completely screened by the reeds and the willows.

"What is he doing there?" thought Harry. He rose, and walked towards the edge of the descent. Narrowly scanning the brake, he now descried two other horsemen within a few yards of the first, but so well concealed that but for his quickened curiosity he would probably never have discovered them. For all he knew, there might be others. "What is their game?" His suspicion was aroused; the vehicle he had seen approaching was perhaps not a wagon; it might be a chaise belonging to Sir Godfrey; it might be—— "Why, 'tis without a doubt Lord Godolphin himself on his way to London, and coming by the shortest cut." There

was no need for further speculation; in those days the inference was sure: a carriage in the distance, a party of horsemen lurking in a copse by the roadside—— ”’Tis highway robbery—ah! the Queen’s purse!”

Harry unconsciously smiled at the thought. His first impulse was to warn the approaching travellers. But the carriage was at present out of sight; he could not make signals, and before he could reach the stretch of road between the ambuscade and their prey, the travellers would certainly be past, while he himself might be seen by the waiting horsemen, and headed off as he crossed a tract of open country. Moving downwards all the time, he in a flash saw all that it was possible to do. The stream passed under the roadway some twenty yards beyond the spot where the horsemen were lying in wait; the banks were reedy, and might screen an approach to the copse beyond the wall. There was a bare chance, and Harry took it.

He raced downhill towards Sherebiah, who was sitting on the bank still, placidly smoking his pipe; landscape had no charm for him.

”Sherry,” said Harry in jerks, ”Lord Godolphin or someone is driving down the road; highwaymen hiding in the reeds; in five or six minutes—come, come, we have no time to lose.”

”Then we’ll go home along,” said Sherry, putting his pipe in his pocket as he rose.

”Nonsense! we can’t slink away and leave them to be robbed.” Harry took Sherry by the arm to drag him along.

”What be the good? Fishen-rods bean’t no match for pistols, and bein’ a man o’ peace——”

”Come, I can’t wait. I’ll go alone, then.”

He released the man’s arm and stepped into the stream. Sherebiah hesitated for a moment; then, seeing that Harry was in earnest, he dropped his tackle and strode forward, saying:

”Zooks, not if I knows it! I’m a man o’ peace, sure enough, but fairplay’s a jewel. Have at the villains!”

He followed Harry into the water. Side by side they raced on, dodging the weeds, scrambling over occasional rocks, slipping on the chalky bottom, making at top speed for the bridge. As they approached this they went more slowly, to avoid being heard. Fortunately, at the point where the road crossed the stream there was a line of rocks, over which the water plunged with a rustle and clatter, drowning the sound of their footsteps. They had to stoop low to avoid the moss-grown masonry of the arch; as they emerged on the farther side they heard a muffled exclamation from one of the horsemen, and climbing the steep face of the tree-covered slope towards the wall they heard a shot, then another, mingled with shouts and the dull thuds of horses’ hoofs on the turf-covered road.

On the way Harry had explained his plan in panting whispers. Running along now under cover of the wall, they came opposite to the scene of the ambush.

"Now, Sherry, do your best," said Harry, as he prepared to mount the wall.

Instantly a new clamour was added to the uproar in the road.

"This way!"

"Shoot 'em!"

"Lash the noddy peaks!"

"Pinch their thropples!"

"Quoit 'em down!"

"Haick! haick!"

By this time Harry was on the wall, by favour of Sherebiah's strong arm. A slug whizzed past his head and sank with a thud into the trunk of a tree just behind; next moment the horse-pistol from which it had been discharged followed the shot, the butt grazing Harry's brow. There was no time to take in the details of the scene. Harry made a spring for the masked horseman who had fired at him, two yards from the wall; but the fellow, alarmed by the various shouts and the sudden appearance of Sherebiah at Harry's side, dug the spurs into his steed's flanks and galloped off down the road, over the bridge, and out of sight. One of his companions lay motionless on the road; the others had ridden away at the first alarm from the wall.

Harry mopped his brow and looked about him. Lord Godolphin stood upright in the carriage, his lips grimly set, a smoking pistol in his hand. His son was on foot with drawn sword; a postilion was crawling out of the ditch all bemired, pale and trembling.

"Odzooks!" cried my lord, "a welcome diversion!"

He was perfectly cool and collected, though his hat was off and his wig awry. "A thousand thanks, my men. Whew! 'twas in the nick of time. Where are the rest of you?"

"There are no more, my lord," said Harry, lifting his cap.

"No more! But the shouts, then?—I heard a dozen shouting, at least. Are the rest on the other side of the wall?"

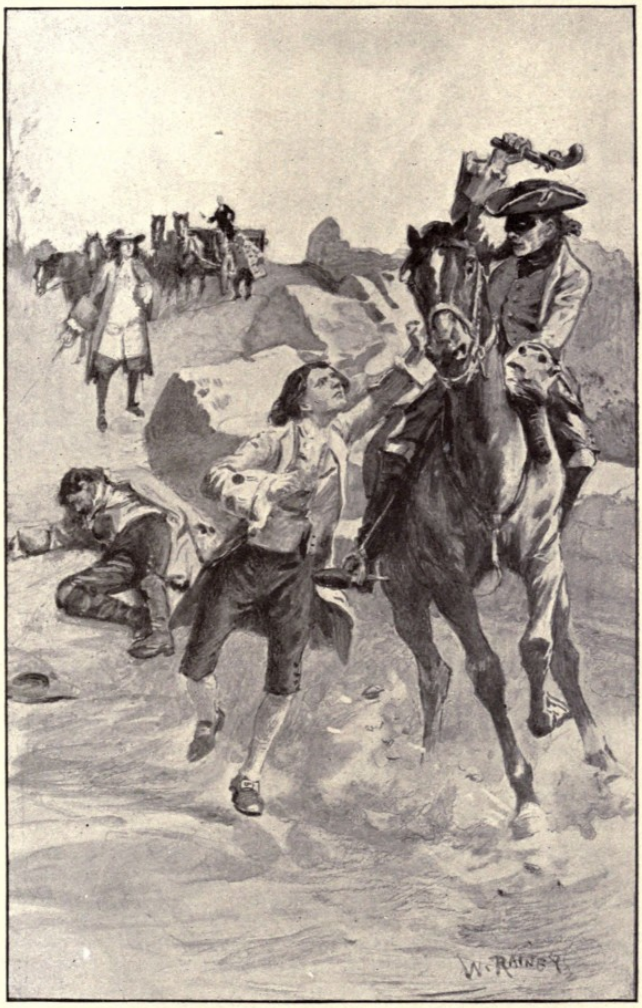
"All on this side, my lord," said Harry with a smile. "Here is the mob."

He indicated Sherebiah, who touched his cap and bobbed to his lordship.

Godolphin stared, then chuckled and guffawed.

"Egad! 'tis a rare flam. Frank, this fellow here did it all, shouted for a dozen; by George, 'twas a mighty neat trick! And, by George, I know your face; I saw you yesterday, I believe! What's your name, man?"

"Sherebiah Stand-up-and-bless Minshull, my lord," said Sherry, "by the water o' baptism, your honour, for I was born while old Rowley were in furren parts. If a'd been born two year arter, my lord, I med ha' been chrisomed wi' less piety."



Harry makes a Diversion

Harry makes a Diversion

”I remember you, and the old gaffer your father—a fine old fellow. Well, my man, your name suits me better; ’tis for us to stand up and bless, eh, Frank? And here’s a guinea for you.”

Sherebiah put his hands behind him and looked down at the coin in my lord’s hand.

”Nay, nay, my lord,” he said slowly. ”True, I did the shouten, or most on’t, but ’twas Master Harry his notion. Pa’son’s son, you see, my lord; know’d all the holy story o’ Gideon; says to me, ’Sherry,’ says he, ’shout high and low, bass and tribble, give it tongue,’ says he; and I gi’d it tongue, so I did.”

Both gentlemen laughed heartily.

”I recognize you now,” said my lord, turning to Harry, who looked somewhat embarrassed. ”Surely you are the hero of yesterday’s cricket match? You swing a straight bat, my lad, and, stap me! you’ve a quick wit if you devised this late surprise. How came you on the scene?”

”We’d been fishing yonder, my lord, and I chanced to spy your carriage and the villains waiting here, almost at the same time. It was clear what they were about, and as there was no time to warn you we came along the stream, and—Sherry shouted.”

His smile as he said the last words met an answering smile on Lord Godolphin’s face.

”A mighty clever trick indeed—eh, Frank? We’re beholden to you. ’Twas a mere chance that I sent my mounted escort on ahead by the highway to arrange a change of horses, never thinking to be waylaid at this time o’ day.”

”Ay, ’twas the Queen’s purse, my lord,” struck in Sherebiah. ”To know Queen’s purse-bearer were a-comen along old road like a common mortal, ’twere too much for poor weak flesh and blood.”

”The ignorant bumpkins mistook your meaning,” said Frank.

”So it appears. But come, you’re the parson’s son, I believe. I forget your name?”

”Harry Rochester, my lord.”

”Going to be a parson yourself, eh?”

”I am going up to Oxford in October, my lord; my father wishes me to take orders.”

”Ah! And your own wish, eh?”

Harry hesitated.

”Come, out with it, my lad.”

”I had thought, my lord, I should like to carry the Queen’s colours; but ’tis a vain thought; my father’s living is small, and——”

”And commissions in the Queen’s army sell high. ’Tis so, indeed. Well, I heard something of your father last night at Sir Godfrey’s; you can’t do better

than follow his example. And hark 'ee, if ever you want a friend, when you've taken your degrees, you know, come and see me; I owe you a good turn, my lad; and maybe I'll have a country vicarage at my disposal."

"Thank you, my lord!"

"And now we must get on. Dickory, you coward, help these two friends of ours to remove that tree. The villains laid their ambush well; you see they felled this larch at an awkward part of the road."

"And I thowt 'twas Simon forester a-choppen," said Sherebiah, as he walked towards the tree.

"What shall we do with this ruffian on the road?" said Frank Godolphin. "He appears to be stone dead. 'Twas a good shot, sir."

"Leave the villain. You'll lay an information before Sir Godfrey or another of your magistrates, young master parson. Did you recognize any of the gang?"

"No, my lord. I only saw the masked man. Perhaps Sherry was more fortunate."

"Not me neither," said Sherebiah hastily. He had gone to the fallen man, looked in his face, and turned him over. "'Twas all too quick and sudden, and my eyes was nigh dazed wi' shouten."

"Well, well, Sir Godfrey's is near at hand; go and inform him, and he will scour the country. We must push on."

The tree was removed; the bedraggled and crestfallen postilions resumed their saddles, and with a parting salutation my lord drove off. Harry stood looking thoughtfully after the departing carriage.

"Master Harry," said Sherebiah, coming up to him, "this be a bad business. The man bean't dead."

"He's saved for the hangman, then."

"Ay, and who med 'ee think he be?"

"You do know him, then! What does this mean, Sherry?"

"Well, I be a man o' peace, and there's mischief to come o' this day's piece o' work, sure as I'm Sherebiah Stand-up-and-bless. 'Tis black John Simmons, Cap'n Aglionby's man."

"A scoundrel his master may well be rid of."

"Ay, if the man were dead! But he be alive; the lord didn't shoot'n at all; 'a fell off his horse and bashed his nob; an' he's got a tongue, Master Harry."

"Well, what then? If he rounds on his fellows, so much the better. What are you afraid of, Sherry?"

"I bean't afeard, not I; but the Cap'n——"

He paused, and Harry looked at him enquiringly. Sherebiah turned away.

"Ah! little sticks kindle fires, little sticks kindle fires, they do."

CHAPTER III
Master and Man

A Midnight Summons—A Warm Reception—Righteous Indignation—Aglionby Retorts—The Berkeley Arms—A Village Sensation—The Constable's Story—Aspersions—Unimpeachable References—Waylaid—Squaring Accounts—The Captain Rides Away

The clock of St. Mary's church had just chimed the first quarter after midnight, and the deep note of the lowest bell was dying away over the tree-tops, when the sound was intercepted by the distant clink and clatter of iron-shod hoofs on the hard road, approaching from the direction of Salisbury. The horse's pace was slow, and there was something in the fall of the hoofs that betokened a jaded steed. It was a clear calm night; the air carried every sound distinctly; and nothing broke the stillness save the footfalls of the horse, an occasional murmur from the birds in the trees, and the whirr of wings as a solitary owl, disturbed by the nocturnal rider, left its search for food and rustled back to its nook in the tower.

The horseman came presently to the church, wheeled round to the right, and urged his flagging beast along the road leading to the manor house. Arriving at the park, he flung himself from the saddle, hitched the bridle over his left arm, and turned the handle of the massive iron gate. But there was no yielding to his push: the gate was locked. The man shook and rattled the handle impatiently, to assure himself that he was not mistaken, then turned aside with an inarticulate rumble of anger, and went to the lodge, a low ivy-grown cottage abutting on the road. He tapped on the small latticed window with the butt of his riding-whip; there was no reply. The horse by his side hung its head and breathed heavily; it was jaded to the point of exhaustion. Again he rapped on the glass, growling between his teeth; and when his summons still met with no response he dealt so smart a blow that one of the thick square panes fell in with a crash. A moment later a voice was heard from within.

"Away wi' 'ee! Who be you, a-breaken an honest man's rest at this fearsome time o' night?"

A night-capped head appeared at the hole, just visible in the faint illumi-

nation of the clear summer sky.

"Open the gate, Dick," said the rider impatiently. "Ods my life, will you keep me waiting here, will you?"

"Be it you, Cap'n?"

"Zounds, man, must I tell you my name? Ha' ye never seen me before! Stir your old stumps, or by the lord Harry——"

"Squire give orders t' gate were to be locked and kep' locked; not a man to come in, not a soul. They's my orders, ay sure, Cap'n."

"Orders! orders!" cried the other in a burst of passion. "Adslidikins, if you're not at the gate with the key inside of two minutes I'll put a slug through your jolt head, you mumper, you miching rogue you!"

And indeed Captain Aglionby displayed a monstrous blunderbuss, and pointed it full in the face of the scared lodge-keeper. For an instant the man hesitated; then, muttering to himself, he disappeared from the window, and soon afterwards emerged from the side door within the palings, his night-gown showing beneath a heavy driving coat. He came towards the gate with the key—a bent old man, tottering and mumbling.

"I shall lose my place; Squire give orders, a' did, not a soul to come in; to drag a aged man from his nat'ral sleep an' lose him his place an' all; well, I was forced; no man can zay as I warn't forced; mumper as I be, I vallies my little bit o' life, and——"

"Hold your tongue, you old flap-eared dotard, and make haste, or I'll pink your soul. Don't you see the jade's dead-beat; 'tis time I stabled her."

The man turned the key and slowly opened the gate. With a grunt the captain led his horse through, and, without so much as a glance at the lodge-keeper, proceeded up the quarter-mile drive leading to the house.

"Old Nick's not abed," he said to himself as he cast his eye over the house front. A light shone from a window in the turret over the porch. "The old night-bird! Lock me out! Oons!"

He threw the bridle over an iron post at the side of the entrance, and walked round a projecting wing of the building till he came to a small door in the wall. He turned the iron ring, pushed, rattled; the door was fast shut. Cursing under his breath, he was proceeding towards the servants' quarters when he heard the creak of a key turning, and, wheeling round, came to the postern just as it was opened by Squire Berkeley himself, his tall, lean, bent figure enwrapped from neck to heel in a black cassock-like garment, a skull-cap of black velvet covering his head. He held a lighted candle; his piercing eyes flashed in the darkness.

"Hey, Squire!" cried the captain in a tone of forced good-humour, "I had much ado to rouse old Dick. 'Tis late to be sure; but if you'll give me the key of the stables I'll settle Jenny for the night and get to bed."

He made as if to enter, but Mr. Berkeley spread himself across the narrow doorway.

"Who are you, sirrah," he said, "to break into my park against my express orders?"

There was contempt in his cold incisive tones, and anger with difficulty curbed.

"Why now——" Aglionby began.

"Who are you, I say? And what am I, that my orders are defied, and my house made a common inn, a toping house for you and your toss-pot ruffians? Go—go, I say!"

The captain was for a moment staggered; the old man's manner left no room for doubt that he was in earnest. But Aglionby was too old a campaigner to cry off so easily. In a tone half-conciliatory, half-aggrieved he said—

"Fair and softly, Squire! this is but scurvy treatment of a tired man. Look you, I've been in the saddle this livelong day; the mare's well-nigh foundered; and for myself—gads so, I could eat an ox and drink a hogshead. To-morrow, in a few hours, I'll bid ye good-bye—for a time, if ye want a change; but to-night—no, Squire, 'tis not hospitable of you, 'tis not indeed."

"You dally with me!" cried the squire, the hand that held the candle shaking with passion. "You set no foot within this door—now, nor ever again. Begone, while there is time."

"While there is time! Look ye, Master Berkeley, I will not brook insults from you. Yesterday you must put an affront on me in the presence of my lord Godolphin, shoving me out of the way as I were a leper, and at the very moment, stap me! when I might ha' paid court to his lordship, and got the chance o' my life. Adsbud, I was not good enough to approach my lord, to accost him, have speech with him——"

"An omission you have since repaired," interjected the old man with a meaning look. The captain started, and there was a perceptible interval before he resumed, in a tone still more blusterous—

"Ods my life, what mean you now? You took care I should not meet my lord in your company; and, i' faith, he showed he wanted none of that neither."

"Hold your peace and begone!" cried the squire in a fury. "You think I know nothing of your villainies? How many times have I harboured you—ay, saved you perchance from the gallows! How many times have you eat my food, rid my horses, browbeat my servants, roistered it in my house, till I could bear with you no longer, and then betaken yourself to your evil practices abroad, consorted with villains, run your neck well-nigh into the hangman's noose, and then come back with contrite face and vows of amendment, to fawn and bluster and bully again? Out upon you! Your rapscallion of a servant is even now laid by the heels, and to-

morrow will have to answer to the charge of waylaying the Lord Treasurer. He's a white-livered oaf, and his tongue will wag, and you'll companion him before Fanshawe, and you'll swing on the same gibbet."

At the mention of his man's plight the captain's face had fallen; but when Mr. Berkeley's tirade was ended he broke into a laugh.

"Ha! ha! Squire, now I come to understand you. 'Tis your own skin you have a care for! Ha! ha! I might have known it. I am to be haled before Sir Godfrey, am I? and to hold my tongue, am I? and to be mum about certain little affairs in the life of Master Nicolas Berkeley—that paragon of virtue, that pampered, patched old interloper, am I? By the lord Harry, if I stand in manacles before Sir Godfrey, you shall bear me company, you painted pasteboard of a saint!"

Berkeley's pale face blanched with fury. For a moment he was incapable of speech. Then he stepped forward a pace; the hand holding the candle shook so, that the grease sputtered upon his gown. His voice came in vehement passionate whispers:

"You threaten me! Do your worst—I defy you!—Back to your wallow, bully!—begone!"

He suddenly withdrew within the doorway, slammed the door, and bolted it.

"Whew!" whistled the captain, left standing outside. "'Tis the worst passion ever I saw him in. Defies me! Well, Master Nicolas, would I could afford to take you at your word! A plague on Simmons! I thought he was dead. He'll split, sure enough, and there's an end of Ralph Aglionby. Jenny, my dear, you're a sorry jade, but you'll have to bear my carcase till we're out of harm's way. We have five or six hours before the world's astir. Do your best, my girl, and we'll cheat 'em yet."

Captain Aglionby led his tired steed down the drive to the gate, roused Dick the lodge-keeper with scant ceremony, and in a few minutes was riding slowly towards the village. As he came into the principal street, he was surprised to notice that the only inn was lit up, a most unusual circumstance at that time of night. The door stood open, and there were lights in several of the rooms on the ground floor. A feeling of apprehension seized upon him; he could not but connect these lively signs with the events of the morning, and especially with the capture of his man. Could the fellow have blabbed already? He was just making up his mind to spur the mare past the inn, over the bridge, on to the London road, when two persons came to the door and caught sight of him. One was Mistress Joplady, the buxom hostess; the other William Nokes, the village constable. It was too late to evade them: indeed he heard the hostess exclaim, "Well, I never! 'tis the Cap'n hisself, sure." Resolving like a wise man to make the best of it, he rode up to the door, dismounted, and, swaggering, with his usual air of assurance

said:

"Egad, mistress, I'm glad to find you afoot. My mare's dead-beat, has carried me nigh forty miles this day; send Tom ostler to stable her, like a good soul; and give me a bite and a bed. I didn't care about disturbing the squire at this time o' night."

The captain was no favourite with good Mistress Joplady, but she received him now with something more than her usual urbanity.

"Come away in, Cap'n Aglionby," she said. "Sure your name was in our very mouths. Strange things be doing—ay, strange things in Winton Simmary; bean't it so, William Nokes? Take the cap'n into the parlour, William; a few souls be there, Cap'n, not fit company for the likes o' you, to be sure, but they'll tell 'ee summat as'll stir your blood, they will so. Tom'll see to Jenny, so be easy."

Captain Aglionby followed the constable into the parlour, where a group of the village worthies were assembled. They were neither smoking nor drinking, a sure sign that they had something momentous to talk about. A silence fell upon the company as the captain clanked into the room, and one or two of the more active-minded of them threw a quick glance at each other, which the new-comer did not fail to note.

"A fine night, men," said the captain jovially.

"Ay, 'tis so."

"And a late hour to find the Berkeley Arms open."

"Ay, 'tis latish, sure enough."

"Any news from the army in Flanders? A post from London, eh?"

"Nay, not 'zackly that."

"Odzooks! speak up, men," cried the captain impatiently. "Why are they all mumble-chopped to-night, mistress?" he asked, turning to the hostess, who had followed him with bread and cheese and beer.

"Ah, they be pondering strange things," returned Mrs. Joplady. "Tell the cap'n all the long story, William Nokes."

The constable, fingering the hat in his hand, looked for sympathy into the stolid faces of his fellows, cleared his throat, and began:

"Cap'n, your sarvant. Eight o'clock this mornin', or mebbe nine—'twixt eight and nine, if the truth was told—comes Long Tom from the Grange, Sir Godfrey's man, as ye med know, Cap'n. Says he to me, 'Constable,' says he, 'Sir Godfrey commands 'ee as a justice o' the peace to bring your staff and irons and other engines,' says he, 'up along to Grange, wi'out remorse or delay, and arrest a prisoner in the Queen's name.' You may think what a turn it gi' me, souls, so early in the mornin'. 'Be he voilent?' says I. 'Can I arrest the villain all alone by myself?' 'Ay sure,' says he; 'there's no knowin' what a tough job 'twould be an he were sound and hearty, but he's dazed, so he be, wi' a crack in the nob, and

won't give no trouble to no mortal constable, not a bit,' says he. 'A crack in the nob,' says he; didn't he, souls?"

A murmur of assent came from the group.

"So I ups and goos wi' Long Tom hotfoot to the Grange, and Tom he tells me by the way the longs and shorts on't. Seems 'twas Sherry Minshull as cracked his nob, leastways he picked un up, he and young master pa'son betwixt 'em, an' hoisted him on a cart o' Farmer Leake's, an' so carried un to Grange and laid un afore Sir Godfrey. 'Twas highway robbery, Cap'n, a-took in the very act, a-stoppen the carriage o' the high lard as come this way yesterday, or day afore, as 'ee med say, seein' 'tis mornin' now by the rights on't. And Sir Godfrey commits un, he do, dazed as he were wi' the crack in the nob, and hands un over to the law, and says, 'Constable,' says he, 'keep the knave fast in the lock-up, an' hold un till I gets word from my Lard Godolphin in Lun'on.' They be his words, Cap'n."

"Well, well, cut your story short, man. Adsheart, ye've more words than matter."

"Ay, but wait to th' end, wait to th' end," put in a voice.

"The end of a rope 'twill be, and not for one neither," added another.

The constable looked a little uncomfortable.

"So I had un fast in the lock-up, Cap'n," he went on, "and 'twas the talk o' the village all day long. Squire himself heard on't, and down he come, so he do, and bein' hisself a justice o' the peace he goos into the lock-up and zees the man, and axes un questions, not for my ears, me bein' a constable; nay, I stood guard at the door; and when Squire coom out he says to me, 'Constable,' says he, 'keep a good guard on un; he deserves hangen, ay, and his mates too.' Never seed I Squire so mad-like; 'twas 'cos it was a lard, maybe, and on his own ground, as 'ee med say."

"Ay, and nearer nor that," said a voice.

The captain put down the tankard from which he was quaffing, and glared round the faces. They were blank as the wall behind them.

"And now what'll he say?" pursued the constable. "He were mad afore, ay sure; now he'll ramp and roar worse nor the lion beast at Salisbury Fair. Ye med not believe it, Cap'n, but 'tis true for all that; the godless villain ha' dared Squire an' Sir Godfrey an' me an' all; ha' broke his bonds an' stole away, like a thief i' the night, as the Book says."

"What!" cried the captain, leaning forward and thumping the table. "Escaped, has he?"

"A' has so, like a eel off the hook."

"Ha! ha! Stap me! eels are slippery things. But 'tis a rub for you, master constable. You'll lose your place, i' faith, you will."

"Why now, it be no sin o' mine. I left un snug in lock-up, I did, door double-

locked and bar up, an' went to take my forty winks like a honest poor man; an' no sooner my back turned than out skips the pris'ner, like Simon Peter in the story. There be witchcraft in't, an' that 'ee ought to know, Cap'n, seein' as the villain be your own sarvant."

"Eh, fellow?"

"Sakes alive, I thowt as 'ee knowed that all the time! Sure 'twas John Simmons, your honour's own body-slave, so to speak. An' I was main glad to see 'ee, Cap'n, 'cause now 'ee know un for what he is, 'ee'll help me to cotch un, in the Queen's name."

"Knows where he be, I'll be bound," said one of the group in a low tone. The captain sprang from his chair, ran round the table, and, before the speaker could defend himself, he caught him by the throat and hurled him to the floor.

"Zounds, loon!" he cried in a passion, "what do you mean? Will you affront me, eh? will you mouth your cursed insults to my very face? Odzooks, I'll slit your weazand, hound, and any man of you that dares a hint o' the sort, so 'ware all!"

The men looked abashed and uncomfortable; the hostess was pale with apprehension, and the constable edged away from the irate captain. His burst of passion over, he turned to Mrs. Joplady and spoke in quieter tones.

"I brook no insolence, mistress. I don't answer for my servant's deeds behind my back. I've been away all day, as poor Jenny will bear me witness; was I to know my fool of a servant would play highwayman in my absence? 'Tis a useful fellow, civil, too, beyond most; I picked him up in London; he was in truth commended to me by no less than his grace the Duke of Ormond, who tapped me on the shoulder in the Piazza at Covent Garden, and said, 'Aglionby, my bawcock, you want a servant; I know the very man for you!' Could I suspect a man after that? How he got mixed up in this business beats me. And as for helping master constable to repair his carelessness—adsbud, 'tis not likely. The man in truth is no longer servant of mine. I am on my way to serve the Queen in Flanders, and this very day arranged with my friend Sir Rupert Verney to take the fellow off my hands. You may hang him, for me!"

"There now, Sam," said the hostess, turning to the man who had been felled, and was now at the door glowering; "your tongue runs away wi' 'ee. Beg the cap'n's pardon, and don't go for to make a ninny o' yourself."

"Never mind, my good woman," said Aglionby loftily. "The yokel knows no better. Now, I'm tired out; give me a bed, good soul, for I must away at sunrise—and egad, 'tis past one o'clock! Good-night to 'ee, men; and I hope Sir Godfrey will forgive you, constable."

He went from the room, and soon afterwards the hostess bade the villagers get to their beds, and closed the inn for the short remnant of the night.

Before seven o'clock next morning the captain was on horseback. The ground was wet; it had been drizzling for several hours, but a misty sun was now struggling up the sky, and Tom ostler foretold a fine day. The captain rode off, answering with a bold stare the suspicious and lowering glances of the few villagers who were on the spot. He was in high spirits; the anxieties of the past night were gone; and as he rode he hummed a careless tune. He had ridden but little more than a mile when, from an intersecting lane, a man stepped out and gripped the horse's reins.

"Get off that there horse!" he said bluntly.

"Gads so, Sherry, you gave me quite a turn," said the captain with unusual mildness. "Don't hinder me, man; I'm off to Flanders, and, i' faith, that's where you ought to be yourself, if all was known. Come, what's the meaning o't?"

"Get off that there horse!" repeated Sherebiah. "I'm a man o' peace, I be, and I settles all scores prompt."

There was a look of determination in his eyes, and in his right hand he grasped a knobby cudgel.

"Right! but we've no accounts to settle.—What!" he cried, as he saw Sherebiah's cudgel raised, "you play the bully, eh? Gadzooks, I'll ferk ye if——"

He was drawing his sword, but the cudgel fell with a resounding whack upon his knuckles, and with a cry of pain he scrambled to the ground and stood, a picture of sullen rage, before his intercepter.

"I'll thank 'ee for your pistols," said Sherebiah, removing them from the holsters as he spoke. "Nay, don't finger your sword; I be a man o' peace, and you know my play with the quarterstaff. Jenny, old girl, crop your fill by the roadside while I have a reckonen wi' Cap'n Aglionby." He laid a curious stress upon the title. "Now, Ralph, you be comen wi' me into wood yonder. 'Tis there we'll settle our score."

Seizing the captain with his left hand, he led him down the lane, through a gap in the hedge, into a thin copse of larches, until he came to a narrow glade. Aglionby assumed an air of jocular resignation; but that he was ill at ease was proved by the restless glances he gave Sherebiah out of the corner of his eye.

"Off wi' your coat!" said Sherebiah, having reached the centre of the glade. "Off wi't! I be gwine to pound 'ee; you can defend yourself, but you'm gwine to be pounded whether or no."

"Confound you, man, what have I done to you? Why the——"

"Off wi't, off wi't! Least said soonest mended. Great barkers be no biters, so it do seem; doff your coat, Cap'n Aglionby!"

"Well, if you will!" cried the captain, with a burst of passion. "I'll comb your noddle, I'll trounce you, for an insolent canting runagate booby!"

He flung his coat on the wet grass; Sherebiah laid down the cudgel and

followed his example.

"Come on, Cap'n Aglionby!" he said. "'Tis not, as 'ee med say, a job to my liken, trouncen a big grown man like you; but 't ha' got to be done, for your good and my own peace o' mind. So the sooner 'tis over the better."

To a casual onlooker the two would have seemed very unequally matched. The captain stood at least a head taller than his opponent, and was broad in proportion. But he was puffy and bloated; Sherebiah, on the other hand, though thick-set, was hard and agile.

As if anxious to finish an uncongenial task with the least delay, he forced matters from the start. The captain had no lack of bull-dog courage, and he still possessed the remnant of great physical strength. To an ordinary opponent he would have proved even yet no mean antagonist; and when, after a few sharp exchanges, Sherebiah's punishing strokes roused him to fury, he rained upon the smaller man a storm of blows any one of which, had it got home, might have felled an ox. But Sherebiah parried with easy skill, and continued to use his fists with mathematical precision. Once or twice he allowed the captain, now panting and puffing, to regain his wind, and when the burly warrior showed a disposition to lengthen the interval he brought him back to the business in hand with a cheery summons.

"Now, Cap'n Aglionby," he would say, "let's to 't again. Come, man, 'twill soon be over!"

At last, beside himself with rage, the captain attempted to close with and throw his opponent. He could scarcely have made a more unfortunate move. For a few moments the two men swung and swayed; then Aglionby described a semicircle over Sherebiah's shoulder, and fell with a resounding thud to the ground. Neither combatant was aware that for some time a spectator had been silently watching them. Harry Rochester, coming whistling through the trees, had halted in surprise, at the edge of the glade, as his eyes took in the scene.

"There now, 'tis over and done," said Sherebiah, stooping to pick up his coat. "That score's wiped off. Stand on your feet, man! And I'll trouble 'ee for your sword."

The captain staggered to his feet. He was in no condition to refuse the victor's demand.

Sherebiah took the weapon and broke it across his knee. From his own pocket he then took the captain's pistols. He carefully drew their charges, and handed them back.

"Now, hie 'ee to Flanders," he said. "You've done more fighten this mornin' than you'll ever do there. You'll find Jenny on the road."

The captain glared at him, and seemed about to reply. But he thought better of it, and with a vindictive glare walked slowly away.

”What’s it all about, Sherry?” said Harry, stepping forward when Aglionby had disappeared.

”Ah, that be ’ee, sir? ’Twas only a little small matter o’ difference ’twixt Cap’n Aglionby and me. We’re quits now.”

”You’ll have to get Mistress Joplady to give you a raw steak for your eye.”

”Ay sure, Cap’n did get in a hit or two,” replied Sherebiah placidly.

”I didn’t know you were such a fighter.”

Sherebiah gave him a quick look out of his uninjured eye.

”Nay, I bean’t a fighter, not me,” he said. ”I’m a man o’ peace; I be so.”

CHAPTER IV
Mynheer Jan Grootz and Another

The Gaffer Chops Logic—In Print—The London Coach—Simple Annals—A Village Hampden—Bereft—An Offer of Service—A Hearty Send-off—Outside Passengers—Introductions—Contractor to the Forces—Followed—The Man on the Road—Sherebiah Muses

It was a dull, damp day towards the end of November, a little more than four months after Captain Aglionby’s unhappy departure from Winton St. Mary. There was again great bustle at the Berkeley Arms; Mistress Joplady’s ample face was red with exertion, and her voice, when she gave directions to her servants, was raised to an acrimonious pitch far from usual with her. The whole village appeared to be gathered either within or without the inn. Gaffer Minshull was there, seated with his back to the wall and leaning on his inseparable staff. Lumpy, Soapy Dick, Long Robin the tanner, Old Everlasting the miller, stood in a group about the door, talking to the ostler, who stood guard, with arms akimbo, over four brimming pails of water ranged along the wall.

Soft Jemmy was standing a yard or two away, watching with open mouth a man who, straddling across a step-ladder, was smearing the ancient sign-board with daubs of black paint, obliterating every trace of the crude heraldic design that had marked the inn’s connection with the lord of the manor. When the board was one unbroken black, the painter descended the ladder with his brush and can, winked at Jemmy, and went into the inn to ”mix the flavours”, as he said in passing. The half-witted youth contemplated his handiwork for some

minutes in mild surprise; then he walked towards old Minshull and addressed him timorously:

"Gaffer, I'm afeard my poor yead won't stand the wonder on't, but it med do me good to know why John painter ha' covered that noble pictur wi' the colour o' sut."

"Why, boy, black's for sorrow, as 'ee med know wi'out tellen an 'ee weren't so simple, and 'tis a black day for Winton Simmary, so 'tis."

"Why be it more black to-day than 'tis a-Sunday?" asked the youth. "'Tis Tuesday, gaffer, bean't it? and new pa'son didn't holler it in church for a holy day."

"Boy, your poor yead won't stand high things, 'tis true, but 'ee know young pa'son be off to Lun'on town to-day, an' that's why all the souls be here, to see the last on un."

Jemmy looked up again at the defaced sign-board, puzzling his poor brains to find some connection between it and the departure of "young pa'son".

"'Tis a shame, gaffer," said Honest John, "to deceive the poor lad, when you know the sign bean't painted out for no such thing."

"Why, there now," returned old Minshull, "bean't it all one? I axe 'ee that, souls. Young pa'son be a-gwine to Lun'on 'cause his poor feyther's dead an' gone; Pa'son Rochester be dead an' gone 'cause o' the fight; an I weren't afeard on un, I'd say the fight were all along o' Squire; and Mis'ess Joplady ha' changed the ancient sign of th' inn 'cause her can't abear to think on't. Bean't that gospel truth, souls all?"

The group looked impressed with the old man's logic. Mistress Joplady, coming for a moment to the door, had overheard his concluding sentences.

"'Tis true," she said, wiping away a tear. "I never liked Squire; nobody never did as I ever heerd on; but when pa'son died I couldn't abear him. One thing I'm thankful for from the bottom o' my heart, and that is, that my house is college property, like the church, and I can snap my vingers at Squire, and I do." She suited the action to the word. "Has been the Berkeley Arms for a hunnerd years, but 'twill be so no longer. When paint's dry, up goos the yead o' Queen Annie, bless her! a poor soul as ha' lost all her childer, like myself, and the Queen's Head it'll be for ever more."

"Ay, things be main different in village now, sure," said Lumpy. "To think what mighty changes come in a little time! Zeems only a few days sin' young pa'son won that noble match—you mind, souls, the day the lord's carriage broke under the weight of the Queen's purse—ay, the day afore he were stopped in old road. I never understood the rights o' that bit o' work. Gaffer, hav 'ee got that printed paper ye read, where the Lun'on talk be given like the words of a book?"

Old Minshull slowly drew from his pocket a folded sheet, rather dirty, worn

at the edges, and falling apart at the folds. He opened it out with great care, and spread it on his knees.

"That's he," said Lumpy. "Gaffer, you be a scholard; read it out loud to us again."

"Ay, an' don't need spectacles neither," said Minshull proudly; "well, listen, souls."

Very slowly, and with as much deliberation as though he were reading it for the first instead of the hundredth time, and moving his forefinger along the line, the old man began to read the account of the attempted robbery of Lord Godolphin which the *Daily Courant* presented to the London public a week after the event. The names of the principal persons concerned appeared with a dash between the initial and final letters, and Godolphin's was read by Minshull as "Lard G line n". After briefly relating the incident, the writer of the paragraph added:

"'Tis said the Prisoner that broke jail was a Servant of a Captain A——y, a Guest at that time of Esq. N——s B——y. The gallant Captain's Commission (as it is credibly reported) is not under the seal of her Gracious Majestie, or King William lately Deceas'd of Noble Memorie, but of the Czar of Muscovy. 'Tis vouch'd by some 'twas none other than the Great Cham."

"Ay, that's print," said Soapy Dick at the conclusion of the reading. "The 'Cap'n A line y' was Cap'n Aglionby sure enough, an' some did zay as how 'twas he let the pris'ner out o' lock-up, and so brought shame to Will'm Nokes."

"Ay, an' some did say as how the Cap'n hisself made one o' the cut-purse rogues as waylaid the lard," said Honest John.

"Old wives' tales," said Minshull. "My boy Sherry be wise for his years, an' he says Cap'n couldn't ha' let prisoner out, 'cause a' were miles away at the time. And as for Cap'n bein' on the road—why, when Sir Godfrey coom in all the might o' the law to 'stablish the truth, Squire up and said as how Cap'n was abed and asleep on that early mornen when the deed was done."

"Ay true, Squire said so; but did a' take his dyin' oath like a common man? Tell me that, souls."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted, and the villagers were thrilled into excitement by the distant tootle of a horn.

"Here be coach at last," cried the ostler. "Ten minutes behind time, and no sign of young Master Rochester. Giles coachman won't wait, not he."

But as the coach came in sight at a bend of the road, two figures were seen hastening along from the direction of the rectory. One was a tall youthful form clad in black from his low felt hat to his buckle shoes. His steinkirk was black, and its fringed ends were tucked into a black waistcoat. Black were his plain drugget coat and breeches, black also his woollen stockings. Nothing redeemed

the sable hue of his garments save his cambric shirt, the white front of which was much exposed, in the fashion of the time. Harry Rochester's face was pale, its expression sad.

His companion, a head shorter than himself, was Sherebiah Minshull, clad in the sober brown of ordinary country wear, and trudging along steadily under the weight of a fair-sized valise. Winter or summer, his appearance never varied: his firm round cheeks were always ruddy, his blue eyes always bright; and his expression, now as always, was that of placid self-content, well becoming "a man of peace".

The two drew nearer to the inn, where the group had by this time been enlarged by the accession of the greater part of the village population, women and children, workers and loafers, mingled in one interested throng. As Giles Appleyard was at that moment explaining to the passenger at his side, he had never seen such a crowd at Winton St. Mary before, though he had driven the coach, good weather and bad, for fifteen years come Christmas. It reminded him of the crowd at Salisbury Fair.

"And seein' as how I've been laid up wi' a bad leg for two months," he added, "I'm behind the times, I be; news travels slow to them as don't drive coaches, and, i' feck, I know no more than the dead what this mortal big crowd do mean, i' feck I don't."

But many voices were ready to tell him when, having pulled up his four steaming horses at the inn door, he descended with grave deliberation from his perch, saluted Mistress Joplady with the gallantry of the road, and entered her house "to warm his nattlens", as he said, with a tankard of her home-brewed. Young pa'son was a-gwine to Lun'on town! It seemed a slight cause for such an unwonted scene; in reality it was a momentous event in the life of Harry Rochester and in the history of his village. Small things bulk large in the imagination of rustic folk; a journey to London came within the experience of few of them; and the departure of young pa'son, following so closely upon two such notable events as the cricket match and the attack on the Lord High Treasurer, had already furnished unfailing material for gossip, and would be the theme of comment and speculation for a year to come.

It was all along of old Squire, they said; and the coachman, for the first and only time in his career, delayed his departure for some minutes after the horses had been watered, in order to listen to the story. A few days after Lord Godolphin's flying visit, Squire Berkeley had fenced in a piece of land which time out of mind had been regarded as part of the village common. Old Gaffer Minshull, whose memory went back fifty years, was called up to tell how in the year '53, just before Christmas, the then parson had held a prayer-meeting on that very spot to celebrate the making of Noll Crum'ell Lord Protector; he remembered it

well, for it lasted five hours, and old Jenny Bates fainted on the ground and took to her bed from that day.

"Ay, 'twas a holy spot, an' Squire med ha' feared to touch un, as the old ancient folk feared to lay hands on the Lord's holy ark; but, bless 'ee, Squire bean't afeard o' nothen, nay, not o' the still small voice pa'son do zay be inside on us all."

When the ground was fenced in the good parson was disposed to carry the matter to law. But though he had already won one case (a matter of right of way) in the courts, the only result was that the squire had carried it to appeal, trusting in the power of the purse. The angry villagers therefore determined to take the law into their own hands. Without consulting the rector, they assembled one evening towards the end of October, and hastening in a body to the disputed space, began to make short work of the new fencing. But the squire had got wind of their intention, by some witchcraft of his own, they believed: he soon appeared on the scene at the head of a gang of his own men. There was a fight; heads were broken, and the squire's party were getting badly mauled when the rector suddenly arrived and rushed between the combatants.

"Ay, poor pa'son, I zee un now, I do," said Gaffer Minshull feelingly, "goen headlong into the rout wi' all his petticoats flyen! A fine upstanden man was pa'son, as ought to ha' been a man o' war. A' stood in the eye of Squire, an' Squire opened on un, gave tongue to a deal o' hot an' scorchen words, a' did. But pa'son took no heed to'n, not he: he spoke up fair an' softly to Squire's men, and wi' that way o' his a' made 'em feel all fashly like; a' had a won'erful way wi' 'n, had pa'son; an' they made off wi' their broken heads, they did; an' Squire was left a-frothen an' cussen as he were a heathen Frenchman or Turk. Ah, poor pa'son! Such a fine sperit as he had, his frame were not built for 't; wi' my own aged eyes I seed un go blue at the lips, and a' put his hand on his bosom, a' did, an' seemed as if all the breath was blowed out of his mortal body; and a' went home-along a stricken soul, and two days arter his weak heart busted, an' young pa'son had no feyther—ay, poor soul, no feyther, an' my boy Sherebiah be nigh varty-vour, and here I be. 'Tis strange ways Them above has wi' poor weak mortals—strange ways, ay sure!"

Mr. Berkeley took advantage of the rector's death to pay off old scores. The legal actions which Mr. Rochester had taken, on behalf of his flock, collapsed for want of further funds; he had already seriously impoverished himself by his open-hearted generosity; and when the squire came down on the dead man's estate for the law costs, Harry found that, after all debts were paid, he was possessed of some twenty guineas in all wherewith to start life.

His project of going to Oxford was necessarily abandoned. He was at a loss to find a career. Educated by his father with a view to entering the Church, he

was fairly well grounded in classics and mathematics, and had in addition a good acquaintance with French, and a great stock of English poetry; but his knowledge was not marketable. He was too young for a tutor's place, and had no influence to back him; friendless and homeless, he was at his wits' end.

Then one day he bethought him of Lord Godolphin's promise. It had been frank and apparently sincere. My lord, it was true, had spoken of a country benefice when Harry's Oxford days were over; but Harry reflected that the slight service he had rendered was not likely to appear greater with the lapse of time, while his need was actual and urgent. Why not take the Lord Treasurer at his word, journey to London, and put his case before the man who, in all the kingdom, was the most able to help him if he would?

He mentioned the matter to Gaffer Minshull, rather expecting that the sturdy veteran would pour cold water on his idea. To his surprise the old man urged him to carry it out, and overbore the objections which every high-spirited lad, even in those days of patronage, must have had to soliciting favours from the great. His eagerness was partially explained to Harry when the old fellow added a suggestion of his own. He was seriously concerned about his boy Sherebiah. In spite of strict injunctions to have nothing to do with the expedition against the squire's fencing, Sherebiah, man of peace as he was, had been attracted to the scene as a moth to a candle. At first he had watched events from a distance, among other interested spectators; but when he saw the fight at its beginning go against the villagers, owing to the superior training of the squire's men, many of whom were old soldiers, he could contain himself no longer. At the head of the waverers he dashed into the affray, and set such an example of valour that it would have gone hardly with the enemy but for the opportune arrival of the rector.

From that moment Sherebiah was a marked man. Whatever reasons the father had for fearing Mr. Berkeley were strengthened when it became evident that the squire had marked and would resent the son's action. Sherebiah had been doing no good in the village since he suddenly returned to it, from no one knew where, a few years before. His father was anxious that he should go away for a time, at least until the squire's anger had cooled. He welcomed the opportunity afforded by the approaching departure of Harry.

"Let un goo wi' 'ee," he said. "'Tis a knowen boy, handy, with a head full o' wise things he's larned in the world. He'd be proud to sarve 'ee, ay, that he would."

"But, gaffer, I can't afford a servant. Twenty guineas are all I have, and I know not what may happen. If Lord Godolphin fails me, my money will soon be gone, and then there'll be two poor fellows instead of one."

"Never fear. I bean't afeard for 'ee. And what does the Book say? Why,

'twas the holy King David as said it hisself: 'Once I were young,' says he, 'and now I be old; but never ha' I knowed the righteous forsaken, nor his seed a-beggen bread neither.' That's what he said, and he knowed a thing or two, so he did."

"Perhaps he didn't know everything, gaffer. Well, you're set on it, I see. Sherry would certainly be better out of the squire's way; so he can come with me, and as soon as I find something to do he had better look for employment, and London ought to be a good place for that."

Thus it happened that, on this November morning, the two passengers who had booked places in the Salisbury coach for London were Harry Rochester and Sherebiah Minshull.

The story took a long time in the telling in the parlour of the inn, and Giles Appleyard was somewhat perturbed when he saw by the big clock in the corner that his departure was overdue. He drained his tankard, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and went out, calling loudly to the passengers to take their places. Harry shook hands all round; every man had something to say to him that was intended to be pleasant and encouraging, but was in many cases the reverse. His heart was full as he thought of leaving the good folk among whom he had lived and whose kindly feeling for him was so evident. When, last of all, Mistress Joplady flung her arms round his neck and hugged him to her ample bosom, and then wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, he felt a lump in his throat, and was glad to escape and mount to his place on the roof of the coach.

"All right, Bill?" shouted the coachman over his shoulder.

"Ay."

"Let goo, ostler."

And gathering up the reins he cracked his whip, and with a clatter and rumble the heavy vehicle, amid a volley of cheers, lurched forward on the way to London.

The journey of nearly seventy miles was not likely to be pleasant. The stage-coaches of those days were large and clumsy structures, with hard springs. The inside passengers were jolted and jostled; the outside passengers had no proper seats, but found what sitting room they could among the packages and bundles. On this morning, there was only one other passenger on the roof of the coach, a stout broad-faced man dressed in brown clothes much like Sherebiah's. He had retained his seat during the scene of farewell, and sat solemnly munching a thick sausage, scanning the crowd out of shrewd little twinkling eyes that seemed a size too small for the other features. When his sausage was finished, he filled a huge pipe and sat puffing in stolid silence.

For some time after the coach started, no word was spoken by the three passengers. Harry was wrapt in his thoughts, brooding over the past, dreaming

about the future. Sherebiah had lit his pipe as soon as he was settled, and smoked on contentedly, stealing a glance every now and then at the broad figure separated from him by a large travelling trunk. He seemed to find some amusement in these occasional peeps at his neighbour, who by and by returned his glance.

"Mizzly mornen," said Sherebiah, with a nod.

"Zo," grunted the other. His eyes were resting on Sherebiah's pipe.

"Tobacco be a great comfort," said the latter, noting the look. "Master Harry there, he bean't come to 't yet; true, 'tis not for babes an' sucklens; but I took to 'bacca when Susan wouldn't take me, and 'tis better nor any wife."

"Where you get dat pipe?" asked the stranger, in a slow pleasant voice with a foreign accent.

"This pipe! Why, over in Amesbury; see, 'tis marked wi' the gauntlet, sure token of a Amesbury pipe, an' there's no better in the land. Why med 'ee axe such a feelen question, now?"

"Once I zaw a pipe like it, wid de mark on it—de gauntlet, you zay."

"Oh! I say, master, what part o' the land med 'ee hail from? Your tongue makes me think 'ee med be a Dutchman, though I wouldn't say so to your face."

The man looked at his interrogator without replying. He stuffed the tobacco down into his pipe with a fat forefinger which exactly fitted the bowl.

"You know Amsterdam, my vrient?" he said.

"Ha' been there, mynheer; so 'tis Amsterdam you hail from! Well, I ha' been in wuss places. Ay, ha' seed summat o' the world, I have, and I knowed 'ee by your cut for a Dutchman."

There was silence again for a space. Both the men sat smoking, heedless of all things around them. They finished their pipes at the same moment, and, moved by a mutual impulse, each handed his pouch to the other.

"Virginia," said Sherebiah laconically.

"Ah! Barbados," returned the other. "My name, Jan Grootz."

"And it becomes 'ee," said Sherebiah. "Now mine bean't so good a match; 'tis over long for one o' my inches, and over proud for a man so meek: Sherebiah Stand-up-and-bless Minshull in the church book, but plain Sherry to them as I takes to, like young pa'son there."

Harry was roused from his reverie at hearing himself mentioned. He looked for the first time at his fellow-passenger, who at that moment lifted his podgy right hand and pointed to a windmill in full sail a little distance from the road.

"Ay sure, minds 'ee of home; your country's full of mills, to be sure. Mebbe you be a miller, now?"

The Dutchman waited to blow a great cloud from his mouth before he answered.

"A sailor," he said; "but I have mills."

"A skipper," rejoined Sherry, looking over his costume. "'Tis not for me to say, but to mortal eye you be more like a varmer.—'Tis a skipper from Holland," he added, including Harry in the conversation, "that has a mill or two to his name and smokes 'bacca out o' Barbados."

"Jan Grootz," said the Dutchman.

Harry acknowledged the introduction, and remarked on the slowness of their progress over the rough road. On this Mynheer Grootz volunteered the remark that, having come all the way from Bristol, he would be glad when the journey was ended. By degrees he became still more communicative; and when the coach pulled up at Basingstoke for the mid-day meal, Harry had learnt that the Dutchman had been to Bristol to inspect a vessel of which he was part-owner, and which had come most fortunately to port after being first knocked about by a French privateer, then badly damaged by a storm. It was to the storm that she owed her escape from the Frenchman, and to her captain's seamanship her escape from the storm. Grootz was particularly gratified at her safe arrival, for she represented a large amount not only to him personally, but to others who could ill afford to lose on a venture upon which he had persuaded them to embark.

When the journey was resumed, the conversation became still more friendly. Harry liked the look of the Dutchman. His broad face with its wide nose and little eyes was not handsome, but its expression inspired confidence; and the careful slowness of his speech, and his habit of pointing with his forefinger when he wished to be emphatic, were a little amusing. He asked no questions, but Harry by and by found himself explaining his own position and relating the events that had led to it, and told him of his projected visit to Lord Godolphin. At this up came the forefinger.

"Ah, my young vrient, you are de son of a minister: ver' well: you know de good Book: ver' well: 'Put not your drust in princes;' de words are drue. I tell you dis; besides my mills and my ships, I do oder dings; I supply food for de men and horses of de English and Dutch armies; and I have met princes; yes—I, Jan Grootz. I tell you dis; wid a good honest merchant of London or of Amsterdam, I care not, man knows where he stand; his foot is on de solid rock; but wid dukes and grand-dukes and oder princes—ah! man tread a quicksand. Dey promise, but do dey pay? You are good boy, I dink; mind you, I do not say I know, for outside do not always speak drue; de apple may be red, and all de time a maggot at core. I tell you dis; seven year ago I make contract over hay wid young captain of Bavarian Elector; it was in Namur campaign; he look good, he speak good, I am well content; but donder! my hay I lose, and 3242 thalers 3 groschen beside. Dis den I tell you; avoid arms and de law, drive some honest trade: zo you respect yourself, and oder people dey respect you. You owe noding; nobody owe you; you are a man."

Ever since the departure from Basingstoke, Sherebiah, sitting just behind Harry, had taken no part in the conversation, but appeared to find something curiously interesting in the road behind, for after once or twice looking over his shoulder he at last faced round altogether, and sat with his back to the horses. Just as the Dutchman finished his speech—the longest to which he had yet given utterance, and one that his slow delivery lengthened beyond its natural extent—Sherebiah turned round, tapped Harry on the shoulder, and in a low tone said:

"Summat's i' the wind."

"What do you mean, Sherry?"

"Wind yourself about and look down the road behind."

"Well, I see nothing—stay, there's a horseman just topping the hill, a good mile behind us: what of that?"

"Why, 'tis like this. He always is a mile behind: that's where 'tis. I seed him afore we come to Basingstoke; but he didn't come to the inn to eat his vittles, not he. I seed him again when we was a mile this side o' Basingstoke; what had he been doen, then, while we eat and drank? We stop, he falls behind; when we trot, he trots; 'tis as if he were a bob at th' end of a line, never nearer never vurther."

"You think we are being followed?"

"That's what I do think, sure enough."

"A highwayman?"

"Mebbe, mebbe not; most like not, for 'tis not dark enough, and he's always in sight."

"Perhaps he thinks he can't be seen."

"Not reckonen on the height of the coach roof? But I seed him, I did, two hours an' more agoo."

"Why should he follow the coach, I wonder? He may belong to someone inside."

"Mebbe, mebbe not; 'tis curious anyways."

"Well, the fellow is clearly dogging the coach; if your curiosity troubles you, suppose you slip off a mile before we reach the next post-house and try to get a nearer look at him as he passes? You can catch up the coach while they change horses."

"Ay, I will, sure. We be nigh the river now; over the bridge and we come to Hounslow heath, a fearsome place for highwaymen. We change at the Bull and Gate, then run straight into Lun'on: oh, I know the road."

It was late in the afternoon by the time the coach reached the inn where the last change of the journey was made. Ten minutes before, Sherebiah nimbly slipped down, crept through a gap in the hedge, and waited for the pursuer to appear. Presently he heard the clatter of hoofs; the sound grew louder, but all at once began to diminish. Scrambling back into the road, he was just in time to

see the horseman strike off at full speed along a by-road to his left, which led, as Sherebiah knew, to London by a course only a mile or two longer than the main highway. The man must evidently have changed his horse somewhere on the road, and could only have taken the detour in a desire to arrive in London ahead of the coach.

Sherebiah stared long and earnestly at the retreating figure. He frowned and looked puzzled as he set off to overtake the coach. The driver was mounting the box as he came up.

"Well, what do you make of it?" asked Harry.

"He be gone off by a side road," replied Sherebiah.

"So your curiosity is not to be satisfied after all?"

"Well, he rid away hard to the left, wi' his back towards me, an' 'tis growen duskish, an' nowt but a owl could see clear."

But when Sherebiah clambered to his place he wore a sober look which did not escape the clear little eyes of Jan Grootz, who silently extended his pouch to him. Sherebiah refilled and puffed away, every now and then removing the pipe from his mouth and staring contemplatively at the bowl.

CHAPTER V
A Message from the Squire

The Old White Hart—A Letter for the Captain—Visions—Aglionby gives Instructions—The Watch—Half-Truths—Ways and Means—Hard Thinking

Sherebiah sat very silent for the rest of the journey. The coach jolted on rapidly towards the great city: passed the market-gardens of Hammersmith, the open fields of Kensington, along Piccadilly, where the first street-lamps shed a dim oily light, through Holborn, at last pulling up at the Angel and Crown in Threadneedle Street. It was past nine o'clock, dull and murky, and few people were about. But a small crowd was gathered at the door of the inn to meet the coach, and Sherebiah, as he shouldered the luggage and moved towards the door, shot a keen but unobtrusive glance at the faces of the men. His movements were somewhat too slow for Harry, who, eager to ease his limbs after a whole day's stiffness and discomfort, entered the hostelry first. All at once Sherebiah quickened his

step, hastened into the lobby, set the luggage down at the foot of the stairs, and then, making a mumbled excuse to Harry, slipped out behind one of the inn servants, and looked narrowly at the diminishing crowd. He was just in time to see a man, whom he had already noticed on the outskirts of the group, saunter away in the direction of London Bridge. Appearances are deceptive, and Sherebiah was not sure that he was right, but he thought the man bore a resemblance to the rider whom he had seen following the coach, and of whom he had caught one nearer glimpse as he turned into the by-road. He followed the man, stepping as quietly as his heavy shoes allowed, accommodating his pace to that of the man in front, and taking advantage of the shadow afforded by the penthouse fronts of the closed shops. The man quickened his steps as he approached the bridge. Sherebiah pursued him at a discreet distance over the narrow roadway, beneath the rickety four-story houses that towered above the bridge over almost its entire length, through Traitor's Gate, and on into Southwark. The man went along one narrow street, and at last passed under a low archway. Walking even more stealthily, Sherebiah still followed, and found himself in the spacious yard of the Old White Hart Inn. This famous three-storied hostelry was built about three sides of a square. Along two sides of the upper story ran a balustraded gallery, with wooden pillars supporting the sloping roof. All was quiet. Sherebiah, keeping in the shadow of the arch, peeped round and saw the man he followed standing at the door waiting for an answer to his summons at the bell, which hung on the outer wall under a gabled cover. After a little time the door opened and the porter appeared.

"Be Cap'n Aglionby within?" said the man.

"Ay, and abed and asleep. What do you want wi' him?"

"I want to see un."

"A pretty time o' night! House was shut up an hour ago—no business doin' these hard times. Why didn't you come sooner?"

"A good reason, 'cause I be only just come to Lun'on. I has a message for Cap'n Aglionby."

"Well, needs must, I s'pose," grumbled the servant. "I'll go up and wake the captain, and be cursed horrible for my pains. Who shall I say wants him?"

"Tell un a friend from the country."

The porter went into the inn, and soon reappeared in the gallery at the top of the house, where he tapped at the door of one of the bedrooms opening from it. He tapped once, twice, thrice, and received no answer; then to his fourth knock came a response the tone of which, though not the words, could be heard in the yard below. A colloquy ensued, of which only the share of the inn servant was distinctly audible to Sherebiah.

"A man from the country, Cap'n, to see you."

Mumble from within.

"So I told him, but here he bides."

More mumbling.

"Didn't tell me his name; a man from the country was all he said, and I knows no more."

The answering mumble was of higher and impatient mood. Then the man came slowly downstairs, grumbling under his breath all the way.

"You're to go up," he said to the stranger. "'Tis number thirty-two. And fine tantrums he be in, waked out of sleep; as if I ain't waked out of sleep or kept from it day and night, and all year long."

The man entered the inn after the servant, and began to ascend. Sherebiah meanwhile, looking around, had espied another stairway at the opposite angle of the courtyard. Darting across on tiptoe, he mounted quickly, quietly, and reached the gallery above in time to see the messenger disappear into the captain's room. He hurried along, and, relying on the porter's complaint of the paucity of business, he opened the door of the adjacent room and slipped in, leaving the door ajar. Through the thin partition he heard the murmur of voices in the next room, but could not catch a word distinctly. In a few moments, however, there was a crash as of a chair being overthrown, followed by a torrent of execrations from the captain. Then the door of the next room opened, and Aglionby came out on to the gallery accompanied by his visitor.

"Hang you and the squire too!" said the angry warrior. "The tinder's wet, and I can't light my candle. Give me the letter and I'll read it by the light of the lantern yonder, and catch my death o' cold withal."

Shrinking back into the darkness of his room, Sherebiah caught sight of Captain Aglionby as he passed the half-open door on his way to the single lantern that feebly lit up the gallery. He had pulled on his breeches and stockings, but for the rest was in night attire. The lantern swung from a hook at the corner of the gallery, three rooms beyond that into which Sherebiah had ventured. Standing beneath it, the captain broke the seal of the letter given him by the visitor, and read rapidly under his breath. The reading finished, he stuffed the paper into his pocket and chuckled.

"Stap me, he begs and prays me now!" he exclaimed. "See, Jock, tell me what ye know of this. Ye ha'n't read the letter, ha' ye? By the Lord Harry, I'll slit—"

"Nay, nay, Cap'n," interrupted the man; "I know nought o' the letter. I'll tell 'ee how it all come about. I was openen the gate for Squire, when—"

"Speak lower, man; your brazen throat'll wake the house."

"I was openen the gate for Squire," resumed the fellow in a lower tone, which was, however, still audible to Sherebiah's straining ears, "when who

should come by but young master popinjay dressed all in his black. He never bobbed to Squire, not he; never so much as cast eyes on un; but when Squire saw the young swaggerer he stopped still as a stone, and looked after un dazed like. Then he put his arm on the gate, a' did, and leant heavy on it, thinken mortal hard; 'twas a matter o' five minutes afore he lifted his head again, and never seed I a stranger look on any man's face than I seed then on Squire's. A' jumped when his eyes fell on me; 'What be staren at, fool?' says he, in one of his rages. 'Shall I run for doctor?' says I; 'you do look mortal bad.' 'Nay,' says he, "tis nothen; a little faintness; 'twill pass.' I touched my cap, as becomes me, and Squire went into park and shut gate behind un. But a' hadn't walked more nor three steps when a' stops, swings about, and 'Jock!' says he, 'order post-horses for Hungerford road to-morrer. And come up to hall inside of an hour; I shall ha' a job for 'ee.'

"Well, I went up to hall after I'd ordered horses, and Squire give me this letter. 'You'll ride to Lun'on to-morrer, and take this letter to Cap'n Aglionby at White Hart, South'ark. And you'll tell the cap'n where young Master Rochester be stayen.' 'How'll I know that, Squire?' says I. 'Pon that he burst into one of his terr'ble rages again. 'How, fool!' says he; 'why, keep the coach in sight, and see that 'ee make no mistake.' So here I be, Cap'n, and young Master Rochester he's at Angel and Crown in Threadneedle Street."

"Thank 'ee, Jock; I know the house. And is the young springald alone?"

"Not he; has Sherry Minshull with un, a-carryen his belongens."

"Zounds and thunder! did Sherry see you?"

"No, i' feck; I kept too far from coach to be seen for sarten, and at Angel and Crown Sherry was too heavy laden to spy me."

"Well for you, well for you! Jock, you'll come and take up your quarters here; there's plenty of room. I'll tell 'em to gi' ye a bed."

"What about the horse, Cap'n? I left un at Angel and Crown."

"Let him bide till morning; then you can bring him here too."

"But Squire, Cap'n,—won't he expect us back, me and horse?"

"Not he; 'tis here written; I'm to keep you if there's any work for you, and odzooks! I'll ha' some work for you, never fear. Jock, if your story has made you as dry as it has made me you're main thirsty; go down and bring up beer for two, and a lighted candle. I'll ring and wake that rascal by the time you get to the foot of the stairs."

The man went down by the way he had come, and the captain returned to his room. As soon as the coast was clear, Sherebiah slipped out into the gallery, carrying his shoes to avoid noise, ran down the outer staircase, stood for a few moments at the foot to make sure that all was safe, then darted across the yard and out at the gate. The street was quite deserted, and Sherebiah, secure from molestation, walked slowly along towards London Bridge, deep in thought. His

friend Harry had been followed to London at the orders of the squire; what was the meaning of that? Surely Mr. Berkeley did not intend to wreak vengeance on the son for the baffled opposition of the father? What had Captain Aglionby to do with the matter? Rumour the omniscient had informed the village that the captain's departure had been occasioned by a violent quarrel with the squire; yet it was plain that the squire knew the captain's whereabouts and was enlisting his aid in some project. Sherebiah wished that he could get a sight of Mr. Berkeley's letter; he was puzzled to account for the old man's shock as Harry passed the gate; but try as he might to piece these strange circumstances together, all his cogitation suggested no clue.

So absorbed was he, so mechanical his movements, that he started convulsively when, just as he had passed through Traitor's Gate, a man stepped suddenly before him from a narrow entry and bade him stop in the Queen's name. Looking up, he saw that his way was barred by a corpulent constable in cocked hat and laced coat, with a staff two feet longer than himself, and half a dozen ancient and decrepit watchmen with lanterns and staves.

"Stand!" cried the constable. "Give an account of yourself."

Sherebiah took his measure.

"Not so, neither, master constable. Out o' my way; 'tis a late hour, and I ought to be abed."

He made to move on, but the constable stood full in his path, and the watchmen grouped themselves behind their superior.

"You may be a villain for aught I know," said the constable, "or even a vagrom or thief. Why abroad at this hour o' night?"

"I'm as sober as a judge," replied Sherebiah, "and neither thief nor vagrom. Stand aside, master constable."

"Well, 'tis dry and thirsty work watching o' nights, and there be seven of us, and a shilling don't go far in these war times; we'll take a shilling to let ye pass; eh, men?"

The watchmen mumbled assent. Sherebiah laughed.

"A shilling? 'Tis a free country, master constable, and a sober countryman don't carry shillings to buy what's his. And seems to me, so it does, as ye've had drink enough a'ready; out o' my way, I say!"

"Arrest him, men!" cried the constable, angry at being disappointed of his expected tip.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when with sudden energy Sherebiah threw himself against him, at the same time placing a leg behind his knee. As the constable fell, Sherebiah dashed at the watchmen, toppled two of them over, their fall being accompanied by the crash of their lanterns, scattered the rest, and ran rapidly across the bridge. This unexpected onset from one whom

they had taken for a simple and timid country bumpkin was too much for the watch. They made no attempt to pursue the fugitive, but returned surly and crestfallen to their lair.

"Where on earth have you been, Sherry?" asked Harry, as his man re-entered the inn.

"Payen a visit to a cousin o' mine, Master Harry. And I was nigh put in lock-up, I was. Was stopped by the watch, but I toppled un over, I did. I'm a man o' peace."

"If you are let alone," said Harry, laughing. "I feared some harm had happened to you. Our Dutch friend tells me London is an ill place at night for a stranger."

"Ay, and by day too, Master Harry," rejoined Sherebiah earnestly. "If I med make so bold, I'd say, get 'ee to-morrow a good cane,—none of your little small amber-tipt fancies as fine gentlemen swing in their dainty fingers, but a stout length of oak or birch, fit to crack a pate."

"I have a sword, Sherry, and can use it, thanks to you."

"Ay, but 'tis not always easy to draw a sword in time in a street brawl, and there be light-fingered gentry as can coax a sword from the scabbard and the wearer none the wiser till it be too late. Be it your poor feyther's sword you ha' brought, sir?"

"Yes, the silver-hilted one; I showed it you once, Sherry."

"Well, 'tis right for a gentleman to wear a sword, though I marvel, I do, at a holy man o' peace like pa'son haven such a deadly piece o' furniture."

"Ay, and I've often wondered how a man of peace like yourself is able to handle a sword so well. You made a swordsman of me, Sherry; how did you become one yourself?"

"Ah, sir, 'tis a many things a man o' peace has to know in the way o' dressens. I believe in peace with a cudgel in your hand. Them as wants peace be most like to get it an they be ready for war."

"You remind me of what Master Butler says:

'There's but the twinkling of a star
Betwixt the man of peace and war'.

But the hour is late, Sherry, and I must be up betimes in the morning, for my visit to Lord Godolphin."

"You bean't gwine to see the high lard to-morrer, sir? Better larn to find your way about this tangle o' busy streets first. 'Tis as easy as sucken eggs to lose your way."

"I have made up my mind to go to-morrow. You see, I must lose no time. I

have only twenty guineas, as you know, and by to-morrow two of those will be gone. And I sha'n't rest till I have tried my luck. Good-night, Sherry! Wake me at seven."

Left to himself, Sherebiah ordered a pint of small beer, and sat for an hour longer, ruminating, with knit brows and compressed lips. More than once he got up and walked round the deal table, stopping to take a pull at the tankard, heaving a sigh, then going on again. He was disquieted. The sudden discovery that the squire's animosity was pursuing Harry no less perplexed than disturbed him. Harry and Mr. Berkeley had never met at close quarters; there had been no intercourse between hall and parsonage. A personal cause of offence was, as it seemed to Sherebiah, out of the question; yet it was strange that the squire's hatred of the father should extend to the son. At length, muttering "No one can tell what's what with the likes o' old Squire," Sherebiah brought his big fist down on to the table with a bang that made the pewter jump and rattle, and fetched the drawer from his place in the bar.

"What d'ye lack?" said the man.

"Nothen, sonny, nothen. 'Tis a way o' mine to hit out when I be a-thinken, a bold way for a man o' peace, true. Bacon at half arter seven, drawer,—and we be country eaters, mind 'ee. Good-night!"

CHAPTER VI
My Lord Marlborough makes a Note

London Streets—A Chair!—A Great Man's Portals—An Effort of Memory—Patronage—Marlborough—A Step in the Peerage—A Memorandum—A Friend in London—A Dinner at Locket's—Mr. Colley Cibber—Great Expectations—A Thick Stick—Prevarication

Harry was awake long before Sherebiah tapped at his door next morning. His projected visit to Lord Godolphin gave him some concern. He had no tremors of shyness at the thought of meeting the Lord Treasurer; but, ignorant as he was of London ways, he knew not how to time his visit, and could hope for no counsel on that point from Sherebiah. He was too much excited to do justice to the crisp rashers which were placed before him at the breakfast-table, and felt

little disposed to converse with Jan Grootz the Dutchman opposite. Sherebiah had taken upon himself to wait at table, but, as a privileged servitor, did not think it unbecoming to throw in a word here and there. He gave Grootz his views on the price of oats and the policy of King Louis of France with equal assurance.

"Know ye where de lord live?" asked the Dutchman suddenly.

Harry had forgotten that he had mentioned his errand to his fellow-passenger, and for the moment repented his confidence. Before he could reply, Grootz went on:

"He live over against the Queen's Wood Yard, by Thames-side, leading to Scotland Yard. My vrient John Evelyn built de house. I have been dere."

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry. "Then can you tell me the best time to visit him?"

"Ja! De best time, it is ten o'clock, before he go to de palace. He rise late; he has many visitors; I zee him myself in his dressing-gown before his zervant have curled his wig, and I wait my turn two hours. And when you zee him, you zall lose no time; he like man to speak out, mark you."

The Dutchman spoke very slowly, not interrupting his meal, and wagging his fat finger as he concluded.

"And how shall I go? Shall I walk?"

"I' feck, no," said Sherebiah from behind. "The night have been rainy, and the streets be mushed wi' mud; you'd be spattered from head to heel, Master Harry. Nay; you med walk as far as the Exchange and buy 'ee a pair o' gloves there for seemliness, and then get your shoes brushed by one o' the blackguards at the corner. Then you can take a chair; 'tis a shilling a mile, and easier goen nor the hackneys, for the chairmen walk on the pavement, and you won't get jolted nor splashed so bad."

"Ja, and I tell you dis," added the Dutchman. "Short poles, and short men; zo, dey take not zo much room, and if dey upzet you, why, you do not fall zo much."

"Ay, and don't let 'em chouse 'ee out o' more than their due," said Sherebiah. "I know they men. If they think a man be up from country, they look at un and then at the shilling, up and down, and miscall un wi' such brazen tongues that he'll pay anything to save his ears. A shilling a mile, Master Harry, no more."

"Zo! De counsel is good. But I give you a better: go not at all. Lords! I tell you dis before: an honest merchant is worth two, dree, no man zay how many lords; and de Book zay, 'Put not your drust in princes'. Still, I wish you good luck, my young vrient, Jan Grootz; zo!"

He squeezed Harry's hand in his own great fist, and then, having demolished his mountain of food, filled his pipe and set forth for the Custom House on Thames bank. Two hours later, Harry left the inn under Sherebiah's guidance, and for the first time in his life trod the streets of London. Filled though

his mind was with the approaching interview, which might mean so much to him, he was yet able to take an interest in the strange scenes that opened before his inexperienced eyes: the brilliant shops, each with its sign of painted copper, pewter, or wood hanging from iron branches; the taverns and coffee-houses, already crowded with people eager to hear and discuss the news, and perhaps to get a peep at the morning's *Courant*; the court and porticoes of the Royal Exchange, to which merchants were flocking; the crowds of money-dealers in Change Alley, looking for clients. He went up to the gallery on the first floor of the Exchange, and bought a pair of gloves from a neat and pretty girl at one of the booths; then strolled along, admiring the rich and dazzling display of silks and jewellery which a few hours later would attract all the fine ladies in town.

Descending to the street again, he passed up Cheapside and through St. Paul's Churchyard, down Ludgate Hill and through Ludgate, where he beheld impaled on stakes a row of hideous heads of traitors, one of which, Sherebiah told him with indignation, was that of Noll Crum'ell. Then skirting the Fleet Ditch, once navigable, but now a noisome slimy sewer, he came into Fleet Street, through Temple Bar to the Strand, and at length arrived at Charing Cross, where he was nearly overturned by a hasty chair-man, whose "By your leave!" was not yet familiar to his ears. At Charing Cross stood a number of boys with boxes before them on the pavement, and cries of "Clean your shoes!" "London fucus!" "Best Spanish blacking!" came in eager competing tones. Sherebiah selected one whose stand was in front of a barber's shop.

"Here's the blackguard for 'ee, Master Harry," he said. "He'll shine your shoes while barber shaves my stubble. A penny; no more."

When the shoes were polished and the stubble mown, Sherebiah called up a couple of chairmen who were sitting on their poles near by.

"Do 'ee know my Lord Godolphin's noble house?" he asked.

"Ay; servant, sir."

"Well then, carry my young master to that very house, and see 'ee don't jolt 'n, or drop 'n, or let 'n get splashed. 'Tis under a mile, Master Harry," he whispered at parting.

Harry would rather have walked. The men took what care they could, but the press of people was so great that they had to dodge at every few steps, and their fare gripped the seat to prevent himself from being knocked against first one side, then the other, of the conveyance. At the corner of Whitehall, as they turned into Scotland Yard, a passing dray splashed up a shower of liquid mud, and Harry felt a moist dab upon his nose. Fortunately the spot was soon removed with his handkerchief; and when, after crossing by the Charcoal House and through the Wood Yard, the chairmen at length set him down at the door of Godolphin's house, he would have felt no anxiety about his personal appearance,

if he had been sufficiently self-conscious to think about it. He had put on his best coat, silk stockings, and buckle shoes; at his side he wore the sword about which he had spoken to Sherebiah. He sprang alertly up the steps, and looked about him with a keen quick gaze that bespoke a definite purpose.

The great entrance-hall was thronged. Servants, officers, government officials, men about town, stood in groups or moved here and there in pursuit of their several objects of business or pleasure. No one appeared to remark the presence of the new-comer, who walked quietly through the throng towards the broad staircase. At the foot a gorgeously-dressed flunkey was standing, to whom one or two gentlemen had already applied for information. As Harry was about to address him, his attention was attracted by a woolly-pated wide-grinning black boy, who at that moment ran down the stairs. He carried a silver tray, on which a cup and jug of fine porcelain jingled as he ran.

"Done, Sambo?" asked the tall flunkey at the stair-foot.

"Yussir!" replied the boy with a white grin. "My lord jolly dis mornin; oh yes; drink him chocolate without one cuss. Gwine to begin work now; oh yes."

"Can I see the Lord Godolphin?" asked Harry, stepping up to the servant as Sambo disappeared.

The man gave Harry a stare, but answered respectfully: "My lord's levee is over, sir. The nigger brings down the tray when the last visitor has gone."

"I have come specially to see my lord, and——"

"Have you an appointment, sir?"

"I think if you will take my name to my lord he will see me."

Harry spoke quietly; he was determined not to be turned from his purpose by mere formality or red tape. The man eyeing him saw nothing but self-possession and confidence in his air.

"My lord is now engaged with his correspondence," he said. "He does not brook interruption."

"My name is Harry Rochester; I will answer for it that you will do no wrong in acquainting his lordship."

After a moment's hesitation the man beckoned to a fellow-servant, and gave him Harry's message. He went upstairs, and returning in a few minutes said:

"What is your business with my lord, sir? His lordship does not remember your name."

There was the suggestion of a sneer in the man's voice. With hardly a perceptible pause Harry replied:

"Tell his lordship I am from Winton St. Mary, at his invitation."

A faint smile curled the lips of the two flunkeys. The second again mounted the stairs. When he descended, his face wore its usual expression of deference

and respect.

”Be so good as to wait upon his lordship,” he said, and led the way.

In a few minutes Harry found himself, hat in hand, making his bow to Lord Godolphin in a large wainscoted apartment. Four large candles burnt upon the mantel-piece, daylight being kept out by the heavy curtains on either side of the narrow window. A huge log fire filled the chimney-place; beyond it stood a broad table littered with papers, which at that moment a young man was sorting by the light of a shaded candle. Lord Godolphin was in dressing-gown and slippers.

”Well, sir?” he said.

”My name is Rochester, my lord.”

”I am aware of that. I do not recall it. Well?”

My lord’s tone was cold and uninviting.

”Your lordship will permit me to mention a little incident on the Roman road by Sir Godfrey Fanshawe’s park, when——”

”Stay, I remember now. You are the lad they called the young parson, eh? I have a poor head for names. When my man spoke of Winton St. Mary I supposed you might be a messenger from the gentleman who entertained us there.”

Now that Harry was actually face to face with the Lord Treasurer, he felt some diffidence in opening the subject of his visit. My lord, in spite of his deshabille, seemed far less approachable than he had been on the old Roman road. Then he was the country sportsman; now he was the chief minister of the Queen.

”Your shouting friend with the scriptural name—how is he?” he asked in a somewhat more cordial tone.

”He is well, my lord; he is with me in London.”

”And your father: has he won his case against the squire? I heard something of him at Sir Godfrey Fanshawe’s, I think.”

”My father is dead, my lord.”

”Indeed! Pray accept my condolences. And now, tell me what brings you here.”

”Your lordship may remember, after the scene with the highwaymen——”

”Yes, yes; you did me a service, you and your man; what then?”

”It was but a slight service, my lord; I do not presume on it; but you were so good as to say that if, at some future time, I should find myself in need of assistance, I was to come to your lordship.”

”Why, I did speak of a country parsonage, I believe. But you,”—he smiled—”why, I really may not venture to set you up in a cure of souls. You have to take your degrees yet.”

”That is impossible, my lord. My father impoverished himself in his feuds with Mr. Berkeley; when his affairs were settled I found myself possessed of but a poor twenty guineas. I have given up all thought of going to Oxford; I must

seek a livelihood."

"H'm!"

Lord Godolphin looked him up and down, as though estimating his chances of making his way in the world.

"You wear a sword," he said. "Rochester—you are no connection of the earl's?—no, of course not, he is a Wilmot. Where do you spring from?"

"My grandfather was a soldier, my lord; I have heard that he died young, but my father seldom spoke of these matters; we have no relatives."

"H'm! I bethink me now, you yourself have an itch for martial life. All boys have, I suppose. Young Lord Churchill was cut to the heart a few months ago because my lady Marlborough would not permit him to follow his father to Flanders. Well, to be frank with you, I see no way of helping you. With twenty guineas you can no more buy a commission than you can enter yourself at a college. To enlist as a common soldier would be a last resource to one of your breeding. There are too many young scions of good stocks for the lesser places at court to go round among them. Yet I would fain do something for you."

He began to saunter up and down the room, his hands clasped behind him, stopping for a moment to listen as the sound of cheers came from the street. Suddenly the door was opened, and the voice of the servant was heard announcing a visitor.

"My lord Marlborough."

Harry looked with eager curiosity as the great soldier entered the room. He saw a tall, singularly handsome man, with short curved upper lip, firm chin, long almond-shaped eyes, and a calm benignity of expression. John Churchill, Earl of Marlborough, was at this time fifty-two years of age. As captain-general of the English forces, in the summer of this year, 1702, he had opened in concert with the Dutch a campaign in Flanders against Louis the Fourteenth of France,—a new campaign in the great war of the Spanish Succession which the policy of William the Third had bequeathed to his sister-in-law. Venloo and other towns had been captured by the confederate armies, Liège had been reduced, and the forces having gone into winter quarters, Marlborough had returned to England to support the Occasional Conformity Bill. He was a close personal friend of Godolphin, and allied to him by the marriage of Francis Godolphin to his daughter Henrietta.

"Welcome, my dear lord!" said Godolphin, starting forward to meet the earl. "I did not know you had arrived."

"I am but just come from waiting on the Queen," said Marlborough. "I arrived late last night."

"You are welcome indeed. All men's mouths are full of your praises."

"Ay," returned Marlborough with a smile; "your Londoners have lusty throats. And I have a piece of news for you." He dropped his voice: the secretary

had vanished through a further door: Harry stood in a quandary, the noblemen both seeming to ignore his presence. ”The Queen has been pleased to express her wish to make me a duke.”

Godolphin laid his hand on his friend’s arm, and said cordially: ”I congratulate you, Jack, with all my heart. Why, this very morning I have a letter from Churchill at Cambridge; there are shrewd wits there; he says ’tis whispered you are to be raised in the peerage, and the boy, young dog, begs me to tell him what his own title will be then.”

”Ah! ’tis over soon to talk of it. I must acquaint my lady first, and methinks she will object.”

”Stap me, Jack! ’tis few women would hesitate to exchange countess for duchess.—God bless me, I’d forgotten the boy! My lord, this is the hero of the little adventure at Winton St. Mary I writ you of. ’Twas he that inspired the stout fellow to shout, and scared the highwaymen out of their five wits.”

Marlborough looked towards Harry, who flushed and bowed. An idea seemed to strike Godolphin. Linking his arm with the earl’s, he led him slowly to the other end of the room, and stood there talking earnestly to him in tones too low for Harry to catch a word. Once or twice both glanced at the tall youthful figure standing in some natural embarrassment near the door. Once Marlborough shook his head and frowned, upon which Godolphin took him by a button of his laced coat and spoke more earnestly than before. At length Marlborough smiled, laid a hand on Godolphin’s shoulder, and spoke a few words in his ear. Then he turned about, and coming slowly towards Harry, said, in his clear bell-like tones:

”My lord Godolphin tells me you have lost your father and are all but penniless. ’Tis an unfortunate situation for a lad of your years. You would serve the Queen?”

”Ay, my lord.”

”You have a quick wit, my lord says. I may make some use of you. Write your name on a piece of paper, and the name of your lodging.”

Godolphin motioned him to the table, where he found paper and a pencil. He wrote his name and the name of his inn, and handed the paper to Marlborough, who said, as he folded it and placed it in his pocket:

”I will send for you, Master Rochester, if I can serve you.”

”My lord, I am much beholden to you—” began Harry.

Marlborough interrupted him.

”’Tis my lord Godolphin you should thank for his good word.”

”’Faith, my lord,” said Godolphin, ”’tis due to Master Rochester that the Queen is served by her present Lord Treasurer. I am glad, my lad, that my friend Lord Marlborough chanced to come upon us here, and I hope you will have reason to be glad also. Now, you will excuse us; we have matters of state to speak of; I

My Lord Marlborough

My Lord Marlborough

wish you well."

Harry murmured his thanks and bowed himself out. His nerves were a-tingle with his unexpected good fortune. To have seen and spoken with the greatest man in the kingdom was itself an unforeseen privilege; and the prospect of assistance from such a powerful and august personage filled him with elation. The earl had shown no great cordiality, it was true; but Harry was inclined to draw good augury from the few words he had uttered. They were probably more sincere than a warm volubility would have been. He left the house with a sparkling eye and a springy gait, and looked eagerly around to see if Sherebiah were near at hand to hear his news. But Sherebiah was nowhere to be seen. Having no particular business, now that his great errand was accomplished, Harry walked through Whitehall into St. James's Park, in the hope that he might catch a glimpse of Queen Anne herself. The guard had just been changed at St. James's Palace, and a stream of people met him as he strolled along the Mall. He was interested in watching them—the fine ladies with their hoops and patches, the beaux with their many-coloured coats, canes dangling at their buttons, tooth-picks between their teeth, and snuff-boxes in frequent use. So absorbed was he that he was startled when all at once a hand struck him a hearty blow on the shoulder, and a voice exclaimed:

"Hey, Harry, what make you, ogling the ladies?"

He turned and saw his friend Godfrey Fanshawe, the captain of the cricket team to whose victory he had so much contributed. The two young fellows shook hands heartily.

"What brings you to London?" continued Fanshawe.

"I've come in search of fortune, like Dick Whittington. You heard of my father's death?"

"Ay, but nothing since. They seldom write letters at home."

Harry then explained the course of events which had brought him to London, concluding with his recent interview with Marlborough and Godolphin.

"Egad, man!" exclaimed Fanshawe, "you're in luck's way indeed. Would that I stood so well with the two greatest men in England. My lord Marlborough will gazette you an ensign of foot or a cornet of horse; and my cornetcy, I may tell you, cost my father a pretty penny. What luck, Harry, if we make the next campaign together! The earl will surely go back to Flanders when the winter is over."

"I should like nothing better."

"Where are you staying?"

"At the Angel and Crown, in Threadneedle Street."

"You must leave that and come westward. Are you alone?"

"Sherry Minshull is with me at present; but he'll get work for himself as

soon as I am settled."

"Sherry's a handy fellow; egad, I know no better! He'll tie a fly with any man, and is as good with sword or quarterstaff as he is with his fists. Well now, 'tis drawing towards dinner-time; come and dine with me; the people of fashion here dine at four, but I stick to country habits. We'll go to Locket's at Charing Cross; you're my guest to-day. And we'll go to the play this evening; the first time, I warrant you, you've seen a play. Come! I stand well with the people at Locket's, and the sharp air this morning has given me an appetite."

It was but five minutes' walk to Locket's tavern. Entering, Fanshawe bowed with elaborate courtesy to the fair dame in charge, and called for the card.

"There's boiled beef and carrots, I see, and a goose, and look, a calf's head. I adore calf's head. What say you? Yes? Boy, bring calf's head for two, and quickly."

With calf's head and cabbage and a wedge of Cheshire cheese, the two young fellows appeased their unjaded appetites. Fanshawe sat for some time finishing his bottle of wine, Harry contenting himself with small beer. Then, as there still remained a few hours to while away before theatre time, Fanshawe proposed a row on the river. Harry eagerly assented; they sallied forth, took boat at Westminster stairs and rowed up to Chelsea, returning to Westminster in time for the performance of Mr. Colley Cibber's new play, "She would and she would not", by Her Majesty's Servants at Drury Lane. Harry was delighted with his first visit to the theatre. He was tickled at the unabashed impertinence of Trappanti the discarded servant, played by Mr. Penkethman, one of the best comedians in London, as Fanshawe informed him; and fell in love with Hypolita the heroine, a part which suited Mrs. Mountford to perfection. But he was perhaps most interested in Mr. Colley Cibber himself, who played the part of Don Manuel the irascible father. His pleasure was complete when, after the performance, Fanshawe took him to the Bull's Head tavern, and showed him Mr. Cibber with his paint washed off, surrounded by a circle of actors, soldiers, lords, and even clergymen. He had never seen an author before. Mr. Cibber had no presence to boast of, with his thick legs, lean face, and sandy hair; but the liveliness of his conversation gave him a sort of pre-eminence among his coterie, and made a considerable impression on a youth ready to admire and wonder at anything.

Fanshawe appeared quite at home among the company. He was indeed a frequent visitor at the Bull's Head after the play, where all were welcome on condition of providing their quota towards the general hilarity. Fanshawe was the lucky possessor of a fine baritone voice, and his spirited singing of west-country songs had won him instant popularity. On this night, in response to the usual call, he began—

”Tom Pearce, Tom Pearce, lend me thy grey mare,
All along, down along, out along lee;
For I want for to go to Widdicombe Fair,
Wi’ Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davy,
Dan Whiddon, Harry Hawk,
Old uncle Tom Cobleigh, and all”;

and by the time he reached the end of the third of the eight stanzas, the whole company were ready to join him in trolling the chorus,

”Old uncle Tom Cobleigh and all”.

It was late when Harry reached the Angel and Crown. Sherebiah was marching up and down before the tavern, blowing great clouds from his pipe.

”Hey now, Master Harry,” he said, with an expression of mingled wrath and relief; ”’tis a mighty scurvy trick you have played me, i’ feck ’tis so. Here we are, your second day in London, and you must go off along by your lone self on who knows what errand o’ foolery. Ay, ’tis strong words for me, and a man o’ peace and all, but not too strong, seee’n as I knows the wicked ways o’ the town and you be unfledged. Zooks, sir, I’ve been in a terrible way, thinken all manner of awsome an’ gashly things, as how you med ha’ been trepanned, or slit by the Scourers, or trampled by some high lard’s horses, or rifled and beat by footpads, or ’ticed into a dicing den by sweetners always on the look-out for a country gudgeon, or——”

”Hold, Sherry, you forget yourself,” said Harry, who was, however, not displeased to find the honest fellow so solicitous about him. ”In truth, I forgot all about you. I can take care of myself, I think. I dined with Mr. Godfrey Fanshawe, whom I chanced to meet, and we went to the play afterwards, and I never laughed so much in my life. Mrs. Mountford’s a beauty, Sherry, and Mr. Cibber—when he doesn’t squeak—has the pleasantest voice ever I heard—nay, not that, after all; ’tis not so pleasant as my lord Marlborough’s. What d’ye think, Sherry? I met the earl himself at Lord Godolphin’s, and he has my name on a scrap of paper, and to-morrow or next day I shall hold the queen’s commission, and then off with the troops to Flanders, and I shall make my fortune, man, and then——”

”Huh!” put in a voice from the doorway. ”Haastige spoed is zelden goed.”

Harry’s excitement was dashed by the slow drawl of Mynheer Grootz, whose little eyes were twinkling as he puffed at his big pipe.

”Ay, a true word,” said Sherebiah. ”’More haste, less speed,’ as the Dutch words mean put into rightful language. ’Counten chickens afore they be hatched,’

as ye med say."

Though he was a little nettled, Harry had too much good sense not to see that his elation had carried him too far. He could laugh at himself—an excellent virtue in man or boy.

"I am an ass, Mr. Grootz," he said; "but really I did not expect such good luck. My lord Godolphin was very kind, and so was the earl, and as he used but few words I do think he meant what he said. I am sorry my absence made you uneasy, Sherry; but I don't understand why you should imagine all manner of harm."

"An ye knew——" began Sherebiah; but he paused, hemmed, and changed his sentence. "All's well as ends well, Master Harry; I axe your pardon for my free words; and here be a fine stout piece of ash I bought in Fleet Street for your hand. Feel un; 'twill crack a pate as quick as speaken, and I'll be more easy in mind knowen you have such a good staff in company."

"Thanks, Sherry!" said Harry with a laugh, weighing in his hand the stick with which the man presented him. "But I'm a man of peace, you know, eh?—at present. Now let's to bed."

As they went from the room Harry remarked, "By the way, Sherry, how is it that you know Dutch?"

"Me know Dutch? Why, sir, what makes ye think I know that outlandish tongue?"

"Why, didn't you tell me just now the meaning of what Mynheer Grootz said to me?"

"Ay, so I did, now. It must ha' been as a dog knows his master's speech, or just as I knowed the meanen o' the holy things your good feyther was used to speak in the high pulpit, for egad, word by word I knowed no more than the dead what a' said, not I."

The explanation struck Harry as rather lame, but he merely said, with a laugh:

"Well, you'll make a very faithful watch-dog, Sherry. Good-night! I shall sleep well;—if I don't dream too much of battle and glory."

CHAPTER VII

Snared

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Hope Deferred—Motes in the Sunbeam—Mynheer makes an Offer—Sherebiah on Guard—New Quarters—Tumblers—Solvitur Ambulando—Doubling—Sick at Heart—Too Late—A Debit Balance—Gloom—Cold Streets—Three Sailors—Muffled

Several days passed—days of unfailing happiness for Harry. Though he spent hours in roaming the town, there was always something fresh to see, something novel to capture his interest. He saw the state entrance of the new Venetian ambassador. He visited the Tower, the Abbey, and St. Paul's, saw Winstanley's water-works in Piccadilly near Hyde Park, and witnessed a football match at Covent Garden. He accompanied Fanshawe several times to the theatre, and somewhat offended that sparkish young gentleman by constantly refusing to join him in card-parties and night escapades in the streets. He saw a back-sword match at the Bear Garden in Hockley in the Hole, and a billiard match at the Greyhound Coffee-house near Monmouth Street. Apart from these public sights, he found endless diversion in the ordinary street scenes: the markets, the itinerant vendors, the acrobats, or posture-masters as they were then called, who performed their dancing and tumbling in squares remote from the traffic. It amused Harry that Sherebiah never tired of these mountebank tricks, but would stand and watch them with unflagging interest by the hour, applauding every neatly executed feat, and criticising with unsparing severity every instance of clumsiness or bungling. Soldiers, on the other hand, apparently did not interest Sherebiah. Harry liked to watch them drilling on the Horse Guards' parade or in Hyde Park; but on these occasions Sherebiah always strolled away, waiting with impatience until his young master had satisfied his curiosity.

"They won't kill you, Sherry," said Harry once, laughing as the man sheered off. "Their muskets are not loaded."

"True. But 'tis no pleasure to me to see such men o' war. Feyther o' mine were a trooper; he be always talken on it; I be a man o' peace, I be."

Every day when he came down to breakfast, and when he returned in the evening, Harry eagerly looked for a message from Lord Marlborough. But the days passed; a week flew by; and still no message came. After the second day he made no reference to the matter; Sherebiah and Grootz considerately forbore to allude to it. But they watched him with shrewd eyes, and saw, through all the curiosity and pleasure he took in his new life, a growing sense of disappointment and anxiety. He had built high hopes upon the interview at Godolphin's; as boys will, he had allowed his fancy to outstrip his judgment, and had added a good deal of embroidery to the simple facts. Already in imagination he saw himself carrying the Queen's colours, performing heroic deeds in the field, winning golden opinions from the general, coming home laden with honour and substantial re-

wards, perhaps to gain, as the acme of bliss, an approving smile from the Queen herself. And he would wake from these day-dreams to the sober reality—-that the desired message from Marlborough had not come, and meanwhile time was fleeting by, and every day saw his little stock of money diminished.

He had resisted Fanshawe's recommendation to change his lodging. Charges were higher, Sherebiah informed him, in the more fashionable parts, and he knew that he could not afford to run risks. At first he had not been parsimonious; he was not extravagant by nature, but he had not hesitated to buy a trifle that pleased him, to give largesse to the ballad-singers and street musicians, to pay his eighteenpence for a seat in the pit at Drury Lane or Lincoln's Inn Fields. But he gave all this up, and thought twice about spending a penny. He bought only the strictest necessaries, and for his amusement depended on the sights of the streets, the parks, and the river, and such entertainment as could be had at the coffee-houses, where for a penny he could obtain a dish of coffee, read the *Daily Courant* with its manuscript supplement, or Dawks's *News Letter*, and hear all the news of the day discussed with more heat than information by arm-chair politicians.

One day the *Courant* announced that the Queen had been pleased to confer the dignity of a dukedom upon the Earl of Marlborough, and that the House of Commons would be asked to grant him an annual pension to match his new rank. Harry remembered what he had heard pass between Marlborough and Godolphin, and when the coffee-house gossips supplemented the official intimation with the rumour that the Countess Sarah had been violently opposed to her husband's elevation in the peerage, he understood the meaning of the peculiar tone in which Marlborough had spoken of acquainting her ladyship. The new duchess was the theme of much conversation and many jests in these free-spoken assemblies. Marlborough was a very great general; everybody was agreed on that; but it was doubted whether he was master in his own house; some said he was henpecked; one plain blunt fellow declared in Harry's hearing that the duke was as much afraid of his missis as any Thames bargee. Harry was not interested in Marlborough's domestic affairs, but his heart sank when he reflected on his own insignificance beside the great man whom the Queen was delighting to honour. After all, how could he expect a man of such eminence, immersed in state affairs, with all the responsibility for conducting a great campaign, to remember a country youth whom he had seen once, and who had made, perhaps, as deep an impression on him as a fly might make on a lion.

That night Harry was eating his supper, somewhat moodily, when Mynheer Grootz, sitting opposite, made him a sudden proposition.

"I tell you dis," he said. "I go back to my country zoon. I have business wid de armies; I sell hay for de horses, meal for de men. You are quick, I see dat; you

speak French, enough for my purpose; I give you good wages if you come and help me in my business."

Harry flushed. The Dutchman dipped a hunk of bread into his soup and filled his mouth with it, looking down at the bare deal board the while.

"I thank you, Mynheer," said Harry with some constraint. "I have another purpose, as you know."

Up came the fat forefinger, moist with gravy.

"I speak plain to you. You have pride; I alzo. But I have mills, and ships, and vields; dey are mine; I am rich—ja, rich; I, Jan Grootz. My fader, he was a poor weaver in Dort; he work hard and die poor; I work hard, and grow rich. I have what for to be proud. You are a gentleman; dat is zo; it is good to be a gentleman; it is not good to be poor. And more, it is not good to zee money go every day, every day, and wait for some prince to fill de empty purse. You have pride; for what? For white hands, and by and by an empty stomach. My hands, dey are not white, naturlik; but my stomach is full, and I stand up before any prince; Jan Grootz; zo!"

He spread his broad hands before Harry, as though he were proud even of their horny skin. The action brought a smile to the lad's gloomy face and dulled the edge of his irritation.

"I won't debate the matter with you," he said. "I'm not afraid of work, I hope, and maybe my white hands may be red enough before long. I won't despair of my lord Marlborough yet; and I know your intention is friendly, Mynheer."

The Dutchman grunted, and applied himself again to his meal.

Great as were Harry's anxieties, Sherebiah's were perhaps even greater. He also was disappointed by the forgetfulness or neglect of Marlborough, and concerned at the constant drain upon his young master's purse; but he had further causes of trouble of which Harry was unaware. Ever since their arrival in London Sherebiah had been possessed by a dread of impending ill. He had always in mind the interview between Captain Aglionby and the squire's man at the White Hart tavern, and day by day expected it to bear fruit to Harry's harm; but for reasons of his own he hesitated to tell him the plain truth. He stuck like a leech to Harry when he went walking, and many times when the lad would rather have been alone with his dismal thoughts he found Sherebiah at his heel, like the watch-dog to which he had compared him. He did not know that even when he succeeded in eluding his too solicitous henchman, it was only in appearance; for Sherebiah, armed with a stout ash cudgel, was seldom many yards behind. Many a night after Harry had gone disconsolate to his bed, the man wended his way to Southwark in the hope of making a further discovery; but he never saw the captain or anyone whom he knew to be connected with him, and when at last he found an opportunity of making a discreet enquiry at the hostelry, he was more alarmed

than pleased to find that Captain Aglionby had departed some time before, and that nothing had since been heard of him.

One morning, when they had been for about a month in London, when Parliament had been prorogued, and a new year had opened, Sherebiah surprised Harry by suggesting that they should remove to an inn near Leicester fields.

"Why, you were against it when Mr. Fanshawe proposed it. How is it that you have changed your mind, Sherry?"

"Well, sir, 'tis this way, if I med be so bold. Your money be gwine fast, and 'twould never do to begin a more humble way o' liven here. Nay, what I say is, if you must pare and scrape, go where you bean't so well known, and then nobody'll think the worse on 'ee for't."

"Hang me, who talked of paring and scraping, Sherry?" cried Harry impatiently.

"I axe your pardon, sir," said Sherebiah earnestly, "but I were not born yesterday. Here are we, four weeks in Lun'on, and you know yourself how many golden guineas you brought wi' 'ee, and how many be left. Sure I bean't a great eater myself, but even my little small morsel ha' got to be paid for. Master Harry, 'twill be best for 'ee to do as I say. Ay, an' if I knowed 'ee wouldn't up and rate me, I'd say another thing, I would so."

"Well—what's that?"

"Why, I'd say, hand over your purse to me. Nay, sir, don't be angry; ye're not wasteful, no; but if we go to another house, I can save 'ee many a penny here and penny there in ways you wouldn't so much as dream on. I know Lun'on folk, you see; ay, I know 'em well."

In the upshot, Sherebiah had his way on both points. The reason for his change of front was that on the previous afternoon he had seen the squire's man Jock hanging about the inn, and had found out subsequently that Captain Aglionby had returned to his old quarters at the White Hart. It was just as well, he thought, to take one step further from danger by changing their lodging. When this was done, and Sherebiah kept the purse, Harry was amazed to find how much further his money went. It would not have surprised him if the weekly bill had been reduced by a small amount; but when he discovered that, though he fared quite as well, the expenses were not half what they had been, he began to think that Sherebiah possessed some talisman against the cupidity of London innkeepers. He found, too, that he was left much more to himself, and wondered why, with the change of lodging, Sherebiah's watchfulness appeared to have diminished.

He was walking with Godfrey Fanshawe one cold January afternoon by Pye Corner, when he was attracted by a crowd of people gazing at a street show that, to judge by their laughter and applause, was exceedingly entertaining. Elbowing

their way through the stragglers on the outskirts, the two young fellows arrived at a position whence they could see what was going on. A group of posture-masters were performing, and at the moment of Harry's arrival, a short thickset man, dressed in fantastic costume, and with painted face, was dancing on his knees with his toes in his hands, keeping time to the music of a flute and a violin. The tune was a merry one, and the movements of the acrobat irresistibly funny, so that every member of the crowd roared with laughter.

"Adzooks!" exclaimed Fanshawe, "the fellow's face is the funniest part of the performance. Look'ee, Harry, 'tis as sober as a judge's on assize; one would think 'twere a hanging matter."

Harry had been so tickled by this odd mode of dancing that he had not noticed the performer's features. He glanced at them now, started with a sudden gasp, and cried:

"By the Lord Harry, 'tis——"

"'Tis what?" said Fanshawe, looking at him in surprise.

"Oh, nothing!"

"Come, I scent a mystery. Unravel, sir!"

"'Tis nothing. See, Fanshawe, the dance is over. Let us go on."

Without waiting for his companion, he pushed his way back through the crowd.

"Faith, I don't understand you of late, Rochester," said Fanshawe in a half-vexed tone, when he overtook him. "You're moody, full of whimsies, all starts and surprises. Would to Heaven that the duke would bethink him of that paper you gave him! You need settling in life. Why don't you go to him, or to Lord Godolphin again? 'Tis few suitors but would show more perseverance."

"Not I. 'Twas against the grain to beg even one favour. I'd rather earn my bread by scraping a fiddle, or dancing on my knees like—like the poor fellow there."

"Well, let me tell you, you'll rue your independence. Adsbud, who would get on in this world if he didn't pay court to the great! Your starveling poet writes a flattering dedication to a lord—for pay! Your snivelling parson toadies to the lord of the manor—for a meal! I except your father, Harry; he was a rare one. 'Tis the way o' the world; we must all do it, or pay the penalty."

"Be the penalty what it will, I'll pay it rather than play lick-spittle to any man."

Fanshawe shrugged. "By the way," he said, "Mr. Berkeley is in town—to pay his court to someone, I swear. 'Tis said he is buying a commission for that cub his son; pray Heaven it be not in my regiment! That's the way o' the world again. Here's Piers Berkeley, the young popinjay, all grins and frippery, like to carry the Queen's colours in a fine regiment because his father has a long purse,

and you, a deal more fit for it, kicking your heels for want of a rich father or a richer patron. I fear 'tis all up with your chances now; but I wish you luck. I go to Flanders in a week; home to-morrow to say good-bye; who knows when we may meet again!"

The two friends bade each other a cordial farewell; then Harry returned sadly to his lodging. Some two hours later Sherebiah came back.

"What do 'ee think, Master Harry?" he said. "I ha' seed old Squire."

"I knew he was in town," replied Harry. "And what do you think I've seen, Sherry?"

Detecting a something strange in his tone, Sherebiah gave him a hard look.

"I never was no good at guessen," he said. "Mebbe the German giant at Hercules' Pillars, or the liven fairy in Bridges Street."

"No, 'twas no giant and no fairy, but a short man—about your height, Sherry—with a round face—just as round as yours—and a solemn look—like yours at whiles; and what think you he was doing? He was dancing on his knees, with a crowd of numskulls round him grinning at his capers, and——"

"There now, 'twas sure to be found out, I knowed it. 'Twas me—I don't deny it, 'cos bean't no good."

"Now I know why you wanted to keep the purse, you old dissembler. You eke out my little store with the pence your antics fetch. Sherry, I love thee; I do indeed. But how did you learn those fantastic tricks with your knees?"

"Oh, I ha' done a bit o' tumblen in my time; ay sure."

"You seem to have done a bit of everything. But when? and why? You must tell me all about it."

"Some day mebbe. Ha' led a motley life for a man o' peace; so 'tis. 'Twould make old feyther o' mine drop all his old bones in a heap if so be as he knowed all my lines o' life. The time'll come to tell 'ee, sir, but 'tis not yet, no."

That was the end of Sherebiah's acrobatic performances. From that day he stuck to Harry more closely than ever; and the weekly bills increased. They had been in town now for nearly two months, and by dint of the greatest economy Sherebiah thought that the money might last for a fortnight longer. Then the wolf would be at the door. Harry had not told his man of Jan Grootz's offer, though he surmised, from a word Sherebiah let fall, that he knew of it. Hoping against hope, he waited and longed for some sign from the duke. Every day Sherebiah went to the Angel and Crown to see if a letter had come, and every day he came back disappointed. He had not given the host his new address, for reasons of his own; and when on one of his visits he learnt that a man had enquired for the present whereabouts of Mr. Harry Rochester, he hugged himself on his prudence. He would not have been so well pleased if he had known that on the very next day, when he returned from the Angel and Crown by a roundabout way to his inn in

Leicester Fields, he was shadowed by a man who had waited for several hours for the opportunity. And he would undoubtedly have counselled a second change of abode if he had known that the spy, after assuring himself that Harry Rochester was a guest of the inn, had gone hotfoot to Captain Aglionby.

Another week went by. On Saturday night Sherebiah counted up the contents of his purse, and found that by the end of the next week he would have spent the uttermost farthing.

"I give it back to 'ee, sir," he said. "Come Monday morn, I go to find work."

"Not so fast, Sherry. We share alike; when you go to find work, I go too. The duke may send for me even at the eleventh hour."

"A plague on the duke! I wish I may never hear of dukes again to th' end o' my mortal days. A duke's a bubble, and that's the truth on't. Better be an honest man, as Mynheer Grootz says."

"'Tis mere forgetfulness, I am sure, Sherry. He has mislaid the paper, I suspect, and his mind being filled with weightier matters, has forgotten that even so insignificant a person as myself exists."

"'Tis my belief he never did a kindness to man, woman, or child in all his born days. Why, all the chairmen and hackney coachmen know un; ay, and madam his duchess too. My lady will haggle with an oyster-wench over a ha'penny, and the only thing my lord gives away for nowt is his smile. Hang dukes and duchesses, say I!"

"Well, Sherry, I can't gainsay you, because I don't know. We'll give him three days' grace, and then——"

He sighed. The world looked black to him. He knew no trade, had practised no art, had no means to enter a profession. He turned over in his mind the possible openings. He could not apprentice himself to a merchant or handicraftsman, for that needed money. He might perhaps get a clerkship in a goldsmith's or a warehouse; Sir Godfrey Fanshawe, no doubt, would vouch for his respectability! He almost envied the footmen of gentlemen of quality, who wore a livery, earned six pounds a year, and a crown a week extra for gloves and powder. He writhed on his sleepless bed that night as he contrasted his present circumstances with his former prospects and his recent imaginings. A clergyman,—an officer of the Queen's, forsooth! he was a pauper, a beggar, with nothing but his health and his wits. Then he rated himself for his despondency. "Fancy snivelling," he said to himself, "because a duke hasn't the grace or the time to remember a promise! What would my father think of me? Here have I wasted precious time waiting on a duke's pleasure when I might have been turning the weeks to some profit. And I was too proud to accept the Dutchman's friendly offer. Egad, I'll go to him on Monday and beg him to give me employment; sink my pride for good and all."

So possessed was he by his determination that Sunday passed all too slowly.

On Monday morning he walked early to the Angel and Crown and asked for Mynheer Grootz. The landlord replied that Mynheer Grootz had left the inn on Friday, removing all his baggage. He was about to sail for Holland, and, as the wind favoured, it was probable that his ship had already left the Thames. This news was a terrible damper. Harry had built confidently on the anticipated interview. Mingled with his gratitude for the coming favour, he even felt a pleasant glow at his condescension in accepting service so much beneath him. And now this new house of cards was toppled down! He turned gloomily away, and wandered aimlessly through the streets, disposed, under the first sting of the disappointment, to believe that fate had indeed a spite against him. He was glad he had said nothing to Sherebiah of his intention, being in no mood to endure condolences, in word or look. "What a useless loon I am!" he said to himself bitterly. "Sherry can earn his living by tumbling in the streets, and maybe in dozens of other ways; I can do nothing. Even Piers Berkeley has a commission in the army—that puppy!"

But Harry was never long in the dumps. He was only a boy, and the misfortunes that had befallen him so suddenly were sufficient excuse for his passing fits of moodiness; but his was naturally a sanguine temper, and by the time he reached the inn his brow had cleared and he was able to eat his dinner with good appetite.

"The last but one, Sherry," he said with a smile. "After to-morrow the purse will be all but dry, and then I shall have to earn my bread. What do you say? Will you teach me to stand on my head, to begin with?"

"Zooks, sir, dont'ee put it so terrible low. Look'ee, now, I ha' some score o' guineas behind my belt; ye're welcome to the loan on 'em till your ship do come home."

"You're a good fellow, Sherry, but I couldn't think of it. Do you want to make me still more ashamed of myself?"

"Well then, sir, why not go to my lord Marlborough's noble house and walk up and down outside till the duke comes out, and stand full in his path and catch his eye—or mebbe his missis'; her med be taken wi' 'ee and command her good man to remember 'ee, for by all accounts she——"

"Hold your tongue, sirrah!" cried Harry with a touch of anger. "Hang about a great man's door, like Lazarus waiting for the offal! No indeed. Nay. To-morrow we shall be adrift; pray God a fair breeze will carry us into port. Sherry, you had better go and tell the landlord we shall leave him to-morrow. Ask for the reckoning; we will pay the score and begin the morning at least free men."

In half an hour Sherebiah returned with the bill. Harry pulled a long face as he glanced at it. He untied the purse-strings and laid his money out on the table.

"'Tis worse than I thought," he said ruefully. "In some unconscionable fash-

ion the bill mounts higher this week; I am ten shillings short without vails to the servants."

"Ah, I know Lun'on folk, I do. But don't let that trouble 'ee, sir; ten shillens won't make a great hole in my store."

"But I won't have your money. Nay, Sherry, call it a whim of mine; 'tis our last day; the charges are mine; to-morrow we must start afresh. I have some trinkets in my box; their worth I know not; but you can take one or two to a goldsmith's and place them with him until the luck turns. You will do that better than I."

He left the room and came back with a miniature set in gold and a brooch of antique make. Sherebiah looked at them with a deliberative air.

"Baubles like these sell for next to nowt," he said. "'Tis not all gold that glitters. But I'll take 'em, sir, and cheapen 'em as best I may. Be I to pledge 'em in my name or yours?"

"It doesn't matter—whichever you like. I'll sit by the fire and read while you are gone."

"Ay, 'tis a raw and nippen afternoon, and there be true comfort in a log fire."

He flung his cloak over his shoulders and was gone. Harry went to his room and brought down a volume of his father's containing Mr. John Milton's poem of "Samson Agonistes". In the dark afternoon he read for some time by the light of the fire, finding a certain melancholy pleasure in fitting Samson's woeful laments to his own case.

"So much I feel my genial spirits droop,
My hopes all flat",

he murmured, and then closed the book over his finger and gazed into the ruddy cavern of the fire till his eyes ached. Sherebiah seemed a long time gone; a feeling of restlessness stole upon Harry. He let the book fall from his hand, rose, and paced about the room, stopping once or twice at the narrow window to look out into the street. The air was misty, the pavement sticky with mud; every passing horse stepped under a blanket of vapour; the wayfarers were muffled about their necks and walked as though bent under a load. Harry fidgeted, wondering why Sherebiah was so long. His reading had not cheered him; his musing did but increase his gloom. At last, unable to endure inaction longer, he put on his cloak and hat, took up the cudgel without which, in deference to Sherebiah's advice, he seldom went abroad, and sallied forth into the street, to walk off his fit of the dumps, if that might be.

By the flickering light above the door he saw three sailors lurching up the street. He passed them, giving them but a casual glance, turned into the Strand,

and spent some time looking listlessly into the lighted shops. At the door of a coffee-house he noticed a group gathered about a newspaper pasted on the wall. A manuscript supplement had just been affixed to it. When he could get near enough to see the writing, he felt a momentary interest in the announcement he read.

"The Duke of Marlborough has rid post to Cambridge, call'd thither by the desperate state of the Marquis of Blandford. It is now 'stablish'd beyond doubt that the young Lord is suffering from the Small-Pox."

Even the great duke had his troubles. Lord Blandford was, as Harry knew, Marlborough's only son; he was the Lord Churchill who had written to Godolphin with boyish curiosity to know what his title would be when his father became a duke. Harry passed on, more than ever convinced that the great man, beset by cares public and domestic, could have no time to think of the small concerns of a country parson's son.

He turned into the Savoy and came by and by to the Temple Gardens, forlorn and desolate in the chill February evening. Not far behind him three sailors were sauntering in the same direction, on their way perhaps to rejoin their vessel in the Thames. The damp cold air struck Harry to the bone; he shivered and drew his cloak closer around him, and was on the point of turning to retrace his steps when there suddenly stood before him a woman, thin-clad, bare-headed, with a whining child in her arms.

"Spare a penny, kind sir, to buy bread. My lips have not touched food the livelong day, and my little boy is fair starved. Oh, sir, have pity on a poor lone woman; spare a penny, kind sir."

Harry stopped and looked at the thin haggard cheeks, the dark-rimmed eyes, the hair hanging in loose damp wisps over the brow. The child's feeble moans stabbed him like a knife; its poor pinched wizened face was a speaking tale of woe. Loosening his cloak, the woman all the while continuing her monotonous complaint, he untied his purse. It contained a guinea and one crown piece. At that moment the three sailors passed him, talking loudly, and laughing coarsely as they jostled the woman in their path.

"The poor creature's need is greater than mine," he thought. "Sherry will bring back some money. Here you are," he said, handing her the guinea. "And for God's sake take your little one out of the damp and cold! Good-night!"

Harry moved on, impressed by the spectacle of a misery deeper than his own, and pursued by the voluble thanks of the poor woman. He had forgotten

his purpose to turn back; and was only recalled to it by the sight of the three sailors rolling on ahead. They were walking arm in arm, and from their gait Harry concluded that the middle one of the three was intoxicated, and needed the support of his comrades. One of them glanced back over his shoulder just as Harry was turning. The next moment there was a heavy thud; the drunken sailor was on the ground, the others bending over him. A hoarse cry for help caused Harry to hasten to the group.

"What is amiss?" he asked.

"Be you a surgeon, mate?" replied the man, a thickset and powerful salt. "Bill be taken wi' a fit, sure enough. A's foaming at the mouth."

"No, I'm not a surgeon. I thought he was drunk."

"Not him. Belay there; let the gentleman see."

Harry went to the man's head and leant over, peering into his face. Instantly the fallen sailor flung his arms round Harry's legs and pulled them violently towards him. Unable to recover himself Harry fell backward, and before he could cry out a cloak was flung over his head and a brawny hand had him by the throat. Through the folds of cloth he heard the men with many oaths congratulate themselves on the ease with which they had accomplished their job. For a few moments he struggled violently, until he felt that resistance was hopeless. Then the cloak was tied about his neck, and he felt himself carried by two of the three, one having him by the head, the other by the heels. They walked swiftly along, and, not troubling to keep step, jolted him unpleasantly. There was a singing in his ears; he gasped for breath; and soon his physical discomfort and his fears were alike annihilated. He had lost consciousness.

CHAPTER VIII
Flotsam

Under the Leads—A Thames-side Attic—A Man of Law—A Matter of Form—A Question of Identity—A Fine Mesh—A Dash for Freedom—Help in Need—For the Plantations—Visitors on Board—Ned Bates—In the Foc'sle—Sailor's Knots—An Old Coat—Odds and Ends—A Soft Answer—Overboard—A Dead Heat—A Sea Lawyer—Grootz Protests—A Stern Chase—Sherry's Story—To the Low Countries

When Harry recovered his senses he found himself tied hand and foot, and with

a cloth gag between his teeth. It was pitch dark; he could hear nothing save a faint scratching near at hand; mice were evidently at their nocturnal work. He lay still perforce; he found it impossible even to wriggle over on to his side. Here was indeed a culmination of his misfortunes.

He tried to think, but the sudden attack and his subsequent unconsciousness had left his brain in a whirl. Gradually the sequence of events came back to him: his walk through the streets towards Blackfriars, the beggar woman, the three sailors, the pretended fit. What was the meaning of it? Had he been marked by the press-gang, and trepanned to serve Her Majesty on the high seas? Had he been kidnapped, to be robbed or held to ransom? Hardly the former, for a knock on the head would have served the kidnappers' ends. Hardly the latter, for no one could have taken the pains to waylay for such a purpose a penniless youth with no friends.

Suddenly he remembered the vague uneasiness shown at times by Sherebiah; his earnest warnings; the cudgel which after all had proved useless. Sherebiah, it seemed, had had more definite reasons for alarm than he had avowed; why then had the silly fellow not spoken his mind freely? Who was the enemy? What motive could any person in the wide world have for kidnapping one who was even yet a boy and had, so far as he knew, done no harm to a living soul? The more he thought, the more he was puzzled.

He was in pain. The cords cut into his flesh; his throat was parched; he could not swallow. How long was this torture to continue? Where was he? Where were his capturers? He longed for a light, so that he might at least see the prison in which he was confined, and so diminish even by one his terrible uncertainties. But no light came, no voice or footfall sounded gratefully upon his ear; and presently a lethargy stole upon his mind and all things were again in oblivion.

He was roused by a light flashed in his eyes. Dazed and still only half conscious, he saw an unknown face bending towards him, and a hand holding a candle. The man grunted as though with relief to find the captive still alive; then, setting the candle upon the floor, he removed the gag. Harry tried to speak, but no word issued from his lips. The man went from the room, leaving the candle still burning. By its light Harry saw that he was in a narrow attic, with rough beams supporting a slanting roof, and whitewashed walls. There was a sky-light above him; he could hear the first patters of a shower of hail.

Presently the man returned bearing a can and a hunk of bread. Lifting Harry, he held the can to his lips. The prisoner drank the beer greedily.

"Where am I?" he asked, recovering his voice.

"Hold your jaw!" was the surly answer. "You are where you are."

"Why am I brought here? What is to be done with me?"

”Hold your jaw, I say! Ye’ll get nothing out of me. Keep a still tongue; for if ye raise your voice someone I know will find means to quiet ye.”

”But I insist on knowing,” cried Harry in indignation. ”Why was I dogged and attacked in the streets, and brought captive to——”

”Stow it! Least said soonest mended. Behave wi’ sense and ye’ll be treated according; otherways—well, I won’t answer for’t.”

”Loose my arms then.”

”Well, I’ll do that for ’ee, and legs too; don’t think ye can run away, ’cos ye can’t. Here’s your supper; dry, but ’tis drier where there’s none. I’ll leave ye to’t.”

Untying the cords, the man gave the bread into Harry’s hand, took up the candle, and went out, locking the door behind him. Harry could not eat; his limbs were cramped with his long immobility; when he stood his knees hardly supported him. But it was pleasant to be able to use arms and legs once more, and after a time his aching pains abated. He groped round the room, shook the door, and found it fast. He could just touch the sky-light with his outstretched hand, and he felt that the glass was loose; but he could not remove it unless he stood higher, and groping failed to find any chair or stool. Escape was impossible; he could but wait for the morning.

He lay awake the greater part of the night, but was sound asleep when the same man re-entered with his meagre breakfast. The morning brought no comfort. A gray dawn struggled through the grimy sky-light, revealing the nakedness of the room. Cobwebs festooned the beams; the boards of the floor were dirty and mouldered; the walls in places were green with damp. Harry took silently the food offered him; he was not encouraged by the previous night’s experience to question his taciturn jailer. The morning passed slowly, irksomely; when the man returned with another meal at noon, Harry ventured to address him.

”How long am I to remain caged here?”

”I can’t tell ’ee, ’cos I don’t know.”

”You’re not one of the sailors who trapped me?”

”Lord, no. I wouldn’t be a dirty swab for nothing ’cept to ’scape the gallows.”

”Who employs you in this turnkey business?”

”That’s my business.”

”Don’t be surly. I’ve done nothing to you.”

”Well, that’s true. You ha’n’t done nothing to me. That’s true enough.”

”Will you do something for me, then? You’re a good fellow, I’m sure.”

”Nay, nay, you don’t come over me, young master. Soft speeches ain’t no good for a tough un like me. When I goes out I locks ye in, and if ye holler till ye bust, ’tis no good, not at all.”

”I didn’t mean that. ’Tis dull as death lying on these rotten boards with

nothing to do; bring me the morning's paper and I'll thank you."

"Well, that's harmless enough, to be sure. Gi' me twopence and I'll buy ye a *Courant*."

"'Tis only a penny."

"True; t'other penny's for me."

Harry smiled and felt for his purse. It was gone.

"Plucked clean, eh?" chuckled the man. "Trust your Wapping swab for that. All the same you shall have the paper."

He returned with the morning's *Courant*, already well thumbed. Harry ran his eye over the meagre half-sheet; there was nothing that interested him except the announcement of Lord Blandford's death at Cambridge.

"The duke has lost his heir," he thought. "He was a little older than myself. Perhaps it is my turn next."

The day wore on. In the afternoon the door opened and a stranger entered along with the custodian. By his cut Harry guessed him to be a lawyer's clerk. His movements were soft and insinuating; his face was wreathed into an artificial smile.

"Good-morning, sir!" he said softly, bowing. "I have waited upon you to complete a little matter of business; a mere formality. The document is quite ready; I have here inkhorn and quill; I have only to ask you to write your name at the foot."

He unrolled the paper he carried, and signed to his companion to bring the writing materials.

"Ah! there is no table, I see. You can hardly write on the floor, sir; James, fetch a table from below.—Your furniture is scanty, sir," he continued as the man went out; "in truth, there is nothing to recommend your situation but its loftiness. You are near the sky, sir, and very fortunately so, for 'tis murky and damp in the street.—Thank you, James! Now, sir, everything is in order; you will, if you please, sign your name where I place my finger, there."

Harry took the pen offered him, and dipped it in the inkhorn. He gave no sign of his amazement.

"Yes," he said, "with pleasure—when I have read the paper."

"Surely, sir, at this stage it is unnecessary. Why delay? I assure you that the document is perfectly in order, and the phraseology of us men of law is—well, sir, you understand that a scrivener is paid so much a folio, and he has no temptation to be unduly brief: he! he!"

"Still, if you do not object I will read the paper. It is merely a form, as you say."

"Very well, sir," said the man with a patient shrug.

He lifted his hand from the paper, and Harry bent over the table to read it.

The writing was clerkly and precise; the sentences were long and involved, with no support from punctuation; but, unfamiliar as he was with legal diction, Harry had no difficulty in making out the gist of the document so obligingly placed before him. His heart was thumping uncomfortably, for all his cool exterior; and he deliberately read down the close lines slowly in order to gain time to collect his thoughts. The request to sign the paper had been surprising enough, but his bewilderment was increased tenfold when he found what it was that he was asked to sign.

Stripped of its verbiage, the document stated that whereas Christopher Butler, gentleman, lately residing in Jermyn Street over against the Garter Coffee-house, had been acquitted of all his debts by the good offices of John Feggans, merchant of the City of London, the said Christopher Butler hereby entered into an indenture to serve the said John Feggans in his Plantations in the island of Barbados for a period of five years. There were qualifications and provisos and penalties which Harry passed over; then, having read the principal articles again, he looked up and said:

"Why should I sign this?"

"Sir!" said the attorney in surprise.

"Why should I sign this? What have I to do with Christopher Butler or John Feggans?"

The lawyer looked round at the other man as though asking whether he had heard aright.

"I am at a loss to give you better reasons than you know already. Who should sign it if not you?"

"I am afraid I must trouble you to explain. See, I find that Christopher Butler, having incurred debts to a large amount, has assigned these debts to John Feggans, who has paid them, and that Christopher Butler indentures himself a slave to John Feggans, to win his release by working in the Plantations. I ask you, what have I to do with all this?"

"Christopher Butler asks that?"

"Who? What did you say?"

"Christopher Butler—yourself."

Harry laughed, so great was his sense of relief. It was all a mistake, then; he had been seized by mistake for some poor wretched fellow who had lost all his money and been forced to adopt this, the last resource of impecunious spendthrifts.

"Pardon me," he said. "There has been a mistake. My name is not Christopher Butler."

He smiled in the attorney's face. The little man looked staggered.

"Not Christopher Butler?"

”Certainly not. My name is——”

Harry stopped. Some instinct of caution warned him not to disclose his real name at present.

”My name is neither Butler nor Christopher,” he added. ”Now, pray let me go.”

”Sir, I have my instructions. I must make enquiries. This is unlooked for, most perplexing. Pray excuse me for one moment.”

He hurried from the room, leaving the door open. The surly custodian, who had followed the colloquy with evident interest, showed that he was not a bad fellow at bottom.

”I’m right glad, that I am,” he said. ”’Twas my own thought you was too young to be such a wild dog, or else you was a most desperate wild one.”

Harry did not reply. Through the open door he heard loud voices proceeding from a room below. He could not catch the words, but there was something in the tone of the loudest voice that sounded familiar. He had no opportunity of forming a conclusion on the matter, for the speaker’s tone was instantly moderated, as though in response to a warning. Immediately afterwards the attorney returned, accompanied by a low-browed fellow in a lackey’s livery. The lawyer’s smile was as bland as ever as he came into the room.

”’Tis not unusual for a man to change his mind, Mr. Butler, but in this case I fear ’t will be a little awkward. I am instructed that you are the Christopher Butler named in this indenture, and have to insist on your affixing your signature to it.”

”Nonsense!” said Harry impatiently. ”I tell you my name is not Butler, and I refuse to sign the paper. ’Tis a preposterous error. I never was in debt in my life; I know nothing of Feggans; indeed, know hardly a soul in London; why, I never was in London till a month or two ago.”

”My dear sir, my dear sir,” said the lawyer, as though expostulating with a hardened liar. Turning to the lackey, he asked: ”You see this young gentleman?”

”Ay, ay, I do so.”

Harry started. The accent was pure Wiltshire, and fell on his ears like a message from home. He scanned the man’s features, but did not recognize him.

”What is his name?” went on the lawyer.

”Butler; ay, ’tis Butler, sure enough.”

”Where did you see him last?”

”In the Fleet prison, to be sure, ay, and on the common side, too.”

”You are sure of this?”

”Ay, faith, sure enough. I seed the gentleman often at maister’s; many’s the time I called a hackney for’n in the darkest hour o’ night, thinken as them as goo fast won’t goo long.”

”And you were present with your master when this little matter of business

was arranged?"

"I was so, ay."

The lawyer looked with his eternal smile at Harry.

"Now, sir," he said, "you will no longer delay to put your hand to this document."

Harry had been thinking rapidly. He gave up the hypothesis of error; the lawyer's visit was clearly part of a deliberate plot; it mattered little whether he was privy to it, or was innocently carrying out his instructions. No doubt there was a *Christopher Butler* who had thus sold himself to pay his debts, but somebody had determined to substitute Harry for the real man. He had noticed that the name Christopher Butler was written in pencil every time it occurred in the document, all else being in ink; and it suddenly flashed upon him that the object had been to entrap him into signing his real name, which would then be substituted for the name pencilled in. He gave the lawyer a long look, put his hands behind his back, and said:

"It is waste of time. I refuse."

Again the lawyer smiled and shrugged.

"'Tis immaterial, sir. This is but a duplicate; the original was signed three days ago in the Fleet. I have now to——"

"Liar!" shouted Harry, springing forward, his face aflame. The door stood open; only the lackey was in a direct line between the prisoner and freedom. Before the man's slow rustic mind had accommodated itself to the situation, he was sent reeling against the wall by a straight blow between the eyes. Harry was already out of the room, at the top of the staircase, when the little attorney seized him from behind and shouted for help. The taciturn jailer stood looking on. There were cries from below and a stampede of feet, and before Harry, with the lawyer clinging to him, had descended more than four steps he was met by the three sailors. Swearing hearty oaths they threw themselves upon him, and in five minutes he was back in the attic securely trussed up.

Even his surly jailer, bringing him food, looked at him with a touch of sympathy. Harry's haggard eyes met his with a mute appeal for help.

"Odsbud!" exclaimed the man, "'tis hard on a mere stripling. If your name bean't Christopher Butler, what be it?"

"My name is Harry Rochester. 'Tis a vile plot. You believe me?"

"Ay, I believe ye. Tain't in reason that a boy should ha' got ocean deep in debt."

"Will you help me? You see what a snare is about me. Will you go to the Star and Garter in Leicester fields and ask for Sherebiah Minshull? Tell him where I am, and what they are going to do with me."

"But what'd be the good, mister?"

”He would find a way to help me. You would know that if you knew him.”

”And how much might ye be willing to pay, now?”

”I haven’t a penny, as you know, but he had some money. Lose no time; pray go now, at once.”

”Well, the truth on’t is I’m paid by t’other party.”

”Who is it? What is the name of the man who has hired you?”

”Faith, I don’t know, but he have a fine long purse, and ’tis a fine swashing gentleman. Howsomever, I’ll go to the Star and Garter as you say, and see your man—what be his name? Minshull; good; I’ll go soon, and—Coming, sir, coming,” he added in answer to a hail from below. ”I’ll go afore ’tis dark, ’struth, I will.”

He left the room, and Harry felt a momentary glow of hope. It was dulled immediately. The three sailors re-entered. Without ado they again bound his arms, which had been loosed to allow of his lifting his food, and carried him downstairs. Daylight was fading. At the door Harry looked eagerly around for some person whom a cry might bring to his rescue. Alas! the house was in a blind alley, and no one but his captors was in sight. He did raise his voice and give one resounding call. A gag was instantly slipped into his mouth, and he was hurried to the open end of the alley, where a hackney coach stood waiting. Into this he was thrown; two of the sailors got in with him, the third mounted to a place beside the driver, and the vehicle rumbled and jolted over the rough cobbles.

Some twenty minutes later it pulled up at the Tower Wharf, where Harry had vainly sought for Jan Grootz a few days before. It was now night, and as he was lifted out and borne towards the wharf side, Harry saw by the light of naphtha torches a busy scene. Sailors, lightermen, stevedores were moving hither and thither; the ground was strewn with bales and packages; the last portions of a cargo were being transferred to the hold of a barque that lay alongside. No one paid attention to the not unusual spectacle of a young fellow going unwillingly to a vessel bound for the Plantations. Harry’s captors, joking, chewing, spitting, shoved him with no tender hands on to the gangway. At the other end of it stood a dark-featured, beetle-browed old seaman, the captain of the vessel, bawling orders to this and that member of his crew.

”Ha!” he cried, as he saw the new-comer hauled along in the sailors’ arms; ”this be the springald? Zooks! ye are none too soon: tide turns in half an hour.”

”Here we be, sir, true; and this be Christopher Butler, mark you, for the Plantations.”

”Papers?” roared the captain, spitting into the river.

”All taut, sir,” replied the man, producing the document that Harry had refused to sign; it bore a signature now.

”Obstropolous, eh?”

”Changed his mind, sir, it seems, since signing on; ha’ give us some trouble.”

”Oons! We’ll cure that. All aboard! Stow the cockerel in the foc’sle; strap un to a plank; we’ll have no ’tarnal tricks.”

As Harry was lugged forward he noticed two figures standing beneath a lamp swinging to one of the yards. He started, and involuntarily increased his weight upon his bearers. One of the two came forward a step towards the captain and, tapping a snuff-box, said:

”Whom have we here, captain?”

”A young puppy as ha’ run through a duke’s fortune and goes as redemptioner where I’ve carried many a man before him.”

”Indeed! So young! ’Tis sad, the wastefulness of young men in this age.”

He took a pinch of snuff and stepped back again. Harry had scanned his features and heard what he said. His heart almost stopped beating with surprise, for the speaker was Mr. Berkeley, the squire, and his companion was Captain Aglionby. ”Did they not recognize me?” he thought. Surely if he could appeal to the squire he might even yet, at the last moment, be saved. He struggled with his captors, but they tightened their hold upon him and wrenched his limbs with brutal callousness. He was carried to the sailors’ quarters in the foc’sle. His bonds were loosed for a moment; then he was laid on a plank and lashed to it. There was a sudden commotion. The captain roared an order to his men, then went to the side to meet a custom-house officer who had just come aboard with two men. An observer would have noticed that Mr. Berkeley hastily turned his back and retreated into the shadow.

”Thought you’d forgot us, sir,” said the captain.

”No, no. But we won’t keep you long; you want to catch the tide.”

The rummaging crew began a perfunctory inspection of the vessel. When they were out of sight Mr. Berkeley came forward and spoke in a low tone to the captain.

”Right, sir,” he replied, and sent a man forward with orders to place Harry in a bunk in the darkest part of the foc’sle and cover him up. Consequently, when the custom-house officer reached the sailors’ quarters, where several of the crew were lolling about, Harry lay hidden, half-stifled beneath a tarpaulin.

”What’s this?” asked the officer.

”That!” cried the ship’s mate with an oath. ”That’s Ned Bates, come aboard mad drunk after a spree. ’Tis the same every voyage, and the medicine’s a dose of rope’s end to-morrow.”

The officer laughed and passed on. The inspection was soon completed; the officer accepted a pinch of the captain’s snuff and left the vessel with his crew, watched by Mr. Berkeley and Captain Aglionby from the corner of a shed on the wharf. In a few minutes the ropes were cast off, and with creakings and heavings

the ship moved into the current and began to float down on the ebb-tide towards the sea.

The tarpaulin was pulled off Harry by a man who took the opportunity to curse him. The gag was removed from his mouth; then he was left to himself. He thought he had reached the lowest depths of misery. Something he had learnt of the awful fate in store for him in the Plantations. Many such poor wretches as himself had sailed across the seas in the hope of redeeming themselves from debt by years of unremitting toil. On their arrival they had become, body and soul, the property of their masters. Treated as no better than convicts, they were put to the most degrading labour, and their employers contrived to keep them, even as labourers, so deeply in debt for clothes and the common necessaries of life that the day of redemption never dawned for them, and they lived and died in abject slavery. This was to be his fate! What a declension from the bright destiny that seemed to be before him but a few months ago!

The foc'sle was dark and noisome. The smell of bilge water and the reek of the lamp affixed to the side nauseated Harry. Physically and mentally, he was desperately wretched. And through all his misery he was overcome by sheer puzzlement. Hitherto he had surmised that, being young and strong, he had been marked as an easy prey by the professional kidnappers who prowled the streets of London, trepanning unfortunate young men likely to fetch a good price with shipmasters or unscrupulous colonial merchants. But the unexpected sight of Mr. Berkeley in Captain Aglionby's company on deck had startled him into a new theory. Many things recurred to his mind. He remembered the bitter feud that had subsisted between his father and the squire; the disappearance of Captain Aglionby after a quarrel, as village gossip said, with Mr. Berkeley; the horseman riding after the coach; the strange warnings he had received from Sherebiah. He could not but feel that these incidents were in some way connected; he began to be convinced that his present situation was due ultimately to the enmity of the squire—the gaunt, sinister old man who was indirectly responsible for his father's death. But though this was his conclusion, he was none the less puzzled. Why should the malignity of the squire pursue the son, now that the father was removed? What harm had *he* ever done, or could he ever do, to the lord of the manor? Was the squire so unrelenting, was his malice so remorseless, that he must bring black ruin upon a boy in vengeance for his baulked will? It seemed inconceivable. Yet what other motive could he have? The more he thought of it, the more puzzled Harry became.

The vessel was slowly threading its way down the river among the many vessels, large and small, that lay at their moorings. At times it stopped altogether, and from the deck resounded shouts and oaths at the obstacles that checked its course. By and by some of the sailors came forward for a spell of sleep, and Harry,

kept wide awake by his hunger and discomfort, saw them tumble into their bunks and soon heard their snores.

It would take several hours to reach the open sea. Was there a chance that, before the vessel left the Thames, he might even yet escape? To make the attempt was mere instinct with a high-spirited boy. The odds seemed all against him. To begin with, he was bound hand and foot to a plank, so that it was impossible even to bend his body. Suppose he rid himself of his bonds, there would be many of the crew on deck while the vessel threaded the crowded water-way, and he would be seen if he sprang overboard; and how could he free himself from the ropes? The idea had not come to him for the first time. When he was being trussed up he had remembered an old trick taught him by Sherebiah, acquired during his mountebank days, when he had mystified rustic spectators by escaping from ropes tied by the most expert hands in the village. He had so stiffened his muscles that he could wriggle out of any ordinary knot. But the situation was rendered more difficult by the plank. He could not lift himself, nor turn on his side. Lying on his back, he tried to ease the pressure of the ropes by the muscular movements he had practised with Sherebiah in sport. But he found, not to his surprise, that sailors were more skilful than anyone who had previously experimented with him. The tension was so great that he had the barest margin to work upon. Force was useless; it would only have the effect of cutting into his flesh and causing his hands and wrists to swell. But his whole mind was now bent upon one desperate venture, and, while the men snored around him, he began to strain on the ropes.

For some time all his straining was of no avail. At last he felt the rope about his wrists give a little. Taking advantage of the slackened tension, he contrived, after what seemed an hour to him, to turn his joined wrists outwards, and in a few more minutes they were free. They ached intolerably; he felt as if all power was gone from them,—as if he could never grip anything firmly again. He waited until the numbing pain was abated, then set to work to free his elbows. These had been separately tied, and after many unsuccessful efforts he almost despaired. At length, however, he managed to shift his elbows down over the edges of the plank, which he was then able to use as fulcrums. Pressing as hard as possible, he forced the ropes slightly slack, then jerked himself sideways and almost on to his face. In doing so he more than once interrupted the snores of the man beneath him, and once desisted in alarm as the fellow growled out an oath. At last his elbows were free, and he lay panting with exertion and hope.

But now that the upper part of his body was unbound, he found himself confronted by an unexpected difficulty. The board to which he was strapped extended down to his heels, and the knot being tied at the far end, he was unable to reach it. A man is never so agile with his ankles as with his wrists, and the plank had effectually prevented Harry from making use of Sherebiah's trick in

regard to his feet. It was impossible to reach the knots with his hands, for the roof of the foc'sle was so low that he could not rise to an upright posture in the bunk. He worked away at the upper part of the rope, but it was so taut that he could not ease it appreciably. He found himself making even more noise than before, and dreaded lest one of the crew should awaken too soon. Breathless with his exertions, he lay still to think. Was he to be baffled after all? Some hours must have passed since the vessel left her moorings, and though her progress had been interrupted and was always slow, yet she was drawing nearer and nearer to the mouth of the river, bringing him nearer and nearer to his doom.

A dull dazed hopelessness was gaining possession of him. He lay with wide-open eyes, staring at nothing; then caught himself following the slight pendulous motion of a seaman's coat that hung from a nail in one of the beams. To and fro it swung, with a regularity that became at last desperately annoying. But all at once that rough stained garment became to him the most interesting and important thing in the world. It seemed to shed a bright ray of hope. Never a seaman but had a knife; fervently did Harry pray that the owner of this coat had not emptied its pockets. Stealthily he bent over. The right-hand pocket was easily within reach. He put his hand in, and drew out one after another a pipe, a pouch, a flint, a steel, a tinder-box, a string of beads, a corner of mouldy biscuit, a horn snuff-box, a tattered letter, a plug of black tobacco, a broken comb, a red handkerchief, and a nutmeg; but no knife. He could only just touch the left-hand pocket; he could not put his hand in. He pulled at the coat, and held it with one hand, bringing the pocket within reach; then he plunged the other hand into its depths. He touched a metal case; it clicked against something, and he held his breath, hoping the sound had not been heard. No one spoke or moved. He felt further; his heart gave a great leap for joy, for he could not mistake the touch of the rugged handle of a clasp-knife. Eagerly he drew it out; to cut the rope was the work of an instant; he was free.

But he was not yet out of danger. His limbs were loosed, but he was still imprisoned in an outward-bound ship. There was only one way of reaching safety: to gain the deck, spring overboard, and swim to land. He knew nothing about ships; he could row and swim, but till he came to London he had seen no vessel larger than a rowing boat. He guessed that while the barque was still in the Thames only a small portion of the crew would be on duty; but he did not know at what part of the ship they would be, nor where he would run least danger of detection. It was still dark; he might easily stumble as he moved about amid unfamiliar surroundings, and there was the risk that, even if he reached the bulwarks safely and sprang over, he might never succeed in reaching land alive. He did not know the width of the stream; he had been so long without food and had expended so much energy during the last few hours that he was in no condition

to endure long fatigue. It would perhaps be better to rest for a little, and seize a moment as day was breaking, when there would be light enough to guide his steps.

His body was still tingling from the strain of the ropes, but with the passing minutes his physical ease increased, and he was able to think more and more calmly. He heard the clang of a bell. Immediately afterwards a sailor came into the foc'sle, woke the man below Harry, and, when he had tumbled grumbling out of his berth, lay down in his place. It was a change of watch.

"Where are we, Bill?" asked the man who had been roused.

"Opening up Gravesend," was the reply; "and a dirty night. Raining hard, a following wind; we'll make a good run out."

The man was asleep as soon as he had finished the sentence, and Harry was reassured by his snores. Gravesend, he supposed, was a river-side village; if he could make his dive there he might find helping hands on shore. He wondered what the time was; the bells that he heard at intervals conveyed no information to him. He raised himself on his elbow and glanced round. It seemed to him that, in the opening to his left, the darkness was thinning; and the vessel was heaving to. The time had come for his venture.

He sat up as high as his confined quarters allowed and surveyed his position. There were five men within the narrow space, all asleep, snoring in various keys. From above came now and then the sound of a voice and the tramp of feet; nothing else was to be heard. Slipping his leg over the side of the bunk, Harry paused for a moment, then slid to the floor. His knee knocked the edge of the bunk below; the seaman turned over with a grunt and asked sleepily, "Be it time already?" It was better to answer than to remain silent, thought Harry. Making his voice as gruff as possible, he said quickly:

"No; keep still, you lubber."

"Lubber yourself; I'll split your——"

His threat ended with a snore. Harry waited a moment to assure himself that all was quiet again; then, divesting himself of his long coat, which he knew would be a serious encumbrance in the water, he groped cautiously towards the opening, now showing as a gray patch in the gloom. Rain and sleet beat in upon him as he halted for a moment and threw a quick glance around before emerging on to the deck. In the waist of the vessel on the port side two men were hauling up casks, probably belated provisions, from a river craft lashed alongside; three or four seamen were high up in the rigging, and the mate was bellowing to them hoarse commands in what to Harry's landsman's ears was a foreign tongue. Harry felt that it was now or never; but, even as he prepared to spring, there was a heavy footfall above, and a man dropped from the foc'sle deck and alighted a couple of yards away. He swung on his heel to enter the foc'sle, and the two

stood face to face.

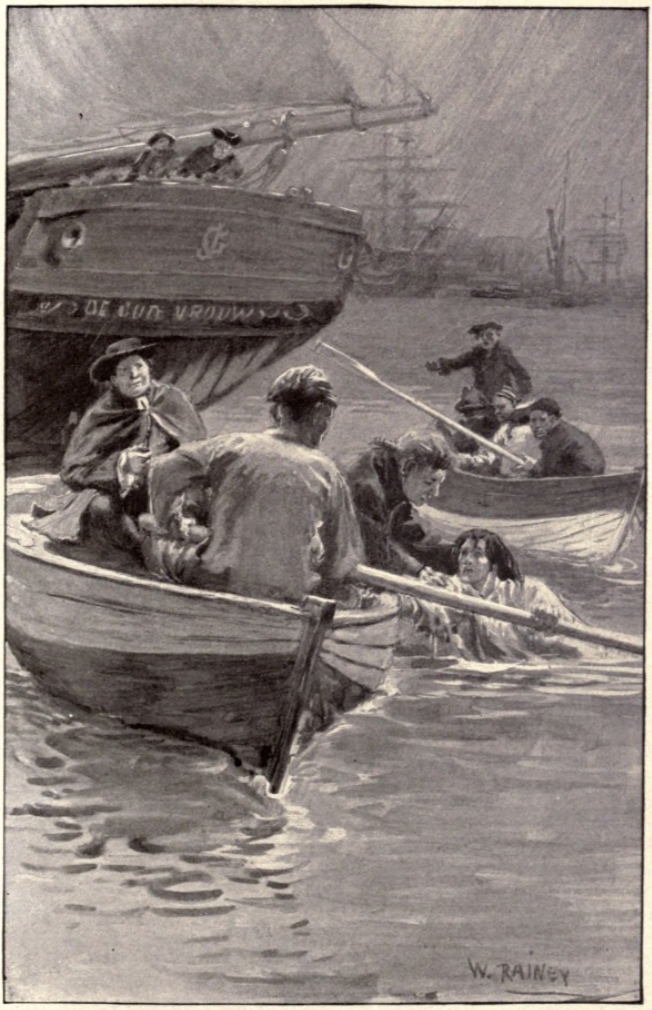
Harry recognized the broad coarse features of the sailor to whose feigned fit his easy capture was due. The man's first impression was evidently that Harry was one of the crew; he quickly saw his mistake, but before his thought could translate itself into action Harry, who had the advantage of being strung up for just such a meeting, sprang upon him as a bolt from a bow. Reeling under a deftly planted blow the man slipped and fell heavily to the deck. Harry was past him in an instant, gained the side of the vessel, and, vaulting lightly on to the bulwark, had dived into the river before the astonished seaman could recover his breath to shout an alarm. In a few seconds Harry rose to the surface, shook the water from his face, and struck out for the shore.

Behind him he heard the angry shouts of the sailors, and afterwards the click of oars working in the row-locks. A boat was evidently in pursuit. No doubt the craft alongside had been cast loose, for there could not have been time to lower a boat. Could he reach land in time? His dive had been so hasty that he had not had time to look around and select his course. But now, through the pelting rain, he gazed ahead to find the nearest way to safety. Judging by the noise of the oars, the boat was rapidly overhauling him, for although he had left his coat behind, he made but slow progress in his water-logged clothes. His view of the shore was intercepted by a few small one-masted vessels lying at anchor, and by a large brig moored about a hundred yards off the clump of trees that formed the western boundary of Gravesend. If he could gain the other side of the brig he thought he might dodge his pursuers. But he doubted whether his strength and speed could be sustained so long. The seamen were pulling with a will; the master himself was in the boat urging them on with oaths and execrations.

Harry swam on gamely, changing his stroke in the effort to husband his strength. But he had only had a couple of minutes' start, and looking over his shoulder he saw that with the best will in the world he must soon be overtaken. Only twenty yards separated him from the boat; he had just come opposite the poop of the stationary brig; he wondered whether a shout would bring anyone to his assistance, when a small skiff appeared from round the stern of the vessel, only a few feet distant from him. It had just put off from the brig and was swinging round towards the shore. Harry gave a hail; the men in the boat rested on their oars; collecting his remaining strength in a few desperate strokes he got alongside, and clutched the gunwale just as he felt himself at his last gasp. At the same moment the pursuing boat came up, and the man at the tiller had some ado to avoid a collision.

"Back water!" roared the master.

The way on the boat was checked; it came to a stop a few yards beyond the skiff and nearer the shore. Meanwhile Harry had been dragged on board the



At the Last Gasp

At the Last Gasp

skiff, and lay drenched, shivering, gasping across the thwarts.

"Cotched, the villain!" cried the ship's master exultantly. "Pull alongside, men."

A few strokes brought the two boats together.

"I'll thank ye to hand un over," said the master. "Zooks! he shall pay for this."

He received no reply, but instead a voice which Harry, half dead as he was from cold and fatigue, recognized with a leaping heart, ordered the crew of the skiff to pull back to the brig.

"Hi!" roared the master, as the boats parted, "are ye deaf or what? Hand over that there runaway; 'tis a deserter. Pull after 'em, men."

The boat started in pursuit, the master shouting with increasing anger. The skiff came below the brig's stern, where a rope ladder was hanging over the side.

"Gi' un up, d'ye hear? Gi' un up, or 'twill be the worse for ye."

"Gif him up! Ja, ja; certainly, but not now, mine vrient; not now, and not to you. Dat is not my way. We do not dings zo in Holland."

"What in thunder are ye gibbering about?" roared the master—"you dirty swab of a Dutchman, you! I tell you he is a deserter. Hand un over, or I'll have the law of ye."

"De law! Zo, mine vrient. We will talk over dis matter as good vrients."

Grootz sat down, while the men on the brig prepared to haul Harry, now limp with utter exhaustion, on deck.

"I, Jan Grootz, find dis young man in de river; ver well. He float in de river; well again; he is what de law call flotsam—dat is zo. Now, mine vrient,"—here Grootz's fat forefinger began to waggle—"flotsam, say de law, belong to de sovereign, dat is, to de lady Queen Anne. What is for me to do in such a case—for me, Jan Grootz? I render to Cæsar—who is de Queen—dat which is Cæsar's—dat which belong to de gracious majesty Queen Anne. Derefore I gif up dis young man to de Queen's officer at Gravesend—perhaps, when he is dry. Zo!"

While this speech was being delivered in the Dutchman's slow drawl, with a placid persuasiveness suited to a discussion between friends who did not see quite eye to eye, the master had been growing purple with rage. He was about to explode into invective when he saw that Harry was being swung up.

"Give way, men!" he shouted. "Run her alongside."

He held himself in readiness to board the skiff as soon as he came within leaping distance. But Grootz, with an activity little to be expected in so burly a frame, seized an oar that had been shipped by one of his men now lending a hand in hoisting Harry on board, and, springing to his feet, with a shrewd thrust sent the master spinning over the side of his boat into the river. He came up nearly a dozen yards away; his crew pulled towards him, and when he was at last hauled

into the boat he was fifty yards down the river. He had evidently shipped a good deal of water, for Grootz's blow must have knocked the breath out of his body; the purple hue of his cheeks had given place to a mottled sickliness. He gasped and puffed and swore; but Harry was by this time safe on board the brig; to take him by main force was clearly impossible; and the discomfited master had no alternative but to regain his own vessel.

Harry was carried to the cabin, his wet clothes were taken off, he was wrapped in blankets and forced to swallow a good bumper of cordial before the Dutchman would allow him to speak.

"Zo!" exclaimed Grootz when he was comfortable.

"You saved my life, sir," said Harry warmly. "I was nearly done."

"Zo!"

"They were taking me to the Plantations. I never heard from Lord Marlborough. They trapped me. All my money was gone. I went to the Angel and Crown to find you, to ask you to give me work; you had sailed."

"Zo! talk no more. Flotsam! Gunst! I tell you dis, my vrient; put not your drust in princes: every man learn dis zoon or late: better zoon. Zo!"

The honest Dutchman left Harry to sleep while he resumed his interrupted journey to the shore. But he had barely reached the deck when he heard himself hailed by a stentorian voice from a wherry sweeping by under full sail and the rapid ply of oars.

"Ahoy there! Ha' ye seed a ship named the *Merry Maid* a-sailen down-along this way?"

"Ja, ja!" cried Grootz, chuckling; "what for you ask?"

But the man gave him no answer; only called to the two men rowing the wherry to pull more lustily.

"Hi!" shouted the Dutchman in his turn; and though his voice was usually low he could roar at need. "Hi! you be too late!"

The man did not turn his head.

"Hi! she is two mile ahead!"

Sherebiah gave no sign. He was rapidly passing out of earshot.

"Hi!" shouted Grootz still more loudly. "Sherebiah, stop! Mynheer Harry is here!"

Sherebiah jumped up so violently that, heavy as the wherry was, he almost upset it.

"Master Harry?" he roared.

"Ja! I tell you."

The wherry slewed round and headed toward the brig. Grootz lit his pipe and watched, his little eyes twinkling with amusement. Sherebiah looked positively aggrieved when he came aboard.

”Oons! ’tis sinful to tear a poor mortal man’s heart out, ’tis so. Here be I, a-chasen a villanous creature, the *Merry Maid* by name, thinken as Master Harry were a forsaken prisoner aboard on her, and ’tis all much ado about nothen, and he a-laughen in his sleeve along o’ your cargo! I wouldn’ ha’ thowt it, not I. Where be the deceiven trickster?”

”Asleep,” said Grootz, with a puff of smoke. ”Flotsam!” He chuckled and guffawed; it was a joke that would last his lifetime.

”What your meanen may be I don’t know, Mynheer; but ’tis me as ought to be sleepen. No sleep ha’ I had, not a wink, since Master Harry played this trick on me; ay, ’twas sinful. And I’ll punch Ralph Aglionby’s costard, I will so, first chance I gets.”

”Tell me about it,” said Grootz.

Sherebiah related how, on returning to his inn with the money for which he had pledged Harry’s trinkets, he was surprised to find his young master absent. As time passed on, and he did not make his appearance, Sherebiah became thoroughly alarmed. About seven o’clock in the evening he hurried off to Southwark, and enquired of the porter at the White Hart whether Captain Aglionby was within. The captain had left a week before, said the porter, in company with a tall, bent, shabby old gentleman. Sherebiah’s worst fears were realized. For weeks he had expected the stroke, and now it had fallen suddenly, and at a time when he was not at hand to parry it. He hastened at once to the house in which, as he had made it his business to know, Mr. Berkeley was staying. Neither the squire nor Captain Aglionby was at home. Sherebiah thereupon took his station at a convenient spot near the house whence he could see without being seen, and some time after midnight was rewarded. The two men he sought returned together. Allowing a little time to elapse, he went to the house and asked to see Captain Aglionby, giving the servant a vague message which he believed would bring the captain to the door. Instead of him, however, Mr. Berkeley himself appeared. To Sherebiah’s question as to what had become of Harry, the squire replied coldly that he knew nothing about him, and shut the door in his questioner’s face.

”Ay, I were a fool to ask un,” admitted Sherebiah ruefully. ”I had ought to ha’ thowt o’ poor old feyther o’ mine.”

Sherebiah was determined to have his question answered somehow. He was early at his post next morning, keeping a careful eye upon the door of the house. He saw the squire and Captain Aglionby issue forth together and visit a lawyer up four flights of stairs in a house near Holborn Bars. He followed all three to a house in a blind alley farther east, never suspecting that Harry was there confined. He shadowed them when they left, saw them enter a coffee-house, followed them when they came out, and then lost sight of them. Returning

to his own inn to enquire whether anything had been heard of Harry, he found that a man had called an hour before and left a message for him, asking him to call without delay at an address in Smithfield. Hastening there at once, he learnt from Harry's late jailer how he had been kidnapped and shipped off to the Plantations. At full speed he rushed to the wharf, only to learn that the *Merry Maid*, William Shovel master, had just taken the tide and was now on her way to the sea.

"You med ha' knocked me down wi' a feather. I sat me down on a box under a gashly torch, and thinks I, 'Rafe Aglionby be too much for 'ee this time, Sherebiah Stand-up-and-bless.' I stood up, I did; time an' tide waits for no man; 'twas a sudden thought; I seed a sailen wherry alongside wharf, and two big swabs hangen round. I showed 'em a crown a-piece, and said there's more to foller, and mebbe summat out o' the Queen's purse too; and here I be, all my poor mortal flesh a-wamblen like a aspen. 'Tis tooken a year off my life, ay, 'tis so."

Jan Grootz smiled.

"Mine good vrient," he said, "I tell you dis. You will come ashore with me; we will go to your inn and fetch your goods. It will delay us, but only one day. Den my ship sails; Amsterdam; you will come?"

"Sakes! What about Master Harry, then?"

"He alzo."

"Oons! Be that th' order o' the day? Well, 'tis a long lane has no turnen. Will there be time for me to go and ha' a few words wi' Rafe Aglionby?"

"No."

"Well, I'll save 'em up. A rod bean't none the wuss for bein' salted. Ay, and I were not always a man o' peace!"

CHAPTER IX
Monsieur de Polignac Presses his Suit

Scenes in Holland—Feeding an Army—A Tulip Bulb—On the Road—The Captain's Man—A Break-Down—Double Dutch—The Captain Again—A Diversion—An Entry—An Exit—Hospitality—Confidences—Rejected Addresses—Palmam qui Meruit—Persuaded—Adèle

"Hundred barrels pork, tousand quarters flour, five hunderdweight sausages,

twenty gallon schnapps, for de garrison of Breda. Ver well, Monsieur de Tilly, de order shall be done."

Mynheer Jan Grootz put down the paper from which he had been translating, and pushed a pair of horn spectacles up his brow.

"Mynheer Harry," he continued, "you will see to dis. Such an order yesterday could not have been met—no. But wid Peter Kolp's man coming from Helmund it is to-day anoder ding. In Helmund, wid Peter Kolp, dere is pork, flour—plenty; yes, my poor vrient Kolp dink dere is too much; he alzo would supply de army. 'Grootz,' he say, 'ask too high prices. As for me, Kolp, I am a cheap man. But Grootz, he is a sad rascal.' But I tell you dis: dey say my poor vrient Kolp forget his measures and weights, he dink fourteen ounces weigh one pound, and sometimes, dey say, he dink ten barrel bad pork make twelve good; so my poor vrient is not now permitted to contract no more; and he sell me his stores. Truly, he is a cheap man! Zo!"

There was a chuckle of satisfaction in the concluding word.

"You will start early in de morning, Mynheer Harry," he resumed, "wid ten carts; Helmund is twenty mile beyond Tilburg, and Tilburg fifteen beyond Breda. You will get de stores from Kolp at Helmund and return wid dem to Breda and hand dem over to the commissary dere. Take wid you your man Sherebiah, and Piet Brinker to show you de road; he will pick drivers for de carts. We hear noding of forayers lately; zo I hope you have a safe journey, And, Mynheer Harry, never forget dat poor Kolp cannot count, and do not know good pork from bad, and mistake chalk for flour. You will examine dese little matters wid much care; zo?"

The merchant replaced his glasses on his nose and proceeded to dictate an invoice to one of his clerks. He sat at a desk in a low-pitched room next to the roof of a gabled house near the Gevangen Poort in Bergen-op-Zoom. The lower floors were devoted to the living apartments; the warehouse and offices were at the top, goods being raised and lowered by means of a crane-like apparatus that projected from the wall like a yard-arm. It was not Mynheer Grootz's home; that was at the Hague; but Bergen-op-Zoom at the head of the eastern arm of the Scheldt was for the present his business head-quarters, conveniently situated in regard to the scattered armies whose wants he had to supply.

It was early in the month of June. For more than three months Harry Rochester had been engaged with the worthy Dutchman, who was kept busy morning, noon, and night in provisioning the allied forces now entering upon a new campaign. He found his employment very much to his taste, and his employer the best of friends. Grootz never alluded to the time when his offer of employment had been slighted, and Harry often smiled as he remembered the pride with which, in the days of his high expectations, he had refused to cast in his lot with a mere merchant. The novelty of the scenes amid which he found

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Map of Part of the LOW COUNTRIES in 1703.

himself on his arrival in Holland had banished his ambitions for the time. The flat country, with its dunes and dykes, its endless canals and innumerable windmills; its quaint towns, in which chimneys and steeples and masts seemed so curiously jumbled; the stolid, hospitable people—the men with their big pipes and snuff-boxes, the women with their characteristic head-dress, the girls with the riband of maidenhood at their right brow; the strange customs—the *spionnen* at the windows, an arrangement of mirrors by which from the upper rooms all that passed in the street below could be seen within; the placard at the door when a child was born; the incessant scrubbing that went on indoors and out; the *trekschuiten* and *pakschuiten* that conveyed goods and passengers along the canals, drawn sometimes by horses, more often by a stout mynheer and his vrouw; the storks nesting among the chimney-pots; the stiff formal gardens with their beds of tulips—everything interested him; his low spirits vanished into thin air, and he enjoyed life with a zest he had never known before.

His duties had taken him into many parts of the country. In March he was at the Hague when the Duke of Marlborough returned to resume command of the forces, and he did not even feel a pang when, a humble member of the crowd, he saw the great soldier whose forgetfulness or insincerity had so woefully disappointed him. He knew the potteries of Delft, and the cheese-factories of Gouda; he had heard the great organ of Haarlem, and the sweet carillons of Antwerp, and practised skating for the first time on a frozen arm of the Y. Finding it difficult to get on without a knowledge of Dutch, the only language understood by his teamsters and the country people, he had thrown himself energetically into the study of the language; and he had, besides, picked up a smattering of everyday German phrases from one of his men, a German Swiss. After his natural British diffidence in adventuring on a foreign tongue had worn off, he delighted to air his new accomplishment with the comely juffrouws whom he met in the course of his journeys. He dropped into the routine of the business so rapidly that Mynheer Grootz once told him he was a born merchant—a compliment which, to his own surprise, did not give the least shock to his dignity.

His intelligence and energy completely won the old Dutchman's confidence, and more than once he had been entrusted with the delivery of supplies to the army in the field. It was not always possible for the military authorities to furnish convoys for these consignments, and they were therefore usually accompanied by well-armed men to guard against the danger of surprise by robbers and freebooters. Many small bands of outlaws were abroad in Holland and Germany, taking advantage of the disturbed state of the country to prey upon the inhabitants, under the pretence of making requisitions for one or other of the contending forces. These marauders terrorized the remoter districts. Hitherto Harry had been fortunate in avoiding any danger of this character. Grootz was

as phlegmatic and silent as ever, but he showed in his quiet way that he was pleased with the lad's unvarying diligence and success.

Harry woke early. The sun was bright but the air cool, and he felt full of vigour, eager to set off on this the longest expedition he had yet taken. Mynheer Grootz was a bachelor, and his breakfast-table was served by a buxom old housekeeper who, after a brief season of jealousy, had capitulated to Harry's cheerfulness and courtesy. At breakfast the merchant in his slow, ponderous manner repeated his customary warnings to Harry to guard against surprise, and to be punctilious about getting a formal receipt for his supplies from the commissary of the force to which they were to be delivered.

"Here is de paper," he said, handing it to Harry. "Make him sign it; he may be a count or marquis or someding of de sort, and I trust none of dem."

Harry laughed. "Put not your trust in princes" seemed to be the prime motto of his host's business career.

"Very well, Mynheer," he said.

"And here is a packet I wish you to deliver. Not for de army, dis; no; it is for a vrient of mine dat live a few miles dis side of Helmund. I promised her a tulip bulb; dis is it."

He handed to Harry a small packet, on which the address was written.

"The Comtesse de Vaudrey," he read aloud. "That is a French name?"

"Ja! De lady is French, a widow, of a family dat had to leave France because of the persecutions. She is French, but a vrient alzo. If you need help, she will give it."

"I hope she is not a very great lady. I have met no lady here higher in rank than a burgomaster's vrouw, and I thought she rather looked down on me."

"The comtesse is mine vrient," repeated Grootz in a tone that implied there was no more to be said.

A few minutes afterwards they left the breakfast-room. At the outer door ten empty wagons were already waiting with their drivers, and as Harry prepared to mount to his place on the foremost, Sherebiah came up with the remains of his breakfast in his hand. Grootz repeated his warnings; Harry smiled and waved his good-bye to Gretel the housekeeper, who stood at the door with her hands folded in front of her ample person, and the line of carts moved off.

The Harry Rochester in charge of the convoy was a different being from the pale thin youth who had left England four months before. His work had had the effect of hardening his muscles and developing his physique; and constant exposure to the air and sun had browned his cheeks and brightened his eye. But Sherebiah presented a still greater contrast. From the moment of landing on Dutch soil he had ceased to shave, with the result that his lips and cheeks and chin were now covered with a thick growth of stiff brown hair. Harry did not

like the change, but when he asked the reason of this departure from old habit Sherebiah merely said that he had concluded shaving to be a waste of time. The reply was hardly satisfactory, but Sherebiah was never communicative unless he wished to be so, and Harry let the matter drop.

The roads were heavy, and the horses were of the large-limbed variety that spell endurance rather than pace. Empty as the wagons were, only twenty miles were made that day, and Harry decided to stay for the night at the Crown Inn at Breda. The town was garrisoned by four battalions of infantry, four regiments of cavalry, and a regiment of dragoons, and it was for these that the supplies were required. Harry sought out the commissary, and promising to deliver the goods within two days, went for a stroll through the town, leaving Sherebiah to bespeak supper at the inn. He roamed through the winding streets, one of which ended with a windmill; admired the warm-toned old house-fronts; William the Third's chateau, encircled by the river Merk; and the fine Hervormde Kerk, with its lofty octagon tower and bulbous spire. On returning to the inn he was met by Sherebiah in some excitement.

"What med 'ee think, sir? Who'd 'ee believe I ha' seed?"

"Well?"

"John Simmons, sir, large as life."

"Captain Aglionby's man—the man who got a crack on the head on the Roman road?"

"The very same."

"I have often wondered how he managed to escape from old Nokes the constable. 'Twas whispered that the captain himself had a hand in it. I suppose he came to this country for safety."

"Ay, not for riches, so 'twould seem," replied Sherebiah rather hurriedly. "A' was down at heel, more like a ragged vagrom than the smart soul as drank his pint at the Berkeley Arms. Mother Joplady couldn' abide un."

"Did he see you?"

"Not him. Nor I don't want to see un, the mumpen cockney.—Supper's ready, sir."

Next morning Harry proceeded with his convoy along the Eyndhoven road and arrived late at his destination, Helmund. Almost the whole of the following day was occupied in loading his wagons and procuring extra carts to carry the stores collected by Grootz's client, Peter Kolp. At his first interview with that "poor friend" of Mynheer Grootz, Harry made it clear that, as a matter of form, the provisions would be carefully tested in quality and quantity, with the result that they were found to be excellent and full weight. It was four o'clock before he was ready to start for Breda. He followed a different route on his return journey. Madame de Vaudrey's house, Lindendaal, lay on the upper road toward

Boxtel—a safer road to travel, as a report had come in that the French had made their appearance near Turnhout, to the south, and were coming apparently in the direction of Eyndhoven.

Unluckily, the convoy had proceeded only a few miles on its return to Breda when, as it was crossing the Aa river, one of the horses took fright and toppled the cart into the water. Fortunately the stream was sluggish and shallow, but Harry saw that it would take some time to extricate the wagon from the mud and collect what part of its load was worth saving. Leaving Piet Brinker in charge of the work, he decided to push on himself with the remainder of the convoy, deliver the packet he carried for Madame de Vaudrey, and wait for the rescued wagon to overtake him. He knew that, with the hospitality universal in Holland, the countess would not allow him to proceed unrefreshed, and he was in truth not a little glad of the opportunity of seeing the lady whom Grootz had so emphatically called his friend. He therefore drove on. The wagon wheels ploughed deep furrows in the heavy sandy roads, and the big Dutch horses plodded on steadily but slowly. The road wound by and by through avenues of elms, pruned of their branches in the Dutch way, and looking to Harry's English eyes very starved and ugly. At length he came to a wall on the right that appeared to enclose a park of some considerable size. A peasant was passing, whom he hailed, asking in Dutch whether this was the house of Madame de Vaudrey. The man looked stolidly at him without replying. Sherebiah repeated the question, using a different phrase. The Hollander answered at once that this certainly was Lindendaal, the chateau of the French lady. Harry sprang from his wagon, ordered the drivers to draw up by the side of the road, which was here parallel with a narrow canal, and entered the gate accompanied by Sherebiah.

"I'll tell you one thing that puzzles me, Sherry," he remarked, as they passed up an avenue bounded on both sides by a breast-high balustrade of stone. "You and I have been in this country the same time, and seen each as much as the other of the people, and yet you have beat me altogether in picking up the language, hard as I have worked at it. I don't understand it."

"Ah well, Master Harry," said Sherebiah, "'tis like that sometimes, so 'tis. You be a scholard, with book larnen and all that; I be, true, a poor common mortal, but mebbe my ear be quicker 'n some."

"Still, the time is rather short for you to have learnt to speak the language so well as you do. Your knowledge has grown as quickly as your beard."

"True now, mebbe so; Samson in the Holy Book growed amazen clever wi' his locks; but I never thowt afore as how it med be the same in these days."

Harry laughed.

"It looks very English, doesn't it?" he said, pointing to the house. It was square, with a veranda painted blue, under which were several windows open-

ing to the ground. In front was an open semicircular space, around which were parterres of brilliant flowers; these were separated from the park and orchard by a prolongation of the balustrades that lined the drive. There were dormer windows in the roof, and at one angle rose a kind of belfry surmounted by a weathercock.

"Give me the packet, Sherry; you had better remain at the door while I go in."

"Ay, or mebbe I med find my lone way to the kitchen?"

"No, no; remain at the door until I have seen Madame de Vaudrey. I can't have you coquetting with her maids."

Harry went to the door, which stood open, the afternoon having been warm. A spare, anxious-looking man-servant came in answer to his ring.

"Is Madame de Vaudrey within?" he asked in Dutch.

The man's accent when he replied in the affirmative left no doubt that he was a Frenchman. Harry explained his errand in French, whereupon the man said in the same language that his mistress was for the moment engaged, but that if Monsieur would wait no doubt she would see him shortly. He led Harry through the wide hall, up a handsome oak staircase into a little ante-room, where, begging him to be seated, he shut the door upon the visitor.

Harry was immediately aware of voices engaged in conversation on the other side of the folding-doors that formed one wall of the room. At first the sounds came to him as murmurs in different tones, but after a time they became louder, and though he could not distinguish the words it was plain that one at least of the speakers was very angry. At length he heard the fierce clanging of a bell below; a few moments after, the manservant came running into the ante-room and threw open the folding-doors. Harry, looking into what was evidently the drawing-room, saw a group of four. One was clearly the lady of the house, short, stout, dressed in a costume little resembling the Dutch housewife's usual attire. She was very angry, talking vehemently, and gesticulating with her plump white hand. By her side stood a younger lady, half a head taller, slim and graceful, perfectly still and collected, though her cheeks were flushed. Opposite to the two ladies, their backs to the four windows which lit the other end of the room, were two men, one very tall and lean, with thin lips. The other was but little shorter and a good deal stouter. Harry's attention had been at first attracted to the ladies; the burlier of the two men was the last of the four to be noticed; and it was with a shock of amazement that he recognized in his figure and blotched red face no other than Captain Aglionby.

"Allez-vous-en, allez-vous-en!" the elder lady was repeating. "Quittez ma maison, tout de suite; je vous l'ordonne, je l'exige, je le veux absolument; retirez-vous, messieurs, d'ici, et au plus vite!"

Aglionby laughed. None of the four had yet caught sight of Harry stand-

ing back in the darker ante-room. The lady turned to the manservant and ordered him to eject the unwelcome visitors. The servant hesitated to attempt a task clearly beyond his strength. Aglionby put his hand on his sword, and then laughed again brutally as he recognized that he had nothing to fear. All the time the taller man stood quietly watching the scene, occasionally moistening his lips; and the girl remained in the same tense immobility, her eyes never leaving the face of Aglionby.

Harry felt it was time to intervene.

"Perhaps I may be allowed—" he began. At the first word the captain swung round as if on a pivot and stared. His puffed crimson face turned a sea-green as he saw advancing towards him, fresh, lithe, confident, the youth whom he fondly imagined by this time leading a slave's life in a Barbados plantation. The other man did not stir; but the two ladies looked towards the speaker with a sort of startled surprise. Stepping towards the elder, Harry continued:

"Perhaps I may be allowed to offer my services. If Madame will be so good as to retire, I will—reason with these gentlemen."

Madame de Vaudrey clasped her hands and looked indecisively at the new-comer, as though doubting the propriety of accepting the intervention of a stranger. Harry was on the point of explaining who he was, when the matter was settled in an unexpected way. The girl moved to her mother's side and took her by the hand. Then, turning to Harry, she said in clear, cold tones:

"If Monsieur will rid the house of these two men he will do my mother a great service. Come, Mamma!" And then, without another glance at any of the three, she led Madame de Vaudrey, still half-resisting, from the room.

The colour had been gradually returning to Aglionby's face, and when the ladies had disappeared his purple hue was deeper than ever. But the surprise of Harry's presence was so great that for the moment the doughty captain was nonplussed; his anger was at boiling-point, but he was clearly at a loss what course to take. His companion stood expectant, a slight smile still on his face—a smile rendered peculiarly disagreeable by a twitching of the mouth that drew one corner perceptibly upwards towards the left ear.

The interval of silence seemed longer than it really was.

"I am sure, gentlemen," said Harry with great urbanity, "you will see the propriety of at once relieving Madame de Vaudrey of your presence."

Then the storm broke. Glaring with rage, unable to stand still, stuttering in his speech, Aglionby roared:

"You insolent puppy, you low-born cully, you—how dare you speak to me! What are you doing here? Stap me, I'll run you through the midriff and rid the world of a bit of vermin!"

"I shall be delighted to give you an opportunity—outside," said Harry qui-

etly. ”Meanwhile, the door is open, and by making your exit you will please not Madame de Vaudrey only, but me and, it appears, yourself.”

”Adsbud, I’ll—I’ll——” stuttered Aglionby, half drawing his sword. Harry had his right hand on the hilt of his own weapon, the third man was still watching the scene, when an unlooked-for diversion occurred. Harry was between the two rooms, the two men opposite him with their backs to the drawing-room windows, which were open. It happened that a flight of steps led up from the garden to a balcony beneath these windows. At this critical moment a fourth man came suddenly into the room from the outside. Before any of the three could perceive what was happening, the new-comer, with a long acrobatic spring, simultaneously imprisoned in his arms the necks of Aglionby and his companion, and half-throttling them dragged them past Harry, through the ante-room, into the corridor, and down the staircase. Harry followed, himself somewhat amazed at their helter-skelter progress—bumping down the stairs, struggling vainly in Sherebiah’s vice-like grip, swaying against the balusters first on one side then on the other, the wood-work creaking and groaning under the pressure. Half-way down the men lost their feet altogether, and were incapable of resisting the rush with which their captor hauled them across the vestibule and through the open door, where he pulled up with a sudden jerk and shot them down the flight of shallow steps on to the drive in front. The whole proceeding scarcely occupied more than half a minute, so sudden had been the onset, so helpless were the two men, gasping half-strangled in Sherebiah’s merciless hug.

Harry ran down the stairs, expecting to find his man engaged in a battle royal before the house. But when he reached the door he saw Aglionby and the Frenchman already halfway down the drive towards the road. They had not waited, then, to demand satisfaction of him. Smiling at his recollection of their headlong descent, he went upstairs again, and was met by Madame de Vaudrey, who had come from another room at the sound of scuffling. She was very pale.

”They are gone, Madame,” said Harry at once, to reassure her.

”Oh, Monsieur, I thank you, I thank you with good heart! Your help at the precise moment was so precious. I cannot thank you too much.”

”It was my servant, Madame—a very useful fellow. He did it all himself. I am glad we happened to be at hand. This unforeseen incident has prevented me, Madame, from explaining my presence here. I have called to leave a packet entrusted to me by Mynheer Grootz, a friend of yours, I think.”

”Oh! it is my tulip bulb. Mynheer Grootz promised to send it me. Yes, he is a friend of mine indeed. But are those men really gone? Will they not overpower your brave servant? They are bad men—oh, they are bad! I fear them.”

”I saw them going down the drive. And my man knows how to take care of himself,” said Harry. ”They will not trouble you again at present. And now,

Madame, as I have Mynheer Grootz's packet in the ante-room, if you will allow me to place it in your hands I will take my leave and proceed on my way."

"Mon Dieu, non!" cried the lady. "You must allow me to give you some refreshment, and your brave man too—if he is really safe! Jean," she called to the servant, "bring wine and cakes and fruit to the drawing-room. But first see if this gentleman's servant is safe."

"He is, Madame," replied the man at once. "The men from the stables and the garden were coming to the door: Mademoiselle had fetched them: and they were too many for Monsieur de Polignac and the other."

"How thankful I am! Bring the brave man up with you. Now, Monsieur—I do not know your name?"

"It is Harry Rochester, Madame; I am English."

"Indeed! Come into the drawing-room and rest. Jean will bring something to eat and drink immediately."

She led the way into the room, gave Harry a comfortable chair, and sat opposite to him, folding her plump hands on her lap, and heaving a sigh of satisfaction and relief. The servant soon reappeared with a tray, and when Madame de Vaudrey had seen Harry supplied with drink and food that pleased him, she dismissed her man, read the letter Mynheer Grootz had enclosed with his gift, and began to talk.

"You are English? That is interesting. My dear husband's mother was English, so that my daughter has a little—a very little, of course—English blood in her. I cannot tell you how thankful I am that you came when you did. That is also another debt I owe to Mynheer Grootz. He writes very amiable things of you. I was at my wits' end, Monsieur Rochestair; I will tell you about it.—Do you like that wine?"

"Thank you, it is excellent."

"I am so glad! You speak French very well for an Englishman. My daughter wishes to learn English. She takes after her father, not after me. I wonder where she is?"

Harry followed her glance to the door; he too had wondered what had become of the tall girl who had shown so much decisiveness of character at an awkward moment. But she did not appear.

"Well," continued the amiable hostess, "let me tell you all about it."

Mynheer Grootz's recommendation was clearly a passport to her favour. She leant back in her high chair, and in her clear, well-modulated voice told Harry what he was, it must be confessed, curious to hear. It was three years since her husband, the Comte de Vaudrey, died. He was a student, not a man of affairs; and his fortune suffered through his lack of business-like qualities. The estate, a small one, purchased by his father when as a Huguenot he fled from France at

the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, was now much encumbered. Monsieur de Vaudrey had bought the best perspective glasses and other expensive scientific instruments, had spent large sums on rare books and specimens, and had so embarrassed himself that he had to apply to the Amsterdam bankers, who advanced him money on a mortgage of the estate. Not long afterwards he died.

"It is only a year ago," continued Madame de Vaudrey, "that we learnt that we were to have a neighbour. The estate adjoining our own had been in the market for many years, and we heard that it had at last been purchased by a Monsieur de Polignac, a Frenchman, and a Huguenot like ourselves. We were rejoiced at the news; a neighbour of our own race and faith would be so charming, we thought. And so indeed he was, at first. I thought his visits to his estate too few; he was so often at the Hague; when he came to see us he was so debonair, so gracious, that I liked him well. With my daughter, quite the contrary. It was prejudice, I told her; but from the first she looked on him coldly. Then all at once he became a more frequent visitor, and I saw—yes, a mother's eyes are keen—that he had pretensions to my daughter's hand. I did not oppose him; he was rich, noble, a Huguenot; but Adèle—certes, Monsieur Rochestair, no maiden could ever have given less encouragement. The first time he was refused he smiled—he does not look well when he smiles, think you?—and said that he would still hope. But though I thought the match a good one, I would not persuade my daughter: she is all I have, Monsieur, and so young. He went away; then a few days ago I am astonished to see him reappear in company with Captain Aglionby, who is visiting him. Now first I begin really to dislike Monsieur de Polignac."

"Did you know Captain Aglionby before, then?" asked Harry in surprise.

"Yes; that is why. I know him, and I think no friend of his can be a good man. Captain Aglionby stayed for a month in this house some five years ago. No, he was not a welcome guest; he was brought here to recover from a wound he had received in a skirmish near by; ah, Monsieur, he is an odious man! I hate his loud voice, his turbulence, his rodomontade; imagine, three times, Monsieur, three times he intoxicated himself in my house, and excused himself with the plea that he had done so many times with the Czar of Muscovy. He used to force himself into my husband's study, meddle with his things, spoil his scientific experiments—my husband was discovering a plan to get gold from sea-water, and we should have been so rich! But the odious captain ruined all. I am sure he did, for the experiments came to nothing."

"Why did you put up with it?"

"Alas! what could we do? My husband was a man of tranquil soul who had lived so long with his books that he could not deal with men. As for me—you see me, a poor helpless woman! and Adèle was then only eleven! judge then my surprise and alarm when I see Captain Aglionby in company with Monsieur

de Polignac. Still more to-day, when Monsieur de Polignac comes once more to urge his suit. Adèle refuses him with scorn. And then—oh, the villain!—he tells me he has bought from the Jews of Amsterdam the mortgage on this estate, and if Adèle will not be his wife, then he turns us out—think of it, Monsieur; turns two defenceless women out. This it is that changes me, a weak woman, into a fury, as you see."

Harry forbore to smile at Madame de Vaudrey's placid impersonation of a fury.

"They are a couple of villains indeed," he said. "It was truly fortunate that I came with Sherebiah at the right moment."

"Yes, indeed; a thousand thanks! And only think of it: just before you came Captain Aglionby, odious man, had dared to hint that when we were thrust out of our home he would do me the honour to marry me. Truly an honour! No, I never forget my dear husband; no, never! Ah, this is the dear brave man, your servant?"

The door had opened, and Sherebiah came in awkwardly, turning his hat between his hands. Madame de Vaudrey rose and, smiling upon him, said:

"I give you a thousand thanks. You are a hero; how strong! how bold!"

Sherebiah bobbed.

"Madame de Vaudrey thanks you," said Harry.

"'Tis handsome of the lady, sir, and I'm obleeged, and axes you to put my sarvices into French lingo, sir."

He bobbed again.

"What about Captain Aglionby?" asked Harry.

"Well, sir, I reckon he be madder than a March hare. Nigh to bust hisself, and hot as pepper. Would ha' slashed me, man o' peace as I be, if 'tweren't for half a dozen Dutch coofs wi' pitchforks and other articles o' warfare drawn up below, wi' the young lady at their head. Ay, she be a warrior bold, sure enough: I never seed such a piece of female manliness all my life long. 'Twas with a flashen eye and a pink rose on each pretty cheek her stood and ordered 'em out. Ay, an uncommon upstanden piece o' womankind her be, to be sure."

Harry was glad that Madame de Vaudrey's ignorance of English could not fathom this plain-spoken tribute to her daughter's charms.

"They are really gone, then?" he said.

"Why, yes, both on 'em; the long beetle chap as well. He be a next-door neighbour, it seems, and a mighty unpleasant neighbour he must be.—Thank 'ee kindly, mum," he added, as Madame de Vaudrey offered him a glass of wine, "but if 'ee don't mind, I'd rather wet my whistle with a mug of beer in the kitchen."

The lady smiled when this was interpreted.

"You English are like the Hollanders in that," she said. "Certainly. Jean,

take the brave man to the kitchen and treat him well."

Sherebiah pulled his forelock and departed with alacrity.

"We must shortly be going on our way, Madame," said Harry. "I have a convoy of provisions for the garrison at Breda, and my wagoners are even now growing impatient, I doubt not."

"But, Monsieur, I cannot hear of it. You cannot reach Breda to-night; and suppose those odious men return? You must be tired. Do me the favour to stay here for the night; and we can find a bed for your man also."

"But the wagons?"

"Let them go on to the village; it is but half a league away. They can remain at the inn there. Monsieur, I insist; and besides, I have to write a letter of thanks to my friend Mynheer Grootz."

Harry had no reason for refusing an invitation so cordial. Madame de Vaudrey beamed when he accepted, and, begging to be excused, went off to make arrangements with her servants. Left to himself, Harry looked round the room. It was richly furnished; the tables, cabinets, and chairs were of French make, in highly polished rose-wood; chairs and sofas were covered with crimson velvet, and two cabinets were filled with beautiful porcelain and Dutch china. The pictures upon the walls were all French, except one—a portrait, evidently by a Dutch hand and of a comparatively recent date. It represented a man's head, with dark complexion and wistful melancholy eyes. Harry was attracted to it by a slight resemblance to his father; not in the features, which were quite unlike, but in the curious sadness of the expression. His thoughts were carried back to his old home at Winton St. Mary, and the quiet life with his father there; a mist came before his eyes, and he fell into a reverie, standing thus before the picture.

So rapt was he in recollection that he did not hear the door open behind him, nor turn to see the entrance of Adèle de Vaudrey. For a moment the girl stood in the doorway, holding the handle. An onlooker would have seen a strange shifting of expression upon her face as she paused in hesitation whether to advance or retire, to speak or to remain silent. It was but for a moment; her lips softened, her long lashes drooped down upon her eyes; and closing the door as noiselessly as she had opened it she slipped away.

CHAPTER X
Bluff

A Stroll—A Fair Cook—Love and Duty—An Arrival—General van Santen—Raiders—A Dozen all Told—Rallying the Peasants—Desperate Counsels—The Masqueraders—Strategy—A Ruse de Guerre—Stage Effects—Final Touches—In Sight—At the Door—Ransom—A Turn of the Screw—Phantom Forces—Dilemma—Discretion—Courtesies

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Rochestair, pardon me for leaving you so long. I have been to prepare your room."

"Thank you indeed, Madame!"

"You were looking at the portrait? It is my dear husband. Is it not a fine head? Can you imagine, after seeing it, that I could put that odious captain in his place? Not that I should think every man bad unless he resembled my husband. No, that would be unjust. But come and see my garden, Monsieur Rochestair. It is beautiful outside now that the sun is going down."

"I shall be delighted. I have noticed how the scent of the flowers comes to us here through the windows."

"Yes, I love flowers. Mynheer Grootz knows that."

Madame conducted Harry through the grounds. They were laid out with more freedom than was usual in Holland, and reminded him at many a turn of well-tended parks at home. The house was surrounded by its garden; beyond this was an expanse of lawn and thin park bounded by a wall. Beyond this again, Madame de Vaudrey explained, lay the orchard belonging to the far larger estate now owned by Monsieur de Polignac. At a considerable distance from the house on the eastern side Harry remarked a large open stretch of ground, roughly circular in shape, covered with grass that grew wild and was left uncropt, Across the middle of it ran a ditch, now apparently dry, passing under the garden wall and the road, and evidently connected with the canal. Near to the spot where the ditch disappeared beneath the wall stood a large dilapidated building, like the storehouse usually attached to a Dutch mill.

"You wonder at our neglect of this part of the grounds," said the lady with a smile. "But that is our skating pond. In winter we open the sluices at the canal end of the ditch; it fills, the water overflows, and thus we flood the field. Then comes the frost, and we have, I think, the finest skating pond in Holland, and quite safe. We used to hold tournaments, people came from miles around; but alas! since this terrible war has recommenced we have almost forgotten those pleasant sports of winter. I do hope it will soon come to an end. I never could understand what men are fighting about. My dear husband used to speak of the balance of power; the French king wishes to rule everybody, he told me; certainly King Louis is a bad man; he has behaved disgracefully to us poor Huguenots; and I dare say you English are quite right in helping the Dutch to punish him. But

war is so terrible. My dear husband was trying to invent something that would enable one army to make another army senseless without killing them; I know nothing about it, but the idea was excellent; and if the truth were known I dare say it was that odious Captain Aglionby who spoilt that too."

Thus the good lady kept chattering to Harry as she conducted him over her little estate. The evening was drawing rapidly in; a light mist was rising, and Madame shivered a little as she turned back towards the house. A moment afterwards her daughter met her.

"Mother," she said, "you should not be out in the damp air. You know it is bad for you."

"Yes, my dear," replied Madame de Vaudrey, submitting to be enwrapped in a large woollen shawl which her daughter's fair hands wound about her head and shoulders. "I have been showing Monsieur Rochestair our little property—alas! soon to be ours no more. I told Monsieur why, Adèle."

The girl's cheeks flushed, but she said nothing.

"I did not tell you, Madame," said Harry, "that I happen to know something of Captain Aglionby."

"Indeed! nothing but what is perfectly odious, I am sure."

"I have reason to believe that he was concerned in an attempt to ship me to our plantations in Barbados. My man tells me——"

"Monsieur," interrupted the girl, "my mother is subject to chills. You are staying with us to-night; will you hasten to the house with my mother and tell us the story at supper?"

"With pleasure, Mademoiselle."

Harry felt a little in awe of this very decisive young lady, with her scornful lip and clear uncompromising tones. She hurried in advance to the house, and was waiting in the panelled dining-room when the others appeared. The table looked very inviting with its spotless napery, shining plate, and vases of flowers, and Harry found the meal much to his taste after the plain fare of Dutch hostelries. Besides such staple viands as Westphalian ham and bag-puddings—one variety of these, filled with raisins and spices, was excellent—there were dainty French dishes—confections of fruit and cream which surprised even Madame la Comtesse.

"Ah, you rogue!" she exclaimed; "I see now where you hid yourself this afternoon."

"Mademoiselle likes cooking?" Harry ventured to say.

"By no means, Monsieur, I dislike it exceedingly."

"Oh!"

"I knew we had nothing ready, Mamma," added the girl, "and you would not have liked Monsieur to think little of your hospitality."

During the meal Harry gave the ladies an account of himself, speaking of his early hopes and ambitions, his disappointments, the vain waiting for a message from Marlborough, the strange animus of the squire, the kidnapping, the interposition of Mynheer Grootz. His hearers were deeply interested; even Mademoiselle, though she said little, and seemed to curl her pretty lip when her mother's curiosity or indignation showed itself in little vivacious exclamations,—Mademoiselle kept her eyes fixed on Harry as he spoke, though whenever he happened to glance towards her she was looking away and appeared unconcerned.

"Ah, there now!" cried the comtesse, when Harry mentioned, without a trace of bitterness, Marlborough's failure to keep his promise; "that is my lord duke's character. He is mean, he is selfish, he loves no one but himself."

"And the duchess," put in Harry.

"But that is his duty. It is his duty to love his wife. I did not say he was a monster."

"Did you love papa from duty?" asked Adèle simply.

"I never said that, Adèle. Of course it is a woman's duty to love her husband, but your dear father was so good, so kind, so fond of me that no one could help loving him."

"Mynheer Grootz is good and kind, but you don't love him."

Madame de Vaudrey flushed.

"You say such odd things, Adèle. I can't think how it is. I never said such things when I was a girl. Mynheer Grootz is good, and kind; you are right; and if it were my duty——"

"Oh, Mamma," cried Adèle, "do forget the word duty! I am sure none of us either loves or hates from duty.—Would Monsieur like some strawberries and cream?"

Harry went to bed that night very well pleased with himself, his hostess, and her daughter. He liked the little, simple, talkative countess; he was piqued by Adèle's reserve, coolness, indifference—he hardly knew what to call it; the something which seemed to indicate that Harry Rochester was a creature far too insignificant for the notice of Mademoiselle Adèle de Vaudrey. "And she is clever, too," he thought. "Faith, how she sent Aglionby to the right-about! Polignac is a scoundrel; what will they do if he turns them out? And how did he come across Aglionby? She will not marry him, at any rate; that's one comfort."

It is very unromantic, but the truth must be told. Thoughts of Adèle did not keep Harry one instant from sleep. His bed was a dark mysterious-looking box, with brown damask curtains drawn closely round it. Withdrawing the curtains, he saw a magnificent quilt of crimson satin, snowy sheets, a lace-trimmed pillow. He scrambled up, barking his legs against the high boards composing the sides, and the moment he laid his head on the pillow forgot Aglionby, Marlborough,

Adèle, and duty.

When Madame de Vaudrey bade good-night to her daughter she said:

"Eh bien, fillette; je l'aime, le bel Anglais. Il est brave, intelligent, modeste, parfaitement aimable, n'est-ce pas?"

"Oh, petite maman, que voulez-vous? Est-ce que je *dois* l'aimer, moi aussi?"

And kissing her mother on both cheeks Adèle ran off laughing.

Harry was awakened in the morning by the loud singing of the birds. He had left his window wide open, and the scent of flowers and perfume from the fir wood at the extremity of the estate gave him fragrant greeting. He sprang out of bed, and stood at the window inhaling the luscious odours, listening to the song of the birds and the incessant hoarse croak of the frogs, gazing at the grass glistening with dew. "I should like a week's holiday here," he thought. "Ay me! it is breakfast, and then for Breda!"

But he had only just left his room when he heard below a violent clanging of the bell, followed by a strange voice speaking in the hall, and a hasty running to and fro. Hurrying downstairs, he met Adèle de Vaudrey at the foot of the staircase.

"Come with me, Monsieur," she said the moment she saw him. "Mamma is not down yet."

She preceded him through the hall door, at which he now saw a light calash drawn up, and behind it ten horses, nine of them sat by Dutch dragoons, the tenth being the steed of the soldier who stood at the door, and whose voice it was that Harry had heard. From the horses, clouds of vapour rose into the fresh morning air; the pace had evidently been forced. In the calash were two men: the elder, in the uniform of a Dutch officer of high rank, reclined on the cushions, half-supported by a young aide-de-camp seated at his side. He was deathly pale; his eyes were closed.

As Mademoiselle de Vaudrey, followed by Harry, came to the door of the carriage, the aide-de-camp without changing his position addressed her in Dutch.

"It is as you see, mejjuffrouw. It is General van Santen; he is desperately wounded. We hoped to reach Breda, but the general swooned a few minutes ago and I dare not drive farther."

"Bring him in at once," said Adèle. "The soldiers can lift him. Never mind about explanations now. One of the soldiers must ride on to the village for the meester; it is only half a league. Monsieur," she added, addressing Harry in her quick, decisive tones, "assist; I will warn Mamma."

She ran back into the house. The inanimate general was carefully carried into the hall. He was a fine soldierly man, with a strong rugged face of English rather than Dutch cast. Harry remembered that Mynheer Grootz had mentioned General van Santen as a friend of his, and one of the ablest and most trusted of

the lieutenants of William of Orange. Madame de Vaudrey had by this time come from above, and stood in pale expectation. The general was laid upon a sofa in the reception-room, and Adèle had already provided a basin of water and a bottle of smelling-salts with which she endeavoured to revive the wounded officer.

"What is it?" cried Madame de Vaudrey, who had left these ministrations to the hands of her capable daughter.

The aide-de-camp explained that General van Santen had left the Duke of Marlborough's camp late at night on his way to the Hague. In the faint dawn he had suddenly come upon a French raiding-party which had apparently made a dash from Lierre. It was known that Tserclaes had advanced from the main French army in order to protect Antwerp. The general had dashed through with his men, but not rapidly enough to escape a bullet which had lodged in his groin. With great difficulty he had kept the saddle as far as the next village; but there, exhausted by the effort and by loss of blood, he had been placed in a hastily prepared carriage and driven on in the hope of arriving at Breda in time to warn the garrison. His wound had proved even more serious than was supposed; he had lost consciousness, and his aide-de-camp had deemed it necessary to halt at the first house and ask for assistance.

"In what direction are the raiders coming?" asked Harry.

"In this direction, Mynheer," replied the aide-de-camp.

"And how far away were they when this happened?"

"About ten miles."

"So they may be here within an hour?"

"If they ride on at once, but they will probably stop to plunder."

"Can they be checked?"

"Alas, Mynheer! there is no force near at hand."

"Surely they will raise the country?"

"But they are mounted, and the country people cannot cope with them. Even if the news is carried to Helmund there are none but burghers there, and they are useless against cavalry, except behind their own walls."

"And how many do the raiders number?"

"More than a hundred, as I judge, Mynheer."

Madame de Vaudrey stood in agitated silence while this rapid colloquy was in progress. Adèle was still bathing the wounded man's temples; no one present had sufficient knowledge to attempt more than the roughest of means to bind the wound. In a few minutes the general opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked, feebly.

"In the house of Madame de Vaudrey," said that lady.

"How far from where I was shot?"

"Only a few miles," replied the aide-de-camp.

”Then someone must ride to Breda for help, and take my despatches. They must be at the Hague to-night.”

”I will write a note to the commandant,” said the aide-de-camp, ”and send one of the troopers.”

”No, no, lieutenant, you must ride yourself. I can’t trust the despatches to a trooper.”

”But I do not care to leave you, general.”

”It is my wish. The enemy can only capture me, but they may do unheard-of mischief around. Delay no longer: ride fast.”

The exertion of talking was too much for him, and he swooned again. Loth as he was to go, the aide-de-camp could not ignore the general’s express instructions. Before leaving he took Harry aside and asked him to consider himself in command of the troopers.

”You’re not strong enough to beat off the enemy,” he said, ”but it will be well for the men to have someone to look to in emergency. Don’t let the general fall into the enemy’s hands if you can help it.”

Harry hesitated. His first duty was undoubtedly to secure the safety of the convoy, for the sake both of the Breda garrison and Mynheer Grootz. On the other hand, he scouted the idea of deserting the ladies in their predicament. Further, the raiding-party were upon the road behind him; they had clearly swept round Eyndhoven, avoiding Helmund, and in all probability were on the heels of the general. Even if he got his convoy safely away from the village it could only move at a walking pace. In an hour or two it must be overtaken, and he would thus do no good either for himself or the ladies by instant flight. He therefore made up his mind to remain at Lindendaal, and assured the aide-de-camp that he would do his best. But when the lieutenant had ridden off, and Harry reflected on the position of the ladies, he thought it worth while to suggest that they should start at once for Breda in order to be out of harm’s way. Adèle answered at once for her mother.

”Impossible, Monsieur! We cannot leave the general; we will not leave the house. Consult your own duty.”

Her tone was not to be gainsaid. Harry went into the hall, wondering what he could do for the best. He met Sherebiah at the door.

”Eh, sir, ’tis a pretty pickle o’ fish.”

”What are we to do, Sherry?”

”As a man o’ peace, I say cut and run.”

”Can’t we defend the house?”

”Wi’ ten Dutch dragoons and a gardener and a maid or two? And two hundred French, so ’tis said!”

”But men will come in from the villages round.”

”Ay, on foot, and with pitchforks and flails. Not much good against swords and carbines.”

At that moment a man galloped up from a village some eight miles down the road, with news that the French were already sacking and burning. They had first demanded a ransom, and the sum required not being forthcoming within the short time allowed, they had begun their ruthless work. A few moments afterwards one of Harry’s teamsters rode up on a cart-horse. He had heard the news from the aide-de-camp as he passed through the village where the convoy had put up for the night, and come back to ask for orders. Harry caught at the chance of delay. The French, it appeared, first demanded a ransom; could they be put off and time be gained for relief to arrive? The question suggested a plan that might be tried in default of a better.

”Ride back, Piet,” said Harry, ”and bring up the wagons as fast as you can, and as many of the villagers as you can muster—with arms, if they have them.”

His idea was to barricade the road; every minute’s delay was a minute gained, and as the news spread he believed that the Hollanders had courage and spirit enough to strike a blow in defence of their homes. In point of fact, Piet had hardly departed to fulfil his errand when Dutchmen came up in ones and twos and threes, some on great lumbering farm-horses, others on foot, all hastening towards Breda in the hope of escaping the devouring French behind them. A few had firelocks, some had bills, others staggered along under the burden of household valuables they hoped to save from ruin. Harry set Sherebiah to intercept them all as they came up and to bring them within the grounds, and as their number swelled he reverted to his original idea of defending the house.

It was a counsel of desperation. The house had several entrances, each one of which must be manned; it was too large to be held by so small a garrison. The outhouses would afford cover to an attacking force. Including the ten dragoons, there were only at present fourteen well-armed men among the ever-growing crowd; he could not improvise arms, and little effective work was to be expected from an untrained rabble, however courageous, pitted against regular troops. Further, to defend the house from within would inevitably lead to its being fired and blown up, and Madame de Vaudrey would profit not a jot. If the house was to be saved it must be by preventing the enemy from reaching it. What chance was there of effectually barring the road against the raiders? He went out to investigate.

As he reached the park gate he was met by two men who had just come on foot from the village. One was a yeoman, the other a soldier belonging to some infantry regiment—a man probably on furlough. Harry was struck by the similarity of their costumes. Their hats were almost alike; their doublets and knee-breeches of similar dark materials; but for the red collar and the bands around the sleeves,

there was very little at a distance to distinguish the soldier from the civilian. A sudden notion flashed through Harry's mind. It was a chance in a thousand; the risks were great; the odds were all against success; but on the other side there was the imminent danger of destruction to the house, ruin to the owners, the capture of the Dutch general, and the subsequent burning of the village.

"We'll try it," he said to himself. "Sherry, send every man up to the house, and let me know the instant our wagons appear."

"Ay, I will, sir.—'Tis a pretty ticklish time o' day for a man o' peace," he muttered under his breath.

Harry ran back to the house. The doctor from the village overtook him on horseback, and they entered together. Mademoiselle de Vaudrey showed some surprise when she saw Harry, but she made no comment.

"Mademoiselle," said Harry, "the general is in good hands now. May I ask your assistance?"

She gave him a keen glance, rose at once from her knees, and followed him from the room.

"Mademoiselle," continued Harry eagerly, "have you any red ribbon, silk, stuff, anything, in the house?"

"Perhaps. Why do you ask?"

"Will you find all that you can, and with your maids sew red bands round the collars and cuffs of the men?"

"To make them look like soldiers—is that what you mean?"

"Yes," replied Harry, delighted that she seized his meaning so quickly.

"I will do so at once. Send the men to the hall."

Harry next called up old Jean, and bade him fetch the gardener. When the man appeared, Harry asked him to gather as many sticks as he could, by preference wood with the bark on, about five feet in length, and stack them at the back door. A few minutes afterwards a message reached him from Sherebiah that the wagons had arrived. He ran upstairs and, regardless of ceremony, called out: "Mademoiselle de Vaudrey!"

Adèle came out of a room, holding a strip of red ribbon.

"Mademoiselle," said Harry, "I must go to the gate. Will you make every unarmed man look as much like a soldier as possible, and see that each is provided with one of the sticks that the gardener is now collecting?"

"Yes. Is there anything else?"

"Is it possible to run up a flag on the belfry-tower?"

"If you say it is to be done, it shall be done."

"I do not want the flag hoisted at present; but if you will prepare to do so——'

"Very well," interrupted the girl.

Harry thanked her with a look, and ran downstairs three steps at a time. He called to one of the dragoons to accompany him, and hastened again to the gate, meeting on the way several men whom, in obedience to his instructions, Sherebiah had sent up from the road.

"Sherry," he said, "ask this fellow if a cavalry troop on the march is preceded by an advance guard. He won't understand my Dutch."

"I can tell 'ee that," said Sherebiah instantly. "They do so. A patrol goos ahead, mebbe a quarter of a mile."

"Oh! Now, mark my plan. Mademoiselle de Vaudrey is making some of the Dutchmen look like soldiers; we've no muskets for them, but at a distance I hope sticks may serve as well. I am going to post these make-believe soldiers around the wall of the estate among the trees; it will look as if the orchard and woods are manned. They will remain concealed until a flag appears on the tower; then their sudden appearance will, I trust, make an impression."

"Ay, sir, 'tis famous. But if the patrol gets much past the house, 'twill be labour lost, for they will be near enough to see 'tis all my eye."

"Yes, that must be avoided. What can be done?"

"I tell 'ee, sir. Leave three o' the wagons on the road, half a mile or so towards the village, where the road bends; I reckon Piet and Hans and me can keep any French patrol a-diddle-daddlen until the flag runs up. Then—do 'ee see, sir?—dragoons slip out of copse and trounce the Frenchmen, Piet and me and Hans draws the wagons across the road: and there be a barricade."

"A capital notion! I will leave that to you, then.—Ah! here is a man from the other direction. He may have news of the enemy."

A countryman, with his wife and family, had just driven up in a cart. From him Harry learnt that the French were sacking isolated farms on the road, and might be expected within the hour. Harry at once went back to the house, ran up the stairs, and again called for mademoiselle.

"May I go up to the roof and see if I can descry the enemy?" he asked.

"I will take you."

She led the way to the turret stair, and in a few moments Harry stood upon the roof, whence on fine days a clear prospect for many miles could have been obtained. The morning was somewhat overcast, and the haze limited his view. But in one quarter he seemed to see a blackness that could only arise from the smoke of burning houses. Between him and the cloud appeared the gables of a house larger than Madame de Vaudrey's chateau.

"That belongs to Monsieur de Polignac," said Adèle in reply to his question.

"The French will come to that first; that will gain a little time for us."

At that moment his eye caught the large barn-like building at the extremity of the Vaudrey estate, just beyond the ditch running into the canal. In a flash

a new idea set his pulse leaping. Hitherto his only aim had been to delay or daunt the enemy until help could arrive from Breda or some nearer point. But the recollection of what he had seen when going round the estate on the previous evening suggested a daring scheme which made him tingle with excitement. Adèle looked at him in silent curiosity as he stood for a few moments pondering the situation. Then he turned suddenly to her.

"Mademoiselle, who opens the sluices of the ditch when you make your skating-pond?"

"Jacques the gardener."

"Thank you! I will go to him."

He turned at once to descend. As he came to the head of the staircase he noticed a mass of coloured stuff lying at the foot of the belfry.

"Ah, the flag!" he said. "Thank you, Mademoiselle!"

A glance upward assured him that the running-line was in order; then without another word he went down. Finding the gardener, he hurried with him to the park entrance. His wagons were drawn up outside. He ordered three of his teamsters to drive their carts into the thicket beyond the outbuilding down the road.

"The enemy will have a rearguard," he said. "As soon as that has well passed, bring your wagons into the road and block it between the wall and the canal. I will send a dozen men and two of the dragoons to remain in hiding with you. Now, Jacques, go to the ditch and open the sluices. How long will it take to flood the field to a depth of seven or eight inches?"

"Not more than half an hour, Monsieur."

"Very well. Stay; have you a boat anywhere on the estate?"

"A punt, Monsieur. I go to market in it on the canal."

"Where is it?"

"In the old barn yonder, Monsieur."

"Bring it out and float it in the ditch half-way across the field. Moor it so that it doesn't drift."

The man hurried away.

"'Tis all ready, sir," said Sherebiah, coming up. "The road is blocked towards the bend, and the men be hidden in the wood. Med I ask, sir, if shouten would be any use?"

Harry smiled.

"We found it useful once, eh, Sherry? Certainly; when you see the flag go up, the more noise you make the better, especially if you can make a din with garden tools, or anything of steel."

"Trust me, sir; I ha'n't served wi' a travellen show for nothen. I'll show 'em the way, ay sure."

”Mind, not a movement till you see the flag. Now, to your places.”

He returned once more to the house. Adèle met him at the door.

”I have done all you said. Is there anything more that I can do?”

”Thank you, Mademoiselle! nothing, I think. I wish to see Madame de Vaudrey now.”

They went together into the reception-room. The general had recovered consciousness, and lay prone on the couch. The doctor was at the window talking to Madame de Vaudrey, who was clearly in a state of intense agitation.

”Oh, Monsieur Rochestair,” she said as Harry entered, ”have they sent help to us yet?”

”No, Madame, I fear there has scarcely been time.”

”What shall we do? what shall we do? I fear we shall all be ruined.”

”Pray calm yourself, Madame,” said Harry quietly. ”Doctor, is it possible to remove the general to another room?”

”I do not advise it. He is comfortable; I hope he will sleep.”

”Meester, let us take him to the dining-room,” said Adèle in Dutch.

”It would be a pity, and——”

”Do you wish it, Monsieur?” she interrupted, turning to Harry.

”Yes, Mademoiselle.”

”Then he shall be removed. Meester, be so good as to have the general removed at once. The men can lift sofa and all.”

Adèle herself called four men in from the front of the house, and the general was quickly carried across the hall into the dining-room. Harry was left with the two ladies.

”Madame,” he said, ”will you remain here with Mademoiselle? Be seated; take up your needle-work; try to look as though there were nothing to fear.”

”How can I? how can I? when every moment I fear to see my house in flames.”

”Mamma,” said Adèle, ”it is necessary. Monsieur is planning to save us; we must help him. Come, I will fetch your spinning-wheel. Monsieur, we will do our best, I give my promise.”

”Thank you, Mademoiselle! When the French arrive, an officer will enter; I will bring him in here; show no concern; leave the rest to me.”

He went out, sent into the woods all the men who were still about the house save two of the dragoons, whom he placed in a cloak-room off the hall. Then he ran up again to the roof.

Looking eagerly down the road, he caught sight of four horsemen approaching at a trot. They were about a mile away. Beyond them the road was concealed from view by a clump of trees. He saw at a glance that Jacques had fulfilled his instructions to the letter. Where half an hour before had been a bare

field there was now what appeared to be a broad lake, with a solitary punt floating at about the middle of its surface. Scanning the boundaries of the estate he failed to descry a single human figure. He drew a long breath; all his preparations were complete; what would be the outcome?

The four riders were drawing nearer, and behind them he now saw the helmets and lances of the main body. They were as yet too far away for him to estimate their number. Taking care to keep out of sight himself, he watched the patrol of four, and saw two of them dismount at the old barn and enter.

"They have left Monsieur de Polignac for the present," he said to himself. "I wonder why."

After a few minutes the two horsemen emerged from the building, remounted, and rode on with their companions. Then Harry slipped down the stairs, instructed old Jean, who was trembling in the hall, to conduct to the reception-room any soldier who came to the door, and then walked quietly in and rejoined the ladies.

"They are coming?" said Adèle.

"Yes. They will be here in a minute."

Madame de Vaudrey gave a gasp and let her hands fall to her sides. Adèle jumped up, slipped a skein of wool over her mother's hands, sat on a stool opposite her, and began to wind the wool into a ball. A few seconds later the clatter of hoofs and the clank of sabres came from without. Then a heavy tread was heard in the hall, and a loud voice called for the master of the house. There was a moment's pause; Jean opened the door, stood on one side, and in a quavering voice announced:

"Madame, Monsieur demande——"

His voice broke, he could say no more. The ladies looked up, Madame de Vaudrey with pale cheeks and twitching lips, Adèle with unmoved countenance and stony stare. After one glance she placidly resumed her winding; Harry, with his hands in his pockets, strolled over from the window.

"Well, my man, what do you want?" he said.

The sergeant involuntarily saluted. He looked by no means comfortable. His eyes went from one to another of the silent group.

"Monsieur—Mesdames——" he began; then, recovering his self-possession and putting on a swaggering air, he continued: "To resist is vain. The commandant will decide. I have warned you, Mesdames—Monsieur."

"It is very good of you," said Harry blandly. "Your boots are marking the carpet; perhaps you will wait outside."

The man's cheeks purpled; without another word he abruptly turned and went out. At the front door he stationed two of his companions, and rode back to meet the advancing troop, the sounds of whose approach were now echoed

from the surrounding woods. From the window Harry saw the sergeant make his report to the officer at their head. The commandant smiled and rode on. Two minutes later his spurs rang on the stone steps, and Jean showed him into the room.

"Madame, voilà encore un visiteur."

In obedience to a hint from Adèle, Madame de Vaudrey rose and made a curtsy. Harry smiled as he saw Adèle's low mocking obeisance. The officer doffed his cocked hat, laid it with both hands upon his heart, and bowed.

"Madame—Mademoiselle—Monsieur," he said.

He was a tall, stout, florid man of some forty years, with large nose and bloated cheeks. His costume was very rich, plentifully bedecked with gold lace and decorations, spick and span in all its appointments. "More like a courtier than a soldier," was Harry's first impression. His few words of salutation had been uttered in a strong German accent.

"Madame, Monsieur," he said, "I have the honour to be a colonel of dragoons in the service of his highness the Elector of Cologne, who, as you are doubtless aware, is in alliance with His Majesty of France. I regret exceedingly to have to discommode you; it is a painful duty; but what would you?—war is war. My duty, Madame, Monsieur, is to levy contributions on the enemy's country. Alas! that I am obliged to treat you, Madame, Monsieur, Mademoiselle, as enemies, but duty is duty. Not for all the world would I render it more disagreeable than necessary to such charming ladies, and to your excellent son, Madame; but I must request you to hand over to me five thousand florins—that, I am sure, you will regard as a most modest estimate of the value of your delightful house. I regret that I can allow only five minutes for the completion of this little transaction; in five minutes, Madame, Monsieur, with five thousand florins I pass on with my men. It pains me to say it, but if the money, or its equivalent—in plate or jewels, Madame, what you please—is not forthcoming within five minutes, I must with the very greatest regret take what I can find and burn the place. The notice is short, it is true; but Madame will understand; we soldiers have no time to spare, and my orders are positive; every house that is not ransomed is to be burned. Ah!" he ejaculated as he caught sight through the window of smoke in the distance, "I fear my men have already set fire to your barn. It is an excess of zeal, but, as the proverb says, the appetite grows with eating; we have had to light many such bonfires of late!"

This speech had been delivered with the greatest deference. At its conclusion the colonel lugged out a big timepiece, and held it open in his left hand.

"From now five minutes, Madame, Monsieur."

Madame de Vaudrey had listened with terror in her eyes. She was beginning to speak, but Adèle called suddenly "Mamma!" in a warning tone, and the

lady sank back in her chair, looking at Harry as he advanced a step or two towards the officer. Harry's throat felt somewhat dry; his heart was thumping unpleasantly; but he was to all appearance perfectly self-possessed as he said:

"Mademoiselle, will you see what can be done?" adding in an undertone the two words, "the flag!"

Adèle nodded.

"Pardon, Monsieur." She curtsied to the officer as she went past him into the hall.

"Before discussing the amount of our contribution, Monsieur le Colonel," said Harry, "may I enquire by what right you make this demand?"

The officer looked him up and down.

"Certainly, you may enquire, Monsieur. I answer: by the right of a hundred sabres, and the practice of war. In my turn, may I beg of you to let this explanation suffice. Time presses. But for the presence of Madame"—he bowed to Madame de Vaudrey—"I should have regarded your question as a mere impertinence, and treated it—and you—accordingly."

Madame de Vaudrey looked anxiously from one to the other, and heaved a sigh of relief as Adèle returned and resumed her seat by her mother's side.

"I marvel, Monsieur," said Harry, after a quick exchange of glances with the younger lady, "that a soldier of your rank and experience, acquainted with the practice of war, should, in your unfortunate position, permit himself such language."

"Comment! My unfortunate position!" The big man swelled, his red cheeks empurpled. Turning to the ladies he said: "Is the young man mad?"

"You shall judge, Monsieur," said Harry quietly. "Do me the favour to place yourself at the window."

He had just caught sight of one of the colonel's dragoons galloping up the drive towards the house.

"That is one of your hundred sabres, I presume. He is hastening to inform you that he has met Dutch troops belonging to General van Santen half a mile up the road. In the other direction—this way, Monsieur—you can just see our men barring your retreat. You observed, no doubt, a canal on your left as you rode along; it is twenty feet deep; and if you will condescend to come to the back windows"—the captain followed him as in a daze—"you will see a large Dutch force occupying yonder woods, which, save the lake on our right, are your only line of retreat."

The colonel's astonishment was no greater than Madame de Vaudrey's. She rose from her chair and moved towards the window, but was checked by Adèle's restraining hand. The girl's eyes were shining, a spot of red burned on either cheek. The colonel stared and stared at Harry, who stood with a slight smile

upon his lips, at the ladies, at the figures which appeared among the trees beyond the wall—heads and shoulders, with cocked hats and red collars, and at every shoulder a musket.

"Comment! comment!" he spluttered; then without another word he hurried from the room, followed by Harry, just in time to meet the dragoon at the outer door. The man saluted.

"Mon Colonel," he said in a fluster, "there is a barricade at the bend in the road half a mile beyond us held by Dutch troops. My comrade Gustave was knocked off his horse by——"

"Donnerwetter!" cried the colonel, relapsing into his native language. He sprang heavily into his saddle on the charger held in waiting by one of his troopers.

"I suppose, Monsieur le Colonel," said Harry carelessly at his elbow, "you are counting the cost of resistance?"

The officer was looking anxiously and indecisively about him, clearly at a loss what course to take, but as clearly eager to make a fight of it.

"I must warn you, Monsieur," added Harry, "that the least resistance will rob you of all chance of quarter. The whole countryside is roused to fury by the news of your exploits. My general has with him not only his own men but a large force of peasants from the villages. If it comes to a fight, he may not have the power, even if he had the inclination, to protect you from their vengeance. They are barbarous in their methods, these peasants; but then, as you know, Monsieur, they have been provoked."

At this moment there was a sharp report. A cornet of the French horse, seeing the barricade of carts suddenly run across the road by the barn, had sent a party of his men back to investigate. One of the troopers as they approached was shot from behind the barricade and fell from his horse. The echo of the shot had hardly died away when there came two reports from the barricade up the road, accompanied by a faint shout. The colonel gathered up the reins; a dragoon came galloping up the drive crying:

"Mon Colonel, we are surrounded!"

"You see, Monsieur," continued Harry, "you are in a ring fence. It is for you to make your choice, and at once, between surrender and—annihilation."

Harry had not misjudged his man. Utterly bewildered, the colonel gazed, like a caged animal, helplessly around him. At the end of the drive his men could be seen rigid and expectant. Behind him, beyond the wall, he saw the figures as he supposed of Dutch troops armed, and with all the advantage of position. The sun, breaking through the clouds, glinted upon steel which, at the distance, he could not be expected to recognize as bill-hooks, pruning-knives, and whatever other implements the premises had afforded. At a little distance down the road

"Mon Colonel, we are surrounded!"

"Mon Colonel, we are surrounded!"

he saw, through gaps between the trees that lined the wall, his patrol galloping back to the main body. Trying to collect himself, he at length set off at a slow trot towards the gate. Harry at once signed to the two Dutch soldiers hidden in the cloak-room to come out, and ordered them to stand at attention one on either side of the door. The leader of the French patrol pulled his horse up on its haunches at the road end of the drive.

"The road is blocked, mon Colonel," he said, "with a barricade of carts and beams held by a strong force of the enemy. We cannot estimate their numbers; they keep under cover; but one of the men is killed by their fire, and by their shouts there must be at least a hundred."

Without a word the colonel rode across to the brink of the canal. The lowness of the water and the height of the bank showed at a glance that any attempt to swim his horses across would be disastrous; they could never scramble up the opposite side. The men might cross and crawl up, but a moment's reflection showed what the fate of a small body of men would be, retreating on foot through a hostile country. The colonel looked down the road; the blazing barn inspired uncomfortable thoughts. He had seen many such conflagrations of late, and knew well that the peasants would take a full toll of revenge if he fell into their power. Wheeling round, he for the first time caught sight of the two Dutch soldiers standing behind Harry on the steps of the house. This seemed to bring home to him the hopelessness of his position; muttering a curse he walked his horse slowly up the avenue. Harry came forward to meet the scowling officer.

"It is the fortune of war, Monsieur. I see you have chosen the wiser course. You surrender to superior numbers. I am authorized by my general to accept your surrender. You will receive honourable treatment; he knows how to appreciate a gallant warrior; but the peasants——"

The colonel tried to smile.

"I am concerned—I say it frankly—for the safety of my men. With your troops,"—he shrugged—"we might take our chance; but your peasants, your burghers—parbleu! we know them; they are savages, they are tigers. To whom, Monsieur, have I the honour of yielding my sword?"

"Immediately, Monsieur, to me; my name is Harry Rochester, an Englishman at present in the—in the Dutch service; ultimately to General van Santen, to whom I shall have the honour to introduce you in a few minutes. Now, Monsieur le Colonel, you will direct your men to ride up the avenue, dismount, stack their arms in front of the house, and fasten their horses to the garden palings behind. Sergeant," he added, turning to one of the sentinel dragoons, "ride at once to the general and acquaint him that Monsieur le Colonel——"

"Baron von Schummelpincken."

"That the Baron von Schummelpincken has surrendered. Send a dozen men

to take charge of the horses. In twenty minutes we shall be in camp."

CHAPTER XI
The Battle of Lindendaal

A Hitch—A Charge in Flank—Irregular Warfare—Called Off—A Suggestion—Compliments—Thanks—Adieux—Luck—After the Fair—A Triumph

To his credit, Colonel the Baron von Schummelpincken did his best to put a good face on the predicament in which he found himself. He rode back to his men to inform them of the arrangement. The moment he had gone, Adèle de Vaudrey came out, her face aglow with excitement.

"Monsieur," she said, "General van Santen asks what the uproar, the firing, means; shall I tell him?"

"As you please, Mademoiselle."

"It is as you please, Monsieur."

"The day is not ended yet, Mademoiselle."

"I will say nothing, Monsieur." She went into the house.

The sergeant had spurred across the meadow behind, through a gate in the wall, into the orchard and wood. In a few minutes he reappeared with his comrades, who came at a trot towards the house. Their pace was leisurely, but a keener observer than the colonel, who at this moment was half-way up the avenue at the head of his troops, might have noticed that the horses' flanks were heaving violently. The men had in fact galloped at full speed from the horns of the position in obedience to the sergeant's signals, and only checked the pace in response to a suggestion of Sherebiah, who had made the best of his way after them. Harry ordered the ten dragoons to draw up in line at right angles to the house.

"Sherry," he said, as the man came up puffing, "bring me one of the dragoons' horses."

He mounted just as the colonel emerged from the avenue. Sherry stood by his side at the nearer end of the line of dragoons.

The colonel, some dozen yards ahead of his men, came to Harry and handed him his sword. Harry politely returned it, a compliment which the officer cour-

teously acknowledged.

"Monsieur," said Harry, "we understand the arrangement? Your men will pile arms in front of the house, file off to right and left, tie their horses to the palings, then pass round on foot to the rear of the house."

"Certainly, Monsieur."

Harry watched eagerly as the troopers came two by two up the drive and did his bidding with the precision of automata. Events had crowded so thickly that he had scarcely had time to think; but now he could hardly sit still on his horse, so intense was his anxiety to get the whole scene over. Everything appeared to be answering to his wishes; his arrangement for the French dragoons to file off in opposite directions was a precaution to divide the force; they began to pass behind the house one by one. About half of the troop had thus piled their arms and fastened their horses; the clock in the belfry-tower struck the first note of noon, and Harry was already congratulating himself that almost by the time the last of the leisurely Dutch chimes was ended his ruse would have been completely successful, when a loud voice was heard from the road.

"Mon Colonel! mon Colonel! they are only peasants and burghers. It is a trick, a trick!"

There was an instant halt. Harry's heart was in his mouth; Sherebiah muttered, "Zooks! 'tis hot 'taties now!" The colonel, his face aflame, spurred his horse from the pillar at the end of the avenue, and, drawing his sword, vociferated:

"A moi! à moi!"

For a moment Harry felt that all was lost. But only for a moment, for in that instant he saw that with his handful of men in line he had the advantage of the troopers debouching two by two from the balustraded drive. Turning to the dragoons at his side he shouted "Charge!" and dashed straight at the enemy. It was in the nick of time. A few seconds later they would have been ready; at this precise moment they were awkwardly placed. Half a dozen men of the nearer file were leading their horses towards the palings; beyond them the armed and mounted men were approaching from the drive, and eight files presented their flank to Harry's little force of ten. As he charged, the dismounted men scattered like hares before him, and the sixteen armed troopers had barely time to wheel round to meet the onslaught before Harry and his Dutchmen were upon them. All the advantage of impetus and direct attack was with the Dutch. Harry, grasping his sword, came full tilt upon a burly Alsatian. Almost before he had realized it he had passed over the dragoon and his horse, and, parrying a swinging cut from the man behind, had shortened his arm and thrust him through the shoulder. The man dropped his sabre and fell from his horse, which wheeled round and plunged madly through the dismounted men on the farther side.

In a trice Harry was through the mellay, and bringing his horse up on its

haunches, wrenched it round so that he might take stock of the new situation. He found that the majority of his Dutch troopers had stuck close to him, and with the readiness of old campaigners were already wheeling round to face the discomfited enemy. A dozen men were on the ground, including the portly colonel; several horses were careering wildly through the small open space, impeding the movements of the dismounted men who had made a dash for the piles of arms in front of the porch. The French troopers were still filing up the drive, but the sudden uproar had startled the horses. The riders were too much occupied with their steeds and too closely packed to make effective use of their pistols; the one or two who fired aimed erratically, and no one was hurt. But Harry saw that the only course open to him was to charge again and again until the peasants, summoned by the noise of the fray, could come to his assistance. It was fortunate that the remainder of the enemy's troop could only debouch two by two from the drive; the stone balustrade on each side of it prevented them from deploying until they entered the open space in front of the house. Two horses that had been rolled over near the entrance to the drive were plunging and kicking, hindering the advance of the leading troopers, who were now being pressed by the men behind. Once more the little band of Dutchmen hurled themselves at the head of the enemy's force, and with the same result, though Harry was instinctively aware, when he again emerged from the mellay, that his followers were fewer in number. Among them, however, he noticed Sherebiah, who had possessed himself of a sword and pistol from the stand of arms and a horse from the palings, and was comporting himself as though, so far from being a man of peace, he had as much experience of warfare as any trooper present. Two of Madame de Vaudrey's gardeners also had appropriated weapons, and were holding at bay a group of the disarmed enemy who hovered round, trying to dash in and recover their arms.

Harry saw little of this, however. He wheeled his horse once more to repeat the charge. He was followed now by only six men; at least a dozen fresh troopers had debouched from the drive, but, like their comrades, they had not time to form before the dauntless seven were upon them. The odds were heavier now; only two succeeded in getting through; the rest were checked. Then ensued a series of fierce duels, the little group of Dutch being broken up and driven back by the weight of the files pressing through as rapidly as they might into the open space. Harry, engaged with a stout trooper, felt with a sinking heart that the game was up; his arm was wrung with hacking and thrusting; his opponent, fresh to the fight, closed with him, leant over his saddle, and tried to grip him by the throat. At this moment there was a fierce shout, followed by a perfect babel of cries. The trooper fell from his horse, transfixed in the nick of time by Sherebiah's sword; and when Harry after a few seconds was able once more to take in what was

happening, he saw the place thick with burghers and peasants who were falling upon the enemy from both balustrades. Some had leapt on to the coping and were dealing heavy blows at the dragoons and their horses with sticks, hooks, scythes, and all kinds of strange implements; others were jabbing through the interstices of the balustrades; all were shouting, smiting, felling with a fierce vehemence that brooked no resistance. A panic seized upon the enemy; the unarmed men bolted to the stables behind the house and barricaded themselves there; the last files of the dragoons threw down their arms and begged for quarter; and, turning to Sherebiah, Harry bade him cry to the peasants, with the full force of his lungs, to hold their hands.

A lull succeeded the turmoil. A crowd of the Dutch were hastening towards the stables to burst open the doors and make short work of the men sheltered there. To them Harry galloped up.

"Men," he said, "halt! in the name of General van Santen. The victory is ours. We must await the general's orders."

The mob hesitated, then, with obedience compelled by their young leader's mien, stood in sullen silence. Harry rode back to the opening of the drive, stationed two of the Dutch dragoons there, and addressed the colonel, who, with a lacerated cheek and contused shoulder, leant against the palings, a picture of chagrin, pain, and baffled rage.

"Monsieur, 'twas not well done. Your parole was given. But you are hurt; go to the house—you will find tendance there."

At this moment another horseman suddenly appeared on the scene, galloping up from behind the house. Wheeling his horse in some surprise, Harry found himself face to face with Madame de Vaudrey's neighbour, Monsieur de Polignac. He looked greatly perturbed; his mouth was twitching; the air of cynical detachment he had worn in Madame de Vaudrey's drawing-room had quite disappeared.

"Monsieur, what is this, what is this?" he cried.

"As you see, Monsieur—a skirmish," replied Harry. "We have captured a raiding-party—and doubtless saved your house from the flames."

"But—but—do you not see your peril? You are not a soldier; these men are not soldiers, the most of them; to wage war is for you quite irregular; if caught by the French—and I hear, Monsieur, rumours of a general advance in this direction—you will all be hanged."

"I will take my chance of that," said Harry. "I thank you, nevertheless, for your warning, Monsieur."

"Bah! I counsel you to release your prisoners—without arms, it is understood—and send them back to their lines."

"That is a matter for General van Santen, Monsieur. Would you care to

repeat your advice to him?"

Polignac gave him a savage look, opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, and, setting spurs to his horse, galloped away.

The scene of this tempestuous little fight differed greatly from its appearance a short half-hour before. Thirty men, of whom twenty-four were French, lay killed or wounded, with a few horses. The stone balustrades were broken in several places; the flower-beds were trampled; the gravel was ploughed up; shattered muskets, swords, scabbards, pistols, hats, cloaks, strewed the ground.

"Carry the dead to the garden," said Harry. "Take the wounded to the outbuildings and attend to them; there is a doctor in the house. A dozen of you take arms from the pile there and guard the prisoners; lock them up in the stables. Sherebiah, I leave you in charge."

Then, hot, weary, hatless, his coat showing several rents, Harry followed the wounded colonel into the house.

"Monsieur," said Adèle, meeting him, "the general insists on seeing you. He was with difficulty restrained from rising and taking part in the fray. You are weary; a cup of wine will refresh you."

Harry gladly quaffed at the cup she presented to him. Then he followed her into the dining-room. The general frowned when he saw him.

"I want to see the leader," he exclaimed testily.

"This is he, Monsieur," said Ad<ble.

"You, Monsieur!—Mademoiselle, a youth, a boy—absurd!"

"It has been my good fortune, Monsieur," said Harry.

The general looked blank with astonishment. He half-raised himself on his cushions, sinking back with a groan.

"They would tell me nothing, save that the French were discomfited. Explain, from the beginning."

Harry gave a rapid narrative of the late events. He spoke always of "we", seeming to include Adèle, the general himself, and even Madame de Vaudrey, who had joined them, among those who had planned the ruse. Every now and then the general broke into his story with exclamations of surprise and pleasure and praise.

"A daring, a clever scheme," he said as Harry concluded. "You are an Englishman, they tell me; a soldier, I presume?"

"No, Monsieur le General, I have not that honour."

"That is the army's loss. You have shown great quickness, great skill, and no less courage. I compliment you, Monsieur."

"I did what I could, of course, Monsieur; but things would have ended very differently but for the peasants' bold attack at the last."

"Bah! I know them; they would have done nothing without a leader, but

with a leader they will fight—yes, and well. I doubt whether, in point of military honour, the French colonel—whom I will tax on the subject presently—did right to reassume command after he had yielded his sword; still, much may be forgiven him; naturally he was chagrined and perturbed; and he is moreover wounded, as I hear."

The general spoke with difficulty; he was very weak.

"You have saved your convoy; that is well. You will wish to take it to Breda. I fear I cannot move. Madame la Comtesse, I shall be your patient for a time——"

"Monsieur, I am honoured," said the lady.

"But the prisoners must be carried to Breda also. Monsieur, that duty—that honour—must be yours. You have laid many under an obligation: Mynheer Grootz, your excellent employer; the garrison at Breda; Madame la Comtesse, whose house you have saved; and myself—especially myself, for without doubt you preserved me from capture, and in my wounded state capture might very well have finished me."

"I hope for your speedy recovery, Monsieur."

"I thank you. Now, you will take six of my troopers with you; armed burghers will serve for the remainder of your escort. I marvel that help has not ere this reached us from Breda; you will report to my aide-de-camp, whom you will doubtless meet there or on the road. Your name, Monsieur, is——"

"Harry Rochester, Monsieur."

"Mademoiselle will note it down for me. My friend Mynheer Grootz will have a visit from me. I am fatigued; Mademoiselle, a little cordial from your fair hand. Monsieur, I bid you farewell."

Harry bowed and left the room, tingling with pleasure at the general's praise. He went to the reception-room and gladly stretched his weary limbs on a low couch there. Madame de Vaudrey followed him.

"How can I thank you!" she exclaimed. "I do thank you, from my heart, a thousand times. How brave! I trembled, I wept when I heard the horrid sounds; I could not look; Adèle looked and told me; I thought you would be killed; I was overcome, I could only pray. Oh! Monsieur, what can I say? I can say nothing; I can only—yes; tiens! I kiss you."

At another time Harry might have been embarrassed; he was now so tired that he could but accept passively all the motherly cares lavished on him by the comtesse. She brought him food with her own hands, smoothed his hair, begged him vainly to accept a ring as a token of her admiration and gratitude; offered to give him a coat of her late husband's to replace his own torn garment. Harry stood it all as long as he could; at last, parrying another kiss, he sprang up and declared it was time he set off with his prisoners and the convoy.

The prisoners capable of marching numbered eighty-five. The remainder

were too badly wounded to be moved. Gathering his escort, he had the stable door unlocked and the prisoners paraded, and sent Sherebiah to marshal the convoy. All was at length ready. It was half-past one when he stood at the door to take leave of Madame de Vaudrey.

"Adieu, Monsieur Harry!" she said. "Au revoir!—that is what I mean. You will come and see us again?"

"Nothing would delight me more, Madame."

"And stay; convey my thanks to Mynheer Grootz for the tulip bulb; you will remember that? and yourself take the thanks of a mother and daughter. Adèle!" she called, "Monsieur Rochestair is departing. Come and bid him farewell."

"Adieu, Monsieur!" said Adèle, coming forward. "I add my thanks to Mamma's for the great service you have done us."

"I could have done little, Mademoiselle, without your aid."

A flicker of pleasure passed over the girl's face; then, with a return to her wonted coldness, she said:

"You are pleased to flatter, Monsieur. But I see there are still knights-errant in the world. Adieu!"

There were tears in Madame de Vaudrey's eyes as she put her arms up and kissed Harry on the cheek. He bowed over her hand, then sprang on to the horse of one of the captured dragoons, and cantered after the line of wagons and men already moving up the road. As he reached them he had the impulse to turn for a last look at the chateau. The turret was just visible above the tree-tops, and upon it he saw a female figure motionless.

"One of the maids hauling down the flag, I suppose," he thought.

Then he set his face towards Breda; it was Adèle who stood there watching until he was out of sight.

"What a lucky dog I am, Sherry!" he remarked to his sturdy henchman as they rode side by side.

"Ay sure, Master Harry, 'tis better to be born lucky nor rich. But speaken for myself, I doan't zackly see there be much luck about it."

"Oh yes! there is. 'Twas merely luck that Mynheer Grootz had to send me this way; mere luck that he had promised Madame de Vaudrey a tulip; mere luck that the French chose that very day to come raiding; mere luck that the place lent itself so easily to a trick——"

"Ay, and mere luck that 'ee happened to be born wi' a headpiece; mere luck that 'ee can handle a sword and sit a horse; mere luck that 'ee've got sojer's blood a-rompen through your veins. Daze me, if all that be luck—well, Them above med as well ha' no finger in poor mortal pies at all."

"Well, well, Sherry! But confess, 'twas odd to come upon Captain Aglionby again, and in that house; what do you say to that?"

”Say! I say ’tis old Satan hisself playen pranks, and we’ll ha’ to keep an eye on the villain.”

”I laughed to see their heads in chancery; ’twas well done, Sherry, to haul them down the stairs as you did. What has become of the captain to-day, I wonder?”

”Trust me, he be doen mischief somewheres. I knows Cap’n, ay, I do.”

From the stout Baron von Schummelpincken downwards the prisoners wore a crest-fallen air. Save for the colonel and his subalterns they all marched on foot, the horses being tied head to tail as Harry had often seen at English country fairs. They had been marching for about an hour when the head of the convoy met General van Santen’s aide-de-camp galloping at breakneck speed. He reined up when he noticed soldiers among the men. Harry cantered to his side. Explanations were rapidly exchanged. The Dutchman laughed heartily when he heard how the enemy had been fooled.

”To tell the truth,” he said, ”I should never have thought the general capable of such a stratagem.”

”Indeed!” said Harry.

”I wish I had been there. It would have been more fitting that I should take the prisoners to Breda than you, a sutler, I suppose you call yourself.”

”I don’t think it necessary to call anybody names, Mynheer, myself least of all. The general expected assistance; why has it not accompanied you, Mynheer?”

The officer explained that on reaching Breda he had found that practically the whole garrison was engaged in a reconnaissance in force towards Antwerp, where General de Bedmar was showing signs of activity that gave the confederate generals some concern. Only two troops of horse had been retained in the town, and these had strict orders not to leave the place. Infantry would be of little use against the French raiders, and indeed it was impossible that they should reach Madame de Vaudrey’s house in time. The aide-de-camp had been accordingly provided with a fresh mount and sent on to the main body, from which a squadron had at once been detached. But the corps, when he overtook it, was a good ten miles beyond Breda, and the relief squadron could not start for the Helmund road until the afternoon. It was now some twenty minutes behind the aide-de-camp, who had ridden forward to convey to the general the news of the coming reinforcement.

He continued his journey, and Harry cantered on to overtake the convoy, which had moved on while the conversation took place. Some minutes later a cloud of dust in the distance heralded the approaching force. When the two bodies met, Harry had reluctantly to tell his story over again. The commander of the squadron pressed him for more details than the general’s aide-de-camp had done, and being a shrewd man he soon put two and two together.

”The honour of the day is yours, my friend,” he said to Harry, ”and by my soul you shall ride into Breda at the head of the column.”

Harry protested; he did not relish the idea of heading a sort of circus procession. But the Dutchman insisted; General van Santen had laid the duty upon Harry, and he saw no reason to relieve him of it. He sent a couple of his troopers on in advance to announce the event. Thus it happened that when, in the dusk, Harry headed his convoy through the gates, he was met by a great concourse of the populace, men, women, and children huzzaing and waving hats and kerchiefs with vast enthusiasm. All the pretty girls of the town, in their quaint bonnets and short skirts, pressed around the horse to see the young Englishman, and a comical little Dutch boy, with a toy drum slung over his shoulder, placed himself in front of Harry’s horse and proudly tattooed him through the streets to the burgomaster’s house. The burgomaster himself made a very flowery speech of congratulation, to which Harry returned the best acknowledgment he could; and he was heartily glad when the tide of compliments ebbed and he had leisure to make formal delivery of his prisoners.

He had not yet escaped, however. He was resting in his inn when a messenger entered with an invitation to an impromptu banquet organized at the burgomaster’s. In vain Harry pleaded that he was in no trim for fine company. The burgomaster’s own tailor undertook to make him presentable; he had to sit through a long Dutch feast and respond to the toast of his health. Even then his labours were not ended. After the banquet the company adjourned to the council chamber, where all the beauty of the town was assembled. Harry had to lead off the dance with the burgomaster’s wife, a stout vrouw of forty-five years and fifteen stone. He did his duty manfully, dancing the stately dances of the day with unflagging spirit, and winning universal praise by the modesty with which he wore his honours. The assembly broke up at a late hour; Harry was dog-tired, and went to bed convinced that it was mighty hard work to be a popular hero.

CHAPTER XII
Harry is Discharged

Rheum and Rum—Gall—Without Ceremony—A Question of Precedence—Res Angustae—The Raw—To Scheveningen—Punctuality and Despatch—From the Dutch Side—Temptation—Renunciation—Gretel—Misgivings

”Atchew!—confusion! This pestilent country—atchew!—will be the death of me. ’Tis one eternal—-atchew!—rheum! Stap my vitals! I wish I were dead. Atchew! atchew!”

Captain Aglionby sat in the topmost room of a high house in one of the less savoury quarters of the Hague. His nose was redder than ever; his cheeks more puffed; his eyes looked like boiled oysters. A thick woollen comforter swathed his neck. Though it was the height of summer, a big log fire blazed in the hearth; window and door were fast shut; and in a temperature of something over eighty degrees the captain was doing his best, according to his lights, to cure a cold.

He was seated at a table drawn close to the fire. Upon the table stood a bottle nearly empty, a beaker, a basin of sugar, an inkhorn, a table-book of writing-paper, and a sheath containing quills. A kettle sang on the fire. When his sneezing fit was over, the captain poured the last of his rum into the beaker, sugared it, filled up with boiling water, and gulped half of the mixture into a throat inured to fiery passengers. Water streamed from his eyes, and his blotched brow broke into a profuse perspiration. He wiped his face with a large red handkerchief, smacked his lips, and, bending over the table, selected a quill.

”Hang writing!” he muttered. ”I never writ a letter but I rued it. Atchew! And with this cursed cold! Well, the sooner begun, the sooner done; so here’s to it. Atchew!”

He cut his quill, dipped it in the ink, and began:

”Mr. BARKLEY. Sir.”

It would have been quite evident to an onlooker that the captain was not a practised penman. He wrote very laboriously, frowning at every stroke, and licking his lips often. Like most illiterate people, he repeated half aloud the words as he wrote them, and being so unused to giving visible expression to his thoughts, he commented as he went along. He was never at a loss how to spell a word, for in those days men spelt as they pleased, and bad spelling might almost have been regarded as one of the marks of a gentleman.

”Sir. This will, I hope, finde you well. For myself, I am afflicted [atchew!] with a voilent Rheum, the wch I feare will turne to an inflamatn of the Longs. [Egad! that’ll please the old niggard!] I command the sarvices of the best Potticary in the place, but finding his nostrums vain, for three dayes have eate nought but Water Gruel. ’Tis said that Rumm is a speedie Cure, but that I eschew. [Atchew!] My

Hande shakes with the feaver, & I shd not rite to you now had I not Surprizing Nuse to give. You must knowe that, visitting at the house of Mme de Vodray, where your he sarvant is ever an honour'd guest, [that's worth fifty guineas to me!] what was my vaste Amazement to finde there that yonge Cockerell H—— R—— swaggering it as one of the beste. It passes my wit to divine how he escap'd from the *Merrie Maide*, & hope y may recover the Passage Money, the wch methinks will be difficult. [Atchew! He won't get a penny o't.] 'Tis passing strange the boy is here, not lesse that he is acquaint with the Vodrays; & moreover with him is my pestilent cozn S—— M——, of whom more hereafter, 'twill be easie to deal with him, whereto I have already things *in Traine*. H—— R—— is employ'd with one Grootz, a merchant of Substance, & one that hath large Contracks with the confederate armies. The boy being out of yr way, y have belike no further cause against him, & wd wish no further stepps taken, comming & going is like at any time to Cooke his Goose, but if I mistake in this 'twould be well to sende 100 Guineas by the same Hande as wont, & I wd endevour to bring the matter to a safe and speedie End, in wch case I wd make bold to aske for a further Summe of 200 Guineas for to requite my Zeale in the sarvice of my honour'd Frende & Patron."

"Atchew! Writing is plaguily dry work," he muttered, breaking off at this point, "and the bottle's empty."

He tugged at a bell-pull, and resumed his letter.

"'Twill be no light Taske, seeing the yonge man hath captured of late a Partie of above 100 French in an Affaire near Breda, the wch I doubte not will give him some Consekence with the Dutch no less than himselfe, of the wch Affaire 'tis like an Account will be printed in the *Courant*. [Sure 'twill give Nick a start.] I must add that Living is *verie Deare* here. For my Creditt sake and the furtherance of youre Ends, I have hired a Magnifficent Appartment, for the wch I have to paye a sweete Rent. Hence it is verie nessessarie I have the Guineas without delai. Waiting yr commands & so subscribe myself yr ever humble and obediant

RALPH AGLIONBY, Captain."

"Atchew! There, 'tis done, and writ fair." He flung his pen on the table. "And I'd fain know what the squire has against the knave; 'tis more than pique, I promise you. Where's Simmons, confound him!"

He sanded the wet paper, folded it, sealed it with yellow wax, and wrote the superscription:

For Nicolas Barkley Esqre ***at his house*** ***Winton St. Mary*** *nr Salisbury, England*

This done, he tugged again at the bell-pull, blew his nose with sounding ferocity, and stuck his legs into the hearth with the air of a man who had successfully achieved a stupendous task.

The door opened, and John Simmons entered.

"Hang you, sirrah! why don't you answer my bell at the very moment, sir? Go get me a bottle of rum."

Simmons, pallid, frowsy, scared-looking, stood hesitating in the doorway.

"Are you deaf, clodpoll?" roared the captain. "A bottle of rum, and instantly!"

"Yes, Captain, and the—and the money, sir?"

"The money, you dog! Where is the crown-piece I gave you this morning?"

"I had to buy the dinner, sir, and——"

"Zounds! You'll answer me, will you? You're the most pestilent knave man ever had to serve him. 'Tis money, money, all day with you. Would that Sherry Minshull had left you to the hangman! Begone, sirrah! and——"

"Pardon!" said a voice in French from the door. "If I am in the way——"

"Come in, Monsieur," said Aglionby, springing to his feet. "And you, booby, be off and do my bidding."

Simmons vanished precipitately. Monsieur de Polignac gasped as he entered the overheated room.

"Phew! It would roast an ox."

"Shut the door. I am nursing a pestilent rheum."

"So it appears. You are in an ill humour, my friend; I fear my news will not cheer you."

"Spit it out and have done with it, then."

"Well, this is it. A commission has been made out, I hear, appointing your young Englishman a cornet in the Anspach dragoons."

"What young Englishman?"

"The young man whom we met at Madame de Vaudrey's."

The captain swore a hearty British oath.

"Where learnt you that?"

"A la bonne heure! It is true. I have it on authority I cannot doubt. Van Santen pressed it; his influence prevailed. There were several vacancies in the

regiment; it lost heavily in the action at Eckeren a few weeks ago. This boy gets the senior cornetcy. We owe it to ourselves, Monsieur le Capitaine, that the junior cornets get an early step."

"Peste! We do owe it to ourselves; or, I should rather say, we owe it to yourself. For me, I have knocked about the world too long to take umbrage easily; and look you, Monsieur, my family, although gentle, indeed I may say noble, cannot compare with yours in quartet-ings and such fal-lals. I understand your sentiments; as you say, something must be done."

"And at once, for which end I have come to see you. My position, as you perceive, is delicate; for myself, I would seek a quarrel with the bantling and spit him on my rapier without remorse. But affairs of state—you understand me; that alters the case. I must not appear. I propose to you this: to affront the boy, provoke him to a duel; you a veteran, he a tyro; it will be a matter of seconds. Voilà!"

The captain gazed steadily at Polignac for a few moments, then said:

"Look you, Polignac, no man ever accused Ralph Aglionby, late captain in the Preobrashenski Grenadiers, of lack of courage—no man, that is to say, that lived to tell of it. Had you made the proposition twenty years ago, I should by this time have been half-way down the stairs on the way to kill this young springald. But twenty years make a difference. My courage is the same, look you; but the years have enlarged my girth—and my discretion. On the point of honour I am as sensitive as ever I was, but I have learnt to have patience—and consideration. Say I engage this peddling fool; what happens? I kill him and baulk you of your revenge. Where are you, my friend? Or suppose, by some vile contrivance, he kills me; where am I? No, no, Monsieur; the right of place belongs to you. Who am I, a broken soldier, a poor unnecessary captain of grenadiers, to take precedence of you?"

"You have most admirable patience," sneered Polignac, "and I am overwhelmed by your consideration. I thank you, Monsieur le Capitaine, and bid you adieu."

"Stay, my friend; why this haste? I have consideration, as you say. Would the world be better for the loss of you or me? are there not more ways of getting even with a man than making one's self a target for his pistol or a sheath for his sword? You remember Marillier, and Aubin, eh? Sit down, and let us talk this over like reasonable men."

Polignac sat on one of the rickety chairs in silence.

"Your memory is jogged, eh? You remember the dark lane, and the light in the window, and——"

"Enough!" exclaimed the other impatiently. "My memory is as good as yours. This is different. I must be circumspect. Were we in Paris—then! But here

at the Hague, I am not my own master; I have weightier interests to consider. An incautious step, even a chance word, may ruin a dynasty. My own life—I do not consider it; but when one is playing for a crown one has duties, responsibilities. If you see your way—well, I am not one to dissuade you; and if a few guilders——"

Aglionby's red eyes gleamed.

"Well, Monsieur, as you put it so, I own 'tis in a measure a question of money. In truth 'tis desperate hard lines that I, who have ruffled it with the best and got drunk with the Czar of Muscovy himself, should be so hard driven as that I cannot offer due hospitality to a friend. Look at this wretched lodging; was ever gentleman, by no fault of his own, mark you, reduced to such straits!"

Polignac, glancing at the mean furniture and the empty bottle, agreeably assented, but concealed a smile.

"Well," he said, "might I ask leave to send out for a bottle of wine?"

Aglionby jumped up with alacrity.

"You say so? 'Tis the mark of a true friend." He pulled hard at the bell-rope. "My man will be here instantly; and, Monsieur, let it be sack—sack, as you love me."

Simmons reappeared without delay, and was despatched for a bottle of sack. With the energy of pleasurable anticipation the captain pursued:

"Now, my dear Polignac, mark—before attempting the house 'tis well to poison the dog; aha! that is only my way of putting it, eh?"

"Of course. A figure of speech; but from the life!"

Aglionby flung him a suspicious glance; at times he had an uneasy feeling that Polignac was quizzing him. But after a momentary pause he went on as before.

"The dog in this case—and a low cur it is—is the young cockerel's servant—the same that embraced you so cordially at Madame de Vaudrey's. Ha! ha! I can relish the comical side of it e'en though he embraced me also!—and before the charming mademoiselle too!"

He guffawed uproariously. He felt that he was now getting tit for tat for Polignac's covert sneers, often rather suspected than understood. But he was not a little startled by the effect of his words and laughter. Polignac flushed purple with rage; his mouth took a very decided twist towards his left eye. Springing up suddenly he cried:

"Morbleu, Monsieur, a truce to your pleasantries! and keep the lady's name out of it, or by the——"

"No offence, no offence, my dear fellow," interposed the captain hastily. "I'm but a plain soldier—just an honest, bluff, outspoken old campaigner; we blades don't pick and choose our words like you fine gentlemen of the courts; though in truth when I was in Russia my manners were as good as the best."

Polignac resumed his seat reluctantly without a word. After a short, strained silence Aglionby went on:

"The first thing, as I was saying, is to get this dog out of the way. Burn him! he follows his master like a shadow. The man removed, the rest is easy. A week from now, and he shall lie his length in six feet of good Dutch soil, or my name isn't Ralph Montacute Aglionby. Leave it to me, Monsieur; there will be necessary expenses; say fifty guilders, a small sum, and at one time——"

"Send to my chambers; you shall have the money. And by the way, here is a packet for Captain Rudge of the *Skylark*. He sails with this evening's tide. Bid him have the greatest care of it; should he run into danger he must destroy it.—It is arranged, then? I shall hear from you?"

"Within a week, on the word of a gentleman."

"Then for the time, adieu!"

When Polignac had gone, Aglionby looked curiously at the packet entrusted to him. The address ran:

For Mistress Consterdine to be left at the coffee-house, *by the Cockpitt, Whitehall, London.*

It was carefully but not conspicuously sealed. The captain turned it over and over in his dirty hands; they itched to open it. "To judge by his rage," he muttered, "he's certainly smit with Mademoiselle de Vaudrey. 'Tis not merely his interest is engaged." He sat musing for a moment. Then his eye fell on a broadsheet, marked with many circular stains, that lay on one of the chairs. He took it up and searched for a passage which he had clearly already read. Lighting upon it, he read:

"The report goes that Coy's Horse embark at Harwich for Ostend on Friday the 16th current. They will join the forces now operating under General Lumley in Dutch Flanders."

"With a fair wind they'll make port to-morrow. Then, Sherebiah Minshull, my sweet coz, we shall begin to square accounts,—you and I."

Stuffing the two packets into his capacious pocket, he clapped on his hat, flung a cloak over his shoulders, wound the comforter more tightly about his neck, and made his way out, sneezing half a dozen times as he met the cooler air

of the street. He walked along the Lange Pooten, the chief business thoroughfare, into an open space known as the Plein. As he was crossing this he caught sight of a figure hastening into one of the larger houses, and almost involuntarily he stepped aside into a doorway until all danger of being seen was past.

"What is the puppy doing here?" he muttered, passing on his way to the old road to Scheveningen. After a pleasant woodland walk of two miles he reached that little fishing village, and found, as he expected, Captain Rudge, owner and skipper of the sloop *Skylark*, a fast sailer which ran to and fro between Scheveningen and Harwich. To him Aglionby confided his own letter and Polignac's. Then he retraced his steps, and at the Hague took horse for Rotterdam. It was near midnight when he returned and wearily climbed the lofty stair to his attic room; but though he was fatigued, and his cold perceptibly worse, he seemed well satisfied with himself, and chuckled many a time before he had drained to the dregs the bottle of sack he had broached with Monsieur de Polignac.

The person from whose sight he had shrunk in the afternoon was Harry Rochester himself, who had just returned from a visit to Marlborough's camp at Hanneff. Mynheer Grootz was up to his eyes in business, and the wide area over which the confederate forces were spread taxed his resources to the utmost. He had now come to the Hague to confer with a committee of the States General and arrange further contracts, and had instructed Harry to meet him there on the completion of his own errand.

"Well, my boy," said Grootz on his arrival, "I did not expect you zo zoon." They were now on such friendly and familiar terms that the Dutchman had dropped the formal address. "How have you fared?"

"Excellently, Mynheer," replied Harry. "The commissary was well content with your arrangements, and said—'tis no harm to repeat it—that were all Dutchmen like Jan Grootz he would be spared a peck of trouble."

"Dat is goot," said Grootz, evidently well pleased. "Dat is how I do my business; always in time, always ready, always sure."

"I had hoped to catch a glimpse of my lord Marlborough himself, but 'twas not to be. Whatever may be said of his meanness and selfishness, Mynheer, 'tis certain he is adored by his army. The soldiers are full of courage, confident in my lord's genius, and all afire to meet the French. They say, indeed, that if my lord were but free of restraint, not bound to take counsel with your politicians here, one campaign would see the end of the war."

"Dey zay!—Yes, well, it may be zo. My lord is a fine soldier—none would deny it—for all he dink little of de rules of war. But as for de field deputies—my countrymen—dey alzo have reason. To Lord Marlborough and you English, my boy, a defeat mean much; dat is zo; but to my country—ah! much more. To us it mean ruin, every village and town overrun, our polders spoiled, our homes

destroyed, everywhere black misery. Dis poor country know it all too well; we have suffered—ah yes! we have suffered before too often. For my lord, it is a game wherein he can noding lose but glory; for us it is a struggle of life and death. True, for myself, I zay in war, as in business, to follow a bold course is best; but I do not derefore blame our statesmen dat dey move zlowly; no, I do not blame dem."

Harry had seen more than once lately that beneath the stolid exterior of the merchant beat a heart warm toward his fatherland and his friends. He could not but recognize much to sympathize with in the Dutch point of view, and began to realize what it meant to the Hollanders to have their country turned into a cockpit for the political contentions of rival monarchs.

A slight pause followed Grootz's earnest speech; then suddenly, with a change of tone, he said:

"Now, Mynheer Harry, I have a ding to zay. Dere are reasons why I find it now necessary to discharge you from my business."

Harry gasped and looked very blank. The merchant nodded solemnly; up came his fat forefinger; and he continued with even more deliberation than usual:

"Dat is zo. I tell you dis; I find no fault wid you; none in de world; but all de same, I zay dat it is necessary you go."

Harry was so much taken aback that he found it difficult to speak.

"Why—'tis sudden—what can—surely—" his tongue stumbled over half a dozen questions before, with an effort to command himself, he said: "Of course, Mynheer, if there is nothing more for me to do, I must perforce seek other work. You have been very kind to me; 'tis but poor thanks I can give you for what you have done."

"What I have done! Gunst! it is noding. And you: it needs not to zeek oder work; it is found. Hearken to dis."

He took up an official-looking paper that lay at his hand and read in Dutch:

"Mynheer Henry Rochester is appointed to a cornetcy in the Anspach dragoons in succession to Mynheer Lodewyk van Monnen deceased."

Harry flushed to the eyes.

"'Tis a mistake, Mynheer, surely. I have not sought this; I know nothing of it."

"A mistake! Not at all. General van Santen come to me and zay, 'Grootz, you have in your business a young man dat has no business to be in your business; he is a soldier, noding less, and we have need of such;' dat is what he zay, and

more, and he go straight off to put down your name for a commission. And here it is, in de gazette. Dat is why I discharge you, before—" (Mynheer Grootz made a brave attempt to be jocular)—"before you discharge yourself."

Harry was silent. His nerves were tingling, his blood sang in his veins. Here was the opening to a career after his own heart. All his earlier longings came back to him; the inward struggle with which he had acquiesced in his father's desire that he should enter the Church; the light of hope that shone on him at his interview with Marlborough; the agonizing dissolution of his castle in the air. And now, unsought, what he had sought in vain had come to him, the aspiration of his boyhood was about to be fulfilled. All this flashed through his mind in a moment of time,—and there was Jan Grootz, smiling out of his kindly little eyes. Jan Grootz!—what he owed to him! But for Jan Grootz he might now be a hapless slave in the Plantations, with no ray of light upon the endless vista of the years. To Jan Grootz he owed his health and freedom, his training in dealing with men; more than all, he had met in Jan Grootz a man whose character compelled his respect and admiration, and whom indeed he had begun to love. Would it not be the worst of ingratitude to leave him now?

The temptation was strong, the inward struggle sharp. But it was only a few moments after the staggering announcement when he bent forward and said:

"Mynheer, I cannot accept this offer—this splendid offer. 'Tis exceeding kind of General van Santen; I owe him my hearty thanks; but 'tis not to be thought of, save you yourself wish to be rid of me, and that I must doubt, since 'tis but a week since you told me I was useful to you. I will see the general, and explain to him the reason why I decline this commission; I must do so at once."

He made towards the door, as though eager to avoid dalliance. Grootz's broad plain face was transfigured by delight and pride and gratification. Catching Harry by the arm, he drew him back, laid his hand on his shoulder, and said:

"No, Harry, my dear lad, I tell you dis; you must not do dis ding. I do not zay I shall not feel your loss"—there was an unusual note of tenderness in his voice—"true, it is not long dat we have worked togeder, but already I regard you—jawohl, regard you as a son, and to miss your bright face, your willing service——hoot! by den donder, I am not myself to-day."

"'Tis too kind of you, Mynheer."

"Nay, nay; I am not zo weak. I am at one wid General van Santen: you are made for a soldier. 'Tis de work you yourself would have chosen; now 'tis de tide of fortune, dat you dare not miss. I tell you dis; I am made up in my mind, fixed, noding can move me. I salute you, Mynheer Rochester, cornet in de Anspach dragoons."

"Indeed, 'tis too good of you, Mynheer."

"Not zo. And dis I tell you alzo. You know me, Jan Grootz; I prosper—God

prospers me. I regard you as my son: well, 'tis a fader's pleasure to provide for his son at de beginning of dings, just as 'tis a skipper's pleasure to zee his ship sail taut and trim. You will have heavy charges: clothes, equipment, a horse to buy. Dose charges, you will permit me, zall be mine. 'Tis but right you should take your place wid de best. I have no kith nor kin, nor like to have; de pay for dragoons is little enough; I add a hundred guilders a month; dat will suffice, dink you?"

"But, Mynheer——"

"Poof! no buts. I zall do as please me. Now, I am hungry: let us go to de parlour. And dere is your man to tell; he will, no doubt, continue to be your servant."

They went from the room, Grootz keeping his hand affectionately on Harry's shoulder. The table in the parlour was already laid, and in answer to the bell old Gretel appeared with a tureen of soup.

"Gretel," said the merchant, "Mynheer Harry is about to leave us."

"There! Something inside told me, Mynheer, you would not keep him long."

"'Tis not of my own will, Gretel," said Harry at once.

"No," added Grootz. "The lad was not eager. He is to be an officer of dragoons."

The old woman curtsied and grunted.

"A rare exchange!" she said. "To my mind 'tis better to sell corn than to stand up to be shot at, and a deal safer. But I wish you good luck, Mynheer."

"Thanks, Gretel, for that and for all your kindness to me. Is Sherry downstairs?"

"Ja, Mynheer."

"Send him up, if you please. I must tell him the news."

"Oh! he will not be pleased. He has a scorn of soldiers, never a good word to say for them. He is in the right."

Harry smiled as the privileged old housekeeper hobbled out. Sherebiah soon appeared.

"Sherry," said Harry, "I have a thing to tell you. General van Santen has recommended me to the heads of the Dutch army, and I am made an officer of dragoons."

"Zooks!" was the man's astonished exclamation.

"We shall still be together, you and I. I shall want a man, of course; and you will not object to the place?"

"Well, sir," said Sherebiah slowly, looking down at his boots, "'tis an awk'ard matter for a man o' peace. 'Tis a line o' life I ha' no love for. To be sarvant to a man o' war is next to bein' a man o' war yourself. Not but what I'd be proud to sarve 'ee, Master Harry; no man more; but them as take the sword shall fall by

the sword, as the Book says, and I take that for a warnen to have none on 't."

"A lame argument, Sherry."

"True, sir, haven no larnen I feel it so. And will 'ee go shoulder to shoulder with our English sojers?"

There was a note of anxiety in his voice.

"That I can't say. I hope that my regiment won't be left out in the cold."

"Well, sir, there's a providence in't. Them above knows what they're about, to be sure, in a general way, and I bean't agwine to set up for knowen better. I'll sarve 'ee, sir, polish your breastplate, currycomb your horse, oil your boots, clean your pistols, keep an eye on the sutlers, and——"

"You seem to have a good notion of your new duties," said Harry, laughing.

"Pretty good, sir, for a man o' peace," said Sherebiah imperturbably. "And when do 'ee mount your horse as a sojer, Master Harry?"

"Zoon," put in Grootz. "General van Santen himself will introduce him to his broder officers; he tell me zo."

"Ay, so. Well, 'tis a world o' changes. For you, sir, 'tis a change for the better, barren 'ee bean't killed; for me,—well, the truth on't is, I fear 'tis the beginnen o' the end for Sherebiah Stand-up-and-Bless."

CHAPTER XIII
Concerning Sherebiah

A Summons—Coy's Horse—Vain Search—A Clue—Sentenced—Confession—A Quiet Mind—A Friend in Camp—The Informer—Intercession—Who Goes There?—Hit—The Mantle of Night—In a Ditch

One evening, a few days after he had received news of his commission, Harry returned home somewhat later than usual from his customary stroll. He was fond of walking through the pleasant woods to Scheveningen, and watching the herring-boats as they sailed out for the night's work. He would chat with the fishermen, and had indeed by his frank manner, and perhaps an occasional gift of tobacco, established himself as a favourite with them.

On this evening, feeling a little tired, he threw himself into a chair in the parlour, and sat musing, gazing into the glowing sky as the sun went down. By and by old Gretel entered and began to lay the supper. She had gone in and out

two or three times in silence before Harry bethought himself and said:

”Why, Gretel, how is it Sherry is not helping you to-night?”

”By den donder, Mynheer, you may well ask! He seems bewitched since the great news. Not half so helpful to my poor old bones as he was.”

”But where is he?”

”He has not returned yet.”

”Returned from where?”

”Why, Mynheer, he went out at once after receiving your message, and——”

”My message!”

”Ja, Mynheer, the message sent by the boy.”

”What boy? Come, Gretel, I sent no message. I know nothing about a boy. Tell me all you know.”

”It was about four o’clock, Mynheer, a boy of twelve or so came to the door—a stranger to me. He asked for Sherry Minshull—no mynheer to his tongue. I called to Sherry, and heard the boy say, ’Mynheer Rochester wishes you to come——’ then the big bell of the Groote Kerk tolled, and I heard no more. But Sherry reached down his hat and said he was going to you, and he and the boy went away together.”

Harry was puzzled, and a little uneasy. He rose from his chair.

”Are you sure you heard the boy mention my name?”

”Quite sure. And Sherry must have thought there was need for haste, for he left his dish of coffee half full, and he is too fond of mocha to do that without a reason.”

Just then Mynheer Grootz came in to supper. When Harry had informed him of the strange message and Sherebiah’s continued absence, he was at first disposed to make light of the matter.

”Gretel is growing hard of hearing,” he said. ”Maybe she mistook de name.”

”Don’t you think, Mynheer, ’twould be well to make enquiry before it is dark? I am strangely uneasy about Sherry.”

The merchant consented to accompany Harry into the streets. Everybody knew him and answered his questions readily enough; but none of the porters of the neighbouring houses, or the watchmen who patrolled the streets, had seen Sherebiah or the boy, though some of them owned that they knew the former well by sight. By and by, however, they came upon an old soldier smoking his evening pipe outside his cottage—the lodge to one of the larger houses in Gedempte Spui. Grootz put the usual question.

”Did you see an Englishman—stout, with a beard, and his hat on one side, pass by a few hours ago with a boy of twelve or thereabouts?”

The soldier removed his long pipe, spat, and appeared to meditate before replying.

”Yes—now I think of it; I believe I did see a man of that cut, though I would not be sure. He might not have been an Englishman. He was stout, certainly, and had a beard; as for his hat, I didn’t notice it, for the truth is, I had been looking at some other Englishmen, a party of Coy’s Horse; my old corps served side by side with them in ’97. Yes, and there was a man among them I knew too; a paymaster—Robins, I mind, was his name—donder! what a temper he had! It was a curse and a blow with him. Ay, it is a hard life, the soldier’s. They halted at the inn over by there, and I was just going over to drink a glass with them for old times’ sake when the Baron’s coach came up and I had to open the gates. A lodge-keeper, see you, is a sentry with no change of guard.”

”Ja, ja! But the Englishman and the boy—which way did they go?”

”Which way? Let me see. They might have gone down the road: no, now I bethink me, I believe they went up the road; but there, I can’t be sure. The sight of the English horse, men I fought side by side with in ’97, before I got my wound——”

”Ja, ja! Thank you!”

They escaped his further reminiscences by walking on, past the inn, past a row of cottages with the inevitable bright green shutters, until they came to the watch-house at the cross-roads. Grootz put the same question to the watchman.

”No,” he replied. ”I saw no Englishman with a boy. But I saw a party of English horse; they had come in from Rotterdam, and I heard afterwards at the inn they were on the track of a deserter.”

It was now almost dark; to continue the search further would be vain. They returned home to their belated supper, Grootz promising to set exhaustive enquiries on foot in the morning.

That night, for the first time for many months, Harry was unable to sleep. He was oppressed by perplexity and uneasiness. From whatever point of view he looked at Sherebiah’s disappearance it seemed equally inexplicable. He could divine no motive for a message sent to Sherebiah in his name; the man appeared to be on very good terms with Dutchmen and was unlikely to have private enemies. Harry was almost forced to the conclusion that Gretel had been mistaken, after all, and that Sherebiah would by and by return with a simple explanation of his absence. He might have met a friend, and be spending a convivial evening with him. Perhaps—the thought came like an illumination—one of the English troopers from Rotterdam was a friend of his—a Wiltshire man, possibly. The suggestion allayed his uneasiness, and he fell asleep half expecting to be called by Sherebiah as usual next morning.

But Sherebiah did not return that night. It happened next day that Mynheer Grootz was early summoned to a conference with a committee of the States General, and when after a prolonged discussion he was released he had to start

at once for Leyden on important business. It was late before he returned. Harry meanwhile had lost no time in pursuing enquiries in every likely quarter, but in vain. Sherebiah had not returned; nothing had been heard of him; and there was nothing for it but to wait yet another day.

He was again wakeful, and his thoughts turned to the errand on which the party of English horse had come. He pitied the unfortunate wretch for whom they were in search—some poor fellow, perhaps, who had escaped in the hope that he would be less easily tracked in a foreign land. The punishment for desertion had become much more stringent and summary of late owing to the prevalence of the offence. Harry himself remembered one bleak morning in London when, having gone early into Hyde Park, he had been the unwilling spectator of the shooting of a deserter. Had they caught the man? he wondered. "I hope——" he thought, then suddenly a strange suspicion flashed upon him. Surely it was impossible; yet—— In a moment slumbering recollections awoke. He remembered that many times, when approaching English soldiers in London, Sherebiah had sidled away and disappeared. He remembered how, more than once, Sherry had shown a knowledge of military matters singularly intimate for a civilian; how insistently he had always proclaimed himself a man of peace; how hardily he had behaved in the fight at Lindendaal. These facts, and many a slight hint scarcely regarded before, combined to convert a chance surmise, almost dismissed as absurd, into a strong presumption little short of certainty.

He sprang out of bed, dressed quickly, ran downstairs with his slippers in his hands, and, noiselessly drawing the bolts, hurried along the silent street towards the inn on the Rotterdam Road at which the patrol had halted. Though it was late, the people of the inn were still up. He asked for the landlord, and had not conversed with him for more than a minute before he was convinced, from what was said of the prisoner, that it was indeed Sherebiah. The troopers had brought with them a led horse; on this they had mounted the deserter, strapping him on each side to a dragoon, and then ridden off at once towards Rotterdam, *en route* for Breda. Returning to the house, Harry woke Mynheer Grootz, told him of what he had learnt, and proposed to start at once for Breda to allay or confirm his suspicion. From this the merchant dissuaded him. A night ride would be attended with difficulty and danger; if he started early in the morning, he might still overtake the dragoons before they reached Breda. Accordingly he went back to bed for a few hours. At dawn he rose, and by five o'clock was galloping towards Rotterdam on the best horse in Grootz's stables.

At Rotterdam he learnt that a body of English horse, consisting of units of several regiments, had left for Breda on the previous afternoon. Waiting for an hour to rest and bait his horse he pushed on to Breda, arriving there about one o'clock in the afternoon. Without delay he sought out the officer to whom he had

delivered his convoy of provisions a few weeks before, and enquired whether he knew of the arrest of an English deserter.

"Ay, and a notorious character, it appears. 'Twas not merely desertion they had against him, but mutiny, and a murderous attack on an officer. He fought like a cat when he was arrested; 'twas a foolish trick, for they were ten to one, and in a little he was overpowered. He was tried by court-martial this morning at nine, and the trial was short."

"Was sentence pronounced?"

"Of course; he had no defence; he was sentenced to be shot."

"There is no appeal?"

"None. The sentence will be laid before my lord Marlborough for confirmation; a matter of form. But pray why do you take so much interest in the man?"

"He is my servant, comes from my village, has done me right faithful service. Good God! to think that he should come to this end!"

The officer shrugged.

"Unhappy chance indeed. 'Tis seven years or more since he deserted; doubtless he felt secure. I am sorry for you. He'll get no more than he deserves."

"Could I see him?"

"Certainly; he is confined in the town-house; I will take you to him myself."

In a few minutes Harry was ushered into a dark room in the basement of the town-house. A candle was lit; he was left alone with the prisoner, and the door was locked behind him.

"Oh, Sherry, my poor fellow, who would have thought you would come to this!"

"Master Harry, 'tis good of 'ee to come and see me. Ay; poor feller! you med well say so; but to tell 'ee the truth, 'tis a load off my back."

"Yes, I understand. I know now why you always scouted the soldiers in London. Why didn't you tell me? I would never have brought you to this country, with our soldiers here, there, and everywhere."

"Tell 'ee! Not me. Why, you and me would 'a had to part company that minute. Besides, 'twarn't zackly a thing to be proud on, look at it how 'ee will. 'Twas ill-luck I were nabbed, to be sure; but I've had nigh eight year as a man o' peace, and I s'pose 'twas time the lid were putt on the copper."

"And they'll shoot you!"

"Bless 'ee, I bean't afeard o' that. I've been shot at; ay, many's the time: at Sedgemoor, and Walcourt, and other cities o' destruction. I can stand fire wi' any man. Nay, the one thing as troubles me is how poor old feyther o' mine'll take it. The poor ancient soul never dreams I desarted; and zooks! 'tis that'll hurt un more'n my bein' a corpse; his boy a desarter, and him a trooper of old Noll's!

Ay, that'll hurt un, 'twill so. And then there's you, sir; how be I agwine to leave 'ee, wi' old Squire and Rafe Aglionby a-seeken whom they may devour, and no one you can trust to polish your breastplate and oil your boots? Ay, the way o' transgressors is hard; the wages o' sin is death; many's the time I've yeard they holy words from the lips of pa'son your good feyther, never thinken in my feeble mind he were aimen at me."

Harry was at a loss for words. Sherebiah was so perfectly resigned to his fate that any attempt at consolation would seem an impertinence.

"How came you to desert?" he asked, to gain time.

"Why, I'll tell 'ee about it. I was a corporal in Coy's horse; med ha' been a sergeant long agoo, indeed. But there was a paymaster o' that regiment, Robins by name; a good sojer, true, but with his faults, like any other mortal man. He was hot in his temper, and crooked in his dealens. Us men was bein' cheated, right and left; our pay was small enough, but we never got it: a penny here and a ha'penny there bein' took off for this or that. Ay, and he was a knowen one, he was. All done so soft and quiet-like. We stood it a long time; at long last, 'twas more'n Minshull blood could stomach, and one mornen I up and spoke out; you see, I warn't a man o' peace then. Well, Robins bein' fiery by nature, he got nettled; I should myself; but 'tis one thing to get nettled, and another to use yer fist. Robins he used his fist, and not bein' zackly meek as Moses, I used mine, and he fell under. Two or three of my mates standen by saw it all. Robins he raved and called on 'em to arrest me, but they wouldn't. But 'twas all up wi' me; I knowed that well enough; if Robins took a spite agen a man he med as well be a dead dog. I had no mind to be a dead dog just then, so I bolted; and that's how I come to be such a man o' peace."

"But surely if you explained that, your punishment wouldn't be so heavy."

"Explain! Bless 'ee, 'twould be no good in the world. To strike a officer be mortal sin. Nay, I've nowt to say for myself; I must just take my wages."

"How did you manage to elude them so long?"

"Oh! the regiment was out o' my way: been quartered this many year in Ireland. 'Twas just my bad luck that they should ha' been sent for on this campaign. Ah, well! a man can die but once; I've kep' the commandments, and that's more'n Robins can say; and there's no commandment 'Thee shall let a man hit 'ee and say thank 'ee'. I bean't afeard o' Them above, and I'll meet 'em with head up and eye clear, like a English sojer."

"When is it to be?"

"They didn't tell me that. 'Twill not be long, you may be sure. My lord Marlborough has only got to scribble his name on the paper, and he'll never remember 'twas me as held his horse at Salisbury in '88 and got nowt but a smile.—Master Harry, belike I sha'n't see 'ee again in this world. When you go home-

along, you'll say a word o' comfort to the old ancient gaffer, won't 'ee? Tell un all the truth; tell un I be main sorry to vex his old gray hairs,—though not for punchen Robins. Gi' him my dear love: his boy, he calls me, poor soul: and say as how I were quite easy in mind and not a bit afeard. He's a trooper of old Noll's, you see."

"I'll give him your messages," said Harry with a gulp,—"if ever I get back alive."

"Ay true, ye med not. The corn-dealen was a safer line o' life.—What! time's up."—A sentry had thrown open the door.—"Good-bye, Master Harry; God bless 'ee! and I hope you'll get a man as'll polish your 'coutrements to your mind. This time to-morrow, belike, I shall be a true man o' peace."

Harry shook his hand in silence; he could not trust himself to speak. He was angry at what he thought the essential injustice of the sentence. Sherebiah had only struck the paymaster in self-defence, and in the original cause of dissension had right on his side. But Harry knew what military discipline meant; it was rigid as iron. Still, he could not help asking himself whether even now it was impossible to get the whole circumstances considered and the sentence revised. He thought of making a personal appeal to Marlborough, but soon dismissed the idea, for Marlborough had doubtless forgotten him, and he had no force of persuasion to bring to bear. Suddenly, as he walked slowly along the street, he remembered Godfrey Fanshawe; he was an officer in a companion regiment, Schomberg's Horse; he would ask his advice. He enquired for the quarters of the regiment, found that it was encamped a short distance out on the Tilburg road, and hastened thither with an anxious heart.

The troops were under canvas, and Harry found Fanshawe joint occupant of a tent with a fellow subaltern.

"Hullo!" he cried when he saw Harry. "I wondered when I should run up against you. I have heard all about your feat—rescuing beauty and all that. What in the world brought you to this country?"

"'Twould be long in the telling. You shall know all in season. I am here on a very special errand. You remember Sherry Minshull?"

"As well as I do you. Many's the trout we've caught together. A right good fellow!"

"At this moment he is lying under sentence of death in the town-house at Breda. Unknown to me, he had been a soldier, and deserted after thrashing an officer——"

"D'ye know him, then?" interposed the other lieutenant.

"He is my man."

"Oh! Sorry for you both. I had heard about it from an officer of Coy's—Cadogan's, I should say; their name's changed."

”Do you know, sir, how he came to be smoked?”

”’Twas an Englishman peached—a soldier of fortune, as it appears, who wished to be nameless. He met the men of Cadogan’s when they landed at Rotterdam, and arranged a trick by which they got him alone on the open road. ’Twas rather cleverly managed.”

”And a dirty mean thing to do,” said Fanshawe warmly.

”Can’t something be done for him?” asked Harry.

”’Tis hopeless,” was Lieutenant Tettefall’s reply. ”Robins was very vindictive; he painted the man in the blackest colours in his evidence before the court-martial, and not one of the officers of the court knew your man. He has a double offence to answer for; ’tis certain he’ll be shot as soon as the forms are completed.”

Harry’s face was then the picture of blank despair.

”On my life, ’tis a thousand pities!” said Fanshawe. ”I fear there is not the ghost of a chance for him.” His face gloomed for a moment; then his high spirits asserted themselves. ”But come, Harry, ’tis no good taking on about it; come and forget it over a bottle. I want to hear your story.”

”No, I’m in no humour for racketing. Would to God I could do something for the poor fellow! Would the colonel intercede if we asked him?”

”Not he. He would laugh and crack a joke. If Sherry were a Dutchman, now! The duke is very sweet to the Hollanders at this time, and a word from one of the States might turn him.”

”General van Santen!” exclaimed Harry. ”I had not thought of him. ’Twas he I happened to be of use to, and Sherry did his share too. Yes, ’twould be no harm to try him. Do you know where he is?”

”At Lillo,” said Tettefall, ”full thirty miles away.”

”I’ll ride there. Fanshawe, can you lend me a horse? Mine brought me from the Hague, forty miles and more, and is done up.”

”I’ll lend you mine. I’d like to save Sherry, but ’tis a poor chance. Leave your horse; I’ll send him and another to meet you on the way back, in case you have to ride for it.”

”’Tis good of you. Do you know the road?”

”The easiest for you is by Bergen-op-Zoom. You are less likely to be interrupted that way than by the Antwerp road; our forces are camped at Calmpthout on that road, and you might be delayed in passing through the lines, to say nothing of falling in with the French beyond.”

”Thanks and thanks again!”

”You’ll have to ride hard,” added Tettefall. ”The duke’s at Thielen, twenty miles east of Lillo; and there’s no time to lose.”

”No, I will start at once.”

”And good luck go with you!”

Harry was soon riding at a smart pace along the road to Bergen-op-Zoom, whence he made due south for Lillo, reaching that small fortified place about seven o'clock in the evening. To his intense disappointment he found that General van Santen was at the British head-quarters at Thielen. He had been absent all day, but was expected to return before night. Had it not been so late Harry would have started to meet him on the road, but he did not care to risk missing him. He waited impatiently; the general arrived soon after nine, and when he had heard Harry's story he consented at once to write to Marlborough, mentioning that the bearer of the letter had earned some consideration by his excellent stratagem at Lindendaal, where the condemned man also had done good service. Armed with the letter, Harry set off at ten, hoping to cover the twenty miles to Thielen before the duke had retired to rest.

Before starting, General van Santen warned him that parties of French horse were out observing the movements of the confederate army. Finding that he was not familiar with the road, the general sent one of his own orderlies with him, warmly wishing him success.

The two riders struck across the fields and by narrow bridle paths almost due east, and passing through one or two ruined villages—among them Eckeren, the scene of the Dutch defeat on June 30th—came to the site of the French camp, vacated and burnt on the approach of Marlborough some ten days before. The air was murky, the sky dark, and Harry was glad of his companion. He was oppressed by the louring prospect of Sherebiah's fate, and the heaviness of the night was not apt to lighten his care. They had ridden for about a third of the distance, and had just left the highway for a cross-road that saved a mile, when all at once, from behind a hedge, there came a sharp challenge in French.

"Who goes there?"

"A friend," said Harry, and, pulling up, walked his horse slowly forward.

"Halt, and give the countersign!" said the voice peremptorily, and dimly, a few yards before him, Harry saw a horseman come into the road.

"Now for a dash; keep close!" whispered Harry to the orderly.

Setting spurs to his horse, he rode straight at the piquet, hoping that when the inevitable shot was fired it would miss him in the darkness. As the horse sprang forward there was a report and a blinding flash, and a choking sob behind. Harry closed with the Frenchman. There was no time to draw his sword, and he did not wish to raise a further alarm by discharging his pistols. Forcing his horse against the flank of the enemy's, he struck the man with all the weight of his fist, and, taking him by surprise, knocked him from his saddle. He turned to look for his companion; he was prone on the ground, and his startled steed had taken flight. Dismounting in haste, Harry found in a moment that the man was dead, killed by the shot intended for himself. At the same instant he heard a sound

of hoofs from behind on his right. Springing on to his horse he set him at the gallop across a flat grassy plain, bearing, as nearly as he could judge, due east. Suddenly he heard the thud of more hoofs, still on his right, but this time in front of him. Evidently he was being headed off by another party approaching from the south-east. He swerved to the left, intending to make a detour; as he did so, there was the report of a carbine from behind a hedge a few yards away. He felt his horse quiver, but it galloped on, the man who had fired plunging through the hedge in hot pursuit.

Harry's nerves were now at high tension. It was clear that he had stumbled upon a piquet or patrol, or even a more numerous party of the enemy, and the odds were in favour of his meeting the same fate as the poor fellow his guide. Unhappily his horse was beginning to flag. Bending forward to encourage it, and patting its neck, he felt that his hand was covered with blood. The horse had been struck. Harry remembered how it had quivered. The wound accounted for its laboured breathing; it was a good horse, and, not having as yet been seriously pressed, could have held its own with those of the troopers behind. But it was plain to Harry that, with the horse severely wounded, the race must now be short, and the result inevitable. The distance between himself and his pursuers was already lessening; a glance behind showed him four dark figures close upon his heels; a few seconds would decide his fate.

At the moment of danger, some men lose their heads, others are braced to the quickest exercise of their faculties. Harry, fortunately for himself, was of the latter class. He saw that to ride on must mean speedy capture; the only chance of escape was to dismount and slip away on foot. But the country here was quite open, he would instantly be seen. He peered anxiously ahead; yes, there, against the indigo sky, was a dense mass of black; it was a plantation of some kind; could he but gain that, there was a bare possibility. He dug his spurs into his panting steed, with pity for the poor wounded beast carrying him so gallantly; but he dared not spare it; apart from his own fate, another life hung in the balance. A brief effort was needed; the horse nobly responded, and by the time it reached the edge of the wood had slightly increased the gap between pursuer and pursued. Pulling up suddenly, Harry sprang from the saddle, struck the trembling animal with his scabbard, and as he slipped among the trees heard it dash forward.

Being wounded, Harry argued, the horse would certainly slacken its pace when no longer urged by the voice and spur of its rider, and must soon be overtaken. The enemy would immediately guess his device, and if the wood should be of no great extent, they would probably surround it, wait till morning, and capture him at their leisure. He waited breathlessly for the coming of the enemy; he saw them sweep past, bending low in their saddles, two men abreast, like phantom horsemen, so quietly did they ride on the turf. His heart gave a

jump when he estimated them as at least half a troop. When they were past he left the wood, and ran across the open plain at right angles to his previous line of flight.

As he expected, his manoeuvre was soon discovered. He heard the Frenchmen call to one another; then the thud of returning hoofs on his right, and in a few minutes he saw several dark forms approaching. They were spreading out fanwise. Only the men at the right of the line were directly approaching him at a trot, searching the ground as they rode. The sky was lightening behind them; the moon was rising; fortunately, Harry being on foot, the pursuers could not see him so clearly as he saw them.

In a moment he perceived that it was a race between him and the man at the end of the line. If he could get beyond the point at which the trooper's present line of march would intersect his own path, he had a reasonable chance of safety. To his dismay he noticed that the man was edging still farther from his comrades, as though suspecting that he was not taking a sufficiently wide sweep. Harry was now panting with his exertions, and in a bath of sweat; he could run no faster over the heavy ground; he felt that the game was up, wondering indeed that the "view halloo!" had not already been given. Plunging blindly, despairingly, on, he was almost at his last gasp when he suddenly fell headlong. He had stumbled into an irrigation ditch. It was overgrown with weeds; in the stress of war the culture of the fields had been neglected; the bottom was dry. The weeds grew high on either side; Harry scrambled on hands and knees into the rank vegetation, and lay still, his flanks heaving, his breath coming and going in quick pants which he felt must be audible yards away.

For some seconds he heard nothing but his deep breathing and the thumping of his heart; then the beat beat of hoofs drawing nearer. A horseman passed within a few yards of him, luckily on the right. Another few seconds, and the Frenchman ejaculated an angry "Nom d'un tonnerre!" as his horse struck the ditch and stumbled. He called to his left-hand man, and Harry, cautiously peering through the enveloping weeds, saw him alight and begin to examine the ditch. But he moved away from the fugitive. As soon as he was at a safe distance, Harry, who had by this time recovered his breath, crept out and stealthily crawled along the watercourse on hands and knees. For some minutes he continued this arduous progress, rejoicing to hear the men's voices receding moment by moment. Then, judging it safe, he rose and broke into a trot, left the ditch by and by, and continued to pound over fields and paths, through hedges and over ditches, for what seemed to him miles. Then he stopped. All sounds had now ceased save the chirp of crickets, the raucous cry of the corn-crake, and the croak of frogs. He had lost his way; he knew not whether he was near a highway; he was dead tired, his knees trembling under him. But he remembered Sherebiah spending

his lonely vigil in the town-house of Breda, waiting for the dawn of his last day, and he set his lips and breathed a vow that the faithful fellow should not die if the last ounce of energy would save him.

CHAPTER XIV
Harry Rides for a Life

The Hour before Dawn—A Trivial Interruption—Recollections—Another Memorandum—The Road to Breda—The Town Clock—Seven Minutes—Against Time—Orange Wins

Years afterwards, when Harry was a father and a grandfather, and the children came about his knees clamouring for a story, nothing held them more entranced, nothing caused them such delicious creepiness, as his account of the hours that followed his escape from the French.

"There was I," he would say, "in the dead of night, a white mist rising from the fields, growing thicker moment by moment—and I knew not where I was, knew not but an unlucky step might bring me again among the enemy. My knees were trembling under me; my mouth was parched; my breast like to burst with the striving of my breath; I was ready to drop and sleep as I fell. But the thought of my faithful servant in that prison; of his being led out and blindfolded, and standing up helpless to be the mark of bullets; of his poor old father that doted on him—ah! my boys, those thoughts were like a goad to me; 'twas as if I was urged on by some unseen power.

"I could not now see the stars, so thick was the mist. I could not choose my way. I could but go forward at a venture, praying that my steps might be directed aright. I staggered into slimy ditches; forced my way through quickset hedges, waded weedy streams; once I came full upon a river that I must needs swim. There was never a cottage light to guide me, for though I crossed many a field of corn and flax, many a broad space of pasture land, I came nowhere near a house or farm, and durst not turn aside, feeling as if some strange power bade me go on and on. I know not for how many hours I struggled on thus, taking no count of time; nor did I feel conscious of my great fatigue, but moved on as though I was a soul without body.

"It grew darker and darker. The night seemed to press upon me, the mist

was like cold clammy hands seizing me to hold me back. Then all at once, going blindly as I did, I well-nigh struck my head against a low wall, and was immediately conscious of the smell of tobacco. 'Twas like a breath of heaven to me, boys. I cried aloud, and the echo of my voice seemed that of a startled ghost. A rough voice answered me; I stood still, my heart thumping against my ribs. Footsteps drew near, and I saw the blessed light of a lantern, and in a moment a man had me by the sleeve, and drew back his hand with a cry, for my garments were cold and wet, and the light was flashed in my face, and I saw a big Dutch farmer, who took his pipe from his mouth and bade me tell whence I had come and what was my business.

"What I said I know not now, boys, but soon I was wrapped in a cloak, lying upon hay in the bottom of a jolting wain, and my new-found friend driving through the dawn towards Thielen. I fell asleep, and when the farmer's heavy hand stirred me, I was in Thielen, and all around me were soldiers and horses and wagons; 'twas the great duke's camp. The village clock was striking four; the sky was already bright; the camp was astir, for the duke purposed that day to bridge the Nette.

"What figure I cut you may imagine. Wet, cold, dishevelled, my face and hands and clothes all bemired, I crawled as best I might from the cart, and staggered to the house where the duke was quartered. There was a sentry at the door: when I said I wished to see the duke he flouted me, laughed in my face, and was for turning me away. But I was in no mood to be delayed. I took from my tunic the sodden letter of General van Santen, and showed it to the fellow, bidding him on peril of his life to stay me. 'Twas enough: he called to a servant; they talked together, eyeing me as though I were some sorry cur: then the man roughly bade me follow him, and within a little I stood in a small chamber, looking with dazed eyes at the man seated at a table there: 'twas my lord Marlborough himself."

"A letter from General van Santen, my lord."

Marlborough looked up as the servant spoke, but did not straighten himself from his bent position at the table, nor remove his hands from the pair of compasses that were stretched on the map there outspread. Several officers were grouped about him; at a smaller table sat a gentleman dealing with a mass of correspondence.

"Mr. Cardonnel," said the duke briefly; then resumed his discussion with the officers.

The secretary turned sideways and took the letter. He broke the seal, ran his eye hurriedly over the paper, then laid it on the table.

"It shall be looked to," he said, and bent again to his writing.

Harry stood for a moment; all his blood seemed to run cold. Then, his whole body a-tingle, he stepped forward.

”Pardon me, sir, the matter is most urgent; ’tis a case of life or death. If you would be so good as to lay the letter at once before my lord——”

Mr. Cardonnel turned and stared with a sort of scornful wonder at the dishevelled, bedraggled object who addressed him in an English and a cultivated accent.

”’Tis too late. My lord’s despatch left last night; the man will be shot in a few hours; the matter must e’en take its course.”

”Sir, may I beg of you——” Harry’s voice, unknown to himself, was raised to a tone of passionate entreaty. ”My lord——”

”What is it, Mr. Cardonnel?” asked Marlborough.

”General van Santen, my lord, asks the pardon of the deserter Minshull, sentenced by court-martial to be shot. ’Tis too late.”

”Write and tell the general so, and be done with it.”

”My lord,” broke in Harry, ”do but read the general’s letter. I have rid and run all night to deliver it; the execution will not yet have taken place, and I know well——”

”Who are you, sir?”

The duke looked puzzled at the discrepancy between the tone of voice and the disreputable appearance of the youth before him.

”My name is Rochester, my lord, the letter—I entreat your lordship to read it—will tell the rest.”

Marlborough signed to the secretary, received the letter from his hand, and read it quickly. It was not long, and the last paragraph read as follows:—

”Perchance, my lord, you may feel that the man’s gallantry in the affair at the Comtesse de Vaudrey’s may be set against his offence, which though heinous was not unprovoked and is now some years old. If your lordship can reconcile it with the demands of discipline to pardon this unfortunate man, you will I trust find that your clemency is not ill-bestowed.”

Marlborough fixed his eyes upon Harry. ”I understand from this letter that the man is your servant?”

He spoke in the low pleasant tone that never varied, whether he addressed peer or peasant.

”Yes, my lord, a very true and faithful servant.”

”And your name is Rochester? Have I not met you before?”

”Yes, my lord, well-nigh a year ago.”

”Where?”

”At my lord Godolphin’s.”

”At my lord Godolphin’s?” A slight ruffle marked his broad white brow. He looked keenly at Harry. All at once his expression changed. ”I remember. I had clean forgotten it. You are the young fellow who intervened in my lord’s roadside adventure? Ah! and now I bethink me, ’twas your man that did the shouting. The same man?”

”Yes, my lord.”

”That is enough.—Mr. Cardonnel, make out at once an order pardoning the man—what is his name?—and discharging him from the army.—The man whose lungs saved the Lord Treasurer has decidedly a claim to indulgence. But I fear, Mr. Rochester, you are late. These little matters are usually determined by eight o’clock in the morning. It is near five: ’twill be some little time before I can despatch an orderly, and there are fifty odd miles to ride.”

”With your leave, my lord, I will go myself.”

”So be it. Mr. Cardonnel will give you the pardon and discharge. It rests with you. I hope you will be in time. Don’t spare your horses.”

”I thank you, my lord, from the bottom of my heart.”

”There, no more: get to horse. Yet one moment: did I not—I seem to remember it—did I not promise to do something for you?”

”’Twas not a promise, my lord.”

Marlborough smiled, and looked at the boy with approval.

”But I intended it as such. I wrote your name, I recollect; papers have a trick of losing themselves: I should have done something for you but for sheer forgetfulness.—Mr. Cardonnel, will you please make a note? Mr.—your full name, sir!”

”Henry Winterborne Rochester.”

”Mr. Henry Winterborne Rochester for an ensigncy.—I had heard of the ruse at the Comtesse de Vaudrey’s: naturally I did not connect it with you. You are with Grootz the contractor, I believe?”

”I was, my lord, but I have just been commissioned cornet in the Anspach dragoons.”

Marlborough and the group of officers laughed outright.

”Begad, my lord, you’re behind the fair,” cried Colonel Cadogan, a big burly Irishman of twenty-eight, Marlborough’s quartermaster-general.

”Ay, indeed, an angel has stirred the pool. But I am delaying you, Mr. Rochester; you must ride hard. Good-bye!”

Harry had been itching to get away. Every moment was of importance. Bowing himself out, he hurried to the inn where Fanshawe had promised to stable

a horse. It was there ready saddled, in charge of a trooper of Fanshawe's regiment, who said that Harry's own charger Orange was awaiting him half-way to Breda. Harry leapt to the saddle, flung a coin to the man, and in less than two minutes was making his way at a sharp trot among the press of villagers and soldiers thronging the street. Clear of the village he went at a canter through the camp, where all was bustle in preparation for the day's march: then, gaining the free highroad, he set his steed to the gallop. Some minutes later he heard a village clock strike five.

Two hours after Harry started on his ride, Godfrey Fanshawe left his tent in company with Lieutenant Tettefall, and mounted his horse to ride into Breda. He had passed a sleepless and anxious night, his mind haunted by the impending fate of Sherebiah, with whom he had spent many a pleasant day on the banks of the Avon, or in the coverts of his father's estate. The execution had been fixed for eight by the clock of the Hervormde Kerk near the market-place, Marlborough's despatch confirming the sentence having arrived late on the previous evening. Fanshawe had seen the major in command, explaining that Harry had gone to see the duke with a view to a remission of the sentence. The major had laughed at the idea, swearing that he would not delay the execution a moment.

Galloping into Breda, Fanshawe's first care was to enquire whether Harry had arrived, or whether any message had come from Marlborough countermanding the execution. But nothing had been heard of the one or the other. Fanshawe made a last appeal to the major, but Robins had that officer's ear, and had convinced him that the condemned prisoner was a rascal of whom the army would be well rid.

At a quarter after seven the regiment was paraded and marched to the castle park, where the execution was to take place. Fanshawe meanwhile paced moodily up and down, watching the inexorable clock. Suddenly, as he looked at its face for the tenth time, he remembered a legend of the Civil War, which his father had told him: the story of a Royalist trooper who, condemned to die at the ringing of the curfew, had been saved by the heroism of his sweetheart, who climbed the belfry tower, caught the clapper of the bell, and with her delicate hands had prevented the fatal sound. His recollection suggested an idea. There was still forty minutes to spare.

At the park gate a knot of idlers had gathered to see the condemned man pass to his doom. Singling out from among these a likely youth, Fanshawe held with him a rapid conversation in whispers; and the two hurried away.

They went straight to the sacristan of the Hervormde Kerk, whose cottage was known to the Dutch youth. By the aid of this interpreter Fanshawe explained to the old man that, being much interested in church clocks, he would like to climb the tower and see the mechanism, at the same time slipping a coin into the

man's hand. The sacristan was a feeble, tottering old fellow, and was persuaded without difficulty to hand over the key of the tower, on the promise of the English officer to return it within an hour. Armed with the key, Fanshawe then hurried under the boy's guidance to the chief clock-maker's in the town. His shop was not yet open for business, but when he learnt that a clock was in urgent need of attention he agreed to send a young apprentice to oblige the Englishman. At twenty minutes to eight Fanshawe with the young clock-maker ascended the church tower. The boy remained at the door.

The clock chimed the three-quarters.

"Pray God Harry arrive in time!" was Fanshawe's thought as he returned to the park gate.

The clock was too far off for any movement of the hands to be noted. Had it been nearer, a close observer comparing with his own watch might have seen that from this time the long hand of the clock advanced one minute for every two.

It still marked ten minutes to eight when Sherebiah, with bound wrists, came up under guard. He smiled serenely when, entering the park, he saw Fanshawe, whose pale anxious looks betrayed his suffering.

"Don't 'ee take on, now, Master Godfrey," he said. "Let 'em aim well and ha' done wi't. Bless 'ee, I bean't afeard. But, Master Godfrey, where be Master Harry? To say good-bye, I mean."

"He—he couldn't come, Sherry."

"Ah! Well, 'tis no sight for a man o' peace, and he ha'n't donned the breastplate yet. Gi' un my love and respect, an 'ee please, sir; and axe un to remember the old gaffer." Fanshawe gripped his hand, and he passed into the park. "Nay, I won't ha' my eyes tied up," he said to one of the firing squad who approached to bandage him. "Must, must I? Well, I'm not one to go agen the law at the last. Got a clean firelock, mate? Ah! there's the bell a-dingen. Tell Robins—nay, I was gwine to forgive un, but I won't; I'll leave that for Them above."

By this time he was standing, with eyes bandaged, against the wall. He ceased to speak; the last stroke of eight had already sounded from several steeples; but the clock of the Hervormde Kerk still wanted seven minutes of the hour. Fanshawe's eyes were riveted on the hands; the soldiers stood at ease, waiting.

Meanwhile, what of Harry?

The road through Turnhout to Breda passes through a wide moorland region and crosses the river Merk. It was a somewhat heavy road at the best, and the recent passage of troops and baggage wagons had made it rutty and uneven.

Harry had started at a stiff gallop; his horse was fresh, and seemed to catch the infection of his eagerness. On he went, scarcely varying his pace, his head low, his ears bent back for his rider's encouraging words. At that hour the road was free; Harry met with no obstruction. He dashed through Turnhout, crossed the river to Hoogstraaten, and there found his own black charger awaiting him. He was not quite half-way to Breda.

"Orange, my beauty, you must go as you never went before," he cried, as he set the animal at a gallop. The horse pricked his ears in response. He galloped on for mile after mile, scattering dust around him, getting many a stare of wonderment from the peasants at work in the fields. As the miles slipped by, Harry anxiously watched his gallant steed. Great flakes of foam fell from the animal's quivering lips; his nostrils were distended wide; his white eye-sockets were rimmed with red; and still he galloped, panting, striving nobly to respond to the caressing pats and cheering words of his master.

"Twenty minutes more, old fellow!" whispered Harry in the beast's ear. "Twenty minutes; if you can only hold out!"

He was nearing the end of his ride, but the poor horse was in distress. Spots of blood crimsoned the white foam; Harry fancied that he saw despair in the animal's starting eyes; and when, still a mile on the wrong side of Ginneken, he heard the little church clock strike eight, his heart sank within him. He dared not press the horse further; he might urge it to a short spurt, but the effort would probably be its last; and he had still three miles to go!

"Well done, Orange, my beauty!" he cried, patting its ear. "Good horse! Near home now; a few minutes more, old fellow, and then——"

Thus he rode on, inspiriting words on his lips, black despair at his elbow. He knew what military punctuality meant; his ears were strained to catch the sharp rattle of musketry. How far could a volley be heard? He could not pause to speculate on the question; all he could hear was the ringing of his flagging steed's hoofs.

He was a mile from Breda. He saw the whole of the little town before him, smoke rising from the chimneys; he overtook a few carts slowly wending towards the market, and heard the wondering exclamations of the wagoners as his blood-flecked steed flashed by. His eyes were straining towards the church tower; pray God the Ginneken clock was fast! But he was too far away to see the hands. On he rode; he came to the open gate; the sentry challenged him, but he was gone before the man had finished the phrase. Now he dug his spurs into the horse's heaving flanks for a last spurt; he clattered through the ill-paved street, shouting to the pedestrians to make way; into the busy little market-place, cumbered with the stalls of apple-women, poulterers, and other purveyors. Boys scurried like rabbits out of his path; women raised shrill cries as stalls were thrown down and

apples rolled wide; dogs barked and girls shrieked; but he was past; the church clock said one minute to eight! Out of the market-square, round the corner,—and there was Tettefall, hastening to meet him.

"To the park!" cried the lieutenant.

Harry shouted in the horse's ear. In half a minute he was in at the park gate, and saw as in a mist the red uniforms of the firing-party, the solitary figure of the condemned man, and the officer in advance of the line with his eyes on the clock.

"Saved!" he cried, flinging the duke's order into the air. In a moment he was off the horse, which sank a trembling, heaving heap upon the ground.

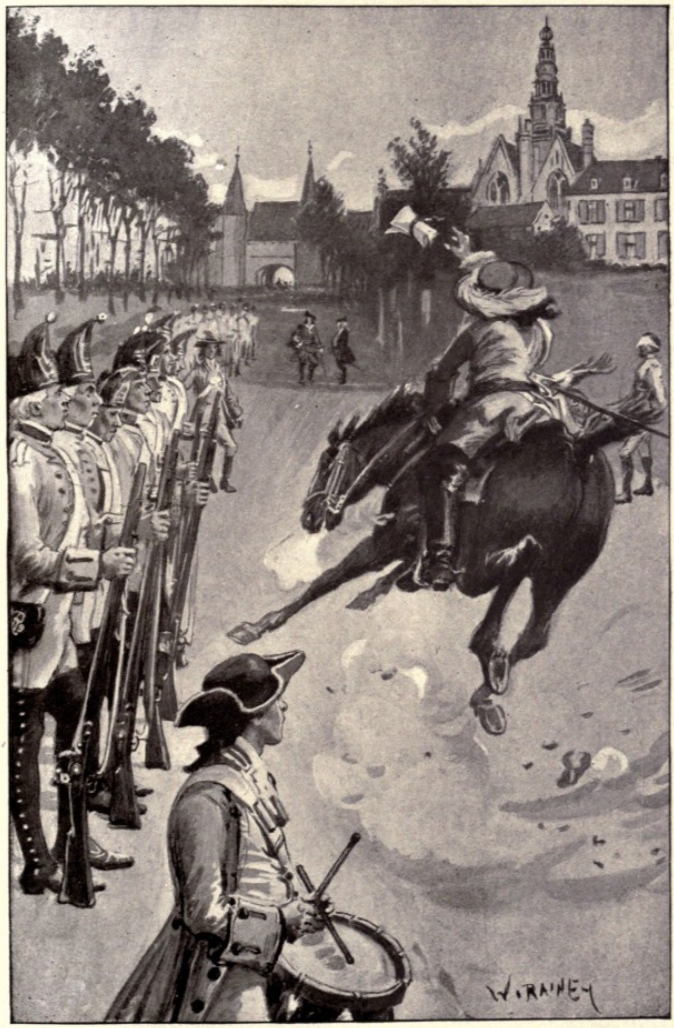
"Just in time—thank God!" gasped Harry, as he sat with the horse's head between his knees.

And upon his dazed ear there fell the first chimes of the beneficent clock, mingled with the loud curt tones of the officer in command as he gave his squad the order to march.

CHAPTER XV
The Water of Affliction

The New Cornet—A Visit to Lindendaal—Fanshawe is Presented—The Family Skeleton—Madame Protests—Mademoiselle Insists—Mynheer is Mysterious—A Silent House—The Law Allows It—Not in the Bond—In the Canal—Sherebiah Owns Up

By his famous ride from Thielen to Breda Harry became doubly a popular hero. Neither citizens nor soldiers, Dutch or English, felt any particular concern with Sherebiah; but Harry's feat, coming before the memory of his former exploit at Lindendaal had died out, raised him to a pitch of estimation that might well have made him vain, but which in truth he found only embarrassing. Fanshawe, on the other hand, whose ready device with the clock had, as Harry was the first to acknowledge, really been the means of saving Sherebiah, was regarded with cold unfriendliness and even dislike by the townsfolk. To tamper with the town clock they regarded as a monstrous and unpardonable offence, and there was some talk of laying a formal complaint before the Duke of Marlborough. The proposal was warmly debated in the borough council, and the burgomaster had to exercise all



The Stroke of Eight

The Stroke of Eight

his tact to prevent the hotter heads from carrying the day.

As for Sherebiah, he was a different man. By his formal discharge from the army the cloud that had pressed upon him for nearly nine years was dissolved; and now that he had become by official licence, as it were, a man of peace in good earnest, he developed, not merely an unexpected lightness of spirits, but a surprising partiality for the company of soldiers. Every leisure moment he now spent in camp or barrack, retailing endless anecdotes of his former experiences as a man of war, and basing on these a right to criticise and instruct which younger men admitted with humility, to the immense disgust and chagrin of Robins.

A few days after the incident, Harry's regiment marched into quarters at Breda, and General van Santen himself paid a flying visit to the town in order to introduce the new cornet to his messmates. Harry was welcomed with open arms, less through the general's sponsorship than through the fame of his own exploits and the proof he had given of courage and daring. One little fact also, which leaked out in course of time, did much to consolidate Harry's reputation as a thoroughly good fellow. He made it his business to find out the relatives of the man who had been killed during the night ride from Lillo. The poor fellow had left a wife and six children, the eldest a boy of sixteen—a slow, earnest, dogged youth who was overcome with shyness when Harry, at the interview with his tearful mother, asked to see him. Harry liked the look of the boy, and offered to apprentice him to an armourer. The mother gladly accepted; and Mynheer Grootz further undertook, at Harry's persuasion, to provide employment for the widow and those of her children who were of age to work. This solicitude of Harry for the family of a man who after all had only been killed by the fortune of war, and had no claim upon him, made an impression on the officers of his regiment; and though it was never mentioned in his presence at mess, it doubtless accounted in large measure for his popularity with officers and men.

For some weeks Harry was fully occupied in learning his new duties, practising with sword and rapier, and improving his knowledge of Dutch: Sherebiah's command of the language was of course no longer a mystery. Schomberg's Horse, to which Fanshawe belonged, being likewise quartered outside Breda, Harry often had opportunities of conversation with his friend. Naturally Fanshawe was amazed to hear of the strange enmity of Mr. Berkeley, and shrewdly guessed that the soldier of fortune who had informed on Sherebiah was Captain Aglionby.

"And mark my words," he said, "'twas another move against you. Sherry seems to have been a sort of watchdog to you; him out of the way, so much the less difficulty in aiming at you. Though what cause the squire has to wish you ill it passes my wit to divine."

"And mine too. 'Tis a desperate revenge on me for being my father's son."

”Have a care, Harry. Having gone so far they will not easily be baulked, and in these cut-and-thrust times a blow in the dark, eh?—exit Harry Rochester.”

”I’ll be on my guard, never fear; and I still have Sherry.”

Harry had not forgotten his friends at Lindendaal. He rode over one free afternoon some three weeks after joining his regiment, and found that the ladies had heard of his promotion, and of his ride, from Mynheer Grootz. Madame de Vaudrey was ecstatic in her congratulations, and only deplored that his new coat was not more brilliant.

”It suits you well, mon ami,” she said, ”but for myself I should like better the red than the blue.”

”Indeed, Madame,” replied Harry with a laugh, ”I hadn’t given it a thought. There’s one advantage in a dull garb: it presents a less conspicuous mark to the enemy.”

”A point, Monsieur, to which also you had not given a thought till this moment,” said Adèle.

Harry laughed; then, changing the subject, he added: ”Have you heard or seen anything more of Monsieur de Polignac and his friend?”

”Nothing, Monsieur Harry,” said the comtesse. ”And indeed we do not wish to. I only fear lest his silence augurs no good for us. As for his friend, that odious captain——prrrut!”

Madame’s indignation was too great for articulate expression. The idea of Aglionby daring to pay his addresses to her was too monstrous. As was her wont in this mood, she prattled away about her late husband, Harry listening sympathetically and wondering at the half-smile on Adèle’s face. When taking his leave, he said:

”An old friend of mine, an English officer, is in camp at Breda. May I bring him, Madame, to call on you one day?”

”I shall be charmed, mon cher ami.”

”Fanshawe speaks little French, I fear, but——”

”Ah bah!” interrupted the lady, ”that matters nothing at all. Adèle shall teach him.”

”I shall be charmed, as Mamma says,” said Adèle.

Harry smiled; nevertheless the suggestion set him thinking as he rode back, and he felt a shade of annoyance when Fanshawe, to whom he mentioned the circumstance, laughed heartily and quoted:

”’Amo, amas, I love a lass’. Is she pretty, Harry? By George! I like the notion.”

The two rode out together in the following week; Fanshawe made a good impression on Madame de Vaudrey, and his stammering French and good-humoured laughter at his own mistakes appeared to form a bond of union be-

tween him and Adèle, for she was soon chatting and smiling with a friendliness and freedom quite different from her reserved attitude towards Harry. Fanshawe talked and laughed gaily all the way back; Harry on the contrary was decidedly glum; and when Sherebiah came to him at night as usual for orders his master's unaccustomed moodiness did not escape him.

"What med be the meanen o' this?" he muttered as he went away.

"'Yanker didee dudel down
Dida dudel launter——'

I must ride out-along to Lindendaal one o' these fine days, and putt a question to Katrinka—ay sure."

One afternoon in the second week of September Harry, having finished his duties for the day, paid a visit by himself to Madame de Vaudrey. He found the good lady in tears, and Adèle with very pale cheeks and a suspicious redness about her eyes.

"Oh, Monsieur Harry!" cried the comtesse as he was shown in, "how glad I am to see you! This is a moment when I need a friend. Look at this letter from that odious Monsieur de Polignac. My poor dear husband! I am glad—it is horrible to say it—but yes, I am glad he did not live to see this terrible day. Read it, cher ami."

Harry looked at the letter. It was a curt and formal note from Polignac intimating that, failing compliance with his suit, he was resolved to foreclose his mortgage on the estate one month from the date of the letter, as the terms of the deed provided. He still offered Mademoiselle his hand and heart; did she accept him as a husband he would immediately destroy the mortgage; he gave her a week to decide.

"The villain!" ejaculated Harry.

"He is within his right, Monsieur," said Adèle.

"Right! Legal right, yes; no doubt it is so; but who but a villain would put the matter in this way!"

"What I do not understand," said Madame de Vaudrey, "is his motive. If Adèle were a great heiress, I can understand that he should press his suit; but she is not; this poor little estate would not tempt an ambitious man; and as for herself, she has shown her aversion so plainly——"

"I hate him!" cried the girl, with a vehemence that surprised Harry, so unlike was it to her usual cold self-contained air.

"It is wrong to hate," said her mother; "but the dear girl has no liking for him, and how should a man desire for a wife one to whom he is so indifferent?"

"Tell me," said Harry, "is the mortgage for a large sum?"

”Alas! yes, for several thousand guilders; that is for the estate alone: the house is separately mortgaged, and the mortgagee in that case is content to receive his interest.”

”Have you no relatives who would advance the money?”

”Not one. We are poor exiles, and have not, I believe, one relative in the wide world.”

Harry was greatly distressed. It was clear that Adèle would never consent to marry Polignac, even if her mother wished it; and there was no escape from the dilemma save by raising the money.

”Are you quite sure you are so fully in the man’s power?” he asked.

”I know it too well. There is no flaw in the documents; my dear husband’s lawyer is a good man; we have no way of escape.”

”Of course you have consulted him?”

”Yes; he can do nothing. It is law, he tells me; we have no other property the sale of which might pay off the mortgage; I have nothing but my jewels, the gifts of my dear comte, and they would not bring one-tenth of the sum we need. The income from the estate would enable us to pay off the mortgage in ten years if we were given time.”

A ray of light struck suddenly upon Harry.

”Does Mynheer Grootz know?” he asked.

”Oh no! Mynheer Grootz is indeed a friend, but he could do nothing—nothing.”

”I am not sure of that. I think he should be told. It is a matter of business; he is a shrewd man of business; he may be able to see a way out of the difficulty that we are ignorant of; with your leave I will put the case to him.”

”No, Monsieur Harry, I forbid it. I prefer that Mynheer Grootz should not know. He has enough to do, I am sure, without being troubled with a poor woman’s affairs. I do not say he has not a good heart; he has; he knows how fond I am of rare tulips, and has so kindly given me bulbs; but no, I could not seek other favours from him, I could not indeed. Besides, the lawyer has said, nothing can be done; Mynheer Grootz can do nothing against the law.”

”True, Madame; and yet—it is a chance; it can surely do no harm——”

”You do not understand, Monsieur; it may do the very greatest harm.”

Harry was mystified, especially as he fancied he detected the glimmer of a smile on Adèle’s face.

”I do not understand——” he began.

”Mother cannot explain,” said Adèle quietly. ”I do not agree with her; I think she is quite mistaken; certainly Mynheer Grootz should be told.”

”Adèle, you are a child; one cannot expect you to understand.”

”Maman chérie, do you think so? You are a goose, petite Maman. Monsieur,

believe me, it will be the very best thing in the world to consult Mynheer Grootz."

"Adèle!"

"It will, Mamma. It is a poor chance, I fear, but ought we to neglect even the least? and you do not wish me to marry Monsieur de Polignac?"

"Mon Dieu, non! A thousand times no! The odious man!"

"Then, Madame," said Harry, "I will venture to see Mynheer Grootz as soon as I can,—or perhaps write to him."

"Eh bien! it is against my will. I protest; I can do no more. You will tell him I protested?"

"Certainly, I shall not forget. I will let you know what he says; perhaps he will come himself. Madame, have a good heart; why, if all else fails, there is my man Sherry; you remember how he embraced the gentlemen?"

Adèle laughed, but the comtesse was too much distressed to see any humour in the situation. Harry was surprised at the flutter into which his simple suggestion had thrown her, and rode away feeling puzzled at the strange ways of women.

He was spared the necessity of writing to Mynheer Grootz, for on reaching his quarters he learnt that the merchant had called during the evening, and had left word that he might be seen next afternoon after his business with the commissary was concluded. He heard Harry's story quietly.

"Leave it to me, Harry," he said, his little eyes twinkling. "I will promise dis Monsieur de Polignac a little surprise. He is a noble; zo I guess by de name. Dey are all de same, dese nobles; and I promise Monsieur de Polignac zall be made to know dat dis is Holland, not France, and moreover dat one honest Dutchman is match for a score of rascal French. Dis man dink he have only a woman to deal wid; well, he zall be undeceive."

"Will you see Madame de Vaudrey, then, or write to her?"

"No, neider will I zee her, nor write to her. But you—you will tell her by no means to answer dis Monsieur de Polignac. He will foreclose in a month, you zay? Very well. He zall meet wid a surprise. Now tell me one ding. Madame la Comtesse—did she ask you to come to me?"

"Quite the contrary, Mynheer; she did not wish it, I did not understand why; the reasons she gave were somewhat lame."

Then for the first time in Harry's knowledge of the Dutch merchant he saw him excited.

"By den donder!" he exclaimed, slapping his thigh. Noting Harry's glance of astonishment he chuckled again, adding: "I tell you dis; you alzo zall zee someding." He wagged his forefinger knowingly.

"You have told me nothing," said Harry with a smile.

"No, dat is true. In good time. You do not yet know me, Jan Grootz."

Harry gave Madame de Vaudrey the Dutchman's message, and after that found only one opportunity of visiting her for nearly a month. On that occasion she showed him a final letter from Polignac, announcing that on a specified day he would attend at the house to receive payment of his mortgage, or, in default, possession of the property. The comtesse had heard nothing from Grootz, and was in great distress, refusing to be comforted when Harry assured her that all would be well. On his return to Breda he wrote to Grootz informing him of Polignac's letter, and next day received a reply asking him to arrange if possible to keep the day named free.

Early on the morning of that September day, Grootz with Harry, Sherebiah, and two men with large bags slung at their saddles, rode out from Breda to Lindendaal. When the door was opened by old Jean, and they had entered, Grootz bade him close it and slip one of the bolts half-way into its socket. After a short conversation with the servant he went into the reception-room, had the bags laid on the table, threw himself into the biggest chair, and calmly lit his pipe.

"Madame abhors tobacco, Mynheer," Harry ventured to say.

"Huh! Zo I now remember. It is a pity; I must put out my pipe, even though she be not here."

"She is gone from home, then? I fancied so by the manner of your entering."

"Ja! At dis moment she and de juffrouw are, as I suppose, fast asleep in Breda. Dey come dere last night."

"Oh! And we receive Monsieur de Polignac?"

"Dat is zo; we receive Monsieur de Polignac."

Deprived of the solace of his pipe, Grootz settled himself to sleep in his chair. An hour or more later he was wakened by Harry.

"Here they are, Mynheer!"

"Zo!"

He was up in a moment, and from the window saw Polignac, accompanied by Aglionby and two sturdy henchmen, walking up the drive towards the house.

"Zooks!" exclaimed Sherebiah, "here be Rafe Aglionby again. 'Twill be no cuddle this time if I lay hands on him. No thanks to he I be not a dead corpse to-day."

"Sherebiah, it is my turn," said Grootz solemnly.

"Zackly, Mynheer, all fair and no favour."

The four men came to the door, and the bell gave forth a resounding clang. All was silent within the house, and Jean at Grootz's orders paid no heed to the appeal. Again the bell sounded; again there was no response. Then Aglionby with an oath began to hammer on the door with his riding-whip. Even this noisy summons being disregarded, after a moment's consultation Polignac ordered one of his men to burst in the door. It yielded easily to his force, and the four trooped

in—to find themselves confronted by Grootz, with Harry and Sherebiah behind him. At the same moment six of the men about the estate came quietly from behind the house and arranged themselves in two parties on both sides of the entrance, outside, and out of view from within. Jean had fulfilled his instructions.

Polignac halted in some embarrassment when he saw Grootz, and Aglionby looked far from comfortable at this unexpected meeting with the two men he had injured.

"Messieurs, I ask you," began Grootz in slow, halting French, "what is the meaning of this forcible entry?"

"Pardon, Monsieur," replied Polignac, recovering his sang-froid instantly. "I have not the pleasure. I came to see Madame la Comtesse de Vaudrey."

"Zo? And permit me to ask, what is your business with Madame la Comtesse de Vaudrey?"

"Before I reply, permit me to ask by what right you question me, and what you are doing here?"

"Decidedly, Monsieur. My name is Jan Grootz; I am here by the power of attorney I hold from Madame de Vaudrey. I beg you see it is in due form."

He exhibited a roll of parchment which Polignac glanced at; he was patently annoyed; his mouth twitched towards his left ear. Aglionby meanwhile had edged towards him, evidently with the intention of whispering something; but Sherebiah noted the movement and exclaimed:

"Keep a still tongue, Rafe Aglionby, 'ee were best, I tell 'ee."

"You are aware, then, Monsieur," said Polignac, "that I come according to due notice as required by law to demand payment of a bond, or possession of this estate, as provided in the deed?"

"Yes; I know it; what is the amount payable under the bond?"

"Fourteen thousand guilders, Monsieur."

Grootz pointed through the open doorway of the reception-room to the bags upon the table.

"There is the money, Monsieur. You will please to count it, and give me a quittance, and hand the bond to me to be destroyed."

With disappointment and rage written upon his face, Polignac proceeded to count the money with Aglionby's assistance. It was a longish process, and neither of the men felt quite at ease under the gaze of the onlookers. At last it was finished; Polignac wrote a receipt, and gave the cancelled bond to Grootz. Not a word was spoken while these formalities were complied with. Harry noticed that Sherebiah had placed himself between Aglionby and the door.

"Zo!" said Grootz. "Wait one minute, Monsieur." He unrolled the deed, ran his eye over it, then looked up and said with deliberate gravity: "Permit me to draw your attention to the fact that the property named in this document is the

land belonging to the estate. It does not include the house and its appurtenances. Wherefore it appears, Monsieur, that you, with a band of ruffian hirelings, have violently broken into the private house of a lady who enjoys the protection of the Dutch flag. That is, permit me to observe, Monsieur, a breach of the law, and subjects you to a penalty—heavy, no doubt; I do not know the law. But for the present, since the law moves somewhat slowly, it would not surprise me if the servants of Madame la Comtesse, who are devoted to their mistress, should prefer to anticipate the sentence. They may be disposed to do what every honest and indignant Hollander would certainly do in the circumstances."

At a signal the half-dozen Dutch servants moved to the door and blocked the entrance.

"Men," said Grootz to them, "these gentlemen, who are not Hollanders, have broken into your mistress's house. I do not give you any advice; but for myself I do not think it would be a breach of the law if you should throw these gentlemen into the canal yonder.—Do not be alarmed, gentlemen; it is cold, I fear, and dirty, but as honest Hollanders Madame de Vaudrey's servants will not allow you to drown, for all their indignation."

Half-way through this speech Polignac and Aglionby had both made to draw their swords; but the six Hollanders seized upon them; in a trice they were overpowered. Their two men looked on, trembling. Polignac, white to the lips, held his peace; but Aglionby, after wriggling vainly in the hands of his captors, turned his head towards Sherebiah and cried:

"Zounds, Sherry, you will not stand by and see your own cousin so misused. 'Tis a vile plot. I have done nothing; what are the ladies to me? what is Polignac to me? Sherry, unhand these boors; I shall catch my death of cold; Sherry, I say, blood is thicker than water——"

"Ay sure, but it bean't so cold."

"Od rat you!" shouted the enraged captain as he was hauled with Polignac out of the house. He kept up his clamorous entreaties and oaths until the very moment when, with a sounding splash, he was heaved into the canal, and with spluttering breathlessness struck out with Polignac for the other side. A moment's observation sufficed to show the Hollanders that their victims could swim; they watched the scene with Dutch stolidity, Grootz placidly smoking his long-deferred pipe.

"Ay, 'tis the water of affliction, as the Book says," remarked Sherebiah sententiously as he watched the swimmers gain the farther bank, clamber up, and slink away, Aglionby obviously pouring out the vials of his wrath upon the miserable Frenchman. "'Tis the fust time for many a day cold water have gone down Rafe's throat, and mebbe he's changed his mind by now about blood bein' thicker 'n this water."

”I admire your strategy, Mynheer,” said Harry to Grootz.

”Zo! We must send dis money to Polignac; his house is near at hand. Dere is one ding to zay: de house is mine, after all. I paid off de mortgage last week—let us zay, for a friend. Dat is all dat Madame need know: Grootz has paid de bonds—both bonds, house and land—for a friend: a matter of business; you understand.”

”Very well, Mynheer; I will be diplomatic if she asks for more information.”

But Harry was as much puzzled by Grootz’s attitude as he had been by the lady’s.

”So Captain Aglionby is your cousin?” he said to Sherebiah later in the day.

”Ay, to be sure: old feyther’s sister’s son. A fine loven feller for a coz, bean’t he, sir?”

”He has got off too lightly, Sherry.”

”Mebbe, but he’ll come to his reckonen some day. You mind seein’ me trounce un the day arter I shouted for the noble lord?”

”Yes, and you would not tell me the reason.”

”Nay, I was ’shamed for my blood. Folks thowt ’twas Rafe as loosed John Simmons. ’Twarn’t him; ’twas me.”

”You!”

”Ay. I knowed as the highway business were a trick o’ Rafe’s, and I knowed as how Simmons would split on un. Fat’ll be in fire then, thinks I. Rafe’ll go to hangman, and poor old feyther o’ mine’ll die o’ shame at such a kicken end for his own sister’s child. I couldn’t stand that, sir, so when Willum Nokes was a-snoren I took down keys from the nail and had Simmons out in a twink.”

”But that doesn’t explain why you fought the captain.”

”Ay, but it do. Here was I, goen agen the law, diddlen Sir Godfrey and other high justices, cheaten hangman and all—and what for, I axe ’ee? ’Cos Minshull blood was cussed wi’ mixen wi’ Aglionby’s. Aglionby blood had got to pay, someways, and so it did, to be sure, for I took a half-pint or so out of Rafe that mornen.”

CHAPTER XVI
Knaves all Three

Labour Lost—Elegant Extracts—Hard Hit—A New Departure—Fishing—County Families—Sack

Captain Aglionby sanded the paper he had just written upon, and leant back in his chair with a sigh of satisfaction. He heard the sound of footsteps on the stairs.

"Here, Mynheer," said the voice of his landlord.

With an instinctive movement he covered the letter, and turned on his chair, in time to see the door open and a visitor enter. He stared for a moment in speechless amazement; then, attempting clumsily to shove the letter entirely out of sight beneath a plate containing the crumbs of a fish pâté, he got up and said:

"Why, Mr. Berkeley; adzooks! 'tis the last man I could have expected to see, the last man—though a pleasant surprise, an uncommonly pleasant surprise."

"Humph!" grunted the old man, with a glance round the mean room. "I feared you would resent my too abrupt entry. After what I had learnt in your letters about your magnificent, expensive, modish apartment, I could not suppose I was walking straight into your parlour—h'm! study; h'm! bedroom and—pantry, h'm!"

"No apologies, my friend, I beg. You take me at a disadvantage, having but just consumed my modest repast——"

"Fish! My nose informs me. 'Tis the fortieth smell that has offended my senses within a quarter of an hour. 'Twas somewhat difficult to discover your—mansion. You are not, it appears, so well known at the Hague as you give out; and when I named you at my inn, with your address, I was advised to bring an escort. I came alone——"

"Ah! Nicolas Berkeley knows how to take care of himself—eh, Squire?"

"But had I known to what an ordeal, to what a series of ordeals, my nostrils would be exposed, I doubt I could not have plucked up the courage."

"'Twas ill done to come upon me so suddenly. The smells—hang me, Squire, I have smelt worse when I was the guest of the Czar of Muscovy. But had you given me a week's, a day's notice, I would have made ready an entertainment worthy of you, my old friend."

"No doubt, no doubt——"

"And indeed I was on the point of writing you when you entered."

"Ay, on the point of; you write to me twice a day, do you? for unless I mistake, you have already writ once to-day. Under the plate, Captain Aglionby—surely I see writ on the paper there some semblance of my name."

"'Tis so; what eyes you have for your age, Squire! I was just trying a new pen, and so full were my thoughts of my generous friend and patron that the pen ran of its own accord, mark you, into the familiar curves. And as I know how you abhor a letter, I will e'en tear up the paper and——"

"Stay!" cried the old man, taking a sudden step forward; "knowing the pains you take in writing, 'tis pity they should be wasted. I set out designing to conduct my son to the army: I find I am embarked on a voyage of discovery; give me the

paper."

The command was uttered in a tone that broke down Aglionby's bravado. He drew the letter from below the plate, and handed it in sullen silence to the squire. The old man pressed his lips grimly together as he unfolded the yet unsealed paper. Aglionby stuck out his legs wide apart, thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, and hung his head in moody dudgeon.

"'Tis excellent pen-work; your hand grows fluent. '*I thank you for the hundred guineas received*'"—Mr. Berkeley read aloud with deliberation and a dry emphasis that made Aglionby wince—"'*and trust the two hundred for which I beseeched you in my last will not tarry.*' To pay your landlord, I take it, for this—magnificent apartment."

"A man must live," said the captain sullenly.

"Ay, eat and drink, and sponge upon his betters for his cakes and ale."

"Oons! Squire, 'tis rum."

"A foul-smelling liquor.—What is this?—'*do violence to natural affection in the service of a munificent patron—inform on a cousin—Sherebiah Minshull condemned to be shot—my lord Marlborough—young Mr. Rochester—rid up in the nick of time.*'"—Mr. Berkeley's brow darkened as he read.—"Let me come to the end of it. '*A visit to the Comtesse de Vaudrey in the interest of my patron—violent assault—in the mellay stumbled into a canal—costume totally ruined and cannot be replaced under ten guineas*'—I observe 'tis shrunk at the sleeve; I thought maybe you had grown, to match your magnificent apartment! Now, sirrah, how much of this precious epistle do you expect me to believe? A fine story, in truth, of the ills you suffer in your constant zeal for your 'munificent patron': is it all of a piece with your 'magnificent apartment'? What have you done with, and for, my hundred guineas?—what, sirrah, your answer!"

Aglionby felt that he was being wronged; he had, in fact, done all in his power; it was not his fault that failure had dogged him. Undoubtedly appearances were against him, and the biting emphasis of the old man's delivery, the cold sneer that lurked in every repetition of his pet phrases, robbed him of speech. He writhed under the lash. Standing over him, the squire gave rein to his temper.

"You take me for a fool, do you, with your cock-and-bull stories!—you flam me off, rat me! with your 'magnificent apartment', your 'munificent patron', your 'constant zeal', which I—I, you swashbuckling villain—am to pay for! Where are the two hundred guineas paid to the captain of the *Merry Maid*?—the fifty guineas to your footpad friends in Wapping?—the hundred sent you but a few weeks past? How has your zeal furthered my interest? Zeal, forsooth! there's a many of your cut-throat gossips would sink you as a disgrace to the craft, for at least they hold to their bargains and are not swindlers as well as——"

"Fire and fury!" shouted Aglionby, springing to his feet and drawing his

sword. "'Tis not to be borne! Clap a bridle on your canting tongue or I'll run your bloodless carcass through!—as I've done with many a better man. D'ye hear, you old Pharisee! Your white hairs under your wig sha'n't preserve you if Rafe Aglionby is roused. And where would you be, rot you—Squire Berkeley of Winton Hall—you and your guineas—if I told what I know?"

Mr. Berkeley had drawn at the same moment, and the two stood glaring at each other over the chair. The old man, his face livid with passion, was in nowise daunted by the other's threats; Aglionby's cheeks were purple, and the veins on his brow stood up like whipcord. For some moments both stood tense, each leaning towards the other; then the squire dropped his sword back into the sheath, gulped, and said:

"Well, well, maybe I was hasty. But you have a great deal to explain, Aglionby—a very great deal to explain."

"As I could have done, had you but given me time instead of treating me as you would a common pickpocket. By George! Mr. Berkeley, Rafe Aglionby is not the man to stand that mode of dealing, as you well know, for all the luck has been against me these late years. Who could have supposed that young Rochester, sink him! would escape from the *Merry Maid*? Was that my fault, pray? By what I can make out he jumped overboard off Gravesend and got aboard a Dutch brig, and the rascally Hollander—one Grootz, a smug corn-dealer—refused to give him up. Could I help that? Then, when I had my snivelling cousin Sherebiah fast in the net, could I prevent my lord Marlborough from signing his discharge and undoing all my work? Could I? I've had the worst of luck all through; and foul words won't mend matters. And, beshrew me, you were not over successful yourself with the cockerel's father, for all your guineas. The youngster's a chip of the old block, and a precious hard chip too, rot him! But I've vowed to carry the thing through; besides your affair, I've now one or two private accounts to square with him; and if you have patience and a trifle more courtesy—by George! you'll have no cause to complain of Rafe Aglionby."

The words came from him in a torrent. He felt that he had a real grievance, and, as often with rogues, the possession of a grievance lent him words if not eloquence. But the squire still looking doubtful, Aglionby picked up a stained copy of the *Amsterdam Courier* that lay on a chair, and pointed to a paragraph giving in French an account, somewhat distorted but substantially accurate, of Harry's exploit on behalf of Sherebiah. As the old man read it he pressed his thin lips together in vindictive rage.

"There for you!" pursued the captain. "'Tis the talk of the town. The youngster is making friends on all sides; he owns a commission in the Dutch army——"

"What!"

"'Tis true; a booby general got him the commission, and the lubber Grootz

"Fire and Fury!" shouted Aglionby

"Fire and Fury!" shouted Aglionby

pays. 'Tis becoming more and more difficult to get at him; but I have a scheme—a pretty scheme, egad!—that can scarcely fail this time. All I need is a small sum to go on with—rat me, Squire, will you still sneer? On my soul, I——"

"Tut, Captain, your skin is surely thinner than it was."

"And yours would be thin had ye not your guineas to line it with. Hang me, Berkeley, a word from me——"

"Come, come," said the squire quickly, "'tis not for old friends to fall out. You were talking of your scheme."

"I was saying that all I need is a small sum in advance—the rest may wait till the thing is done."

"And what is your scheme? You do not expect me—no offence, Aglionby—to buy a pig in a poke this time."

"'Twere better, maybe——" Aglionby was beginning, but just then a footstep was heard on the stairs. He evidently recognized it. Hesitating for a second he lowered his voice and continued hurriedly: "'Tis one of the men engaged in the job. I will call on you later at your inn. 'Twould be amiss were he to know you had any concern in it."

Berkeley looked suspiciously at the captain, but, unable to fathom his embarrassment, he picked up his hat and slowly moved towards the door. It opened in his face, and Polignac appeared. He stepped back courteously to allow the older man to pass. They bowed to each other, with a mutual glance of keen scrutiny. The squire bade Aglionby good-day, refusing his attendance; and as he passed down the stairs Polignac entered the room.

"Who is your visitor, captain?" he asked. "An English milord, by his appearance."

"Yes; a friend from England—an old friend of my family: a neighbour: in fact, our estates join—or all but, for 'tis but a narrow trout-stream divides 'em."

Aglionby's manner was still a little flurried. His mind was not very quick, and took time to adjust itself. Polignac threw his hat upon the table, sat astride of a chair, and went on with admirable gravity:

"And the fishing—it is often, without doubt, what we Frenchmen call an apple of discord. I have known so many disputes."

"The fishing! oh!—yes!—well, that arranges itself. It is quite simple: we take one day, he takes the next."

"Tour à tour. Admirable! You English are the people for transactions! I must make the acquaintance of your so accommodating friend and neighbour. Is he—how shall I say it?—one of us?"

"No. He takes no part in affairs. He cultivates his estate. His call now is merely in way of friendship."

"Ah! that is indeed amiable. Parbleu, he has the look! And what is he doing

in this country?"

Aglionby was growing restive under the cross-examination. He had the air of a witness who fears that he may be enticed into an admission against his will. But he had not the wit to fence with his visitor.

"Nothing," he replied curtly. "He comes with his son, that is in the army, and now joins his regiment."

"He has a son in the army? My dear friend, certainly you shall present me. I desire of all things to extend my acquaintance among your countrymen—in furtherance, it is understood, of my cause—of our cause, pardon me."

"I fear you will find little encouragement with him. He hates your countrymen as one hates a toad."

"The amiable man!"

Aglionby's constrained manner had betrayed him to his astute visitor, whose curiosity was now effectually aroused.

"Then, my good captain," he continued, "it shall be my pleasing task to convert him. Indeed, you must present me. He shall be a recruit—a little aged, perhaps, but what matters that? In truth, it is an advantage, if his estates are as large as you say."

"I did not say his estates were large."

"But they march with your family's—is it not so? And unless I deceive myself, the D'Aglionbys are—how do you say it?—milords of the manor of half the comté of Viltshire. You remark, my dear captain, what a memory I have, even for your barbarous English geography."

The captain, more and more restive, fidgeted on his chair.

"Parbleu, monsieur," he said doggedly, "you must allow me to be the judge who among my friends is likely to be of use to us. This one, I say, is not; you must be content with that."

Polignac, seeing that nothing was to be gained by pressing the matter in the captain's present mood, adroitly changed the conversation.

"Eh bien! As you will, my good captain. You know my zeal in the cause, and Tout fait nombre, as we say in France. Now, my friend, how goes our affair—yours and mine, I mean?"

Aglionby's face cleared. He was now on surer ground.

"Admirably, admirably, monsieur. Look you, I have arranged with some six stout fellows—every one to be depended on. Nothing remains but to choose the hour and the place. And besides, I have set Simmons on the watch: he comes here to report at five o'clock."

"And it is now half-past two. If it pleases you, mon brave,—there is time—we will have in a bottle of sack and drink success to our enterprise."

"If it pleases me! Parbleu, Polignac, I've drunk nothing but rum since Berk—

—since the last remittance from my agent was spent. A bottle of sack! Many I've emptied with the Czar of Muscovy, whose head, mark you, is not as strong as mine. Certainly, a bottle of sack—the money, my friend?"

Some two hours later, Aglionby left the inn at which Mr. Berkeley was putting up. His mood and mien were jovial; his rubicund cheeks even more ruddy than usual. He was too old and tough a campaigner, and too well seasoned by his experiences in Russia, to allow himself to be overtaken in liquor; but he was certainly in an unusually buoyant humour, and trod the street with a confident swing. As he passed along, he jingled the money in his pocket, and appeared to take an uncommon pleasure in the sound. His brow was clear, his eye bright, and he held half-audible communion with his thoughts.

"'Tis a hard world, Rafe my boy; odso, 'tis a hard world. 'Tis not often a man gets paid for doing what he would gladly do for nothing. Ay, and 'tis less often he gets paid twice, begad! Rafe, my bully boy, you're in luck. Stap me, we'll break another bottle of sack and drink to your success. Nay, nay; hold a little: business before pleasure. A draft from our Hebrew friend—egad, they're the one good thing I know in Amsterdam; that is easily got; then a letter to the Elector's chamberlain; oons! 'tis more difficult, but to be faced; I'm no scholard, hang it, but I can pay some poor scrivener that is, whether 'tis to be Latin or French; and to be Captain Rafe once more's worth a dollar or two for pen-work. Then for a bottle at the Goudenhoof'd. And to-morrow, my friend Rochester and my excellent coz with the scripture name—to-morrow, by the lord Harry, our final reckoning!"

CHAPTER XVII
In the Dusk

Katrinka—Filial—Fine Feathers—A Practical Joke—Up a Tree—A Trap—In Waiting—The Last Minute—A Bolt from the Blue—Ad Misericordiam—A Theory—With Thanks

Harry had for some time been itching for an opportunity of active service in his new calling. Garrison life, with its drilling and exercising, was all very well,

and he had much to learn; but the business of a soldier was to fight, and he was eager to take his share in the campaign, on the issue of which so many important interests depended. His chance came at last, and though the result was too tame for his active spirit, he felt that it was at least a beginning.

At the end of the first week in September his regiment received orders to join a corps forming under General Brulau to begin the investment of Limburg, a little hill-town south-east of Breda. On the 10th the force of twenty-four squadrons encamped before the town, cutting off all access, and occupying the approaches and the lower town without resistance. Some ten days later the Duke of Marlborough arrived with his main force; batteries played night and day on the upper town, and made so wide a breach that orders were given for a grand assault. At this point, however, the French commander, seeing the futility of resistance and the hopelessness of relief from the outside, beat a parley, and in less than twenty-four hours agreed to surrender. On the 28th the garrison of 1400 men laid down their arms and marched out. The duke, having taken possession of the place, announced that the campaign was closed, and the army would at once go into winter quarters. Harry therefore returned to Breda without having drawn his sword, and had to reconcile himself to the thought of a long winter of inaction.

One morning a messenger came to him from Mynheer Grootz, bearing a present of tea and Japanese ware from the merchant to Madame de Vaudrey, part of a cargo from the east which had eluded the French warships and privateers that scoured the narrow seas. Since the incident of Polignac's discomfiture at Lindendaal, Grootz had been assiduous in paying little attentions of this kind to the ladies, and often sought Harry's aid in conveying his presents. Harry was somewhat amused at this amiable side of his former employer's character; Grootz was not on the surface a likely squire of dames. No doubt, Harry thought, he was anxious about the welfare of the ladies in their solitary position, with no master of the house, but only a number of faithful though not too intelligent servants. He was nothing loth to be the medium through whom these gifts reached Madame de Vaudrey, and he found that Fanshawe was always very ready to accompany him on these and other occasions.

It happened that on this day Harry was on duty, and saw no opportunity of getting away until the evening. Having been absent from Breda for nearly three weeks, he was anxious to learn how things were at Lindendaal. The proximity of Polignac always gave him some uneasiness, and though that gentleman's hold on the ladies had been effectually snapped, Harry felt by no means sure that he would accept his rebuffs as final. He therefore sent for Sherebiah, and ordered him to ride over with Mynheer Grootz's parcel. Sherebiah's eagerness to set off amused his master.

”You want to see Katrinka—is that it?” he said.

”Well, sir, her do have a good hand at griddle-cakes, and I ha’n’t tasted ne’er a one for three weeks.”

”’Tis cupboard love, eh, Sherry?”

”The truth on’t is, Master Harry, I be a-thinken o’ old gaffer at home. He’s had a deal of trouble wi’ maids and housekeepers; can’t get ne’er a one to cook his bacon to his mind, and besides has a sweet tooth for griddle-cakes. Katrinka be a rare buxom wench; not a beauty, sure, though handsome is as handsome doos; and when I found out her tidy ways and light hand wi’ the kickshawses—well, says I, she be the right maid to keep old feyther o’ mine above-ground for another ten year.”

”Oh! and have you put the matter to Katrinka?”

”There’s the rub, sir. Her be in the main willen, but there’s a worm in th’ apple. The truth on’t is, sir, her have high notions.”

”Indeed! She wants to be something better than a nurse-cook, eh?”

”Not zackly that, sir; her notions be husband high, sir; her won’t make griddle-cakes for feyther o’ mine not unless her be his darter, which is a backward way o’ sayen, marry me.”

”That’s terrible, Sherry.”

”It med be wuss, Master Harry. I ha’n’t no fears myself, but ’tis old feyther I be thinken on. ’Ee see, I’m his boy; though I be forty-five by nature, to his old aged life I be but a younker yet; and I be afeard he’d think me a forrard youth did I venture a word about marryen.”

Harry laughed outright.

”Take my advice, Sherry,” he said. ”If Katrinka’s a good girl, get the knot tied; we sha’n’t be home again for a year at least; you can break it gently to the old man, and sing the praises of your wife in respect of bacon and girdle-cakes and other housewifely virtues.”

”Thank ’ee, sir; and ’ee won’t mind if I be a bit late back, ’cos ’twill take a good time to talk over all that wi’ Katrinka; her be terrible slow wi’ her mind, sir.”

”All right! Get along; and you may give her a kiss from me. ’Tis the chubby one, isn’t it?”

”True, sir; a apple face, wi’ a dimple in the chin, and eyes as blue as her chiney, and hair this side o’ red, and——”

”There, there. You’re in a bad way, Sherry; go and get it over, man.”

Not long after Sherebiah’s departure, Fanshawe came in.

”What do you think?” shouted Harry. ”That old oddity Sherry is in love with Katrinka, one of the maids at Lindendaal, but was afraid to pop the question lest his father thought him too young. He has gone over to Lindendaal to-day; I

fancy 'twill be a settled thing by the time he returns."

"Oh!" Fanshawe appeared somewhat constrained. "The fact is, Harry, I am riding to Lindendaal myself, and I came to see—to ask—that is, have you any message for the ladies?"

"No; as it happens, Sherry is taking them a parcel from Mynheer Grootz.—You've got a new coat, surely?"

"Ay; you see my old one was faded; things bleach soon in this country——"

"And a new hat, I declare!"

"The old one was too vexatious shabby. Then you have no message?"

"No; Sherry conveys my regards. You'll have his company back; I suppose you will be rather late, and 'twill be no bad thing to have a companion; there have been one or two robberies by night on the Helmund road."

Until the evening Harry was fully occupied. The regimental riding-master had begged his assistance in training a number of recruits, and, since example is better than precept, he had been for several hours on horseback, showing the Dutch youths the manage of their steeds. When this was finished he had a turn at the foils with the quarter-master, who had taken a fancy to him, and was wont to declare him one of the best swordsmen in the army. After his evening meal he felt he should like to stretch his legs, and, guessing that Fanshawe and Sherebiah would soon be on the way home, decided to walk out and meet them. It was a fine still evening, the road was dry, and a spin of a couple of miles, as far as a big chestnut-tree that marked the limit of the Sunday promenaders, would pleasantly end the day.

The sun was going down as he left the walls of Breda behind him, throwing a long shadow on the road. He did not hurry his pace, but ambled easily along, musing as a walker will, and paying little heed to things around him. His thoughts were bright and clear, for he was in the pink of physical health, and he felt that Providence was very good to him. It was just a year ago that his father had died, and all the prospect looked black. How strangely things had turned out! The very event that had seemed to fling a pall over his life had really proved the entrance to the career nearest to his heart. He was already impatient for the winter to be over; surely with the next spring the war would be prosecuted more vigorously, and the Dutch authorities would not hang like a drag upon the wheels of Marlborough's plans! He was ambitious, as every young officer must be, to distinguish himself; and in his ambition there was a spice of *amour propre*; he felt that he should dearly like to prove to the great duke himself that he would have done no discredit to his sponsor if his commission had been an English one. But a Dutch cornet, he thought, would have little chance of coming under Marlborough's personal notice; and, after all, what did it matter? Duty was duty, wherever and for whomsoever it was done.

Thus weaving a chain of imaginings, he came to the big solitary tree before he was aware of it. He halted; Fanshawe and Sherebiah were not in sight; the dusk was thickening, and he did not care to walk farther; yet, having come so far, he was loth to go back without them. Surely they could not be long now! Opposite the tree there was a gate into a field. He climbed on to that, and sat with his feet tucked below one of its bars, intending to wait their arrival. From his higher position he now descried two figures in the distance; in another moment he saw that they were horsemen. "Here they are at last!" he thought.

A whimsical idea flashed into his head. They would not expect to see him; he felt sportive, the boyish instinct for fun asserting itself. What if he could surprise the two—dart out on them unawares and make them jump? The tree opposite overhung the road for several yards, its foliage was still fairly thick, for the season had been mild; the autumn frosts and gales had not yet begun; and it would provide ample shelter. He sprang off the gate, ran across the road, leapt the ditch at the side, scaled the trunk with an agility bred of long practice in Wiltshire, and was soon hidden among the leaves, some fourteen feet above the road. He filled his pocket with burrs he found still clinging to the branches, laughing inwardly as he pictured Fanshawe's consternation when he should receive one of those prickly missiles on his head.

Soon he heard the measured beat of the approaching horses. Peering between the leaves, he was disappointed to notice that the riders were not Fanshawe and Sherebiah after all. One of them, a bulky man, had a familiar appearance, the other was masked; but in the first Harry recognized Captain Aglionby, and the second in figure and bearing unmistakably recalled Monsieur de Polignac. Harry wondered what was the meaning of the mask; knowing his men, he had little doubt that some villainy was afoot. His wonder gave way to uneasiness when he found that, instead of passing the tree, they dismounted and stood exactly beneath him. They opened the gate on which he had been seated a few minutes before, and led their horses through into the field, along the stone dike at the edge, and at some distance from the gate, as Harry could just see in the gathering darkness, secured them to the wall, after some difficulty in finding anything to hitch them to. Then they returned to the road, talking in low tones, and looking expectantly up and down.

"'Sdeath!" muttered Aglionby, "what has become of them?"

"Raté encore une fois?" sneered Polignac, inferring the other's meaning from his tone.

"Parbleu!" growled Aglionby, adding in French: "They ought to have been here a quarter of an hour ago. They cannot be long now."

Harry's curiosity was growing. The two men were clearly expecting somebody; for a moment he wondered whether Aglionby was meditating another at-

tempt on Sherebiah, but it could hardly be that, for the captain had looked towards Breda as he spoke, not in the other direction. He listened with all his ears.

"They may as well stay away altogether if the others are here before them. We are only ten minutes ahead."

"Nearer twenty, if you believe me. They were riding slowly when we saw them—a mile behind; and we saved several minutes by the short cut through the wood. There is time yet."

As he spoke, three figures could be dimly seen coming along the road from the direction of Breda. Aglionby and his friend at once shrank back behind the dike, but after a moment's scrutiny, being apparently satisfied, came out again and stood waiting by the side of the road. The three men approaching caught sight of them and hastened their steps, to be received with curses when they reached the spot. One of the men, an Englishman, sullenly defended himself.

"It is all due to that confounded church clock. It has never gone right since Mr. Fanshawe tampered with it. But we are in time, Captain."

"No thanks to you," growled Aglionby. "Where is the rope?"

One of the other men opened a sack he carried, and produced a stout rope some thirty feet long.

"Take one end," said Aglionby, "and fix it to the gatepost; at the top, fool, not the bottom. You, Simmons, take the other end and loop it once round the tree. And quickly, do you hear?"

While the men were obeying his order, Aglionby put on a mask, not, as in Polignac's case, as a precaution against recognition by the hirelings, but by the victims.

By this time Harry's uneasiness had become real alarm. Motionless in the tree, he durst not rustle the leaves to make a peep-hole; he could only judge of what was going on below by the words he heard. It was clear that a carefully planned attack was to be made upon someone; he could not doubt that the someone was Sherebiah; both Polignac and the captain had heavy scores to pay off. Fanshawe would be involved in the same peril. His notion of playing a trick was forgotten; there was serious work for him to do.

"Let the rope lie on the road," he heard Aglionby say, "and you men remain at the tree ready to raise it and draw it taut at my signal."

Harry saw through the scheme in a flash. The rope was to be pulled taut across the road to stop the progress of the horsemen, and in the confusion the victim was doubtless to be attacked, every advantage being on the side of the ambuscaders. And at this moment his ears distinguished the faint distant beat of hoofs on the road.

"Captain," said one of the men, "what if I were to climb the tree and pick them off from above?"

Crouching against the stem Harry felt his heart-beats quicken. The suggestion if promptly acted on would be fatal to the project he had already formed to turn the tables upon the unsuspecting party beneath.

There was a moment's pause. Then another voice in low tones interjected:

"I hear horses on the road."

"No," interposed Polignac, replying rapidly to the man's proposal. "We must have two men at the rope if they are riding abreast; that leaves only three when we stop them; it is easy to miss in this dark night, and they are both ready with their weapons. Remember, there must be no noise; one volley, then cold steel, lest we have the Breda garrison upon us."

Harry wore his sword, and had with him the pistol without which he never stirred abroad. He had been rapidly deciding upon his course. If he was to be of any use, he must warn his friends before they came within range of the ambuscade; yet he durst not fire too soon, for the only result would be to bring them up at a gallop, and they would then almost certainly fall victims. Now that almost complete darkness had fallen, he ventured to make an opening in the foliage and to peer cautiously down.

He saw Aglionby and Polignac on the other side of the road crouching behind the gate-posts. Two men had concealed themselves behind the tree's thick trunk, holding the slack end of the rope; the third waited near them, pistol in hand. Though Harry could not see weapons in the hands of Polignac and Aglionby, he had no doubt that they too had pistols, ready to be used as soon as the riders were brought to a stand-still. On the side overhanging the road, the tree had been lopped of one or two lower branches, but a fairly thick bough ran out on the other side just above the man holding the pistol. Quickly, for time pressed, yet with great caution in order to avoid the slightest noise, Harry crept from his perch over the road, sliding backward down the branch until he reached the trunk. Then, holding his sword lest it clinked against the tree, he straightened himself and turned round, steadying himself with his free hand. One careful step brought him to the fork of the horizontal stem and the parent trunk. He heard the hoof-beats coming very near; the riders could be but a few hundred yards away; fortunately the growing sound was loud enough to drown the slight rustle he could not avoid; and besides, the men below were too much preoccupied with their stratagem to have wits for anything but their advancing victims.

Harry's feet were now wedged somewhat awkwardly; he felt by no means secure, and was for an instant perplexed how to dispose of his sword, for in drawing his pistol with the right hand he would need the left to maintain his equilibrium. He hit on a solution. Grasping the lower part of the scabbard with his knees he prevented it from rattling against the tree trunk; then, resting on his left hand, he bent over to get as clear a view as the circumstances afforded

of the man immediately beneath. For a second he hesitated. It went against the grain to fire at the unsuspecting wretch; but the sound of the hoof-beats now certainly within musket-shot banished his hesitation and clinched his resolve. It was life against life: the lives of Fanshawe and Sherebiah against those of the villains ambushing them. Taking careful aim he fired. The cry of the wounded man was smothered by his own shout:

"Stop, Fanshawe! Jump the ditch and make for the tree!"

Without waiting to learn the result of his warning, he sprang round, heedless now of what noise he made, and, swinging by a branch to his right, dropped to the ground just behind the two other men, who had let go of the rope in their alarm and were transfixed with terror and amazement, staring into the black depths of the tree above them. One of them faced round as he heard the thud of Harry's descent. Without pausing to draw his sword Harry hurled himself at the man, hit out at him with all his strength, and felled him to the ground. The other, the first moment of paralysis past, whipped out a pistol and snapped it before Harry had time to recover himself. It missed fire; Harry closed with the man. There was a brief, sharp struggle; in the midst came Sherebiah's voice:

"Where bist, sir, where bist?"

"Here; by the tree; get a grip of this knave!"

At the sound of Sherebiah's voice Harry felt his opponent's efforts relax; the man tried to free himself; but Sherebiah had ridden his horse up to the tree, and bending low from the saddle to distinguish between the combatants, he brought the butt of his pistol down on the man's head. He fell without a groan.

Now Fanshawe dashed up. His horse had slipped at the ditch, thus giving Sherebiah a slight start.

"Two men on the other side of the road," panted Harry. "Follow me!"

Springing across the ditch he gained the other side of the road, and vaulted the gate. Fanshawe and Sherebiah had to dismount to follow him, for the road was too narrow to allow of their leaping the gate. Aglionby and his companion had not waited; discovering that their plan had failed, they had hurried away towards their horses. But they had not gone far. Harry heard a noise ahead; there was a chance of overtaking them before they gained their saddles. He dashed on over the stubble, and soon descried a broad figure lumbering along; from its stertorous breathing he guessed it to be Aglionby, an opinion confirmed immediately by the mingled oaths and entreaties which the captain sent after Polignac, who being lighter of foot had far outstripped his fellow-conspirator. Hearing Harry's step just behind him, Aglionby at length halted, swung round, and fired his pistol. But hard running and breathlessness flurried him and spoilt his aim; the ball whistled harmlessly past. So impetuous had been Harry in pursuit that he had had no time to draw his sword. He struck out at Aglionby, who only half warded

the blow, staggering backward and endeavouring to parry this lively attack. Seeing his opportunity, Harry closed and tripped the big man up with a favourite fall taught him by Sherebiah; and Fanshawe coming up with Sherebiah at this moment, Aglionby was secured in a trice.

"That cursed coward!" he spluttered, as they led him back to the road. "Odsnigs! I'll be even with him for this."

"Nay," said Sherebiah, who had him grimly by the collar, "'ee'll never be *even* wi' un, Rafe Aglionby. Your carcass'll need a longer rope."

"'Tis all a mistake, coz, on my honour," pleaded the captain.

"Don't 'ee coz me, I disown 'ee. I'll see a villain hung; and that'll be no mistake."

"Leave him to me, Sherry," said Harry, "and go and see to the man we hit."

A short examination proved that the man Harry had shot was less seriously wounded than he who had fallen to Sherebiah's pistol-butt. The third man whom Harry had knocked down had escaped in the darkness. The other two, injured as they were, were unable to walk, so Harry had them hoisted on to the horses, where they were held up by Fanshawe and Sherebiah. With Aglionby in his own keeping Harry led the march to Breda. On arriving there, all three prisoners were handed over to the Dutch authorities, and Harry asked Fanshawe to his rooms to talk over this adventure of the road.

"Faith," said Fanshawe, when Harry had explained his presence on the spot, "'twas a mercy you had the thought to walk out. But it passes my understanding why that fellow Aglionby should have been minded to waylay me."

"'Twas not you, 'twas Sherry that was the intended victim. I told you of the neat way he bundled the captain out of Madame de Vaudrey's house; that was only one of several affronts the bully has had to suffer. And I rather suspect that you were mistaken for me."

"How so?"

"'Twas part of the scheme of old Berkeley's to get rid of me; of that I am sure. And the other fellow, the Frenchman, must be pretty sore at his two discomfitures."

"You will, of course, inform against him."

"'Twould be little use, I fear. He was masked; I knew him only by his voice, and my testimony would not suffice to convict him on that ground alone."

"Did Aglionby say nothing as you walked into the town?"

"Nothing. I plied him with questions, but he held an obstinate silence; scarce opened his mouth except to say 'twas all a mistake."

"I am not sure you are right. Don't you think it may have been the Frenchman's plan—to get rid of me?"

"Why of you?"

”Well, you told me he is a suitor for Mademoiselle’s hand——”

”What then?”

”He may have looked on me as a rival.”

”Come, that’s a good joke. You’ve known Mademoiselle for little better than a month.”

”Ah! One can see you’re young, Harry, and fancy free; I wish I were. But your Monsieur de Polignac might have spared his pains.”

”You’re talking in riddles, Fanshawe; speak plain English, man.”

”Well, ’twas true.”

”What was true?”

”She wouldn’t have me.”

Harry stared in puzzlement. Then a light dawned, and he smiled.

”You don’t mean to say you’ve been on your knees to Mademoiselle Adèle?”

”Indeed I have! By George, Harry! isn’t she a splendid creature? But she wouldn’t have me: that’s all over; life isn’t worth living now: I don’t care how soon a bullet puts an end to my miserable existence.”

Fanshawe sighed lugubriously; Harry laughed.

”Poor fellow! is it so bad as that? She didn’t fall a victim to your new coat, then?”

”’Tis all very well for you to laugh. Wait till you suffer just such a rebuff.”

”Tell me what you said.”

”How do I know what I said? I only know what she said. She dropt me a curtsy, the hussy, and thanked me for the honour, and said she had no mind to a husband and would never wed, but stay with her mother. And then she opened the harpsichord and said: ’Don’t let us be children, Monsieur. Sing me that amusing song of yours and be amiable.’ And ’pon my word, Harry, I couldn’t resist; she has a masterful way; and when her mother came in there was I trolling ’Widdicombe Fair’ as if there’d been never a word of love betwixt us.”

”Cheer up! you were too sudden. Wait a few months and then try your luck again.”

”Never! I know she won’t look at me. And take my advice, Harry. If ever you fall in love with a girl, don’t make yourself cheap and sing cheerful songs. Egad, if I’d sung dying ditties and sighed like a furnace I might have had a different tale to tell. I’ll go to quarters; but I sha’n’t sleep; I know I sha’n’t; good-night!”

CHAPTER XVIII

A Little Plot

Father and Son—A Message from Breda—An Afternoon Call—When Greek meets Greek—The Tug of War—Pourparlers—The Merk—Two Men and a Sack—Snatched from the River—Cousin Rafe—Scant Gratitude—A Ray of Light

One afternoon Squire Berkeley sat solitary in his inn at the Hague, warming his lean, withered hands in the blaze of a log fire. The air was cold, and it had been raining heavily for hours. The old man had laid aside his wig; a black velvet skull-cap covered his white hair to the ears; and, clad in the long cassock-like garment of rusty black that he always wore indoors, he might have passed, with his thin haggard cheeks, for an ascetic dignitary of the Church rather than the prosperous lord of an English manor.

He sat in a high-backed chair, staring into the fire. His lips moved as he communed with himself, and the expression of his face showed that his thoughts were none too pleasant. Once or twice he clenched his teeth and brought his closed fist heavily down upon the arm of the chair; he sighed often, and looked the very image of a sad, anxious, embittered man.

Presently the door opened noisily and, with a gust of keen air that made the squire shiver, a young man entered the room. It was Piers Berkeley, the squire's son. He was dressed as usual in the height of fashion, but presented a bedraggled woebegone aspect now, his finery effectually ruined by the rain.

"Split me, father," he cried in a peculiarly high and affected tone of voice, "I'm verily the most wretched man on earth."

"What is the matter?" said the old man, turning half round. "Why have you left your regiment?"

"Why! Stap my vitals, 'tis what I wish to know. I've rid post from Breda through the most villainous rain ever I saw. Look, I'm splashed to the eyes; my third best wig is utterly ruined; the colour of my waistcoat has run; 'twas a heavenly puce, and I'll be even with the tailor, hang him! that swore the colour was fast. As for my new jack-boots—look 'ee, they're not fit for a ploughman. And why! You may well ask."

"Well, you have a reason, I suppose. You want more money for your drunken orgies—is that it?"

"Hark to that, now! Was ever poor wretch so scurvily used by his own father! Why——"

"Come, a truce to your prating. Your reason, sir, and at once."

”A warm welcome, egad! Well, sir, I’ve a something for you, a billet-doux; ha! ha!”

The squire sprang up with an agility surprising in a man of his years. There was a look of expectancy, almost of joy, in his eyes, and he held forth his hand eagerly.

”Give it me,” he said.

”You will deal handsomely by me,” said the youth; ”consider, ’tis not every son would ride through pelting rain and spoil his garments withal for——”

”Give it me, I say,” cried the old man passionately.

Piers took from an inner pocket a letter, sealed with a big red seal. The squire’s eyes gleamed as he took it and saw the handwriting of the address; his hand trembled as he tore away the seal and unfolded the paper. Then came a sudden change. The pallor of his cheeks became a deathly white, his features were distorted with rage, he muttered a curse and flung the letter to the floor.

”Gadzooks, ’tis not a billet-doux, then,” piped his son, stooping to pick up the paper.

”Let it lie!” shouted the old man. ”Lay not a finger on it, you—you puppy!”

”Why, there now,” said the youth in an aggrieved tone. ”That is all the thanks I get for adventuring myself in the fury of the elements, and ruining past cure as fine a coat as ever was seen in Spring Garden.”

”Silence! Hold your foolish tongue! You’re a useless fool! You’re a scented fop, the mock of every farthing playwright in the kingdom. Heavens! what have I done that I should be cursed with a brainless, senseless coxcomb that can do nothing but squander good money in fal-lals and worse!”

”Odsnigs! ’tis most villainous injustice. I can do many things, egad. I can make a good leg, and trounce a watchman, and pink a cit, and——”

”Out of my sight, out of my sight!” cried the exasperated father, stepping forward with uplifted hand as though to strike the poor fool.

”Zoons! I protest this——”

But he left the sentence perforce unfinished, for the squire caught him by the shoulders and exerting all his strength thrust him from the room, turning the key, and standing for a moment with hand on heart to recover his breath. Then he suddenly opened the door again, caught the young man before he had gone three steps, swung him round, and holding him in a firm grip said:

”See that you say nothing of this. You know nothing of that man, that Aglionby, except that you met him on the packet-boat; you hear me? Presuming on that acquaintance he sought your assistance; you have wit enough to remember that? And you are not to go near him again.”

”Egad, I’ve no wish to. Once is enough. A prison cell is no place for me. I had to hold my nose; and egad, to use a whole bottle of scent afterwards.”

The old man pushed him contemptuously away, returned to his room, and again locked the door. He picked up the letter, sat down in his chair, and, crouching there, seemed to have shrunk even to less than his former meagre bulk. He read the letter again. It ran:—

"SIR,

"Fate is against me. In pursuit of the Businesse you wot of, I am at this present layd by the heels, in Jail, under sentence to be Hang'd. Young Rochester & my Cozen have done it. 'Tis nessessarie for you to pulle me out of this Hole, & speedilie, or *I'll tell All I knowe.* The Meanes I leave to you; I advize to comunicate with Mr de Poliniac at his house in the Plein; he will helpe: he has *Goode Reasone*, for at a Worde from me he'll *swing too.* No more at this Present from yr humble

"RALPH AGLIONBY.

"P.S.—I knew your Sonne was in Breda. He *knowes Nothing.*"

The squire tore up the paper and flung the pieces on the fire. For a few moments he sat in thought; then he rose and went into an ante-room, returning soon in his outdoor attire—wig, cocked hat, and long cloak. A few minutes later he was walking at a brisk pace through the rain towards the house mentioned in Aglionby's letter. He knocked at the door; there was no answer; the green shutters were closed, the house had the appearance of being shut up for the season. He knocked again, and yet again, with growing vehemence, attracting the attention of passers-by. At length the door was opened for a few inches. Mr. Berkeley pushed it, but it was on the chain.

"Qu'est-ce que Monsieur demande?" said a voice.

"Monsieur de Polignac."

"Monsieur is not within," said the same voice in English, the speaker having detected the squire's nationality by his accent.

"Where is he?"

"Pardon, Monsieur, I am not sure where my master is at this moment; but if Monsieur will leave a message——"

Something in the man's manner assured Mr. Berkeley that he was lying.

"Look 'ee, my man," he said sternly, "I counsel you to bethink yourself. I will walk for five minutes, in the rain; you will have time to acquaint your master that an English gentleman whose name is probably unknown to him desires to

see him on a very urgent matter—in the interest, mark you, of himself. An urgent matter, mark you. In five minutes I will return."

On returning Mr. Berkeley was instantly admitted. The manservant, cowering beneath his stern look, led him meekly to a room off the hall, where he found Polignac in long cloak and jack-boots, evidently on the point of departing on a journey. The squire gave him a keen glance, and was not surprised to find that it was the same man whom he had met at the door of Aglionby's attic some months before.

"Monsieur de Polignac?" he said.

"That is my name, Monsieur."

"My name is Berkeley. I met you at Aglionby's. It is for him I come. I desire a word with you."

"I am at your service, Monsieur. Shall we be private?"

"It will doubtless be better so."

Polignac shut the door, and offered Mr. Berkeley a seat.

"Thank you, I will stand; I need not detain you long."

"As you please, Monsieur."

"You have heard, Monsieur, of the plight into which our friend Captain Aglionby has fallen?—I say *our* friend."

"I will not dispute the phrase, Monsieur. I had heard, as you surmise."

"Pardon me—as he is our friend—am I right in assuming that the news may have some little connection with your purposed journey?"

"Since, as you say, he is *our* friend, I do not deny it, Monsieur."

"So that it will be, let us say, not disagreeable to you if some means of—of cheating the hangman—I am a plain blunt man, Monsieur—should be discovered?"

"Pardon me, Monsieur, I do not follow you."

Mr. Berkeley looked at him keenly.

"I have had a letter from our friend," he said slowly.

"And I also, Monsieur."

"He solicits my assistance."

"And mine."

"I came at once to see you."

"And I, Monsieur, leave at once for Paris."

"Ah!"

Polignac, leaning against the window-frame, had an inscrutable smile upon his face.

"I will sit down," said Mr. Berkeley, placing a chair with its back to the door; "I find our interview will last a little longer than I looked for."

"As you please, Monsieur. You will permit me?"

Polignac seated himself at the table.

"It appears, Monsieur," said the squire, "that I should have said *my* friend."

"Again, Monsieur, I will not dispute the phrase. His family estates join yours, I understand?"

"What?"

"I do not know; I only repeat what your friend told me."

"Yes, I understand," said Mr. Berkeley hurriedly, feeling that by his unguarded exclamation he had lost one point in the game. "Not precisely adjoin, but the phrase is sufficiently exact: we are neighbours."

"And naturally you are concerned at the hapless situation into which your neighbour's evil star has brought him."

"That is so, Monsieur."

"Especially seeing that his evil star's influence extends also to you; is it not so?"

"As a neighbour and friend, you mean, Monsieur?"

"No, I do not mean that. I cannot say, like you, Monsieur, that I am a plain blunt man, but I think with small effort you will understand my meaning. I put myself in your place. Suppose, I tell myself, a neighbour of mine, whom I had found useful, had in the course of some enterprise on my behalf been so unlucky as to come into the grip of the law; naturally I should feel deeply concerned in his fate, and certainly I should do all in my power to save him, especially if I knew that the said enterprise was one that the law would look unkindly on. Such would be my sentiments, Monsieur, and I do not suppose myself different from other men."

"The case is so well put, Monsieur, that it would seem to fit your situation to a nicety."

"Appearances are then deceitful, Monsieur. Strange to say, I had the same thought with regard to you. Your friend the captain is not a hero, certainly not a martyr, and even though a few vindictive words at the last would not save his neck, yet to a man of his disposition it would sweeten his end to know that another shared his fate."

Mr. Berkeley had been growing visibly restive. How much did this suavely malicious Frenchman know? He dared not question him plainly.

"You speak, Monsieur, of a few vindictive words. It is clear to me that Aglionby has threatened you——"

"And I care not a jot for his threats," interrupted Polignac. "As you are aware, I am about to depart for Paris; eh bien! Monsieur le Capitaine's threats will not reach me there."

"But if I save him, Monsieur?"

Polignac's mouth twitched.

”He is a vengeful man,” pursued the squire. ”I should have no object in concealing from him your notions of the obligations of friendship; and since it appears that you, on your side, permit yourself to talk of an ’enterprise’ and ’the grip of the law’, does it not occur to you that the captain, and I myself as his friend, might make things—well, very unpleasant for you? And remember, you are not in Paris yet.”

There was a moment’s silence, taking advantage of which Mr. Berkeley leant forward and, tapping Polignac’s knee, added:

”Come, Monsieur, let us understand one another. It is to my interest that Captain Aglionby should not die—by the hangman; it is to your interest—correct me if I am wrong—that he should not live, or you will find this country shut to you. Our interests appear to clash; but is it not possible—I throw out the suggestion—to reconcile them—to gain both our ends?”

Polignac smiled.

”Let us talk as friends, Monsieur,” he said.

An hour passed before Mr. Berkeley left the house. It was still raining, but his gloomy expression had given place to one of fierce satisfaction. Polignac bade him a cordial adieu at the door, and as soon as he was gone called his servant.

”Antoine,” he said, ”unsaddle my horse. I do not ride to-day.”

One evening, at dusk, Harry Rochester, whom no experience could cure of his habit of taking solitary strolls, was seated on a bridge spanning the Merk at a short distance outside Breda. His thoughts were anything but pleasant. Aglionby and his associates, though defended by the sharpest criminal lawyer in Holland, had been condemned to death, and the execution had been fixed for the morrow. Harry knew that the captain richly deserved his fate; his action in betraying his cousin Sherebiah in itself put him beyond the pale of pity, to say nothing of his persistent offences against Sherebiah’s master, which Harry was more ready to forgive. But despicable as the man was, Harry, almost in spite of himself, felt a certain compassion for him. He had learnt from Sherebiah something of his history. His mother, old Gaffer Minshull’s sister, had died when Ralph was very young, heart-broken by her husband, one of Cromwell’s Ironsides, yet a hypocrite of the most brutal type. Aglionby had received a fair education, but had run wild from boyhood, and as a mere youth had decamped or been driven from his father’s house and gone out into the world to seek his fortune. Sherebiah had lost sight of him for years; suddenly he had reappeared at Winton St. Mary, seared with travel and hard faring, and full of stories of adventure and prowess in all parts of Europe, especially in the service of the Czar of Muscovy. Harry knew as much as Sherebiah of his subsequent career, and shared the surprise of

the whole village at the strangely close acquaintanceship between the captain and the squire.

This was the man who was to die next day, and Harry, sitting on the bridge, one hand clasping his knee, almost wished that he had let the villain go. He had been brought up in the worst school; all his life long he had been an Ishmael, his hand against every man, every man's hand against him. His mother had been a Minshull: surely there was some seed of good in him; mayhap his villainies were only the desperate expedients of a man who had no means of livelihood; certainly he could have no cause of enmity against Harry, and his machinations must be put down to the man who employed him. His approaching fate weighed also upon Sherebiah, who had for days gone about with restlessness and anxiety printed upon his usually jocund face. Certainly the good fellow had no reason to love Aglionby, but after all they were of the same blood, and Sherry appeared to fear keenly the shame and disgrace.

Looking over the glooming river, idly watching the rolling water and the scattered buildings upon the bank, Harry suddenly perceived a small door open in the face of a store or warehouse some few yards to his left. The door was some thirty feet above the river, and gave upon a narrow platform to which goods were hoisted by a crane from barges below. As the door opened, inwards, a head appeared. The owner looked for some time up and down the river, over which darkness was fast falling. All was quiet; no traffic was passing; no craft indeed was to be seen save one small boat, moored to a post on the bank some yards on the other side of the bridge.

The head disappeared, but immediately afterwards two men emerged from the doorway, coming sideways through the narrow opening. Between them they carried a large sack which their exertions showed to be heavy. They came to the edge of the platform; they laid their burden down; then, giving a quick look around, with one push they toppled it over, and it fell with a sounding plump into the water. It disappeared below the surface; after a moment the two men returned into the warehouse, and the door was shut.

The rivers were such common receptacles of rubbish that Harry would not have given a second thought to this incident but for a certain furtiveness in the manner of the two men. He wondered what the sack contained. All at once he saw it reappear on the surface, several yards nearer to him; the stream was flowing fast in his direction.

"'Tis maybe a superfluous dog," he thought, for only an animal was likely to rise after such an immersion. Yet it was large for a dog.

The sack came steadily towards him: it was about to pass under the single arch of the bridge: he leant over to watch it: and with a start of amazement saw dimly a white human face. At that same moment the bundle sank again.

Harry could not know whether it was man or woman, whether alive or dead, but without an instant's hesitation he ran to the other parapet, sprang on it, and dived into the river. A drowning man rises three times, he had heard; perhaps there was a chance to save this poor wretch, whoever it might be, and foil his murderers.

Coming to the surface with a gasp, he looked around for any sign of the dark bundle, fearing lest in the blackness of the encroaching night he might lose it altogether. For some seconds he saw nothing; then, a few yards away, it bobbed up. Three or four vigorous strokes brought the swimmer to it just as it was going down once more. He seized it with his left hand and, supporting the head above the water, made for the bank, luckily no more than seven or eight yards distant. He hauled the heavy object up the sodden slope, stooped down to examine it, and saw that it was a man tied up to the neck, and with a gag about his mouth. It was the work of a moment to tear away the gag. He placed his hand over the man's heart: did it still beat? He could not tell; all feeling seemed to be deadened within him by his excitement and strain. The man made no sound or movement. Harry shivered and thought he must be dead; of the means to resuscitate a half-drowned man he knew nothing.

A few seconds passed; then he heard hasty footsteps behind him, and turned just as Sherebiah sprang down the slope. The faithful fellow had been again playing his part of watch-dog; he had seen Harry's plunge into the river, and raced round the embankment in alarm.

"Fecks, you give me a jump, sir," he panted. "What's amiss?"

"Ah! Sherry, look; 'tis a man, in a sack; the poor wretch is drowned, I fear."

"'Tis murder then. Let's see, sir."

He stooped down, cut the fastenings of the sack, and pulled it off the body.

"Now sir, lend a hand. Fust thing is to pour the water out of un."

"He was gagged, Sherry."

"Then that saves our time. A gagged man can't ship many gallons o' water. Leave un to me, sir."

He quickly opened the man's coat and vest, bent over him, and pressed heavily beneath his lower ribs. Then he sprang back, and again bent forward and pressed. After repeating these movements several times, he went to the man's head, took his arms and pulled them back till they met behind, then jerked them forward upon his breast. A gurgling sound came from the man's lips.

"He be alive, sir," cried Sherebiah. "Another minute or two and we'll have un on his feet."

A great sigh escaped from the prostrate form.

"Well done, master," said Sherebiah, ceasing from his exertions. "You've got your breath again, thanks be. Now, take your time, and don't get up till 'ee feel

disposed: only bein' drippen wet the sooner you be dry the better, so——Sakes alive! Master Harry, 'tis my good-for-nothen cousin Rafe Aglionby, and no one else."

"Good heavens!"

"Rafe, man, can 'ee open your eyes? 'Tis me and Mr. Rochester; you be safe."

Both Harry and Sherebiah were now stooping over the captain. His eyes opened; the same choking sound came from his lips. For some minutes he lay gasping, wriggling, endeavouring vainly to rise, the others watching him the while with mixed feelings. His recovery of consciousness was slow: at last his movements ceased, he heaved a great sigh and looked up with intelligence.

"How be'st come to this?" asked Sherebiah. "Thowt 'ee was ripe for hangman this time, coz."

"Rot you!" spluttered the captain, struggling to his feet. "Hands off! Shall I never be quit of you!"

"Zooks! That's your thanks! Come, Rafe, blood's thicker nor water, as 'ee said yourself: you've broke prison sure enough, but they'll be after 'ee afore mornen. Mr. Rochester ha' saved 'ee from drownen, but you must put a few miles betwixt 'ee and hangman afore you can rest easy. How be'st come to this, man?"

"Let me go, I tell you."

"But you be drippen wet, Rafe; you'll cotch your death o' cold;—and faith, so will Master Harry. Better get home, sir, and change your things."

"No hurry, Sherry. Captain Aglionby, believe me, you must make yourself scarce. You've done me many an ill turn, for what reason I know not. But that's past now; I have no wish to give you up to the hangman. There's a boat moored to the bank a few yards down: you had better take that, and row through the night. Sherry, you're dry; change clothes with the captain."

"I'll have none of his clothes. I'll take the boat. Out of my way!"

Escaping from Sherebiah's grasp, Aglionby stumbled away in the direction of the boat, the other two watching him in silence until the darkness swallowed him.

"Unthankful viper!" muttered Sherebiah.

"To save a foe's life is an injury never forgiven," said Harry with a shrug. "I'm shivering, Sherry: let us get back."

"Ay sure. But I'd like to know what be the true meanen o' this. To be saved out o' jail and then chucked into river—why, in a manner o' speaken 'tis out o' fryen-pan into fire. One thing 'tis sure: my coz Rafe bean't born to be hanged nor drownded neither: question is, will it be pison or a dagger-end? But you be mortal cold, true; we'll home-along, sir."

They returned to the city, and were passing a large inn in the market-place when Harry suddenly touched Sherebiah on the arm.

"Sherry, you see that man at the door of the coach there? 'Tis one of the men I saw fling Aglionby into the river. I know him by his cap."

"I' feck, we'll have a nearer sight on un, and see who he be speaken to in coach. Keep close, sir, and we'll take a peep at 'em unbeknown."

Crossing to the other side of the street, and keeping well in the darkness, they quickly made their way towards the coach, and reached a position whence, by the light of the inn lamp, they could see into it without being seen. Each turned to the other in silence, astonishment and conviction in their eyes. The occupants of the coach were two: Mr. Berkeley and Monsieur de Polignac. It was to the latter that the man at the door was speaking. They were clearly at the end of their conversation; the man touched his cap and withdrew, and as the coach drove off, a look of gratification shone in the faces of its two occupants.

"What do you make of that, Sherry?"

"Make on't! 'tis plain as a pikestaff. Dead men tells no tales; that's what I make on't, sir. Rafe Aglionby knows a mort too much for they two high-liven villains; that's where 't is: they got un out o' jail to stop his tongue at scaffold foot, and then pitched un in the river to cool it for ever. 'Tis a mortal pity we let un go, sir, for't seems to me we ought to know what he knows, and get to the bottom o' the squire's desperate work agen you. But you always was a tender-hearted Christian, like your feyther afore 'ee."

"I couldn't let murder be done before my very eyes, Sherry."

"Ah, you'll have to see wuss now you be a man o' war, sir. Well, 'tis heapen coals of fire on his yead, as the Book says, and mebbe Them above'll reward 'ee for't; ay, so."

CHAPTER XIX
Marlborough's March to the Danube

A Foreigner at the Hall—War Again—Good-bye!—Comparisons—Up the Rhine—A Bold Stroke—Marlborough's Way—Despatches—A Mission to Eugene—Fanshawe Missing—The Road to Innsprück—Zum Grauen Bären—Mein Wirth—Breakfast at Three—The Second-best Room—A Trap-Door—Midnight Visitors—A Hasty Toilet—A Sound on the Stairs—Through the Copse—Stampede—The Lieutenant of the Guard—At Obermiemingen—The

Little Abbé—Max Berens—A Surprise Visit—Mein Wirth Explains—Injured Innocence—In the Net—Hobson's Choice—The Missing Messengers—In Terrorem

No soldier worth his salt ever endured the long idleness of winter quarters patiently, and Harry Rochester was not an exception to the rule. As the weary months passed slowly by, he grew tired of the endless drilling and exercising, varied by marching and sham fights. He was very popular with his captain, Willem van der Werff, and the other officers of the regiment, but found himself unable to take much interest in their amusements. Beer-drinking was not to his taste; the Dutch comedies performed at the theatres were dull, and the paternal government prohibited the performance of lighter French pieces. As the winter drew on he had opportunities of skating, and became so proficient as to win a prize at a regimental match; but the frost was not of long duration. He was not a fellow to allow time to hang on his hands. He practised broadsword and sabre with Sherebiah, read a great deal of Dutch, studied all the military histories on which he could lay hands, and spent many an hour poring over maps until he had the geography of all central Europe at his finger-ends.

No great news came from the outside world. In November the Netherlands suffered in some degree from the fierce storm that swept through the Channel, strewing the English shores with wrecks, ripping off trees at the roots, blowing down churches and houses. In the same month also the Archduke Charles passed through Holland *en route* for England and Spain, to assume in the latter country the sovereignty which was the bone of contention between his father the Emperor and King Louis of France.

Almost the only relaxations in Harry's life were his visits to Madame de Vaudrey's house, where both he and Fanshawe were always welcome guests. They formed with Mynheer Grootz a little house-party there during the New Year week. It happened that on the last day of the year 1703 Sherebiah received a letter from his father: a rare event. One piece of news it contained was much discussed at Madame de Vaudrey's table.

"And now I must tell you," wrote old Minshull, "as Squire hev had a Visiter for a matter of munths. 'Tis a tall blacke Frenchman by his looks and Spache, a tarrible fine gentleman, with a Smile & a twitching Mouthe. Squire & he be alwaies together, moste particler Frendes it do seeme. None of us soules can't abide him, nor the Qualitie neither. For myself, I don't like his Lookes, not me, & 'tis luckie he can't understand English, for being a Man to speake my Minde I say things nowe and again as would turne his blacke Hair white."

Harry had already mentioned having seen Polignac drive away from Breda in company with the squire.

"The odious man!" cried Madame de Vaudrey, when Harry translated the gaffer's letter. "I only wonder that the other man, that insolent captain, is not with them. I wonder where he is?"

"I don't know," said Harry, who had kept his own counsel regarding the last he had seen of Aglionby.

"I hope he will never cross my path," said Mynheer Grootz. "He is truly a villain, a dastard: to inform on his cousin, and to plan the attack on Harry, and to have the insolence to pay court to Madame la Comtesse!"

"Yes, indeed," said the lady, "and my dear husband not four years dead! Who is the squire that your old friend writes of, Harry?"

"He is lord of the manor at my old home, Madame. His son is in one of our foot regiments, and Mr. Berkeley came over to Holland with him: it was then he met Monsieur de Polignac."

"Qui se ressemble s'assemble. What is the name of the bad old man, Harry?"

"Berkeley."

"Berkeley!" Madame de Vaudrey puckered her brow and appeared to be reflecting.

"How ugly your English names are!" exclaimed Adèle, "and how difficult to say! I cannot even yet say Rochestair properly."

"You say it better than you say my name," said Fanshawe gloomily.

"But then I have known Monsieur Rochestair longer," returned Adèle. "Shall we go into the drawing-room, Mamma? I do so want to hear Monsieur Fanshawe sing that amusing song of his again."

Fanshawe glowered. He knew that Adèle was teasing him, and wished with all his heart that he could recall the luckless moment when he had first amused her with the song of "Widdicombe Fair". Harry's eyes twinkled.

"Yes," said Madame de Vaudrey, "you young people can precede us to the drawing-room. I have a little matter of business to talk over with our good friend Mynheer Grootz."

Then Adèle's eyes caught Harry's, and they both smiled as at some secret known to them alone.

Time passed away, and at length, when the winter was gone, and the gray Dutch sky was rifted with the blue of spring, came the welcome news that Marlborough had arrived at the Hague and that a great campaign was to open. No one knew what the duke's plans were, but there was a general feeling that stirring events were preparing, and a universal hope that the long series of small engagements, sieges, marches and counter-marches would be brought to an end by a decisive pitched battle. Mynheer Grootz was working night and day at com-

missariat business, and for weeks there was a continual bustle of preparation: the cleaning of arms, the testing of harness, a thousand-and-one details that employed countless people beside the soldiers.

At length a day came when, all preparations completed, the eager troops were ready to march out. Harry and Fanshawe, accompanied by Sherebiah, rode over to Lindendaal one evening to take farewell of the ladies. Fanshawe was in the dolefullest of dumps. Notwithstanding Adèle's refusal of him, he had still nursed a hope that time might prove on his side, but found every hint of a sentimental nature adroitly parried, and now feared that with his absence his last chance would disappear. His spirits were raised a little by the warmth, and indeed effusiveness, with which she bade him good-bye.

"I shall hope to hear great things of you, Monsieur," she said, "and to learn that you have come through the campaign unscathed."

"Your good wishes shall be my talisman, Mademoiselle," said Fanshawe gallantly, bowing over her hand.

Harry meanwhile had taken leave of Madame de Vaudrey, who held both his hands and spoke to him with a quite motherly tenderness. Then he turned to say good-bye to Adèle. She had disappeared. Fanshawe had already gone out to the front of the house to see that his horse's girth was rightly strapped, and Harry followed, thinking that Mademoiselle had perhaps accompanied him to the door. But as he passed through the hall, he saw through the open door of the dining-room that Adèle was there, standing at the window with her back to him.

"There you are, Mademoiselle," he said, entering the room; "I was looking for you. It is a longer good-bye this time."

She turned round slowly, and her back being to the sunset glow he could scarcely see her features. She held out her hand, and said slowly, with perhaps a little less cordiality than he had unconsciously expected:

"Adieu, Monsieur Harry!"

He took her hand, hesitated for a moment, and then was gone.

As he left the porch he saw Sherebiah coming round from the garden with his arm unblushingly about the waist of Katrinka, the prettiest maidservant of the house. The honest fellow led the girl up to his master.

"I've done it, sir," he said. "Her've said it. Feyther o' mine may think what a' will, but, an't please Them above to bring me through, by next winter there'll be a Mistress Minshull once more to comfort his old aged soul. Eh, Katrinka, lass?"

The girl looked shyly up and dropt a curtsy.

"'Pon my soul, Sherry, you're a lucky fellow," said Harry. "My old friend will be pleased, I promise you. And look 'ee, I'll give you five minutes to say good-bye to Katrinka while Mr. Fanshawe and I ride on."

”Thank ’ee, sir! I’ll catch ’ee up, soon as her be done.”

”Sherry has had better luck than you, Fanshawe,” said Harry with a smile, as they rode off.

”Yes, confound him! But hang it, Harry, I’ll not give up hope yet. She was very kind to me when she said good-bye, and, by George! if I only escape a Frenchman’s bullet and can manage to come off with flying colours and a neat little sabre-cut—who knows? she may be Mistress Godfrey Fanshawe yet.”

Harry was silent. He felt a little surprised, perhaps a little hurt, that Adèle should have shown more warmth to Fanshawe, a friend of later date. He did not know what he had expected; he could not, indeed, have put his thoughts into words; but the coldness of Mademoiselle’s farewell, so strongly contrasting with Madame’s affectionate manner, had left him vaguely dissatisfied and made him disinclined to talk. Fanshawe, however, was in high spirits, and chattered freely as they went side by side at a walking pace along the road to Breda. Sherebiah by and by overtook them, and kept a few yards behind. He too was in capital spirits, and, having no one to converse with, was humming as he rode:

”So Tom Pearce he got to the top o’ the hill,
All along, down along, out along lee;
And he seed his old mare a-maken her will,
Wi’ Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter Davy, Dan
Whiddon, Harry Hawk, old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all,
Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all.

”So Tom Pearce’s old mare, her took sick an’ died,
All along, down along, out along lee,
And Tom, he sat down on a stone, an’ he cried,
Wi’ Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney, Peter——”

”Confound you, Sherry!” cried Fanshawe, who had been so busy talking that not till this moment had he recognized the song. ”Hanged if you are not always singing that wretched ’Widdicombe Fair’!”

”Beg pardon, sir. No offence. ’Tis a favourite ditty o’ mine, and, axin’ your pardon, I thowt ’twas one o’ yourn too.”

”Nay; anything else, anything else, my good fellow, not that, as you love me.”

”Very good, sir. I be in a mind to troll a ditty, ’tis true, and if my tenor tones don’t offend ’ee, I’ll try a stave o’ ’Turmut-hoein’.”

Next morning, under a bright May sun, the troops in Breda marched out to

join the Duke of Marlborough at Ruremond. As Harry's troop passed Lindendaal, and he caught a glimpse of fluttering handkerchiefs at the windows, he could not help wondering whether he should see those kind friends again.

At Ruremond the troops were reviewed by the duke himself; thence they marched to Juliers and Coblentz, where they halted for two days to allow the Prussian and Hanoverian levies in British pay to unite with them. Everybody had expected that the march would be continued up the Moselle, with the purpose of coming to grips with the French army under Marshal Villeroy. But to the general astonishment orders were given to cross that river by the stone bridge, and then the Rhine by two bridges of boats, and to proceed through the principality of Hesse-Cassel. The new orders were eagerly discussed by the officers of all the corps, but Marlborough had kept his own counsel, and indeed at this time his plan was known to scarcely anyone but Lord Godolphin, with whom he had talked it over in outline before leaving England, and Prince Eugene of Savoy, to whom he had entrusted it in correspondence.

The plan must have seemed hazardous, even reckless, to soldiers who held by the old traditions; but it was one that displayed Marlborough's military genius to the full. He had divined the true meaning of the recent movements of the French armies, and determined on a great effort to defeat the aim of King Louis so shrewdly guessed at. Relying on his ally, the Elector of Bavaria, the French king had resolved to make a strenuous attack upon the Emperor in the heart of his own dominions, Vienna. If Austria were crushed in one great battle, Louis had reason to expect a general rising of the Hungarians, by which the empire would be so much weakened that he could enforce peace and secure the triumph of his policy on his own terms. Already a French army under Marshal Marsin had joined forces with the Elector of Bavaria; other armies were rapidly advancing to reinforce them, and the combined host would be more than a match for any army that the emperor could put in the field against it.

Marlborough saw only one way to save the empire: he must prevent if possible the junction of the several French armies, or, if that were impossible, defeat them in a pitched battle. But he knew that the States of Holland would shrink from the risk of an expedition so far from their own borders; he therefore gave out that his campaign was to be conducted along the Moselle, and only when he was well on his way, and it was too late to oppose him, did he reveal his full design. Fortunately the Dutch Government rose to the opportunity; they sent him the reinforcements and supplies he asked for, and were satisfied with the detachment of one or two small forces to keep watch on Villeroy, who had crossed the Meuse and was threatening Huy. For himself, Marlborough intended to press forward with all speed towards the Danube, join Prince Louis of Baden and Prince Eugene of Savoy, and give battle to the combined French and Bavarians on ground

of his own choosing.

For Harry this famous march was attended with endless novelty and excitement. Every morning at dawn camp was struck, and for five or six hours, with occasional halts, the troops marched, covering twelve or fifteen miles, and bivouacking about nine o'clock, thus completing the day's work before the sun grew hot. All along the route supplies for man and beast were furnished by commissaries, whose duties were so well organized that everything was on the ground before the troops arrived, and they had nothing to do but pitch their tents, boil their kettles, and lie down to rest. Everything was arranged and carried out with matchless regularity and order; Marlborough himself had a thorough grasp of the details, and showed such consideration for his men that on personal grounds he won their admiration and confidence. The passage of so large and miscellaneous a force, consisting of English, Dutch, Prussians, Danes, and levies from several of the minor German states, might well have been attended by many disorders; but Marlborough always displayed great humanity in his dealings with the people of the country through which he passed, and in these matters an army takes its cue from the commander-in-chief.

After quitting Coblentz, the duke went forward a day's march with the cavalry, leaving the artillery and foot to follow under the command of his brother, General Charles Churchill. Unfortunately rainy weather set in towards the end of May, and the roads were rendered so difficult that Churchill's force lost ground, and by the time Marlborough reached Ladenburg, on June 2, was four or five days behind. This delay gave the duke some little cause for anxiety, for he had learnt that Prince Louis of Baden, a brave but sluggish general of the old school, had allowed reinforcements to reach the Elector of Bavaria, and failed to seize an excellent opportunity of defeating the combined force. Marlborough, wishing on this account to hurry his advance, sent back two troops of Dutch horse to assist his brother with the cannon. One of these happened to be Harry's. The heavy Flemish horses were serviceable in dragging the guns, but the rains were so persistent and the soft roads so cut up that when Churchill reached Maintz he was still some five days' march behind the duke.

Late on the night of June 3, when the camp was silent, a courier reached Maintz with the following despatch from Marlborough at Ladenburg:—

"I send this by express on purpose to be informed of the condition you are in, both as to the troops and the artillery, and to advise you to take your march with the whole directly to Heidelberg, since the route we have taken by Ladenburg will be too difficult for you. Pray send back the messenger immediately, and let me know by him where you design to camp each night, and what day you propose

to be at Heidelberg, that I may take my measures accordingly."

General Churchill was roused from sleep to receive the despatch. He at once wrote his reply, but on sending it out to the messenger learnt that he had been suddenly seized with illness, and was unable to ride. Churchill then sent for Captain van der Werff, and asked him, since he had already ridden the Ladenburg road with his troop, to despatch the letter by one of his subalterns. The captain, who knew of Harry's relations with Marlborough, pleased himself with the thought of bringing the two together again, and, to Harry's unbounded delight, ordered him to ride at once to Ladenburg. Before he went he was summoned to the bedside of General Churchill, and saw the tall, thin, battered form of that excellent soldier in the unheroic attire of night-shirt and cap. From him he learnt, in case of accident, the gist of the message, which was that Churchill undertook to arrive at Heidelberg on June 7. Harry started before dawn, and reached the camp at Ladenburg early. He had crossed the Neckar by the bridge of boats used by Marlborough's troops on the previous day, and found the army encamped along the river-side opposite the town. The usual daily march had been pretermitted, in order to allow time for the infantry to make up something of the ground it had lost.

When Harry was taken into the presence of the commander-in-chief, Marlborough was engaged in conversation with Count Wratislaw, the emperor's agent, Colonel Cadogan, his quartermaster-general, and other officers of his staff. The duke had learnt that Prince Eugene of Savoy was on his way to join him, and was anxious that the meeting should take place as soon as possible, so that the plan outlined in their correspondence might be discussed in full detail. He had sent two messengers with letters to meet Prince Eugene, informing him of his whereabouts and urging him to hasten his coming; but neither had returned, and he could not but fear that some mischance had befallen them. But it was a characteristic of Marlborough's that, whatever his difficulties and anxieties, he preserved always the same outward appearance of settled calm—a great factor in his power over men.

He received General Churchill's letter from Harry's hand with a pleasant smile and word of thanks, and bade him wait, to see if it demanded an answer. Then he resumed his conversation, which was conducted in French. Before long Harry, though he remained at a distance too great to allow of his hearing what passed, judged from the glances thrown occasionally in his direction that something was being said about him. Presently Marlborough beckoned him forward.

"Mr. Rochester," he said, "I have an errand for you. I wish to communicate with Prince Eugene of Savoy; two of my officers whom I sent to him have

apparently miscarried; I wish to try a third. You have had experience in getting about the country, and I know from one or two incidents in your late career that you have your wits about you and can make good speed. You will carry a letter from me to Prince Eugene. I will inform your colonel that I have employed you on special duty.—Mr. Cardonnel, be good enough to write from my dictation."

He dictated a short note to his secretary.

"You understand French, of course, Mr. Rochester?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Then I need not repeat my message. You will keep it in mind in case circumstances should require you to destroy the letter. You may meet with danger on the road; otherwise I am at a loss to know why I am without a reply to my two former letters. You must therefore be on your guard. You will use all dispatch, hiring fresh horses wherever it may be necessary—without, of course, incurring needless expense. I opine that you may meet Prince Eugene at Innsprück; Colonel Cadogan will furnish you with a map; your best road will lie through Heidelberg, Wisloch, and the Swabian Alb. When you reach the prince you will doubtless be fatigued; his reply may be sent by another messenger, to whom you will give such hints for his guidance as your own journey may suggest. In that case you need not unduly hurry your own return, and on your way back you may find it possible to make enquiries regarding the fate of my missing messengers: they were Lieutenant Fanshawe of the Duke of Schomberg's Horse, and Lieutenant Buckley of Colonel Cadogan's. Do you know either of them?"

"Lieutenant Fanshawe is an old friend of mine, my lord," said Harry, "but I don't know Lieutenant Buckley."

"Very well. His Excellency Count Wratislaw here will, I doubt not, favour you with a letter of safety which will avail you with any of the civil authorities whose assistance you may need *en route*; but since 'tis advisable to attract as little attention as possible, I counsel you to make no use of the letter except on emergency. 'Twill be common knowledge along the road whether the prince has passed on his way to the army, so that you should meet with no difficulty in finding him. Perhaps, the two lieutenants having apparently come to grief, 'twould be well for you to ride incognito. What is your opinion, Colonel Cadogan?"

"Faith, my lord, let him go as a young English milord making the grand tour."

"But he would then need a servant and baggage."

"Give out that his servant has broken his leg or is laid up with the colic, and he is riding post to Venice; his wits will invent a reason."

"I think, sir, I would rather go as I am," said Harry. "My errand would not then be complicated."

"The simpler way is often the best," said the duke. "Very well. Here is the

letter; I will send you Count Wratislaw's shortly; you will then set off at once."

Harry bowed and withdrew, feeling highly elated at being entrusted with this mission. It was an expedition on which he would gladly have had the company of Sherebiah; but there was no time to send for him; besides, one might go more safely than two. An hour later, furnished with a supply of money by Colonel Cadogan, he rode off on a fresh horse, passed through Heidelberg without delay, by favour of Count Wratislaw's safe-conduct, and struck into the long straight road that led due south through Leimen and Wisloch.

What had become of Fanshawe, he wondered. It was a friendly country; the enemy were, so far as he could gather, no nearer than Ulm on the Danube, so that it was little likely that Fanshawe had fallen in with French or Bavarian troops. On the other hand, the country was infested with spies, and here and there in out-of-the-way spots bands of outlaws were said to have fixed their haunts, whence they made depredations on neighbouring villages. But it was useless to speculate on what might have happened, and Harry took care not to awaken curiosity or suspicion by any premature enquiries. Stopping merely to change horses at posting inns and to snatch a light meal, he reached Stuttgart about six o'clock in the afternoon, having ridden sixty miles since he left Ladenburg. This, with his previous ride from Maintz, had made him stiff and sore; but, tired as he was, he determined to push on after a short rest, and reach, if possible, the little town of Urach that night.

Soon after leaving Stuttgart he entered the district known as the Swabian Alb, a country of wooded mountains and picturesque, well-watered valleys, now in all their midsummer glory. The road became steeper after he had crossed the river Neckar, and as his horse was labouring somewhat he began to wish that he had remained to sleep in Stuttgart. He was still some miles short of Urach when he came suddenly upon an inn, standing back from the high-road, and nestling among a group of tall, full-leaved beeches. It bore the sign "Zum grauen Bären". The pleasant situation and the warm colours of this Swabian hostelry were very inviting to a tired man. His mouth was parched with thirst; his horse was panting and steaming; and a short rest would do both of them good. A moment's hesitation; then he wheeled to the left, and was met by the landlord, who rose from a bench before the inn, where he was smoking his evening pipe along with a squat companion looking like a farmer. The landlord was not so attractive in appearance as his inn, but he gave Harry a suave greeting in German, and asked how he could serve the noble Herr. Harry had picked up a word or two of German in Holland, and asked in that tongue for the refreshment he desired; but at the first word the landlord gave him a sharp yet furtive look, immediately effaced by his wonted bland smile. He went into the inn, and soon returned with a cup of wine, while an ostler brought a pail of water for the horse.

Harry was glad to rest his aching limbs on the bench, and to sip the cool Rhenish. The landlord, standing by him, showed a desire to be conversational.

"The noble Herr is for Urach? He will scarcely get there to-night."

He spoke now in a mixture of German and bad French.

"Why, is it so far?" said Harry. "I thought I was nearly there."

"True, Excellency, it is not very far; but the town council has become somewhat timid since the French and Bavarians came prowling along the Danube, and the gates are shut at half-past seven."

"A solitary horseman will not scare them," said Harry with a smile. "They will surely open to me."

"Not so, Excellency. The order is stern. Why, only yesterday a Rittmeister passing to join the forces of the Prince of Baden was refused admittance just after the clock had struck, and had to come back to this very inn. Donner, was he not angry, the noble Herr! But anger cannot pierce stone walls; the gentleman uttered many round oaths, but he came back all the same. Was it not so, Hermann?"

His thickset companion assented with a rough "Jawohl!"

"Well, I can but try," said Harry, thinking of Count Wratislaw's letter as his open sesame. "I shall ride on in a minute or two."

The landlord lifted his eyebrows.

"The noble Herr has perhaps more persuasion than the Herr Rittmeister. But if you find it as I say,—well, there is good accommodation within."

He went into the inn with his companion, leaving Harry on the bench. Harry reflected. It was absurd to tire himself needlessly; he had ridden with brief intervals for nearly eighteen hours since he left Maintz, and felt by no means eager to get into the saddle again. Perhaps it would be best to close with the man's offer, sleep at the inn, and start fresh early in the morning. Yet he hesitated; there was something about the landlord that he did not like; he felt for him one of those unaccountable antipathies that spring up at a word, a look, a touch. But the feeling was vague and unsubstantial; after a moment he dismissed it as unreasonable, and concluded that his best course would be to take his rest now rather than run the risk of having it deferred for some hours.

He went into the inn.

"The noble Herr decides to stay?" said the landlord. "Well! I would not persuade, but I think you are right, Excellency. Johann, take the gentleman's horse to the stable. I will see then that a room is prepared. And you will like supper, Excellency?"

"Yes. Anything will do."

He accompanied the ostler to the stable and saw the horse well rubbed and fed.

”Whose horse is that?” he asked, noticing a sorrel in the next stall.

”He belongs, Excellency, to the gentleman now with the host, by name Hermann Bart, a farmer of the district.”

”Oh! he looks a strong beast—the horse, I mean. I shall want to be off at dawn; you’ll see that my horse is ready?”

Returning to the inn, he ate the plain supper brought him by an old woman as deaf as a post. While he sat at table the landlord stood opposite him, attentively anticipating his wants.

”I can have a light breakfast at three, landlord?”

”Certainly, Excellency; we are early birds here, though in these times there are few travellers along the road, more’s the pity.”

”Ah! Is there any news of the armies hereabouts?”

”Why yes. Only yesterday—so it is said—the Elector of Bavaria crossed the river at Ulm, and the Prince of Baden, who ’tis to be hoped will beat him, stands somewhat higher up at Ehingen across the mountains yonder.”

”You have not been troubled yourself by the soldiers?”

”Never a whit, Excellency. And I trust I never shall be. They march, you see, along the rivers, and my little place is out of their route. You are travelling far, mein Herr?”

”Not a great distance,” replied Harry, thinking it prudent to give no information. The landlord made no attempt to press him, but kept up a desultory conversation until he had finished his supper.

”I will go and take a look at my horse, and then turn in.”

He went out to the stable, and noticed that the second horse was gone.

”Your friend the farmer has gone home then?” he said to the ostler.

”Yes, Excellency, some time ago.”

”My horse is comfortable, I see; good-night!”

As he left the stable he heard the man behind him whistling as he gave the cobbles a final sweeping for the night. The tune seemed familiar, but Harry was not sufficiently interested to give another thought to it. The landlord met him at the door with a lighted candle and led the way to his room.

”It is a small room, Excellency,” he explained apologetically; ”not such a room as befits a gentleman of your rank. But the truth is, the heavy rains of late have found out a weak spot in the roof, and my large guest-chamber is consequently very damp. The small room here to the left is, however, very comfortable; it was last occupied by an Austrian nobleman who slept through the night without turning an eyelid.”

”Then it will suit me very well,” said Harry.

”Breakfast at daybreak, you said, Excellency?”

”Yes.”

”You will want nothing more to-night?”

”Nothing. Good-night, landlord!”

Harry shut the door and shot the bolt. He thought the Austrian nobleman must have been easily satisfied. The room was about twelve feet by seven, and contained nothing but a bed and a chair. There was one small window opening on to the courtyard some thirty feet below, the view of the yard being partially obstructed by a projecting wing of the house immediately beneath. The air of the room being very stuffy, he opened the window wide; then he undressed, blew out the light, and got into bed, pulling out the blanket, which seemed somewhat frowsy, and finding enough warmth in the light coverlet.

But he found it impossible to sleep. He was in fact overtired, and bodily fatigue often makes the mind only more active. He fell a-musing, and wondered what it was in the landlord’s manner that he disliked. Through the window came the sound of the stableman’s whistle as he locked the yard gate, and Harry tried in vain to recollect where he had heard the tune before. The ostler was a happy fellow, evidently; perhaps his master was better than he appeared. The whistling ceased, a door banged, presumably the man had gone to bed; ”and he’ll sleep as sound as a top,” thought Harry. He turned over on to his back and stared at the ceiling, which consisted of thick beams with rough boards between. By and by he noticed a dark square outline in the planking just above him. He could not see it distinctly, for the beams of the rising moon did not fall upon it directly, but across the bed, making the room itself fairly light. For a time he looked idly at the square; it was evidently a trap-door. He began to be curious about it, then was aware of an indefinable, inexplicable sense of uneasiness, of insecurity. He felt that he could neither withdraw his gaze from the trap-door nor put it from his thoughts. He turned on to his right side, away from the window, but in a few moments was on his back again, staring up as before.

”This is ridiculous,” he said to himself impatiently. ”I wonder whether the thing has a bolt.”

He rose, and, standing on the bed, found that with outstretched hand he could just reach the boards. Exploring the edge of the trap-door with his fingers he soon discovered that there was no bolt, though there had evidently been one at some time, for on a second search he felt an iron socket let into one of the adjacent joists. He raised himself on tiptoes and gently pushed at the door. It rose slightly; clearly it was not fastened above. No glimmer of moonlight came through the small gap between the trap and the ceiling; therefore it did not give directly upon the roof, but probably opened into an attic or loft. There was nothing more to be discovered, and indeed he scarcely felt that he needed to discover more, for his uneasiness had already been largely dissipated by action. He lay down again, and tried to sleep.

This time he was successful. How long he slept he did not know. He suddenly awoke, and at the first moment of consciousness remembered the ostler's tune; he identified it now; it was something like Fanshawe's song of "Widdicombe Fair". He was not enough of a musician to decide how close was the resemblance; country songs of different nations were, he supposed, often alike. Glad that his puzzlement was gone, he settled himself once more to sleep.

All at once his senses were roused to full activity by the sound of two or more horses approaching the inn, at a walk, as he knew by the fall of the hoofs. It was very late for travellers; besides, travellers would probably have ridden up at a trot; he wondered who the riders could be, and listened intently. In a few moments the sounds ceased; then through the open window came the murmur of low voices. Springing quietly out of bed, he went to the window and peeped cautiously out. Five men were leading their horses into the copse immediately opposite to the inn. The short squat figure of one of them reminded him of the farmer whom he had seen with the landlord a few hours before; he seemed the shorter by contrast with the next man, a tall massive figure. They went quietly, and disappeared into the copse; soon afterwards four of them emerged from the trees and approached the inn. Not a word was spoken; the men were apparently walking on tiptoe; but there came the slight sound of a door opening and closing, then dead silence again.

By this time Harry was as wide-awake as ever he had been in his life. His uneasiness returned in full force, and was now magnified into suspicion. The landlord's furtive look and unsatisfactory manner; the story of the closing of the gates of Urach; his lame explanation about the room; the absence of a fastening to the trap-door; the disappearance of the landlord's forbidding companion; the reappearance of the same man with a number of others; their stealthy movements, and the fact that they had tied their horses up in the copse instead of bringing them into the courtyard—all these were links in a chain of suspicious circumstance, of little significance singly, but disturbing when taken together. And the stableman's tune—what did that mean? Was it actually the tune of "Widdicombe Fair", and not merely one resembling it? Had the ostler heard it from Fanshawe's lips? Was he on the track of the explanation of the disappearance of one of Marlborough's messengers?

Quickly and noiselessly Harry slipped on his clothes. His first duty was, of course, to deliver the duke's letter; nothing must interfere with that. His suspicions might be utterly groundless, but on the other hand they might be only too well justified. He must be on the safe side; it was necessary to put himself out of harm's way.

Only one staircase led to his room: it sprang from the narrow entrance-hall of the inn, on each side of which were the doors of the rooms on the ground

floor. He could scarcely hope to be able to pass down, however stealthily, without being discovered; and even if he did succeed in this and left the inn, he would be immediately seen by the fifth man, who, he guessed, had been left in the copse to keep watch on the front door. The staircase being given up, there remained only the window and the trap-door. By placing the chair upon the bed and mounting it he might manage to swing himself up through the trap-door; but it flashed upon him that if any mischief were intended the midnight visitors would certainly approach through the attic or loft above. He remembered passing, at the head of the stairs, a door which he had taken to be that of a cupboard; it might be the entrance to a stair leading to the loft, and if he tried that exit he would certainly be in an even worse trap.

A glance from the window determined his choice. There was a drop of about fifteen feet from it to the roof of the outbuilding. In the moonlight he caught sight of what appeared to be the top of a drain-pipe from the roof of this lower building to the ground. The drain-pipe would form an easy means of descent could he gain the roof. There was only one way to do that: to descend by aid of a rope. Without hesitation he drew the thin coverlet from the bed, and tore it across the middle. Knotting the two pieces together he rolled up a clumsy but serviceable rope. The window was only two feet from the bed-post. He tied the rope to this, slung his boots round his neck, wrapped his scabbard in a corner cut from the blanket, to prevent its clanking, and prepared to descend.

It was fortunate that the window was already open, for the creaking of the frame might have attracted attention. There was a risk that the man in the copse might see him as he got through the window; but the moon was now above the house, and the overhanging roof cast a deep shadow over all below.

He had his hand on the broad window-sill, preparing to begin the descent, when an idea gave him pause. How ridiculous he must appear if his suspicions turned out to be baseless, and he had slunk like a thief from the house! How humiliating would be his situation if he were caught in the act and treated as a doubtful character! He could not be suspected of stealing; there was nothing to steal; but he might be thought to be running away without paying. He could prevent that, at any rate. He put a gold piece on the chair.

"That's double pay," he thought.

But still he hesitated. No man cares to look a fool, and he would certainly look very foolish if his imagination proved to have run away with him. But what is that? A slight creak on the stairs, then another. Now a faint rustle outside the door. Holding his breath he listens. Yes, the supposed cupboard door is being opened; a moment, then he hears the faint but unmistakable creak of footsteps on the crazy stairs leading to the attic. He hesitates no longer. In two minutes at the most the intruders will have come through the trap-door into the room.

Throwing one leg over the window-sill, he grasps his rope with one hand and the sill with the other; over goes the other leg, and now he is hanging by the frail rope. He feels the soft material yield to his weight; it is stretched to its full extent; it holds! He needs it for only a few feet. Down he glides: his feet touch the slates of the outhouse; now he is in full view from the copse save that a chimney-stack on the roof throws a black shadow all around him. Will he escape notice? Keeping the chimney between him and the copse he crawls slowly over the slates and finds as he had hoped that the rain-water pipe is out of sight. He slips over, grasps the pipe, and is half-way down when there is a noise in the room above; and as his feet at last touch the ground he sees two faces at the open window and hears loud shouts.

He had already resolved on a risky experiment; it appeared his only chance of escape. He had noticed that the country around, though hilly, was bare of vegetation except about the inn, where trees had been planted to tempt wayfarers. He knew that as soon as he got away from the buildings his figure would be seen in the bright moonbeams, and he was bound to be ridden down. The shouts from the window might be expected for the moment to hold the attention of the man on the watch. Relying on this, Harry darted across the road in the shadow of the outbuildings and dived into the copse some twenty or thirty yards from the place where the men had entered with the horses. Bending low, moving rapidly, yet with all possible caution, among the trees, he bore to the left towards the single watcher, whom he could now hear on the road shouting in answer to the men in the house. Harry could not distinguish their words, but judged from the vehemence of their tone and his own consciousness of his design that they were bawling to the sentinel to return to the horses he had left. It was a question which should reach them first. The copse was almost dark; a glint of light from the moon filtered through the foliage here and there. Running in his stockings Harry made no noise; but he could already hear the heavy trampling of the man as he plunged through the trees somewhere to his left.

Suddenly he came to a narrow clearing; on the other side he saw the horses tethered to the trees. Keeping just within the edge of the copse he ran round at his utmost speed towards the animals, and just before he reached them saw that their guardian had arrived at the end of the clearing nearest to the road and had stopped in the attitude of listening. There was much hubbub from the direction of the inn, and by the sounds Harry knew that several men were crossing the road towards the copse. The horses were between him and the solitary sentinel. Coming to the nearest, he cast off its bridle, then, vaulting to the saddle, he drew his sword and cut the bridles of the others, which were standing head to head, loosely attached to the projecting branch of a small tree. The man gave a shout and rushed forward when he saw Harry on the horse. It was a moment for quick

decision. Smartly hitting the four intervening horses with the flat of his sword, Harry set them scampering through the edge of the copse. The man could not evade them, and in a moment he was knocked down. Harry meanwhile, trusting to the darkness, followed on the heels of two horses which were heading through the clearing towards the inn. At the outer edge of the copse he was encountered by two men who attempted to catch his rein. Toppling one over and cutting at the other he gained the highway; then set his borrowed steed to a gallop and rode on towards Urach. "A near shave!" he thought. He stopped a few hundred yards from the walls to put on his boots, then rode up to the gate.

It was shut, and he had some difficulty in rousing the gatekeeper. When the man came at length to his summons, he refused point-blank to allow the rider to enter.

"I can't wait," cried Harry. "Seek the officer of the watch; I'll not answer for what may happen if you delay me."

The gatekeeper went away grumbling and returned with the lieutenant of the town guard, who held a pistol and asked Harry's business.

"I am on a mission for my lord Marlborough," said Harry. "This letter from his Excellency Count Wratislaw will satisfy you."

The officer tried to read the letter by the light of the moon, but finding this impossible, waited until the gate-keeper had lit his horn lantern. Then, having read the letter, he ordered the man to open the gate.

"Will you ride farther to-night, Monsieur?" he asked.

"No, I am dog tired," replied Harry. "Will you direct me to a lodging?"

"Permit me to offer you the hospitality of my own quarters. The inns are all closed, of course; you are a very late traveller, Monsieur."

"Yes, I have been somewhat delayed on the road. If you will give me sleeping quarters for a few hours I shall be obliged to you."

In less than a quarter of an hour he was fast asleep. At four he was wakened, according to instructions given before he turned in. Stiff and sore as he was, he meant to ride on at once, for the sooner his mission was completed the sooner would he have the opportunity of seeking an explanation with the innkeeper, which he promised himself should be a thorough one. The lieutenant of the guard, a pleasant fellow, had a light breakfast ready, and was eager to give information about the road. From him Harry learnt that the highway to Biberach would lead through the lines of Prince Louis of Baden. Though he had no instructions to avoid the prince's army, he thought it very probable that he would best serve the duke by preventing gossip. So, finding that by diverging somewhat to the right and taking the road by Riedlingen he would pass outside Prince Louis's lines and lose little time, he decided to adopt this course. Thanking his entertainer, and promising to call on him on the way back, he set off on his ride.

Not a word had he said about his adventure at the inn. It would be time to deal with that when his duty was done.

Harry rode a hundred miles that day, reaching the town of Immenstadt in the evening. He met with no adventure on the way; he found ready service at the inns at which he stopped to change horses, rest, and eat. But at the day's end he felt all but worn out. The sun had shone brilliantly, scorching his face, neck, and hands, and causing much discomfort to his horses. They suffered, however, less than he, for while the steeds were changed at short stages, the rider was always the same. He got some little relief by walking up the steepest hills along the road. His physical state and his preoccupation made him oblivious of the scenes through which he passed; afterwards he had but the vaguest recollections of hill ridges, bosky dells, blue lakes, and dark masses of rock, with a miry road winding among them, and here and there inns where he was thankful to rest awhile.

He slept that night at Immenstadt, rose reluctantly early next morning, and started for what he hoped was the last stage of his journey. About ten o'clock he arrived at the little village of Obermiemingen. As he rode in, he noted signs of excitement in the street. The whole population seemed to be gathered about the inn. At the door stood a heavy travelling coach with four horses, two of them saddled for postilions. His arrival diverted the attention of some of the peasants to himself, and they parted to make way for him. Dismounting stiffly he went to the inn-door and called for the host. After some time a servant came to him and explained that mine host was engaged at that moment with his Excellency Prince Eugene of Savoy, who had driven up shortly before attended by two officers and thirty troopers.

"Then I am in luck's way," said Harry. "I have a letter to his Excellency: conduct me to his room."

Two minutes later he found himself in the presence of the renowned soldier: the man who, mocked at in the French court as the "little abbé" and refused employment by King Louis, had ever since lived for nothing else but to prove himself a thorn in that monarch's side. He was of somewhat less than the middle height, dark-complexioned, with refined though not small features, and large flashing eyes. Harry presented his letter; the prince having read it, laughed and said:

"My lord Marlborough is anxious, Monsieur. But a few hours ago I received a message from him—dated several days back, it is true: you have had better fortune than the first messenger. The letter was brought to me at Innsprück by a farmer from the Swabian Alb; the courier, an officer of my lord Marlborough, had fallen from his horse, it appears, and being conveyed to a cottage the children had made free with his wallet while he himself lay insensible and their elders were attending upon him. For myself, I suspect it was the elders who were curious. But

the letter contained no more than this one you have brought, so their curiosity reaped but little gratification.—Now, are you to carry my answer to my lord?"

"If your Excellency wishes," said Harry, "but my lord duke told me I might use another hand if I were fatigued."

"And that you certainly are. You must have come at great speed, and I will not tax you further. Very well. I am proceeding to Immenstadt; there I shall await a communication from Vienna, and then go directly forward to my meeting with the duke. I will acquaint him of my design by a messenger of my own. Pray refresh yourself now, Monsieur."

In a few minutes the prince drove off with his escort, and Harry enjoyed a sort of reflected importance. He was given the best the inn could afford, and provided, after some delay and difficulty—his request was almost incomprehensible to the landlord—with the luxury of a bath. He remained in Obermiemingen until the heat of the day had spent itself, then cantered easily back to Immenstadt, where for the first time for many days he slept the round of the clock. Reporting himself to Prince Eugene next morning, he learnt that the expected messenger from Vienna had not yet arrived, and having nothing to detain him there he started on the road back. There was no need for hurry; that day he rode seventy miles, to Riedlingen; then next morning he went on to Urach, where he at once looked up the amiable lieutenant of the guard who had treated him so well on his way through.

"You are back then, Monsieur?" said the lieutenant, greeting him heartily. "I did not tell you before, but the truth is I was not at all sure you would reach your destination safely."

"And you didn't wish to frighten me! But why, Monsieur?"

"There are bands of marauders in the hills; deserters, broken men, and what not, ready to snap up any unsuspecting traveller who promises to be worth it. They have done much damage in the neighbourhood, robbing and plundering undefended farms and hamlets, and though we are strong enough here to beat them off we cannot risk an expedition against them, and Prince Louis of Baden is too much occupied, I suppose, to give any heed to our requests for assistance."

"Well, Monsieur," said Harry, "I was not ignorant of what you have told me. And indeed I want to ask your help in a matter not unconnected with it. Two messengers from my lord Marlborough's army have disappeared somewhere in these parts; I think I have a clue to their fate, and wish to follow it up. Can you procure me the services of a stout, sensible fellow to ride with me?—a man thoroughly to be depended on, and one who will face danger if need be."

"I know the very man," said the officer instantly; "one Max Berens, who was servant to a French officer until the beginning of the war, but, refusing to fight against his own people, is now out of employment. He is a young fellow,

strong, honest, intelligent; I know him well. I will send for him."

Harry liked the look of Max Berens when he appeared. He reminded him not a little of Sherebiah, of whom he might have been a younger and a slighter copy. Max readily accepted Harry's offer of a week's service, and promised to be ready with horses at seven o'clock that same evening.

At that hour the two rode north towards the wayside inn. On the way Harry asked Max if he knew anything of the landlord.

"Little enough, Monsieur. He's a sly fellow, and demands high prices; but there, the same could be said of any innkeeper."

As they drew near the inn they made a detour, and, entering the copse from the farther side, tied up their horses and came through the trees. Dusk had already fallen, and as the sky was overcast the evening was blacker than is usual at the time of year. The inn was in darkness except for a light in the kitchen. Followed by Max, Harry emerged from the copse, crossed the road, and rapped smartly on the closed door. It was opened almost immediately by the landlord himself, who, seeing two men on foot, and not recognizing Harry in the darkness, said:

"Come in, gentlemen. What are your commands? I will bring a light in a moment."

Returning with a candle, he now saw who the first of his visitors was, and looked very uncomfortable.

"I have very little in the house, Excellency——" he began deprecatingly. Harry cut him short.

"Pray don't be distressed. I left hurriedly—you remember me, landlord?—and we have a little reckoning to make together. It need not take long.—Max, stand at the door, and see that our good host and I are not disturbed.—Now, landlord, we will have a little talk." The kitchen door was open and the room empty. "This will do quite well; I repeat, we shall not remain long."

The man looked relieved, Harry thought; but he said nothing, merely brushing a chair for his visitor. Harry sat down, removed his hat, and leant back, stretching his legs for comfort after his ride.

"Yes, landlord, I left your house somewhat hurriedly, I fear, and at an unseemly hour."

The man shot a quick glance at him; but, having now had time to collect his wits, assumed an air of friendly concern, and began to speak with great volubility.

"The noble Herr had indeed a miraculous escape. Your excellency will remember—I told you of the marauders. They are dangerous knaves; they stick at nothing; only the other day they sacked and burnt a farmhouse in the hills, and killed all the inmates—man, wife, three children, and a dozen servants. Glad indeed was I to find that your excellency had eluded them. They must have spied

upon your coming; yes, dangerous villains, I say. We should have had troops to protect us, but his highness Prince Louis—whom God defend!—cannot spare a man, it is said, so hard is he pressed by the French; and we poor Swabians are at the mercy of these robbers, the offscourings of all the armies. Ah, your excellency, these are bad times for us poor folk, bad times indeed; not that it becomes me to complain when our noble rulers think it necessary to make war; but it is the poor who suffer. It is we who are taxed to keep the soldiers afoot; the bread is taken out of our children's mouths; we are murdered and robbed, our houses are plundered and burned——"

"Except in your case, mein Wirth," said Harry, interrupting the man's hurried, nervous, inconsequent speech. "You seem very comfortable here; I see no signs of plunder or burning."

"No, your excellency, they—they—they were disturbed."

"Disturbed!"

"Did I say disturbed? I meant alarmed—alarmed, mein Herr. Your excellency's escape—for which Heaven be thanked!—caused them to hurry off;—yes, to hurry off, for, of course, they feared the guard from Urach; that is how it was: your excellency understands?"

"Perfectly. And which way did they go?"

"Which way, your excellency?" The man's tone was expressive of the greatest surprise: he was gaining confidence. "How should I know? They galloped away; that was all I knew——"

"Ah! And where did they get the horses?"

"The horses! the horses! Ah yes! the horses." Mine host was now floundering desperately. "Why, of course, they caught the horses and then galloped away—you understand?"

"Excellently. And my horse—you have that in your stable still?"

"Your horse! Yes, of course; it must be there; I will go and saddle it myself for your excellency."

"Not so fast. There is no hurry, my friend. They caught the horses and galloped away. And where are they now?"

"What strange questions, Excellency! Where are they now? How should I know! It is announced they went away towards Ulm: one can never tell with such wretches: they are here to-day and gone to-morrow. To look for them would be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

"That's a pity, landlord; I fear you must make up your mind for a long search."

"A search! I, Excellency?"

"Yes, you. And we will, if you please, start at once."

Harry said this in the same quiet matter-of-fact tone in which he might

have said, ”I will have breakfast at eight”. The landlord looked dumbfounded, his head hanging forward, his eyes fixed in a wild stare upon the face of the visitor. Harry sat up in his chair and spoke very slowly and distinctly, leaving time for the words to sink in.

”I have come, landlord, either to find our midnight disturbers, or to deliver you in their stead to the magistrates of Urach. Which it is to be depends entirely on you. No; it is useless to protest”—the man was rubbing his hands nervously together, and stammering an expostulation—”I have the strongest proof that you were associated with the villains in the trap set for me three nights ago. You can make your choice between returning with me to Urach, where there is plenty of rope and a serviceable gallows-frame in the market square; and yielding me sincere and instant help in the little enquiry I am about to make. I do not wish to hurry you: you shall have a few minutes to think it over. Bring me a cup of wine.”

The man moved to the cupboard as in a dream. Harry took the cup he offered, and as he sipped it, watched the landlord return the bottle mechanically to its place on the shelf, take up a plate and put it down again, cut half through a loaf of bread and leave the knife in it, flick imaginary crumbs from the clear table. He looked like a rat in a trap. He glanced at the window, then at the door, and appeared for a moment to measure his chances in a struggle. But Harry’s air of confident self-possession, and the knowledge that a sturdy henchman held the door within a few feet of him, daunted any impulse to active resistance. At length, drawing a napkin nervously through his fingers, and trying to assume an air of dignified forbearance, he said:

”I am in your excellency’s hands. I protest; but since you doubt me, I am willing to accompany your excellency to Urach, and prove my innocence to the magistrates. I am well known in Urach, and permit me to say, I shall require good compensation when you are forced to admit your mistake.”

”Your expectation shall not be disappointed,” said Harry quietly. ”We will, then, start at once.”

”But it will be near midnight when we arrive, your excellency being on foot——”

”You have my horse in your stable, I thought?”

”I was mistaken,—a moment’s forgetfulness, mein Herr. The horse—the other day—I mean——”

”Yes, I understand. Nevertheless, we will start at once.”

”But, Excellency, nothing can be done until the morning. If you will wait——”

”For another visit from your friends? no.”

”Not my friends, Excellency. I am an honest man. But as you will. I will

awaken the ostler and leave him in charge of the inn."

He made quickly towards the door, but Harry, who had seen through all his attempts to gain time and make an opportunity to get away, interposed.

"Ring your bell there: that will waken him. But you will not leave him in charge of the house: he will come with us, and your servant also. The inn shall be shut up, and I doubt not your good fortune in escaping the attentions of the marauders will still hold. I will give you five minutes to get ready."

The landlord, seeing that his last hope of communicating with his friends was gone, recognized that the game was up. His assurance collapsed; he became merely sullen.

"What is it that your excellency wishes me to do?"

"As I said: first to choose between complying with my demands and facing a public trial for treason at Urach."

"What are your excellency's demands?"

"First make your choice."

"Your excellency will guarantee my safety if I comply?"

"I cannot answer for that; but I will do what I can."

The man's face gave signs of a final mental struggle; then he said:

"I will do as your excellency wishes."

"A wise choice: it gives you a chance of saving your neck; there is none at all the other way. A few questions first. How many travellers—let us say officers of the English army—have you trapped as you tried to trap me?"

The man hesitated.

"Quick!" cried Harry, "no paltering now. You know the alternative."

"One, your excellency," was the reluctant, sullen admission.

"And what became of the other?"

"He was waylaid on the road."

"The first, or the second?"

"The second."

"And the officer captured here—what was he like? Was he tall or short?"

"He was tall, Excellency, with fair hair and blue eyes. He was always whistling."

"These officers—where were they taken to?"

"To the hills."

"In what direction?"

"Towards Geislingen."

"Where are they now?"

The man dropped his eyes and fidgeted. He had been growing restive under this examination; his tone had become more and more sullen.

"I—I don't know, Excellency," he stammered.

”Come, refresh your memory. Remember—they have to be found; I must have an answer, and an exact description of the spot: out with it!”

The landlord could hardly have looked more uncomfortable if a thumb-screw had been applied. For a few moments he strove with himself; then muttered:

”I don’t know: the castle of Rauhstein—when I last heard.”

”And when was that?”

”Yesterday.”

”The castle will not have moved, eh? Where is it?”

”About ten miles away.”

”Who owns it?”

”Nobody: it is a ruin. The land belongs to the Graf von Rauhstein.”

”But it is not so much a ruin that it cannot shelter your friends. How many do they number?”

”Two hundred or more.”

”What are they?”

”All kinds: soldiers, outlaws—French, Bavarian, Swabian.”

”And who commands them?”

”A Bavarian captain: by his speech, a foreigner born.”

”That is enough, I think. We will prepare to start.”

”To start, Excellency! Whither?”

”For the castle.”

”But—but, Excellency,” stammered the man, ”you do not mean it? You would not venture there, you and I and two men? You—we—they would murder us all.”

”We must risk that. As for you, your risk will be equally great, or greater, if you stay here: if the two officers are not safe in Urach by to-morrow night, a detachment will be sent to arrest you. You understand?”

The landlord was chapfallen and pallid with mingled fears. On the one hand, the vengeance of the associates he had been constrained to betray; on the other, the retribution of the burghers of Urach.

”Excellency,” he said falteringly, ”I have given you information. You have promised to guarantee my safety——”

”No,” interrupted Harry; ”I said I would do what I could.”

”I trust to you, Excellency: you will have mercy upon a poor man; in these days it is hard to live; I did not mean any harm to the officers; I insisted their persons should not be injured: I was under compulsion, fearing——”

”Enough!” said Harry, to whom the man’s cringing and whining were more distasteful than his former attitude. ”Give my man the key of your stable: he will saddle your horse. We shall not need to awaken your servant, after all. You will

lead the way to the castle. And one word before we start: try to mislead us or play us false, and you will be immediately shot. I give you my word for that. Now, put on your hat."

CHAPTER XX
The Castle of Rauhstein

The Hidden Way—In the Fosse—Below the Dungeons—Out of the Depths—A Sleeping Castle—The Stairway in the Keep—Counting the Chickens—The Battlements—A Breakneck Descent—A Friendly Shower—A Narrow Margin—Eugene Laughs—A Bold Stroke—Eugene's Double—"Our Good Prince Eugene"—Mein Wirth as Postilion—An Empty Pistol

It was about nine o'clock, and a dark night, when Harry with his two companions set off on horseback towards the castle of Rauhstein. When Harry mentioned their destination to Max, the man said that he had known the district from boyhood, and was well acquainted with the castle and its precincts, so that it was unnecessary to take the landlord as guide. But the latter could not be left to himself except under lock and key, and Harry decided that it would be at once safer and more convenient to have him with them. Max led the way along a horse-track that zigzagged over the limestone hills, Harry followed with the landlord, their horses being securely linked together. Harry had unbuttoned his holsters, displaying two pistols; the sight of them, he felt, would keep the landlord on his good behaviour.

The track was tortuous, skirting rugged spurs of rock, crossing narrow ravines, and here and there a mountain brook, passing through black clumps of beech forest that dotted the slope. The riders were surrounded by a vast silence, broken only by the cries of night birds and the croak of frogs in the pools. The horses' shoes clicked on the hard ground; it would clearly not be safe to approach too close to the castle on horseback, and as they rode Harry quietly asked the landlord how the ruin was situated, and whether there was any cover within a secure distance. He learnt that the castle was built against the hill-side, so that it was inaccessible from the rear; it was almost wholly in ruins, but the keep and one or two adjacent parts had been recently made habitable by the marauders. There was a fosse, now dry; the drawbridge had disappeared, and was replaced

by a rough bridge of planks. The landlord knew of no entrance but this; it was guarded day and night, but no watch was kept on any other part of the building. There were no trees in the immediate neighbourhood of the castle, but about half a mile before it was reached an extensive plantation of beech covered a valley to the right of the track, and in this the horses could be left.

It was past eleven before the three riders reached the beech plantation. There alighting, they tied their horses to trees well within the clump, and proceeded on foot. It occurred to Harry that if the animals chanced to whinny they might be heard by any member of the garrison who happened to be without the walls; but Max told him that the two tracks leading to the castle from the Urach highroad were both a considerable distance to right and left of the hill path by which they had come, so that there was little fear of such an untoward accident.

They climbed up the path in silence, the darkness being so deep that they could not distinguish the outline of anything more than a few yards away. It was therefore almost unawares that Max himself, for all his knowledge of the country, came upon the main road into which the track ran, about a quarter of a mile from the castle. Here he stopped.

"Monsieur," he said, "I heard what the landlord said to you. It is all true; but though he speaks only of the entrance by the plank bridge, I know, and he may know too, of another—one that I discovered by chance, rambling here with some comrades many years ago. It is a small broken doorway opening from the fosse, much overgrown with bush and trees, and indeed so well hidden that I almost doubt whether I could find it after this long time."

"Well, Max, you must try. I don't want you to go into the castle yourself: I suppose you have not seen it since the marauders have sheltered there?"

"No, Monsieur."

"Then I must go myself. The fosse is dry, you say?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Then we can all three go down into it, and the landlord and I will remain hidden while you search for the secret entrance. Whither does it lead?"

"To a tunnel that rises gradually up the hill, and enters the castle near the dungeons below the keep."

"Lead on, then. We will go to the left, and walk warily to escape the ears of the sentry at the gate."

In a few minutes they came to the edge of the fosse. They clambered carefully down, assisting their steps by the young trees which thickly covered the steep side. When they reached the bottom, Max went forward by himself to explore. His movements caused a rustle, but being followed by the scurrying of rabbits disturbed in the brake, such slight customary noises were not likely to alarm the sentry, even if he should near them.

Harry had his hand on the landlord's wrist as they waited minute after minute. Max was gone a long time. All was silent now save for the murmurs of birds and the chirping of insects. At length, after what seemed to Harry's impatience hours of delay, the man groped his way back, and whispered:

"I have found it, Monsieur."

"That is well. Now lead us to it."

"You will not take me into the castle, Excellency?" murmured the landlord in affright.

"Have no fear. Be silent."

The three went into the tangled mass of tree and shrub, and Max had no difficulty now in taking a pretty direct path to the opening of the tunnel. When the bushes were pulled aside, they revealed to the touch—for to see was impossible—an arch of crumbling brickwork not more than five feet high. Evidently a man could not walk upright through the tunnel.

"Did you ever get into the castle this way?" asked Harry.

"Yes, Monsieur, but it was fifteen years ago."

"So that the tunnel may be blocked now?"

"Certainly."

"Or it may be the haunt of wild beasts?"

"Nothing wilder than rabbits, I should think."

"Well, it is not too pleasant a task to crawl through there in the dark, but it must be done. Now, Max, you will return to the place where we left our horses; the landlord will go with you. Here is one of my pistols; you know what to do with it if need be. Wait for me there: if I do not come to you within say a couple of hours, ride to Urach, and tell the lieutenant of the guard what has happened."

Max hesitated.

"Let me go, Monsieur," he said. "Why should you run into the jaws of danger? They are desperate men, these brigands."

"Thank you, Max! but it is my task. Do my bidding, my good fellow; I have counted the cost."

He waited until the two men had crept away; then, crushing the feeling of eeriness that affected him in spite of himself, he bent his head and went forward into the tunnel. There was at once a scurry of animals past his legs; he felt the furry coats and tails of rabbits brush his hands; but he went slowly forward, touching the wall at his right to guide himself, and wondering how long the tunnel was, and whether there was enough air to carry him through to the end. The atmosphere was stuffy, with mingled smells so nauseating that Harry quickened his pace, eager to escape into purer air again. He had not thought to count his steps when he first entered the tunnel, but began to do so after taking about a dozen. At the fortieth of his counting the wall to his right came to an end. He

stopped, and, raising his hand above his head, found that it was not obstructed by the roof: he had evidently come to the end of the passage. He stood upright and listened; he could hear nothing.

Extending his arms, he found that he was in a narrow passage. Max had said that the tunnel led below the keep: there must, then, be a staircase somewhere. Harry went cautiously forward, stopping at every few steps to listen, and placing his feet with great care to avoid coming unawares upon some obstacle. At length his foot touched what felt like a stone step in front of him; another moment, and he was sure he had come to the expected staircase. It was pitch dark; he mounted carefully, and found that the stairs wound round and round. He had just counted fifteen steps, when his head came into violent contact with something above. The blow brought tears to his eyes, and he rubbed his head vigorously, as he had been wont to do after a knock in his childish days.

Feeling with his hands, he discovered that the staircase was roofed over with stone. It appeared to be a slab let down into sockets; yet no, on the left side there was a space of about a finger-width between the stone and the wall, on the right there was no such space. He paused; the stone was so broad that to lift it was clearly impossible; it had never been intended to be moved from below. He bent his head, hitched his left shoulder, and shoved hard against the stone. It did not yield by the smallest interval. For a moment he was puzzled. Then a possible explanation of the space between the stone and the wall at the left occurred to him. Perhaps the stone moved on a pivot? He went to the other side and set his right shoulder to it. At first he felt no yielding; but exerting all his strength he shoved again, the stone slowly gave, and with continued pressure moved over until it came to a vertical position, leaving space enough for his body to pass through. He ascended, keeping his hand on the stone to prevent it from falling back noisily into its place, clambered on to the floor above, let the stone carefully down, and stood up to collect himself before proceeding farther.

Now that he had come thus far, he felt a chill shrinking from what lay before him. He was alone in a strange place, within a few feet of desperate and unscrupulous ruffians, who would kill him with no more compunction than they would spit a hare. The unknown peril might well give the bravest pause. But a thought of his duty stilled his tremors. He had a duty of service to Marlborough, and a duty of friendship to Fanshawe; remembering them, he steeled his soul.

If his hazardous visit was to prove of any service he must discover the nature and position of the defences. He knew little about the construction of castles, but Max had said that the entrance led to the keep, which was the only part of the ruin still habitable. The inmates must therefore be somewhere near him, and it behoved him to move warily. He was apparently in a stone-flagged passage. He took off his boots and slung them round his neck; then went forward a

few steps, and came upon another passage at right angles, the farther end being faintly lit as from a distance. Stealing down this, he saw on his right hand the arched entrance to what was clearly the great hall of the keep, a long bare chamber illuminated by two or three smoky candles. Along the walls lay a number of men, sleeping on mattresses, cloaks, bundles of straw. At the farther end was a large table, at which two men were seated, bending forward with heads on their crossed arms, as though dozing. The table was covered with pots and tankards and metal plates. Taking this in at one swift glance, Harry turned to see what lay in the other direction.

A few feet from him was the bottom of another winding stair, which, he conjectured, led to the top of the keep. In the wall to his right there was a narrow opening giving on the courtyard, where he heard the movements of many horses. He was wondering whether, finding the doorway into the courtyard, he might venture to steal across it and explore the other side, when he heard voices from the hall behind him. Quick as thought he slipped back into the dark passage he had first entered, and waited there with beating heart. Peeping round the corner, he saw two men—doubtless the two who had been bending over the table—pass as if towards the staircase. He heard their spurred boots ringing on the stones, and knew by the sounds that they were ascending the stairs, to relieve guard, he guessed, at the top of the keep. There was evidently nothing to be discovered by remaining where he was; if he followed the men he might find a means of exploring the upper part of the fortress. He ran lightly along the passage, and began the ascent of the winding stair, finding himself soon in total darkness. But after about a dozen steps the staircase began to be faintly illuminated from above. Harry paused for a moment to listen. He heard nothing but the footsteps of the men who had preceded him, and was just going on when, through a loophole in the wall to his right, he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs and the shout of a man. He held his breath and stood still. The horse had evidently just come over the bridge and through the archway into the courtyard. There were now sounds of many voices below; the hoof-beats suddenly ceased, and shortly afterwards Harry heard hurried footsteps on the stone passage he had lately left, and voices growing in volume and echoing in the circular space of the winding stair. Several men were ascending. If he remained where he was he must inevitably be detected; his only course was to continue his ascent. But he had not taken three steps before he heard footsteps above him; the sentry who had been relieved was coming down. His heart was in his mouth. But the men below were the nearer; there was just a chance that if he went higher he might come upon some temporary hiding-place, and in his stocking feet he made no sound that would betray him.

Up then he went; the light was becoming stronger; and a turn of the stair-

case brought him opposite the doorway through which it shone. The door was gone. He hesitated but for a moment; below and above him the footsteps were perilously near; on the wall of the room he saw two long military cloaks hanging to the floor; they would conceal him. Peeping into the room, he noted with one rapid glance a smoky guttering candle and a figure recumbent on a mattress. He went in on tiptoe, and slipped behind the cloaks. The slight rustle he made disturbed the slumbering man.

"Qui va la?" came the sleepy question.

Harry stood still as a stone, and felt his heart thumping against his ribs.

"Qui va la?" repeated the voice in a louder tone, and by the increased light in the narrow crack between the cloak and the wall Harry guessed that the man had risen on his elbow and snuffed the candle. An answering voice came from the doorway.

"Sebald Schummel, mon capitaine."

"Ah! Bien! Donnez-moi de vos nouvelles."

Harry felt a cold shiver down his back, and an impulse to pull aside the cloak and confirm by sight the evidence of his hearing. The voice was the voice of Captain Aglionby. Here was a discovery indeed. But he had scarcely time even to be surprised, for he was listening intently to a conversation that absorbed all his thought.

"The prince has arrived in Urach," said the new-comer. "He leaves at five in the morning on his way to Stuttgart. He travels by coach."

"Ah! what is his escort?"

"Two aides-de-camp and thirty dragoons, mon capitaine."

"A bagatelle! The game is ours!"

"Yes, mon capitaine," said another voice; "he will not easily escape us."

"Parbleu! He shall not. You are sure of the hour, Sebald?"

"Yes, Monsieur; and I have left a trusty man to send us word if it is altered."

"He is not likely to change his route?"

"There is no reason for it, mon capitaine, and our men are watching every road."

"Good! Your news is welcome, Sebald. Go and eat; I will consult with Monsieur le Lieutenant here; you shall have your orders by and by."

Two or three men left the room, and the captain was alone with his lieutenant and Harry. The latter had already heard enough to set all his wits on the alert. The conversation that ensued, though carried on by both the speakers in continuance of a former discussion, gave Harry little trouble to understand. It was evident that the marauders under Captain Aglionby's lead were planning to intercept Prince Eugene on his way to meet Marlborough, and Harry listened with a flutter at the heart as all the details were arranged. The ambuscaders,

divided into three bands, were to station themselves at a point about two miles north of the wayside inn, where the road narrowed. Two of the bands were to conceal themselves in the woods on either side of the road, the third some distance behind them, towards the inn, to cut off any escape rearwards.

"Monsieur le Prince will sleep hard to-morrow," said Aglionby with a chuckle, when he had arranged the composition of the bands. "Now, as we must start in an hour or two, do you go down and rouse the men; I will follow in a minute and give them their orders. What sort of night is it?"

"Dull, with a threat of rain."

"Ah! we shall want our cloaks. Well, rouse the men; our bird will have his feathers clipped long ere this to-morrow."

Harry had gone cold at the mention of the cloaks, and gripped his pistol. But the lieutenant went from the room without disturbing him, and Aglionby shortly afterwards followed. Harry heaved a silent sigh of relief, waited until the sound of his footsteps had quite died away, then left his hiding-place and hastened to the staircase.

He was in no doubt what to do. To descend, now that the garrison was awakened, would be to court instant detection. The alternative was to go higher up the keep, and endeavour to find some way of escape over the ruined battlements. He mounted a few steps; the moon had risen, and her light, fitfully shining between masses of flying scud in the sky, lit up the staircase through the narrow openings at intervals in the wall. A few steps more, and on his right Harry saw a low doorway, this also without a door, leading directly on to the battlements. He peered up the outer wall of the keep, and saw that a sentinel at the top must almost certainly descry a figure moving along below. But escape he must; Prince Eugene must be warned in time, and Urach was several miles away. He longed for a friendly cloud to obscure the moon while he made a dash; and, pat to his wish, a dark mass of thunderous density cut off every gleam. Without another moment's delay Harry sprang on to the broken masonry, and, taking sure foothold in his stocking feet, ran towards a tower at the left-hand corner of the enceinte, hoping there to find an exit. The upper part of the tower was almost wholly in ruins, but the lower part was in good preservation, and to his disappointment Harry found that the only doorway led into the courtyard, in which he already heard the bustle of preparation. There was nothing for it but to pursue his way along the battlements to the tower at the right-hand rear corner. Entering this, he discovered a postern on the outer wall. It was twenty feet above the summit of a steep slope leading to the level ground a hundred yards away. Harry looked out, and saw that below the postern the masonry had crumbled and fallen, and was now covered with undergrowth and ivy clinging to the tower wall. To make his descent here he would have to risk a broken limb, perhaps a broken neck, but

there was no other means of exit that he could discover, and it was necessary that he should get quickly away with Max and the landlord before the marauding band rode out. Clinging to a strong tendril of ivy, he leapt on to a precarious corner of broken brickwork, lost his footing, checked his fall by clutching at a shrub, found a firmer foothold a little below, and so made the complete descent to the edge of the slope, where he stayed his progress by again grasping the ivy.

The air was warm and close, foreboding thunder, and by this time Harry was bathed in sweat. He rested for a few moments at the foot of the wall. The jagged masonry had cut holes in his stockings and made his feet bleed. Between him and level ground was a steep declivity of almost bare rock, so precipitous that to walk down it was impossible, to run dangerous. He pulled on his boots, lay on his back, and slid down feet foremost, with some bumps and bruises, but with more serious injury to his apparel. As he reached the level a loud rumble of thunder broke above him, and he felt the first large spots of a shower. He was far from the place where he had left his companions, and to reach it he would have to cross the direct road to the castle gate. To avoid discovery it seemed best to creep down into the dry overgrown fosse, and steal his way along until he gained the spot on the other side of the plank bridge where he had descended to find the tunnel. Even under the bridge the vegetation was rank and thick enough to conceal him, and he had no fear of his movements being heard, for the rain was now pattering fast. This, then, he did; in a few minutes he came to the place where he had parted with Max, and, scrambling up the side of the fosse, struck into the road and hastened towards the trees. He wandered for some time among them without finding the men of whom he was in search, and at length risked a low call.

"Is that you, Monsieur?" came the reply in Max's voice from near at hand.

"Ah! I was afraid I had lost you. Have you the landlord safe?"

"Yes, Monsieur. I had almost given you up."

"Lead out the horses. We must get to Urach as quickly as possible. And not by the road: do you know a way across the hills?"

"Yes, but it will be difficult to find in the dark, and hark to the rain!"

"Yes, it is raining hard, but you must try to find the way; I dare not risk the road. Lead on, Max; I will follow you with the landlord."

Max led his horse through the wood, the others close behind him. Crossing the road, he entered a narrow ravine, left this at a cleft on the right, and taking a tortuous course, rising continually, he came after some twenty minutes to the crest of a rocky hill.

"It is all right, Monsieur," he said. "The way is easier now and we can mount. The rain is over, too."

"Well for us! Now, Max, at your best pace, provided it is not neck-breaking."

The three set off, the landlord uttering many groans and lamentations as he jolted in his saddle. Harry did not address him; he had too much to think of. If, as Aglionby's messenger had said, there were spies in Urach and around, it was likely that the entrance of three riders into the town at so late an hour would be noticed, and might awaken suspicion. Harry's wish was not merely to foil the ambuscade, but to turn the tables on the ambuscaders. As he rode he decided what to do.

"Max," he said, riding alongside of the man where a difficult part of the track caused a slackening of the pace; "Max, tell me when we come within about half a mile of the town; we will halt there."

"We leave the hills and strike the road at that distance, Monsieur."

"Very well; we will stop before we reach the road."

It was two o'clock in the morning when the three riders came to a halt within a little dell concealed from the road by an intervening hillock.

"Remain here with the landlord and my horse, Max," said Harry. "I am going on foot to the town."

At the gate-house he gave the password and was at once admitted. He went to the lodging of the lieutenant of the guard, woke him, and told him in a few words what he had discovered.

"Mon Dieu!" cried the lieutenant, "you are just in time. The prince decided last night to hasten his going; he sets off at four. He will have to remain here, or go back, for his escort are no match for these brigands, even with our burgher guard, who in any case are not permitted to leave the town. The prince must either wait here until he can get a force from Prince Louis of Baden, or try another road."

"The roads are watched. But I think the prince had better carry out his original intention and leave here at five."

"But he will certainly be captured."

"Not certainly. I should like to see him. I left Max and that rascal of a landlord half a mile out. The town is quiet; do you think it will be safe to send for them?"

"Oh yes! I will do that. You will find the prince at the Rathhaus."

"Will you lend me a change of things while mine are drying?"

"Of course! The sleeves of my coat will be short for you, I fear, but you will not need it long."

To change was but the work of a few minutes; then Harry hastened to the Rathhaus. The guard made some demur to admitting him at such an hour, but yielded when he assured them that his message was urgent, and he was conducted to an aide-de-camp, who on hearing his story in outline did not scruple to awaken the prince. Harry was not prepared for the reception his news met with. The prince broke into a roar of laughter.

”A right tit-for-tat for the Duke de Vendôme,” he said. ”Two can play at coney-catching! You are surprised at my levity, young sir; but the truth is, I tried to play the same game on the duke two years ago: attempted to seize him in his house at Rivalto on the banks of the Lake of Mantua. I sent fifty men in boats to capture him; but they killed the sentinel instead of carrying him off, as I intended; the noise drew the guard to the spot, and my men had to re-embark to save their skins. Well, in war let him trick the other who can: I am obliged to you for your warning. Un homme averti en vaut deux: we’ll be even with the tricksters. What shall we do, lieutenant?”

”It would seem that we must take another road, Monsieur le Prince,” said the aide-de-camp.

”Ma foi, non; we’ll cut our way through them. I never turned back on my enemy yet.”

”They are too many, your highness. Your thirty men could not cut their way through two hundred.”

”Then we must go another way.”

”They have spies on the roads, Monsieur,” said Harry. ”Your highness would have to make a wide detour, and that would give the brigands plenty of time to sweep round and intercept you. If I might suggest a plan that occurred to me——”

”Go on.”

”It is that your highness’s coach should set off at the time arranged, attended by a portion of your escort——”

”Empty?”

”Not so, Monsieur. A man might take your highness’s place. The brigands would imagine their scheme was prospering; the scouts would be drawn off; and after an interval your highness with the remainder of the escort could safely take the western road and be well on the way to Stuttgart before the trick was discovered.”

”Aha! And who is to personate me? Not yourself? You have too great an advantage of me in inches.”

”My ambition is less, your highness. I have a man of about your height; if you would deign to let him wear your wig, hat, and cloak for a few hours, I think he would make a personable copy of your highness.”

The prince laughed.

”Well, you have a ready wit, my lad. But it would be running into the jaws of the wolves; I should lose half my escort and my coach, and you and your man your lives. They would not spare you when they learnt how you had tricked them.”

”It would be a cheap purchase of your highness’s safety. Besides, I think we might manage to escape the wolves, as your highness is pleased to call them.”

”Indeed! Come, you are a young strategist; what have you in your mind?”

”To get into the castle, Monsieur le Prince, while the greater part of the brigands are absent, and to hold it until a force can be sent from Stuttgart to our assistance.”

”A bold scheme, by my faith! What reason have you to suppose you could surprise the castle? It will not be left unguarded.”

Then Harry gave a rapid narrative of what had happened since his adventure at the inn. Prince Eugene listened with close attention, his eyes lighting up with excitement and pleasure as he heard the details of the plan Harry had thought out as he rode from the castle.

”Parbleu!” he exclaimed at the end, ”a bold scheme indeed, one after my own heart; I should like of all things to be with you in it. And you think my cousin Marlborough’s two messengers are now in the castle?”

”I have no doubt of it, your highness; and as one of them is an old friend of my own, I have a strong personal reason for making the attempt.”

”Well, I will not stay you. Rather I will say, Good luck to you! You deserve to succeed. I make no doubt that I shall be able to send you from Stuttgart a squadron or two of Prince Louis of Baden’s horse, and if you and they can annihilate this pestilent band of outlaws you will do a service to the Emperor—a service that I shall take care is not forgotten. Time is pressing; my valet shall give you the suit I wore yesterday; I shall not need to trouble your man to lend me his in exchange, as I have another with me—a plain costume that will tell no tales. Ma foi! I could wish that for the next twelve hours he were Eugene of Savoy and I—what is his name?”

”Max Berens, Monsieur.”

”Write his name, Lieutenant; if he were a courtier he would doubtless be content with the bare honour of filling my clothes for the nonce, but being a sensible man he will prefer a more tangible recompense. I shall see to it. Well, you have woke me from sleep, Monsieur; now I will ask you to leave me while I dress. And as we must be secret about this disguise, lest there be spies in the town, I shall not see you again until I meet you, as I hope to do, in my lord Marlborough’s camp. Send your man here; I will take care that he is treated with the deference becoming his rank. Ha! ha! it is an excellent joke.”

Harry went away delighted with the readiness with which the prince had entered into the spirit of his scheme. It was full of danger; he was under no illusion as to that; but this lent an additional zest to the adventure; he had thought out his plan carefully, and reckoned on finding an invaluable coadjutor in the landlord.

At five o’clock, in the cool of a fine morning, the prince’s gilded coach drew up at the door of the Rathhaus, with fifteen dragoons in full riding trim. A carpet

was spread from the entrance across the path to the coach, and one of the town officials stood in waiting to show the great man to his seat. By and by a figure in cocked hat, full wig, laced coat, and corslet came out with a fair counterfeit of Eugene's active gait; he gave a somewhat stiff acknowledgment of the salutes of the soldiers and the respectful obeisance of the local magnates and the crowd of interested townspeople, and stepped quickly into the coach. Harry followed him. The door was shut, the word given to the two postilions, and amid the cheers of all Urach the vehicle rattled over the stones, out at the gate, into the open highway. No one but the principals in the little drama, and the fifteen picked men of the escort, knew that the man to whom they had just shown such deference was not Eugene of Savoy, a prince of a sovereign house, but Max Berens, the simple son of a shoemaker.

Harry had been at the pains to drill his companions in the part they were to play. He had learnt from Max that there were two roads leading from the main highway to the castle. Of these the one nearest to Urach was the better; it branched off about a mile on the town side of the inn. The other was a more circuitous and difficult track across the hills, leaving the highroad at a point rather more distant from the inn on the farther side, and only a few yards from the spot chosen for the ambuscade. Between the two cross-roads the highway took a somewhat irregular course, and while it was visible from point to point, only a few yards of the intervening portion could be seen from either of the by-roads, owing to its windings and the undulations of the ground. When the coach, therefore, should arrive at the first road it would be descried by the ambuscaders, but would then disappear from their view, not becoming visible again until a short distance before it reached them. On this fact Harry reckoned for the successful accomplishment of the first part of his scheme.

A mile out of Urach, Harry found the landlord awaiting him in charge of one of the town guard. He was taken into the coach, which then drove rapidly on. On arriving at the cross-road, instead of going straight forward towards the inn and the ambush, it swung round to the right, and at Harry's orders the postilions whipped up the horses and drove at a headlong pace towards the castle. The actual turning could not be seen from the place of the ambuscade, and Harry confidently expected that the brigands, having caught sight of the coach the moment before it left the road, would await its coming without suspicion. Its non-appearance after a time would surprise them; they might suppose it had stopped at the inn to bait the horses; they would allow for this, and a considerable time would elapse before they discovered the truth. This interval would, he hoped, give him so long a start that he would have ample time to play his trick upon the garrison.

About half a mile from the castle, Harry ordered the postilions and escort

to halt at a spot where they were hidden from the garrison by a stretch of rising ground. He then dismounted four of the dragoons, bade them get into the coach, and made the landlord change places with the postilion on one of the sear horses. In his hand he placed an empty pistol.

"When we drive on," he said, "you will point that at the back of the postilion in front of you, and look as grim as you please. When we come within earshot of the sentry at the bridge—I will give the word—you will shout to him to let us through quickly: 'Here we are!' you will cry. I have let down the window, you observe; Berens will be a few feet behind you with a loaded pistol: you understand?"

Then turning to the eleven dragoons who were still on horseback, he said:

"Now, men, you know your part. Wait till we are over the bridge, then gallop up at full speed with sabres drawn and pistols cocked, ready for anything."

"What about the four horses, Herr Capitan?" asked one of the troopers.

"We must leave them. Tie their heads together and string them to that tree yonder: we may get them by and by; if not, the coach horses will serve. Now; all ready! Drive on, landlord."

The two postilions—the foremost a stalwart dragoon—whipped up the horses, which dashed forward at a furious gallop towards the castle. It was a tight squeeze in the coach—Harry, Max, and the four big troopers jammed together in a narrow space.

"Level your pistol, landlord!" cried Harry.

The pale perspiring landlord held his harmless weapon in his left hand, covered by the loaded pistol of Max in the coach. On they drove, ploughing up the soil heavy with last night's rain, the horses straining at the traces. They were within thirty yards of the bridge.

"Shout, landlord!" said Harry in a loud whisper through the open window.

"Here we are! here we are!" cried the man.

"Louder!"

"Here we are!" He almost shrieked the words.

"The others are behind!" prompted Harry.

"The others are behind!" cried the landlord.

The sentry at the farther end of the bridge gave an answering shout; the boards that served for a gate were removed; the coach clattered and rumbled over the rocking creaking planks, and the postilions pulled up their reeking horses in

the courtyard of the castle.

CHAPTER XXI
Across the Fosse

Shoulder to Shoulder—Wrecking the Bridge—Well Found—The Dungeons of Rauhstein—The Castle Cook—The Enemy's Plan—Unwilling Help—A Parley—The Bridge Builders—At Short Range—Supper—Counsel—Fireworks—Long Odds—A Rush—From a Sling—A Covered Way—Firing the Train—Shambles

The shouting and the clatter of the coach had drawn the garrison into the courtyard. From these twenty men, the remnant of the brigand band, a great cheer went up, and they pressed forward eagerly to see the princely captive. Two or three of them were unarmed, but the rest, with the habit of seasoned warriors, had their swords in their belts and carbines slung at their shoulders.

"Well done, Otto!" cried one, slapping the landlord on the back.

But at that moment both doors of the coach were flung open, and out of each sprang a man with a pistol in the left hand and a sword in the right. These were followed by others, and before the astonished garrison realized the situation, six fully armed men were among them, and one, a tall, dark, lissom young fellow, all fire and energy, was calling on them to surrender. A few, cowed by the pistols pointed within a foot of their heads, and taken utterly aback by this astounding change of scene, flung down their carbines from sheer inability to think; but the more nimble-witted, and those on the outskirts of the little group, scurried away, under cover of their comrades, out of range, unslinging their carbines and drawing their swords as they ran.

Meanwhile the foremost postilion, in obedience to orders previously given by Harry, whipped up his horses and drove them at a gallop round the courtyard, narrowly escaping a bullet from the carbine of one of the garrison, until he came opposite the gateway, where he drew up so as to present the side of the coach to the opening, and cut the traces. The garrison, having by this time perceived by how small a body they were confronted, came forward in a compact mass against the little band. Carbines cracked, pistols flashed, steel rang on steel, and with shouts and oaths the two bands engaged. Harry was not in this mellay,

for in the confusion he had slipped away and rushed through the archway, just in time to see the sentry striving with might and main to hurl the planks of the bridge into the fosse. He had caught sight of eleven dragoons in Austrian uniform galloping up from the valley half a mile away. The man turned as he heard Harry's approach, snatched up his sword, which he had dropped for his work with the planks, and threw himself into his guard in the nick of time to meet the attack. Harry felt that it was not a moment for fine sword-play; the man was a burly fellow, clumsy, and to appearance dull of wits. Running a risk which would be fatal if his opponent were a keen swordsman, Harry gave him an opening. It was instantly accepted, but the thrust was parried with lightning rapidity, and before the man could recover himself Harry's sword had ploughed a deep furrow in his forearm, and with a yell of pain he let his own weapon fall to the ground. Stepping back at the same moment with the instinct of self-preservation, he tumbled headlong into the fosse.

Immediately Harry wheeled round and dashed back to the support of his men, now engaged in a desperate and unequal battle. Their backs to the coach, they were facing dauntlessly thrice their number of infuriated brigands, who had discarded their firearms and came to the attack with swords flashing in ever-narrowing circles. One of the dragoons had already fallen; but his comrades were all tough soldiers tried on many a battle-field, recking nothing of the odds, every man with full confidence in himself and his fellows. They were ranged in a quarter circle against the coach, with just enough space between them to allow free play with their weapons. Twice already had they beaten back the enemy; a third and more determined onslaught had somewhat broken their formation, and two men had been wounded and forced back, exposing the flank of the others. Harry sprang through the coach just in time to close the gap. He hurled himself into the fray with a shout; the enemy, taking him for the advance-guard of reinforcements, fell back for a moment; and before they could recover and return to the charge there was a thunderous clatter on the bridge, the eleven troopers flung themselves from their steeds, and scrambling man by man through the coach gave threefold strength to the hard-pressed line.

"Charge!" shouted Harry in his clear, ringing voice.

The men surged forward with a roar of exultation, scattering the brigands to the limits of the courtyard. Two or three bolted like rabbits into the keep; the rest cried for quarter and flung down their arms; the din of battle suddenly ceased, and some seventeen panic-stricken prisoners were the prize of the victors.

"Max, go into the keep, up the stairs to the top, and tell me what you see."

From the parapet of the keep Max shouted that he saw a large troop of horse not a mile away, galloping amain towards the castle.

"Men, with me!" cried Harry.

Twelve dragoons sprang through the coach after him, and with haste helped him to draw the planks of the bridge within the archway. They had completed their task save for the last plank when the foremost files of the enemy galloped up, checking their horses at the very brink when they saw the unbridged gap before them; no horse could cross on a two-foot plank. Harry withdrew his men just in time to escape the bullets fired at them by the baulked and enraged brigands. At the last moment he himself stooped, lifted the end of the plank, and hurled it into the fosse. A slug whizzed past his head; he dashed back under the archway, through the coach, breathless but safe.

As he stepped through the coach into the courtyard he heard a groan. His wounded men had been carried into the keep; at the moment no trooper was near. Bending down, he looked beneath the coach, and saw the landlord lying flat on his face, his head buried in his arms, groaning dismally.

"Are you hit, landlord?" asked Harry.

"Lord have mercy on my soul!" groaned the man.

"Never mind your soul; are your limbs sound? Come out, and let me look at you."

A palpitating mass crawled from beneath the vehicle. Dirty, chap-fallen, and dishevelled, but unhurt, the landlord stood in trembling and pitiful cowardice.

"Where are you hurt? Come, I've no time to waste. Why," he added, as he turned the man round and examined him, "you haven't a scratch. You're a pretty consort of ruffians! Get away into the keep and make yourself useful, or——"

The man scrambled away in limp despair, and Harry smiled grimly as he went about his pressing task.

He knew that he was safe for a time. The two hundred men outside were completely cut off from their quarters. "If they want their castle they must come and take it," thought Harry. They could only enter by one of three ways: the main entrance, if they repaired the bridge—but that could be prevented by marksmen within; the tunnel—but that could be blocked up; the tower by which he himself had escaped—but one or two men there could easily prohibit access by the slope and postern. Harry set a sentinel at each point, and then made a rapid survey of the position.

He found that the castle contained, besides a huge quantity of plunder, a plentiful stock of provisions, arms, and ammunition. There were indeed many bags of powder ranged carelessly around the walls of the courtyard, and these Harry had removed to a more secure place in one of the towers, and covered with sacking. He then went up on the battlements to see what the enemy were about. They had withdrawn to a knoll at some distance and dismounted, and an exciting discussion appeared to be going on among their leaders. Harry called to Max to

remain on the look-out and report any fresh movement among them; then he prepared to visit the dungeons.

The prisoners had been secured in the hall of the keep.

"Which of you acts as warder?" asked Harry, entering the hall.

"Zooks! if it an't young Mr. Rochester!" said an amazed voice in English. "I be the warder, Mr. Rochester."

"You, John Simmons! Now, answer me quickly: are there any prisoners below?"

"There be two, sir, certainly, and I was against it—that's the truth, sir; I was against it, but the capt'n he would cool their courage, he said, and what could I do, sir?—though it did cut me to the heart to serve Mr. Fanshawe so——"

"Hold your tongue, knave! Take me to the place at once."

"I was against it," muttered the man, as he led the way out of the hall, through the stone passage, into a room near the spot at which Harry had ascended from the tunnel. Here he lifted a slab in the floor, and let down a rope ladder, coiled beneath it, into a pit of blackness.

"They are there?" exclaimed Harry in horror, as he peered down, and found himself unable to discern anything.

"I was against it," murmured Simmons again.

"The inhuman fiends!" cried Harry. "Fanshawe, are you there?" he called into the mouth of the dungeon, his voice echoing strangely from the hollow.

"Yes," came the faint answer. "Who are you?"

"'Tis Harry Rochester, old fellow. We'll have you out in a trice,—and Lieutenant Buckley, too; is he with you?"

"Ay. Is the ladder down?"

"Yes. Come along; we're all friends here."

Soon Fanshawe's fair head appeared above the hole. Harry caught his arm and helped him to step on to the floor.

"God bless you, Harry!" he said feebly. His cheeks were drawn and pale; his eyes sunken and haggard; his hair was dank and disordered; and he tottered and would have fallen but for Harry's sustaining arm. After him came a young officer whom Harry did not know. He, too, showed signs of suffering, but his incarceration was shorter by several days than Fanshawe's, and he was not so much overcome by the sudden return to light and liberty.

"Poor old fellow!" said Harry, linking his arm in Fanshawe's. "Come and let me make you comfortable. I'll tell you all about things by and by, and hear what you have to tell. We must get you right first. Aglionby shall pay for this!"

The two luckless prisoners were taken to the hall and given food.

"I've fed 'em twice a day reg'lar," said Simmons. "They ha'n't wanted for nothing, and I was against keeping 'em shut in that there damp and foul hole."

”Silence, fellow! Go and bury the men killed in the fight. Then come to me.”

Having made Fanshawe and Buckley as comfortable as possible, Harry selected one of his own men to act as store-keeper, and then, as a sudden idea struck him, called for the landlord. The man could not at first be found, but after some search was discovered and hauled with many gibes into Harry’s presence.

”Cease whimpering and listen to me,” said Harry. ”You must do something to earn your food. You shall be cook. Doubtless you know the arrangements of this place; go and prepare a good meal for the men, and do your best; it will be to your interest.”

Ascending then to the top of the keep, he sent Max down to get some breakfast, and looked around. The enemy were not in sight. They had evidently withdrawn into the copse about half a mile distant; perhaps under cover of it they had drawn off altogether. But knowing their leader, and imagining the fury with which he must have seen the frustration of his carefully-laid plans, Harry could not believe that he would tamely accept the check as final. Aglionby, whatever his faults, did not lack courage. He was not likely to throw up the game at the loss of the first trick. He would probably assume that it was Prince Eugene himself who had stolen a march upon him; in that case he would suppose that he had the prince caged in the castle; and whatever advantage he had expected to derive from the capture of the prince would induce him to strain every nerve to prevent him from escaping. His aim, Harry supposed, had been to hand Prince Eugene over to the Elector of Bavaria, and reap much credit as well as a more tangible recompense. In order to entrap the prince he had sent on Fanshawe’s letter by another hand. If he returned to the Elector’s army without his prize, when the odds had seemed all in his favour, he would become the laughing-stock of the camp. Harry therefore felt certain that he would attempt to retake the castle at whatever cost.

If he should succeed, Harry knew that he himself need expect no mercy. Aglionby had a long account against him; time after time his plans had been foiled; the sole item on the credit side, the saving of his life at Breda, was likely, in a man of his disposition, only to deepen his rancour.

He would, of course, sooner or later find out his mistake in regard to Prince Eugene; and when the discovery was made he would expect the prince to send a force at the first opportunity to relieve the men, whoever they were, who had captured the castle, or at any rate to avenge their fate. In either case Aglionby would lose no time, but would hasten by all the means in his power any attack he might meditate. So far as Harry could judge, he had nearly three hundred men under his command; it would not be long before he learnt, if indeed he did not already know, that the present holders of the castle did not number more

than a score. In the circumstances he would almost certainly attempt to take the place by assault, and the obvious point of attack was the gateway. The bridge was broken down; the fosse was too deep to be filled up; the attackers would therefore have to construct another bridge, and the fosse being little more than twenty feet wide, they could easily rig up a portable platform strong enough to carry them to the assault. There was plenty of timber in the neighbourhood; with the force at his disposal Aglionby might make a serviceable bridge in a few hours.

Meanwhile, what was Harry to do with the prisoners? The question gave him some trouble. He had plenty of provisions; there would be no difficulty in feeding them; but if he kept them in the castle they would require a guard of at least one man day and night, so that of his own little band two men would practically be lost for effective defence. If, on the other hand, he let them loose, he would add eighteen men, fourteen of whom were unhurt, to the enemy's strength. Deciding that on the whole it would be best to keep them, he went down to settle their fate without loss of time.

He gave them one by one the option of making himself useful in the defence of the castle, or of being lowered into the dungeon whence Fanshawe and Buckley had just been released. With one consent the men elected to avoid the dungeon. Harry at once set some of them to collect stones from the more ruinous parts of the castle, and to pile them up across the gateway, leaving loopholes for musketry fire. Others he ordered to take a supply of heavy stones to the summit of the keep, and to stack them there out of sight from the distant copse. Three armed men accompanied each squad to prevent treachery. In pursuance of the plan of defence that was forming in his mind, Harry went himself to the most dilapidated of the three towers, and selecting two or three specially large blocks of stone, weighing at a guess about a hundred-weight each, he had them loosened from the debris and carried up the winding stair of the keep. In the courtyard he saw a number of stout poles, for which a use at once suggested itself. As they would not go up the winding stair, he got one of the men to splice several lengths of rope, and the long rope thus formed was let down from the top of the keep and knotted to one end of the poles, which were then drawn up the tower on the side facing the courtyard.

When these tasks had been completed, the prisoners were placed in the ground-floor room of one of the towers, and a man was set over them, with orders to shoot any who should attempt to move from the place. Harry divided his garrison into watches as on board ship, each watch to be on duty for four hours. Every man had his post, and, entering into their young leader's spirit, the dragoons accepted readily the duties laid upon them, and showed themselves full of a light-hearted confidence that augured well for their success. One and all they

were hugely delighted with the trick, and discussed it among themselves with much merriment, exasperating Max, however, by the mock deference they still paid to him as Prince Eugene.

As soon as he had a spare moment, Harry got from Fanshawe and Buckley an account of their experiences. As he had guessed, Fanshawe had been captured at dead of night in the inn, his captors coming through the trap-door. Buckley had been misdirected by the landlord, and, losing his way, had fallen into an ambush. Both had been kept in the dungeon day and night, and fed twice a day. In his turn Harry related the chain of adventures which had ended so happily for them, and when he told them something of his plans for the future they both declared themselves well enough to assist him. This, however, he would not allow for the present, promising to avail himself of their help as soon as they had had time to recover from the effects of their confinement.

Just before noon, the man on the look-out at the gateway announced that one of the enemy was approaching with a flag of truce. Harry climbed up to the battlements to the left of the keep, and as soon as the man was within earshot demanded his business. Speaking in French, the messenger said that he had come at his captain's order to say that if Prince Eugene surrendered, he would be granted honourable treatment, and conducted to the camp of his highness the Elector of Bavaria, his men being allowed to go free. If these terms were rejected, the castle would be stormed and every member of the garrison would be put to the sword. The decision must be made in half an hour. Harry smiled.

"You may take our answer now," he said. "Tell your captain that soldiers of the confederate army do not yield to brigands and cut-throats."

The messenger rode back to the copse, and for some hours there was no further sign of the enemy, except for a few men who were noticed moving about a stretch of marshy ground about a mile from the castle. Harry wondered what their object could be, and calling Max to him, asked what there was on the marsh that they were likely to find useful.

"There is nothing there, Monsieur, but mud and reeds."

"Reeds! Of course. They are cutting reeds to bind together lengths of timber for a bridge. I heard the sound of chopping from the copse this morning. Well, Max, I think we are prepared for them."

Soon after three o'clock a body of about two hundred men was seen approaching on foot in open order. When within musket-shot they took what cover the irregularities of the ground and the scattered shrubs afforded, and opened fire on every embrasure. Among them Harry had no difficulty in recognizing the burly figure of Aglionby. Word was passed round among the defenders to make no reply. The enemy were at present too far off to do much damage, or for the fire of the garrison to be effective. A few minutes later Harry, who had

posted himself on the keep, so that while invisible himself he could see everything, observed a small body of men emerge from the copse, bearing a number of narrow palisades, consisting, as he discovered on their nearer approach, of thin logs roughly bound together. When they had come within about two hundred yards of the castle, the main body of the enemy directed a more continuous fire upon the battlements and loopholes, many advancing close up to the edge of the fosse. Still there was no reply from the defenders. The bridge-bearers came up at a slow run.

Harry had disposed of his little force as follows. Three men were stationed on the top of the keep, four at loopholes on the stairways half-way up each side, five behind the barricade of stones in the gateway, and one to carry orders from his own position on the keep to the men below. As soon as he saw the bridge-bearers approaching he instructed his dragoons to fire when he gave the word, but only at the men carrying the palisades. The extemporized bridge was in four sections, each about two feet across, and carried by six men.

The twenty-four came on, halted at the brink of the gully, and prepared to raise their palisades. Then Harry gave the word. The troopers below had been instructed to fire at the left-hand sections, those above at the right-hand sections. At the word they sprang up, thrust their muzzles through the embrasures and loopholes, and, undeterred by the patter of the enemy's bullets around them, took deliberate aim. The effect was all that Harry had hoped. The range was short; the men were old campaigners of iron nerve, and almost every shot told. Two or three men in each section of the bridge-bearers fell; the rest, dismayed by the fate of their comrades, loosened their hold on the palisades, which dropped back on to the farther side of the fosse. There was a rush among the bolder spirits to supply their places, and Aglionby himself, his red face purple with fury and excitement, threw himself at the head of his men, who strove with desperate haste to raise the palisades once more. But there was no cessation of the fire from the walls. Harry had taken the precaution of collecting from the stock of arms four muskets for each man, so that they needed to waste no time in reloading. No sooner had the palisades begun to rise again than a second fusillade burst forth from the castle; again the unwieldy poles fell clattering to the ground; again the men who had survived rushed back out of range. Aglionby and one or two others at first refused to budge, and took shelter behind the timber; but when they found themselves deserted they at length scoured away after the rest, and the whole force drew off.

"Fire no more," cried Harry. "Let them look to their wounded."

Finding that the firing from the castle had ceased, a party of the enemy ventured to the edge of the fosse and removed the hapless men there, some stark dead, others wounded more or less severely. Half a dozen men remained on

watch at points surrounding the castle; the rest withdrew to the copse; and the members of the garrison, not one of whom was hurt, rejoiced in the repulse of this first assault, and went in relays to eat the meal which Otto the landlord had prepared for them.

No further movement of the enemy was observable. Max suggested that they had encamped in a large open glade within the wood. As night drew on, a slight glow above the tree-tops and thin columns of smoke proclaimed that camp fires had been lighted. Evidently, then, the enemy had not relinquished their hope of recapturing the castle. They were, of course, aware that its present garrison could not escape, for the plank bridge could not be collected and replaced unobserved; without it the inmates could only leave on foot, and they would thus easily be overtaken by the horsemen.

Harry sat down with Fanshawe and Buckley to eat his supper and discuss the situation. He was most apprehensive of a night-attack.

"They would have far better chances than by day," he said, "for their numbers would tell against us, and we should have to divide our force so as to guard points that might be threatened at any moment."

"But the battlements are inaccessible," said Fanshawe.

"The tower by which I escaped, you remember, is not. 'Tis difficult of approach, indeed, but not impossible to resolute men. I should have to leave at least one man to guard the postern. Of course, I shall block up the underground entrance by the tunnel; a few stones piled on the trap will prevent it from being lifted from below. But in the darkness 'twill not be so easy to hinder the enemy from throwing a bridge across the fosse: that is most to be feared."

"Defend it with a mine," suggested Buckley.

"A good thought!"

"And easy to do. The soil at the edge of the fosse will be soft: dig a hole and bury half a bag of powder in it. Pack it tightly with earth and stones; you can lead a train of powder through the barricade into the courtyard."

"Take care it is out of the reach of stray sparks from the men's matches," said Fanshawe, "or there'll be an explosion too soon and all spoilt."

"You're good counsellors, both of you. We'll make something of this defence among us."

Harry waited until dusk before carrying out Buckley's suggestion, in order that his movements might not be seen by the enemy. Having removed several stones from the barricade, he set two men to dig a hole near the gateway, filled it with a large charge of powder, and rammed down the earth upon it, taking care that several large stones were placed near the surface. Then the barricade was restored, and the garrison rearranged, only two men being now left in the keep, the rest being ordered to take up their position in the courtyard.

These arrangements had only just been completed, and those of the dragoons who were not on watch had just turned in, when a body of men was heard approaching. The garrison was instantly called to arms, and Harry went up to a coign of safety in the battlements to await events. It was almost pitch-dark: he dimly saw black masses moving about on the farther side of the fosse; but he had resolved not to waste powder and shot by opening fire with uncertain aim, and the enemy, finding their progress unmolested, came, as his ears told him, right up to the fosse. He wished he had some means of throwing a light on the scene, but knew of nothing in the castle sufficiently inflammable for the purpose.

After a time the noise outside, strikingly in contrast with the absolute silence in the castle itself, increased; the sound was like that of men slowly moving forward with heavy loads. Harry heard the clank of stone against stone, low whispers from across the fosse, less guarded commands from a short distance farther back, where work of some kind was evidently in progress. As Harry listened, his uncertainty as to what was going on at length became intolerable, and racking his brains to devise some means of making a light he at last hit upon an idea. The cushions of the coach were probably stuffed with hay; that would burn, and if smeared with grease might give a blaze strong enough to illumine the scene for a few moments. He immediately had the cushions ripped up, and found that their stuffing was as he had guessed. There was a good stock of candles in the store-room; some of these were melted down and the grease poured into the long bundle of hay made from the cushions. The mass was carried to the top of the keep, weighted with a stone, kindled, and thrown down. It fell steadily, the flame increasing as it gained impetus, casting a yellow glare upon the walls of the castle and its surroundings. Its appearance caused a sensation among the enemy: as it reached the ground several men rushed forward and stamped it out; but it had already fulfilled its purpose, and Harry had seen all that he wished to see.

At the brink of the fosse the enemy had constructed a low parapet: a large supply of stones was stacked about thirty yards to the rear, and men were still adding to the store from the scattered debris in the fosse and at the base of the ruined walls. The intention was clear: protected by the parapet, the enemy hoped to throw their bridge across the fosse in safety. With this knowledge Harry's fear of a night-attack was removed, for if the enemy intended to assault in the darkness the parapet would be unnecessary. They had apparently not cared to risk such an enterprise. The bridge would be none too wide even in daylight for the passage of a body of men rushing pell-mell over it. The attack, then, was probably to be deferred until dawn. Having completed their task the enemy by and by drew off, and in anticipation of desperate work on the morrow Harry went to snatch a brief sleep, leaving Max as responsible head of the watch.

In the cool glimmering dawn of that June morning Harry was awakened by Max with the news that the brigands were moving from the copse. He hastened at once to his post, and saw that the parapet extended for some twenty yards along the farther side of the fosse, with a gap in the centre protected by a traverse. The enemy came forward rapidly, took up the palisades they had vainly endeavoured to throw across the fosse on the previous day, and under cover of the parapet began to rear them. As Harry had feared, musketry fire from the castle was almost wholly ineffectual: only the men on the top of the keep got an occasional chance as the besiegers incautiously moved away from their breastwork, thus exposing the upper part of their bodies. The long palisades were slowly reared on end, and lowered as slowly across the fosse, till the end nearer to Harry rested on the base of the barricade beneath the archway. When the last section was in its place, the fosse was spanned by a bridge wide enough to allow four men to cross it abreast.

Harry felt a tightening at the heart as he realized the magnitude of the task he had set himself. His force, reduced by his losses to eighteen, including himself and the two English officers, who were scarcely effectives, was outnumbered by nearly eighteen to one. And the enemy were no feather-bed warriors. Looking at their motley array, he recognized that he had to contend with some of the fiercest, most desperate, least scrupulous men of war that Europe could produce. Their nationalities were as varied as their costumes. His inexperienced eye could not distinguish their types: but he saw small men and big men, men fair, men dark, old and young; some were born dandies, as their attempts at decoration in adverse circumstances showed; others born tatterdemalions, who even in affluence would have held the decencies of costume in derision. About a hundred seemed to be regular soldiers of the Elector of Bavaria's army. Only one bond held them together: a common love of lawlessness and rapine. He felt a new respect for Aglionby; only a man of some moral force, however perverted, could have imposed his leadership on such a heterogeneous crew.

At the moment Aglionby was in consultation with a few others at some distance, and out of range of the clumsy firearms of those days. Among the little group Harry singled out two men as of more consequence than the rest: a tall fellow matching the captain in height and bulk, wearing a red sash—the same man he had seen approaching the inn,—and a small active man in whose cap a peacock's feather was jauntily stuck. They were evidently discussing with great animation their plan of attack.

As nearly as Harry could judge, about a hundred men were crouching behind the parapet. A body nearly two hundred strong was held in reserve near the leaders. Against these Harry had five men in the gateway, three at the summit of the keep, three half-way up, and Max as lieutenant and aide-de-camp.

Suddenly the group of leaders parted, a bugle rang out, and simultaneously with a fierce discharge of musketry from the parapet two men dashed forward from each end of the gap on to the bridge. At a second's interval these were followed by another four, while several men rushed from the reserve towards the far end of the parapet to fill their places. Three fell under the first volley from the defenders, but the rest sprang forward unhurt, and gaining the other side began to clamber up the barricade, to tear down the stones, or, thrusting their muskets through the loopholes, to discharge them hap-hazard at the garrison within. But three of the defenders of the gate had held their fire, and, boldly mounting a low platform of stones just inside the barricade, they discharged their pieces point-blank into the mass of men now crowding with shouts across the bridge. The brigands, Harry noticed, were headed by the big red-sashed Croatian he had seen in consultation with Aglionby. They recoiled but for a second, then surged forward again, and, yelling with fury, hurled themselves against the breastwork. Eugene's troopers, led by Max, held their ground in silence, save for a muttered exclamation when one of their adversaries fell reeling into the fosse.

It was not long before the weight of numbers began to tell; portions of the barricade had been pulled down; the gallant defenders were hard beset. Calling to the two men in the keep, Harry rushed down and flung himself into the fray, shouting to Max to go to the top of the keep and carry out orders he had previously received. Max hurried away, and Harry lost count of time as he engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand fight across the fast crumbling barricade. Standing upon their platform the defenders still had the advantage of position, and Harry and his two men being fresh, the enemy for some few minutes gained but little. Then, as the attackers were once more beginning to make headway, there was a terrible crash on the bridge. The fighting ceased as by magic; all was still. A huge mass of stone, swung outwards from the top of the keep, had broken with terrific force through the light palisades, leaving only one section intact, and carrying with it into the fosse nearly a dozen men. The survivors on the castle side, seeing themselves almost cut off, were seized with panic and made a simultaneous rush for safety, the big Croatian pushing his weaker and wounded comrades into the fosse in his reckless haste to regain the opposite bank.

Harry gave a gasp of thankfulness and relief,—and turned to see Fanshawe and Buckley, who, weak as they were, had come up unknown to him towards the close of the fight to bear a hand.

"Thank you, old fellow!" he said to Fanshawe, "we have scored one."

But he turned again, and, leaning on the barricade, anxiously scanned the field. The leaders of the enemy were once more in earnest consultation. They must have lost at least twenty men in the short sharp struggle; but the defeat seemed only to have enraged them. During the first part of the fight Max had

been full in their view, and as he still wore the prince's costume the brigands were no doubt convinced that Eugene himself was the head and front of the defence, and were buoyed up by the hope of capturing him. For some minutes the discussion among the leaders continued; then, as having come to a decision, they moved off with their men towards the copse, and, save for half a dozen who remained to watch the castle, were seen no more for some hours.

Their absence gave Harry an opportunity of attending to his wounded. He found that three were somewhat seriously hurt, and one was rendered hors de combat. His total force was now reduced to fourteen, including himself, his brother officers, and the two men on guard.

Towards mid-day, under a broiling sun, the enemy again appeared. This time, in addition to palisades freshly made, they carried with them a number of rough frameworks penthouse shaped, fashioned from stout saplings bound together, like the bridge, with withies from the marsh. Evidently there was a man of resource among them. Each of the frames formed a kind of wooden tent, two yards long, some three to four wide, and six feet high, requiring the united strength of half a dozen men to carry. But there was no lack of men, and the bearers, protected from bullets from above by the roof of these shelters, came safely almost to the edge of the fosse. The new palisades were thrown across, but this time the materials were stronger. One of the sheds, its end closed with light logs, was rushed across the bridge by a dozen strong men. A second was joined to it, then a third, and so on until a continuous corridor stretched across the fosse. The lashings holding the logs together at the inner end being cut, from out of this testudo sprang brigand after brigand, who came impetuously up to the barricade and instantly engaged the defenders in a furious hand-to-hand combat. Max, whose marksmanship with his huge sling had been so effective before, hurled stone after stone down upon the testudo, but they were turned off by the sloping roof, and though the bridge creaked and groaned under the impact it did not give way.

It was fortunate for the defenders that only a few men at a time could make their way through the shed, and the space at the end was too narrow to allow of a great accession of numbers unless the foremost could scale the barricade. The enemy had again lost heavily at their first onset, but as soon as one man fell his place was supplied, and no respite was given to the little band within. Shoulder to shoulder Eugene's men formed a wall of steel across the gateway: again and again they beat back the enemy at the breastwork. But against such odds they could not hope to escape unscathed; there were no reserves; and of the enemy there was still a host ready and eager to fill the gaps. One man and then another of the troopers fell, this one to rise no more, that to crawl away and stanch his wound. Seven men were now all that was left of the fighting line, and when

Fanshawe and Buckley came up and insisted on sharing their comrades' peril, Harry felt that he dared no longer delay the playing of what might prove his last card. With a word to Max to keep up the fight, he slipped for a moment out of the press, struck a flint, kindled some tinder he had kept in readiness, and then, shouting to his men to make for the keep, and waiting till they had begun to run, he lit the train.

At the last moment a trooper fell, so badly hurt that he could not move. Harry sprang forward, caught the man by the belt, and dragged him into the courtyard towards the keep. The enemy, astonished at the sudden flight of the garrison, hesitated for a moment before charging across the obstacle which so far had held them off. Then, just as they leapt forward over the barricade, now an irregular heap of stones, there was a blinding flash behind them, and a deafening roar. The ground rocked; fragments of the dilapidated walls fell inwards and outwards; a dense cloud of dust and smoke bellied over the scene, and the air was rent by the cries of men in agony.

Disregarding the falling stone-work, Harry ran forward to the archway, his eyes smarting with the fumes. As the cloud gradually settled, he saw crowds of the enemy huddled together on the farther side of the fosse, their eyes aghast intently fixed on the archway. But of the bridge, and the sheds, and the stream of men who a minute before had been pressing forward exultantly across the fosse, not a vestige remained. Wood and men lay an indistinguishable mass at the bottom.

CHAPTER XXII
The Fight in the Keep

Soldiers All—The Silent Watches—Twice a Traitor—The Oubliette—The Horizon—Fanshawe Volunteers—A Powder Barrel—Nearing the End—Allies—Von Stickstoff—More Stickstoff—The Confederate Camp—The Anspach Dragoons—At the Sword Point—A Brief Respite—The Fight on the Stairs—The Last Stand—The Anspachers

Harry was sick at heart when he came to examine his losses. Three of his men were dead, nine badly wounded, there was not one but bore marks, in bruise or cut or strain, of the desperate strife in which they had played such manful parts.

He arranged for the burial of the three gallant troopers; then, heavy-hearted as he was, set to work with indomitable pluck to repair the damage done to the defences. The prisoners were pressed into the service; the barricade was restored, and another mine was dug, though from the crack that showed in the masonry of the archway Harry feared that a second explosion would bring half the keep tumbling about his ears.

Having done all that could be done, and shared a meal with his devoted men, Harry went with Fanshawe and Buckley to the top of the keep to discuss the future.

"Our state is parlous, Fanshawe," he said. "Another assault will wipe us out."

"We have a breathing-space. The brigands have had enough for the present. Their ill-success must have daunted them."

"But Aglionby will not give up yet. He is playing for a high stake.—What is doing yonder?"

In the distance he saw two wagons and a band of some fifty men making their way across the hills towards the copse in which the enemy were encamped.

"Reinforcements, it appears," said Buckley. "Perhaps food; they will raid every farmhouse round."

"We must say nothing of this to the men," said Harry. "'Twould dishearten them."

"It seems you have no choice but surrender," remarked Buckley.

"Never—unless you and Fanshawe as my superior officers take the responsibility."

"Not I," said Fanshawe. "'Tis absurd to think of! The men are devoted to you; and Prince Eugene put you in command; you have done wonders, and whatever be the end, we'd be fools to interfere—eh, Buckley?"

"Certainly."

"Then I won't surrender. Say we make terms, think you the enemy would hold to them, finding the prince not here? They would wreak vengeance on us for their disappointment and their losses. They are in the main freebooters, the scum of the French and Bavarian armies, as near savages as men can be. We could expect no mercy at their hands. Besides, Aglionby will by and by discover, if he have not already done so, that I am here; and he has too many scores to pay off to deal very tenderly with me or my men. We can but hold out to the last, and hope that help may come in time."

"The prince must by this be in our camp," said Fanshawe. "What if we tell the enemy they are on the wrong scent?"

"'Twould avail us nothing. Aglionby would not believe the story, or, if he believed it, would scout it publicly so as to keep his men together. He would be

the more deeply embittered against us."

"You are in the right," said Fanshawe. "Pray God help comes to us, then."

"We can still hold the keep," said Harry. "One man on the winding stair can hold many at bay; we must fight against time."

That night Harry could not sleep for the harassing problem of the continued defence of the castle. True, his object had been gained; Prince Eugene had got off in safety; he himself had fought a good fight; but it was clear that unless help came soon his defence must be broken through by sheer force of numbers. He was resolved to die rather than fall a captive into Aglionby's hands; but the longing for life was strong within him. He thought of all that had passed during the two years since his meeting with Lord Godolphin: the strange vicissitudes, the ups and downs of fortune; the inexplicable enmity of Mr. Berkeley; his pleasant relations with Mynheer Grootz and the ladies of Lindendaal; the chances which had served him so well and brought him so near the realization of his dearest longings. It was hard to think that at this moment, when the confederate army under the greatest generals of the age was moving towards events of high moment, he should be cut off in this obscure spot and robbed of the opportunity to which he had looked forward so eagerly.

He did not think only of himself. He remembered his companions—Fanshawe, Buckley, the faithful Max, the brave troopers whose fate was linked with his. Their lot was worse than his, for they had ties—parents, children, relatives, to whom they were dear: he himself was alone in the world. Apart from Mynheer Grootz, who he knew loved him; Madame de Vaudrey, whose feeling for him was warm; Sherebiah, whose affection was perhaps the closest of all; there was no one to be interested in his welfare. Thinking of Madame de Vaudrey he thought of her daughter, and was dimly conscious that he would have liked to stand well in her eyes—to break through that cold reserve of manner she had always shown to him, and win from her one look or word of approval. Fanshawe, he knew, still nourished a hope of winning her; it seemed to depend on him whether Fanshawe should have another chance.

He lay awake, thus musing, and gazing at a star that shone through the loophole in the wall. By and by he felt a strange uneasiness, unconnected with his previous train of thought. All was quiet; not even the hoot of an owl broke the stillness. Unable to account for his feeling, he rose and went to the top of the keep.

"Is all well?" he asked the sentry there.

"All is well, Monsieur."

"You have seen or heard nothing?"

"Nothing, Monsieur, but the scurry of rabbits in the fosse."

"Good-night!"

He returned to his bed and lay down again. But still he felt uneasy; again he was impelled to rise. This time he went down into the courtyard. Max was on duty there. The horses were ranged round the walls; the coach stood in the corner to which it had been hauled; everything was as it had been. He went into the large hall: the prisoners were all asleep, the sentry on guard. Something led him to continue his round; he was determined to allay his restlessness by examining every nook and cranny of the castle. Taking a lighted candle, he made his way into the lower part of the keep. He arrived at length at the chamber to which there was access from the tunnel. He started, and stopped short in amazement and consternation. The stones which had been heaped on the trap-door had been removed. With a muttered imprecation on the man who he supposed had carried the stones up the keep for use with the sling, he was turning to order someone to replace them when he noticed that several stones were piled in a corner near at hand. He stood still, puzzled at this strange meddling with his work.

At this moment he heard a slight sound beneath him, and saw a tremor in the stone trap-door. Could he believe his eyes? One end of the stone was rising. Quick as thought he blew out his candle, and backing behind a pillar drew a pistol from his belt. His fascinated eyes were fixed on the slowly moving stone. There was now a ray of light at its edge; he heard whispering voices. Steadily the heavy slab was pushed into a vertical position; then appeared the head, the shoulders, the body of a man. By the light of the sputtering candle he carried Harry recognized Otto the landlord. Now he saw the meaning of all that had puzzled him. The man, alarmed for his safety if, as must seem inevitable, the brigands captured the castle and found him there, apparently an accomplice in the trick played upon them, had sought to purchase his peace by leading them through the secret passage. Harry felt a keen pang of self-reproach that he should not have foreseen this development and taken steps to prevent it.

But he was instinctively bracing his muscles for the impending struggle. The landlord was now through the opening; he stepped on to the floor of the room and bent down to assist the next man. Slipping the pistol back into his belt, Harry made two bounds and was beside the stooping figure. The man heard his footfall and instantly straightened himself; but even as he raised the hand holding the candle to ward off the imminent blow, Harry struck him full upon the chin, and with a stifled gasp he fell headlong to the stone floor. Then Harry, throwing all his weight against the slab, hurled it with a crash into its place. The landlord's candle was guttering, still feebly alight, on the floor. By its glimmer Harry hauled from the corner one after another of the stones that had been removed, and piled them with desperate haste upon the trap until the way was again effectually blocked.

Then, picking up the candle, he examined the prostrate body. The man was

Mein Wirth is surprised

Mein Wirth is surprised

stunned. Harry, for all his anger, could not help pitying the poor craven wretch. But only one course was open to him. The crashing sound had already brought Max and two other men to the spot.

"Lower him into the dungeon," cried Harry.

And the dark hole in which Fanshawe and Buckley had spent nights and days now received the senseless body of the traitorous landlord.

Sleep was banished for the rest of the night. The alarm had gone through the garrison, and every man was on the alert. It was clearly imperative to provide against a possible attack by way of the underground passage. Such an attack was, in truth, not very likely. Only one man could pass the slab at one time from below, and save by mining operations the enemy could scarcely force a way through the ton of stones which Harry now caused to be heaped above it. But it was necessary to set a watch at this point, and as he could not spare another man from his already too much diminished force he decided to withdraw the man from the tower by which he had escaped from the castle, and to release the prisoners.

Before he did this, however, he resolved to employ them once more in strengthening his defences. It was pretty evident that the result of another assault would be to drive him into the keep. The entrance to this from the courtyard was without a door; it was necessary to block it up, leaving only a narrow gap that could be easily closed. He employed the prisoners to pile the largest stones that could be found flush with the doorway, in such a manner that the enemy, approaching from the outside, should be unable to get a hold upon them or push them away. A narrow opening was left, and heavy stones were placed on the inside, near at hand, to block it up when the time should come. At the same time a large supply of missiles was conveyed to the top of the keep.

It was clear from the movements of the enemy during the day that they were far from abandoning the siege. No doubt they had been encouraged by the arrival of reinforcements. Sections for a new bridge were brought in the afternoon and placed close to the fosse, together with the sections of a second testudo. These were certain indications of another attempt on the gateway.

Many times during the day Harry went up the keep and looked anxiously northward for the expected succour, always to be disappointed. He could not believe that Prince Eugene had left him to his fate; something must have happened to detain the relieving force, and Harry thought with anguish of heart that it might arrive too late. Then an idea struck him. Why not send out a messenger to hasten the troops if they were indeed on the road? There was one serious objection: the garrison could not safely spare a man. He mentioned his idea to Fanshawe.

"Let me go," said his friend instantly. "I am of little use as a fighting man; my strength is not equal to a fight so desperate as the last. But if I can get away,

I might find a horse in a neighbouring hamlet, and I could at least keep my seat in the saddle. And an officer would prove a better messenger than a trooper."

Harry accepted the offer. Fanshawe might fall into the hands of the enemy, but he was willing to face the risk, and under cover of night there was a reasonable hope that he might elude them. About ten o'clock he clambered along the battlements towards the rearmost tower, and there, assisted by a rope, he made his exit by the postern, slid down the slope more riskily ventured by Harry on his first visit to the castle, and, taking a wide sweep, disappeared into the darkness.

When Harry returned to the keep, he was informed by the sentry that he had heard dull movements beneath the trap-door. The sounds had now ceased. Harry's conclusion was that the enemy had been searching for a weak spot in the passage, and having failed had finally given up any notion of effecting an entrance there. He arranged with Buckley to take the watch from midnight till dawn.

With the first glimmers of daylight Harry carried out his resolve to release the prisoners. The odds were so heavy against him that one man inside was now worth thirty out, and with no prisoners to guard he could add one to his effective force. Rapidly marshalling them, he led them to the ruined tower, and let them down by a rope as Fanshawe had been let down in the night. The movement was seen by one of the enemy's scouts, and before the prisoners had all reached the ground a crowd of their comrades had gathered at the foot of the slope to meet them. Their appearance seemed to create great astonishment; they were surrounded and eagerly plied with questions. One result of their release was that a new point of attack was disclosed to the enemy, who had apparently not dreamt hitherto of making an attempt by the postern. Harry saw a small body detach themselves from the main force and approach the slope; but knowing the difficulty of an assault uphill upon such a narrow opening he doubted whether they would push an attack home; still, it would have the effect of engaging one at least of his men.

It was very early in the morning; the enemy had everything ready; but they appeared to be waiting for something. Once more Harry scanned the horizon vainly for sign of helmet or lance. Suddenly there was a deep rumbling roar from the interior of the keep; an exultant shout rose from the enemy's ranks, and rushing forward at full speed they began to throw their new bridge across the fosse. Shouting to his men to hold the gateway to the death, Harry hastened down to the entrance of the keep, where he was met by stifling fumes of gunpowder. Then he rushed up the winding stair to the first floor, and saw Buckley staggering towards him.

"I had just been relieved," panted Buckley. "The explosion occurred the moment after I left the spot. It stunned me for a few seconds. The poor fellow

who took my place must have been blown to atoms."

"They laid a charge last night, 'tis clear," said Harry. "But they can't follow up at once; they must wait until the fumes have cleared away, and that will take time: there are no vent holes. Remain at the top of the stair; with your musket and pistol you can hold several off for a time. They are assaulting the gateway; I must go."

Harry, having proved the futility of dropping missiles upon the testudo, had concentrated his whole force, save Buckley and the man in the tower, at the gateway. He noticed that the new bridge was higher at the farther side of the fosse than at the end near the castle. The reason was soon evident. The testudo this time was not blocked up by logs, and Harry behind his barricade could see through its entire length. A screen of saplings was suddenly raised over the farther end of the bridge; it was as suddenly removed; and down the inclined plane rolled a small keg of powder, with a burning fuse attached.

"Back, men, back!" he shouted.

The command was only just in time. They were but a few yards from the barricade when there came a roar like thunder, followed by a second as Harry's own mine was exploded, and through the swirling smoke fierce and derisive cheers. Holding his breath and stooping low, Harry rushed back to see what damage was done. The barricade had disappeared; the archway was in ruins; and the enemy were flinging another bridge across the fosse to replace that destroyed by the explosion. So far as the defence of the gateway was concerned, Harry saw that the game was up. At the best he could but delay the enemy for a few minutes, and even then he would risk having his men cut off from the keep. Recalling the man from the farther tower, he collected his little band, ordered them to fire one volley into the advancing ranks, and then withdrew through the barricaded doorway into his last defence.

At that moment he heard the dull sound of a shot above. Buckley must be beset! Giving Max orders to hold the courtyard entrance, and sending a man to hurl down stones from the roof upon the enemy crowding below, he took two men with him to assist Buckley, whom he found hard pressed near the head of the other stairway. Sword in hand, he was holding the narrow winding passage against the big red-sashed Croatian, who was making a desperate thrust at him with a half-pike, the head of which had been severed by the Englishman's blade.

"Steady, Buckley! I am here!" shouted Harry.

He drew his pistol from his belt, slipped under Buckley's arm, and just as the Croatian hurled himself up the last step intervening between himself and his foe, Harry fired point-blank at his heart, and he fell back upon his comrades. The narrow stairway was choked with men; the din of their shouts echoed and re-echoed from the winding walls, and above all the uproar Harry distinguished the

tones of Aglionby, yelling to his men to make way for him to pass.

When Fanshawe left the castle he walked steadily on for some hours, making a wide circuit round the enemy's position, guiding himself by the north star. His progress was difficult over the hills in the darkness. He had to scale bluffs, to creep up rocks, to spring across ravines, to wade through swamps at the risk of being engulfed, to skirt patches of wood—though in one case, finding that he was being taken too far out of his course, he plunged boldly into a copse, trusting to his good fortune to bring him safely out at the other side. Thus delayed, it was long before he felt sure that he was safe.

At last he struck into a narrow pathway leading north-west. Proceeding more rapidly along this, he was brought, after walking for some four hours, into what was apparently the highroad along which he had passed with Marlborough's letter about ten days earlier. He was very tired, but resolved to press on until he reached a village. Another hour's walk brought him to a hamlet with a modest Gasthaus. He knocked up the landlord, and with some difficulty persuaded the suspicious man to provide him with a horse. No troops, he learnt, had passed through. The landlord had been told that firing had been heard among the hills in the direction of Rauhstein; he did not understand what it could be, for the castle was in the possession of brigands, and he did not think the prince's men were near enough.

Staying at the inn but to eat a little food, Fanshawe rode on, and suddenly, some little while before dawn, came on a picket of four men upon the road. He was challenged; the speaker was evidently a German, and of German Fanshawe knew not enough to frame a sentence. He tried French; but that raised the sergeant's suspicions; he mentioned the names of Marlborough and Prince Eugene, with no better success; and he was marched off under guard into the neighbouring village.

His escort halted at a small cottage, and the sergeant entered. Colonel von Stickstoff was in bed. He was awakened, but the colonel was nothing if not a stickler for etiquette, and he declined to see Fanshawe until he had made some preparations. When Fanshawe was marched in, therefore, he found himself confronted by a short, stout, pompous little officer, with his tunic buttoned tight, a rug across his knees, which were guiltless of breeches, and a large flaxen wig set awry over his nightcap. The quarter-master was summoned, and an interrogation began.

"Who are you, sir, and what have you to say for yourself?" asked the officer in German.

Fanshawe tried to explain in French, of which he had obtained a smattering.

"Ha! You are a Frenchman! Take that down, quartermaster. Everything must be done in order."

This was somewhat embarrassing. Fanshawe might understand the German's French, but he must necessarily be ignorant of what was said to the quarter-master in German.

"I am an officer in my lord Marlborough's army," he said haltingly.

"Take that down, quarter-master. A Frenchman in Lord Marlborough's army. In what regiment, Monsieur?"

"In Schomberg's Horse."

"Take that down. Now, Monsieur, explain to me how it is that you, a Frenchman in Lord Marlborough's army, are here, ten miles from his camp at Gros Heppach."

This was good and unexpected news. Fanshawe at once proceeded to make it clear that he was an Englishman, then explained in as few words as possible whence he had come and the urgency of his mission.

"Take that down," said the colonel, translating to the quarter-master.

The man wrote slowly, and Fanshawe was growing more and more restive.

"I beg you to note, Monsieur," he said, "that while we are talking Prince Eugene's men are possibly being massacred by the brigands. They are at least forty to one."

"Ha! Take that down. The enemy is in force; we must adopt every precaution. No doubt they are an advance-guard of the Elector's army. How many do the enemy number?"

"Some three hundred."

"Three hundred!—And I have only two hundred and eighty-three. We are outnumbered. Take that down. We must arrange a *postirung*, according to rule, quartermaster; note that, strictly according to rule. I will write you the instructions. Lieutenant Spitzkopf will advance with ten men three hundred and twenty paces in front of our position; Lieutenant the Baron von Blindwurm will post himself with five men two hundred and sixty paces on our right flank—or is it two hundred and forty? Hand me my manual, quarter-master."

"There is a swamp there, Excellency," suggested the quarter-master doubtfully.

"Then they must post themselves in the swamp. A *postirung* is a *postirung*; let there be no mistake about that. Let me see; yes, here it is: page one hundred and nine: 'Superior force: detachment in presence of, what steps to take'. Yes, it is quite clear; we must secure our position and send for reinforcements. 'Send for reinforcements': that is it. You will at once send a messenger to Stuttgart; I will write a despatch to the general while he is saddling up."

Then turning to Fanshawe he said:

"I regret, Monsieur, that, having failed to give the countersign, you must consider yourself under arrest until your bona fides is established. Quarter-

master, take the prisoner away; see that things are done in order, and be sure to wake me up when the enemy are sighted."

Fanshawe protested, but the colonel was evidently impatient to get back to bed, and waved him peremptorily away. He was led out and deprived of his arms, boiling with anger, and, feeling that every moment was of importance, in a state of desperation. This was the officer to whom Prince Eugene had entrusted the urgent task of relieving his hard-beset troopers! The confederate camp was only ten miles distant; if only he could find some means of sending word thither of the dire straits in which Harry was!

As he passed along the street with his escort, he saw a number of horses approaching, apparently from being watered. The first, a fine charger lighter in build than the average cavalry horse of the period, was led by a groom, who at this moment tethered the animal to a post a few yards from his commandant's cottage. The trooper into whose custody Fanshawe had been confided was marching on his right hand, carrying not only his own carbine but the prisoner's sword and pistols. Fanshawe saw a bare chance of escape and unhesitatingly took it. With a sudden movement he deftly tripped the man up, sprang to the post, unhitched the reins, and before the onlookers could collect their scattered wits was on the horse's back and twenty yards down the road. There was a great hubbub behind him; fortunately none of the troopers was at that time armed. Suddenly he bethought him of the vedette whom the extreme caution of the commandant had doubtless caused to be posted in the rear of his force. He might come upon him at any moment. Taking the first turning to the right he set spurs to his steed, dashed along a lane, leapt a fence, and plunged into an orchard. From his study of the map previous to his ride with Marlborough's message he remembered that Gros Heppach lay on the Göppingen road, to the north-east of his present position. If he could strike this by a path over the hills he might yet succeed. He spurred on, the rising sun enabling him to choose the easiest ground, and by and by came upon a rough country track leading in the right direction. He galloped along at break-neck pace, and gaining a little eminence, his eyes were gladdened by the sight of white tents dotting the valley some three miles below him.

He sped down the hill, and soon came plump upon a Dutch outpost, which had evidently seen him from afar and prepared to stop him. Reining up, he asked to be taken at once to Lord Marlborough. The Dutchman did not insist on explanations, recognizing him as an English officer, but sent a man at once to conduct him to headquarters. He had but just reached the outer circle of the camp, when he saw Colonel Cadogan riding slowly along in company with another officer whom he did not recognize. Without hesitation he rode up to the colonel, saluted, and begged to be allowed a word with him. His explanation was soon made, and to his surprise Cadogan burst into a great laugh and cried in French:

”This concerns your highness. The troopers who played the trick on the brigands, and that young daredevil Rochester, are trapped in a castle.”

”Nom d’un tonnerre!” cried Prince Eugene. ”Are they not relieved? I ordered a detachment of Würtembergers to ride out to them two days ago as I passed through Stuttgart. What has become of them?”

”It appears,” said Cadogan, still laughing, ”that they are on the road, but the colonel is learned in the art of war and is advancing by strategical moves.”

”Sacrebleu! He must be one of Baden’s men. That young countryman of yours, Colonel, must be saved.”

”Yes, though he is a Dutchman now. Mr. Fanshawe, your friend’s regiment is close by; you had better take a squadron and ride out at once. I suppose a troop or two of Dutch dragoons will be a match for the brigands?”

”Certainly, sir,—of the Anspach dragoons.”

”Very well, lose no time. I will mention the matter to the duke, to whom you will, of course, report yourself at the earliest opportunity. Good luck to you!”

Fanshawe rode off, and within a quarter of an hour was leading some two hundred of Harry’s troopers, Captain van der Werff at their head, and Sherebiah among them, along the shortest road to the castle of Rauhstein.

The winding staircase of the keep was ampler than in most castles of the kind. Two men could mount abreast, but it was only possible for one to find room for sword-play. The attackers soon adapted their tactics to the conditions. One man pushed to the front with sword and pistol; another just behind supported him with pistol and pike. Not long after Harry came upon the scene, Buckley, all but sinking under the strain, had to be assisted up the staircase. This gave the brigands a momentary advantage, for Harry was left with only one swordsman to stem the rush. There was no room for his companion by his side; he therefore sent him aloft to bring large stones to hurl upon the mob. Not for the first time he had reason to congratulate himself on the hours he had spent with Sherebiah and the Dutch instructor of his regiment in practising with sabre and rapier. His was the advantage of position, but the enemy were always two to one, and had they had patience to recharge their pistols after the failure of their first flurried snap-shots, or boldness enough to press forward regardless of the loss of the first few men, they could have borne him down with ease.

Only a few minutes had elapsed after Harry’s arrival at the stairhead when he heard a well-known voice storming below. The enemy gave back for a moment, then Captain Aglionby pressed upward and engaged Harry hand to hand. Harry was sufficiently occupied in parrying the captain’s vengeful attack without the necessity of guarding against the pike that threatened every moment to

impale him. This he could only turn aside; he had no time for a sweeping cut to sever its head. Fortunately for him the captain and his supporter impeded each other on the stairway. Yet Harry saw that the struggle could not last long, and fervently hoped that the man he had sent for missiles would return in time. The clang of weapons and the shouts of men rang through the stone-walled spaces. Aglionby had learnt from the released prisoners of the trick that had been played upon him, and his fury found expression in the violence of his onslaught and the venom of the curses he hurled upon his nimble-wristed opponent. Harry said never a word, but kept his eye steadily upon the captain, turning aside stroke and thrust.

At length he heard a footstep behind him. A stone as large as a man's head struck the wall immediately below him on his left. Narrowly missing Aglionby, it rebounded from the curved surface and struck the pikeman below him with a terrible thud. With the steadiness of an old campaigner the captain did not so much as wince, but continued his attack with still more savage energy. When, however, another stone hurtled down the stairway, maiming two other men below him, the rest of his followers turned tail and fled helter-skelter to the foot. A third stone grazed Aglionby's arm; then, seeing himself deserted, he backed slowly down the stairs.

The attack having been thus for a time repulsed, Harry left two men on the stairs with pistols ready charged and a supply of stones, and hurried across to the other staircase to find how things had gone there. It was with unutterable relief he saw that the assault of the enemy on the entrance to the keep had so far been beaten off by the combined fire from the doorway and the hurling of heavy blocks of stone from the top of the building. But the enemy were preparing another move. Finding that they could not force the obstacle, nor approach near enough to tear it down, they were about to try the effect of an explosion. A keg of powder had been rolled to the entrance by a lucky rush between the falling of two of the dreaded stones from above; now, hugging the wall so as to avoid the fire of the defenders, they were laying a train.

Harry saw that it was only a matter of minutes before the barricade at the entrance to the keep would be blown in. He utilized the time by bringing down a further supply of stones from the battlements and storing them within easy reach of the inner stairway. He could not prevent the explosion, or raise further obstacles to the progress of the besiegers; he could but defend every inch of the staircase, and retreat, if it must be so, step by step to the top of the keep. Almost despairing now of relief, he was prepared to fight to the end, and, looking round on his little group of stalwarts, he saw no sign of wavering on their part. Eugene's men were worthy of their master.

Half an hour passed; the pause lengthened itself to an hour; yet the train

had not been fired, the attack had not been renewed. Had the enemy some still more desperate device in preparation? Instinctively he looked far out over the country; but through the sun-shot haze he descried no sign of a friendly force. Then the watchman whom he had left on the roof saw a thin ribbon of flame dart from the outer gateway, along the wall, to the barred doorway of the keep. There was a deafening roar, followed by the crash of ruining stone-work and the vociferations of the exultant forayers, who swarmed forward to clear away the rubbish. Their ingenuity was inexhaustible. When the mingled smoke and dust had eddied away, Harry saw that they bore with them stout shields of wood, each carried by two men, intended to ward off the missiles he was preparing to launch upon them as they mounted the winding stairs. This was the explanation of their long stillness. Running down, he heard from his left the din of fierce strife in the stairway leading to the dungeons. The enemy were attacking at both points simultaneously.

Then began the last bitter struggle: the besiegers pushing relentlessly before them the long upright shields that occupied almost the whole height and breadth of the stairway; the besieged contesting every step, hacking and thrusting, splitting the shields with the jagged boulders from the ramparts, lunging with sword and pike through the narrow spaces at the sides, yet moment by moment losing ground as fresh men from below came up to replace their wounded or exhausted comrades. A din compounded of many separate noises filled the narrow space—the crash of stones, the creak of riven wood, the clash of steel upon steel or stone, the crack of pistols, the cries of men in various tongues—cries of pain, of triumph, of encouragement, of revenge. Desperately fought the little garrison, every man loyal, resolute, undismayed. They had no reserves to draw upon; theirs but to stand staunch against fearful odds, and, if it must be, die with courage and clear minds. With labouring breath, drenched with sweat, sickened by the reek, battle-worn and weary, they plied their weapons, hurled their missiles, grimly gave blow for blow. Back and ever back they were driven by the remorseless shields; forced from the lower stairways they are now collected—a little band of seven—on the single one above; Harry and Max in front, two pikemen behind, and behind these, three who turn by turn smite the mass thronging below, over the heads of their own comrades, with cyclopean masses which only the strength of despair enables them to lift and hurl. Now a stone crashes clean through one shield, ay, through two, making its account of the bearers, and giving pause to the brigands. Now a pike transfixes a limb, a sword cleaves a red path, a bullet carries death. But the enemy press on and up; like an incoming tide they roll back a little after every upward rush, rising, falling, yet ever creeping higher, soon to sweep all before them.

Now only six men hold the narrow stair. The dimness of the scarce lit space

below is illumined from above; a yell of triumph breaks from the brigands' throats as they realize that they are nearing the top of the turret. The cry is like a knell to the hearts of Harry Rochester and his devoted five. Only a few steps, and they must be forced upon the roof, driven against the parapet, at bay to the horde of wolvish outlaws already exulting in their victory. Aglionby has gone, sore hurt by a thrust from a pike; but a doughty leader is still left, the lithe Frenchman whose peacock's feather flickers hither and thither in the van. Mechanically the defenders wield their weapons, cast their last stones; the force is gone from their strokes, their dints fall ever feebler and feebler upon the steel-edged wooden wall that thrusts them upward without mitigation or remorse. Never a man dreams of yielding; Buckley falteringly whispers a word of final cheer; there is no mercy for such obstinate fighters from the savage outlaws, afire with the lust of blood, infuriated by the checks and losses of the past desperate days.

They are at the upmost turn of the stairway now, their heads already in the pure clear air of the bright June morning. The imminence of the end nerves them for a last despairing rally. Through the gaping joints of the battered shields they make so sudden and trenchant an attack on the foe that for a brief moment the upward movement is checked. A rebound: already the feathered Frenchman leaps upward as on the crest of a wave, when a confused shout reverberates through the hollow turret, a message is sped with the rapidity of lightning from base to summit; all is hushed to a sudden silence; then, while the six stand in amazed stillness, the Frenchman swings round and, amid the clatter of wood and weapons, flees headlong down the stairs at the heels of his scurrying comrades. Bewilderment for a moment possesses the six, as, with the vision of death before their eyes, they rest heavily on their weapons. Then Buckley, nearest to the parapet, with a shout that breaks into a sob, cries:

"They flee! they flee!"

Three bounds bring Harry to his side. With elbows on the parapet he gazes hungrily into the open. The four press about him. Between the castle and the copse men are scampering like scared animals, a few on horseback, most of them on foot. And yes—in the distance, moving across the hills from the north-west,—what is it that causes Harry's heart to leap, his blood to sing a song of tempestuous joy in every vein? One look is enough; he cannot be deceived; in the horsemen galloping amain towards him he recognizes his own regiment, the Anspach dragoons. One moment of self-collection: then he turns to his men.

"We are saved, my men," he says quietly.

And from the parched throats of the five war-scarred warriors on that ancient keep rises a hoarse thin cheer, that floats away on the breeze, and meets

the faint blare of a bugle.

CHAPTER XXIII
Blenheim

Compromising Papers—A Jacobite Agent—Praise from Eugene—A Contrast—Sherebiah Resigns—Foreign Ways—A Divided Command—The Duke's Day—The Field of Battle—"The Doubtful Day"—A Famous Victory—A Fugitive—Coals of Fire—A Revelation—Warnings—Silence—A Soft Impeachment—Down the Rhine

Never a more cordial meeting took place between friends than the meeting of Harry with Godfrey Fanshawe. The latter, with Sherebiah, rode straight for the castle, while Captain van der Werff and his dragoons swept upon the scattered forayers, exacting a terrible retribution from all within reach of their sabres. The moment when the friends met in the courtyard was too tense for speech. Buckley, weaker than the others after his imprisonment, almost sobbed; Eugene's three dragoons sat down on the flagstones and, resting their heads on their crossed arms, sought the blessed oblivion of sleep. Harry's overwrought body was all a-quiver; his trembling lips stammered out broken and inconsequent phrases; and Fanshawe wisely left him to Sherebiah's tendance.

It was not till much later in the day that the story of the siege was told. Harry's fellow-officers were unstinted in their admiration of his pluck and resourcefulness. He on his side was provoked to mirth by Fanshawe's story of the methodical Colonel von Stickstoff, though he was serious enough when, turning to his friend, he thanked him earnestly for what he had done to hasten the relief.

When Captain van der Werff arrived, he made a thorough search through the castle, and discovered in the cellars a large and motley collection of plunder gathered by the outlaws. There were costly church ornaments, bullion, pictures, pieces of tapestry, jewelry, arms, clothes, articles of furniture, but no plate; this, he concluded, had been melted down to avoid the risk of discovery. In the dungeon was found the shattered body of the landlord of the Zum grauen Bären, killed by the explosion engineered by his own friends. Harry could not but reflect on the nemesis which had pursued this man of crooked ways.

Preparations were made in the late afternoon for riding back to the confed-

erate camp. Many of the stricken brigands had surrendered to Captain van der Werff's dragoons, and were escorted into Urach to be dealt with by the civil authorities. At Harry's suggestion the bodies of the slain were examined by Sherebiah, to see if Aglionby was among them; but he was not recognized; it was probable that he had escaped. Before the castle was finally deserted, Aglionby's room was searched. In a wallet beneath his bed a large number of papers was found, consisting of letters, tavern bills, private memoranda, gazettes, and a parchment conferring the rank of captain in the dragoons of the Elector of Bavaria upon Ralph Aglionby, late of the Preobrashenski regiment of his imperial majesty of Muscovy.

Harry looked through all these papers himself, hoping to find some clue to the inveterate animosity of Mr. Berkeley. But though he was disappointed in this, he discovered three papers which seemed to him of particular interest, and which he kept carefully apart from the others. The first was a brief note in French from Monsieur de Polignac, written from the head-quarters of Marshal Tallard, congratulating Aglionby on his commission in the Bavarian forces, and asking him to meet the writer as soon as circumstances permitted. From this Harry concluded either that Polignac had not been concerned in the attempt to drown Aglionby in the Merk, or that he was a man of consummate and unblushing duplicity.

The second was a letter from Mr. Berkeley himself, written long before. The squire spoke of enclosing money, and referred to the matter of H—— R——, hoping that the captain would make a better job of this commission than with the M—— M——, by which Harry understood the name of the vessel that had carried him down the Thames. The letter continued:

"I shall require of you cleare proofe of your profess'd Zeale in my service before I despatch any further Remittance. It will beseeme you to send me an Attested Copie of such *Forme of Certificate* as is usual in Holland. Let nothing stande in the way of this moste necessarie Document; I doubt not that among the *Notable People* with whom you at present consorte there will be founde a *respectable* Attorney to whom the Businesse may be with suretie confided."

This letter left no possibility of doubt that Mr. Berkeley was prepared to stick at nothing to remove Harry; but it threw no light on his motive, and Harry was as much perplexed as ever.

The third of the papers was a letter from a certain Anne Consterdine in Westminster, addressed to Aglionby at the Hague.

”This is to advise you”, it ran, ”that the Packett from M. de P—— despatch’d by the hands of the Honnest Captin came safely to my hands. The Gratification that you use to recieve will be pay’d to you at the same Place as afore. I am bid by the *Friende* at St. J—— to say that besides this your Name & Services have been noted with a speciall Marke, & will be *rewarded* with all Rightfull Diligence when the *Good Shippe* you wot of comes safe to Port.”

To Harry this letter was a mere enigma; it bore no special significance; but he gained enlightenment when he showed it to Fanshawe. That young man was three years older than Harry, and had moved in a more varied society.

”By Jove!” he exclaimed, on reading the letter, ”your friend Aglionby has many irons in the fire. ’Tis clear he is a go-between, and the correspondence, being betwixt Westminster and the Hague, can mean but one thing. The ’good ship’, too—what can that be but the ship that is to convey the Pretender to England to assume his father’s crown? Your Aglionbys and Polignacs are Jacobites, Harry; there will be another bone to pick with them.”

The plunder was packed into Prince Eugene’s coach; the wounded dragoons were set on horseback and taken into Urach for treatment. Then, after the destruction of what ammunition remained in the castle, Harry rode with his comrades and Eugene’s three dragoons from the memorable scene, and before sundown entered the confederate camp at Gros Heppach. The news of their coming had been already spread by a man riding in advance, and their entry was made amid the clamour of thousands of shouting men and drums and fifes. In a sort of triumph Harry was escorted to head-quarters, where, in the presence of Marlborough and Eugene and officers of their staffs, he had to tell over the story of the ruse and the subsequent siege. He remembered afterwards how differently the two great generals had heard him. Prince Eugene ever and anon broke into exclamations, slapped the table, crossed and uncrossed his legs, was up and down, restless and excited. Marlborough listened throughout with the same tranquil attentiveness, scarce moving, saying never a word. When the story was ended, Eugene cried impetuously:

”Ma foi, my lord, this is a lad of mettle. He has done right worthily, and merits much at our hands. For myself, I beg him to accept at once this ring; you did me a gallant service, Monsieur, and it will not displease you to wear as a token of my thanks a ring from the finger of Eugenio von Savoye.”

”I add my thanks to his Excellency’s,” said Marlborough quietly. ”If I mistake not, my secretary already has your name on a list for advancement; it is a long list, but no name has more merit than yours. You will see to it, Mr. Cardonnel, that Mr. Rochester is not overlooked.”

”Parbleu, my lord!” exclaimed Eugene, ”I am for speedier measures. The lad is an officer of Dutch dragoons, I believe. I ask for his services as aide-de-camp to myself; and, ma foi, I give him a commission in my own hussars. Monsieur, you will not object to the transfer?”

”Your Excellency does me too much honour,” said Harry, his breath almost taken away by such good fortune.

”That is settled then, with my Lord Marlborough’s consent?”

”I have no objection, your Excellency. And the young man could not be in better hands.”

”Then I will see your colonel, Monsieur, and the matter shall be arranged as speedily as possible.”

Harry felt some natural elation at this surprising change in his fortunes. He was a little amused, too, to think that this was the third time he had come under Marlborough’s notice, and each time the benevolent intentions of the duke had been anticipated. He could not but contrast Prince Eugene’s impetuous generosity with Marlborough’s placid goodwill; it was not till long afterwards that he understood what obstacles lay in the duke’s way. Marlborough was continually being pestered with applications from people of importance at home on behalf of their friends and connections; and in the then state of politics he could not afford to set aside the requests of those whose support he was so deeply concerned in retaining. Harry never had reason to doubt the kindness of Marlborough’s feeling towards him, and as he gained knowledge of the complex intrigues in which the public men of those days were enmeshed, he thought of the duke without bitterness.

Before many days he was gazetted captain in the Imperial service, and left his regiment to join Prince Eugene. His departure was signalized by a banquet got up by his fellow-officers, at which he was embarrassed by the many complimentary things said of him. He parted from his old comrades with regret, tempered by delight at the prospect of close service with the great general who had so highly honoured him.

Since his return to camp, he had remarked a strange and unaccustomed moodiness in Sherebiah. The worthy fellow went about his duties with his usual care and punctuality, but he was abnormally silent, seldom smiled or hummed country songs as he had been wont to do, and appeared to be in a state of chronic antagonism to Max Berens, whom Harry had taken as additional servant since their adventure together. Harry affected to ignore Sherebiah’s change of manner; but in reality it amused him, and he was in constant expectation of something that would bring matters to a crisis.

One morning Max came to him in a state of exaltation. Prince Eugene, unwilling that a man who had worn his clothes to such good purpose should

remain unrewarded, had not only presented him with the suit, but had purchased for him the Zum grauen Bären on the Urach road. Max said he was loth to leave his new master, but could not throw away so good a chance of settling in life, and added that as Mr. Rochester's Englishman apparently disliked him, the prince's gift had come most opportunely.

Max had hardly left Harry's presence when Sherebiah entered. He doffed his cap and fingered it uncomfortably, his usually cheery face wearing a portentously lugubrious look.

"Well, Sherry, what is it?" asked Harry.

"Well, 'tis like this, sir. 'Tis a sayen, a' b'lieve, when in Rome do as the rum uns do. These be furren parts, and there be furren ways o' doen things. Seems like now as if I bean't no more use, and I've been a-chawen of it over, and the end on't is, I be come to axe 'ee kindly to gi' me my discharge, sir."

"Indeed, Sherry! you surprise me."

"You see, sir, I be nowt but a Englishman,—a poor honest Wiltshire man; you can't make a silk purse out o' a sow's ear, and nothen'll make a furrener out of a home-spun countryman."

"That's true enough, Sherry, but you're right as you are."

"Nay, sir, axen your pardon. True, I ha' still got a bit o' muscle, and can handle a sword featly; but I'm afeard I can't brush a coat nor fold a pair of breeches like a furrener, let alone wearen on 'em. Zooks! suppose a man do get inside of a high prince's goodly raiment, do it make un a whit the better man?—I axe 'ee that, sir. Many's the time I've seed a noble coat on a scarecrow in a turmut-field, sir."

Harry remembered that of late Max had made the care of his clothes his special province.

"Furren ways and furreners," continued Sherebiah, "I can't abide 'em, and but for bein' a man o' peace I'd find it main hard to keep my hands off 'em, be they in prince's fine linen or their own nat'ral smalls, sir."

"You don't like foreigners, eh?—Katrinka, eh?"

Sherebiah was nonplussed for a moment, but recovered himself with his usual readiness.

"Ay, but there's a deal in the bringen up, sir. You can break a colt, and tame wild beasts, and make summat o' crabs wi' graften. Katrinka be a young wench, and teachable; bless 'ee, I've teached her how to fry a rasher and make a roly-poly; her be half Wiltshire a'ready, and sings the song o' turmut-hoein' like a bird. And 'tis my thought, sir, bein' discharged, to have our names cried and do the lifelong deed, and goo home-along and bide wi' feyther."

"Well, if your mind's set on it, I suppose I must be content to lose you both."

Sherebiah ceased twiddling his cap and looked startled.

”Both, sir!—did I rightly hear ’ee say both?”

”Yes, you and Max.”

”Hoy! be it the holy state o’ matrimony wi’ he too?”

”I shouldn’t wonder. Prince Eugene has made him a present of the Zum grauen Bären inn, and he’ll want a wife to help him.”

Sherebiah looked thoughtfully at the floor.

”The striplen be a good enough feller,” he said slowly. ”Barren his furren blood, which he couldn’t help, poor soul, he bean’t a bad feller. He looks uncommon spry in the prince’s noble garments—ay, he do so.”

Sherebiah paused, and began to twiddle his cap again. Harry waited patiently.

”I’m a-thinken, sir, ’twould be onbecomen in a Wiltshire man to let his duty goo by, in furren parts an’ all. Bean’t in reason for both to take our discharge all o’ a heap, and if the young man Max goos, I bides, leastways till ’ee set eyes on a plain Wiltshire man as ’ee’ll fancy better.”

”Well, that’s all right, Sherry. Now I think the best thing you can do is to go and wish Max good luck.”

He could not help smiling at Sherebiah’s obvious relief at the turn things had taken. Sherebiah heaved a deep sigh; then, as he observed Harry’s amused expression, a broad grin overspread his features, and he moved away.

With the arrival of Prince Eugene the campaign entered upon a new phase. Dissimilar as they were in character and temperament, the prince and the duke at once became fast friends. Eugene not merely fell under the spell of Marlborough’s personal force of character; he recognized his transcendent genius, and threw himself with enthusiasm into his plans. Unluckily, the Prince of Baden was a man of a different stamp. He was a soldier of the old school, brave as a lion, but wanting in judgment, cautious, methodical, a stickler for form. He joined the others in counsel at Gros Heppach, and being the eldest in rank expected that they would yield him the chief command. But the execution of their plan, so daringly conceived, demanded qualities he did not possess, and Marlborough had to exercise all the tact and patience of which he was so consummate a master. With much difficulty he persuaded the prince to share the command with him on alternate days, but not all his diplomacy availed to induce him to depart for the Rhine army. He insisted on remaining with Marlborough on the Danube, and Eugene had reluctantly to accept the other charge. On the 14th of June, therefore, Eugene left for Philipsburg, to watch Marshal Tallard, who was marching along the Rhine to join forces with the Elector of Bavaria. Harry accompanied him.

Then began a fortnight of wearisome marching, in cold and rainy weather. The Elector of Bavaria was by this time aware that Marlborough’s design was to attack him, and in order to cover his dominions and check the confederate

army until the expected reinforcements reached him he sent General D'Arco to occupy the Schellenberg, a height commanding Donauworth, on the north bank of the Danube. Hearing from Eugene that Tallard and Villeroy were at Strasburg organizing these reinforcements, Marlborough decided immediately to attack the Schellenberg. It happened to be his turn of command; he knew that if the day was allowed to pass Baden would find reasons for postponing the attempt, and after a hard march he threw his weary troops upon the position and carried it with heavy loss against an obstinate defence.

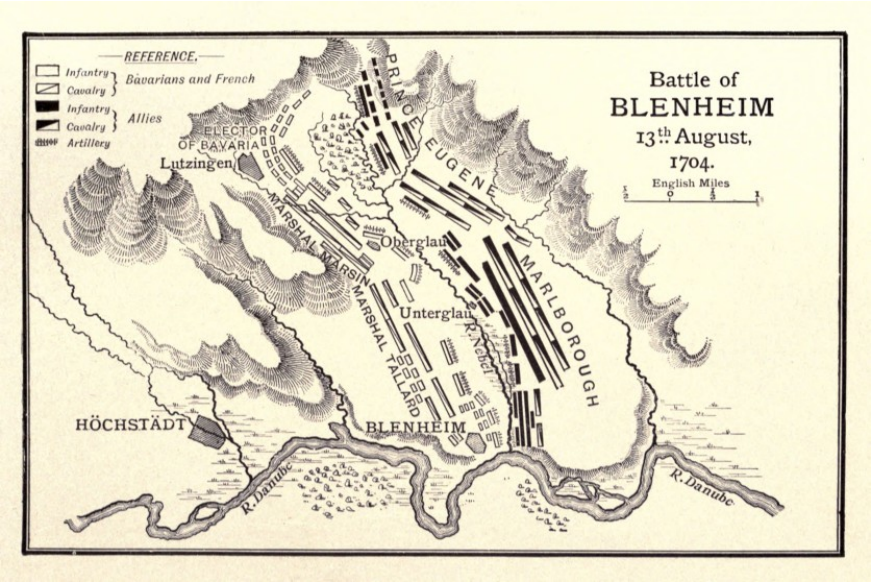
A diplomatic attempt to detach the Elector from his alliance with France having failed, Bavaria, now open to the confederates, was put to fire and sword. Marlborough, one of the humanest generals that ever lived, refused to allow his own forces to engage in the work of burning and pillage, and did his utmost to restrain the excesses of the German soldiery.

Eugene meanwhile, having failed to prevent the junction of Tallard with Marsin and the Elector of Bavaria, paid a hurried visit to Marlborough at his camp at Sandizell to concert operations against the now formidable enemy. Luckily, Prince Louis of Baden agreed to lay siege to Ingolstadt, and his colleagues were relieved of the presence of one whose captious temper was a continual stumbling-block.

During Eugene's absence news reached his camp that the enemy were hastening towards Lauingen with a design to cross the Danube. Harry was despatched to Sandizell with this important information. He met the prince on the road back; the latter immediately returned to Marlborough, who decided to reinforce him, and moved his own camp to Schönefelt, nearer the Danube, in order to be able to co-operate with him should occasion arise. Late at night on Sunday, August 10, Eugene sent word to Marlborough that the enemy had crossed the river at Lauingen. Marching out at once he joined the prince, and early on Tuesday morning they went towards Hochstadt, where they intended to make their camp. On a hill two miles east of that town they caught sight of some squadrons of the enemy. Not knowing whether this was merely a reconnoitring party or the advance-guard of the main force, the two generals mounted the church tower of Dapfheim, and through their glasses saw that the whole army of the enemy was in full march in their direction, and that a camp was being marked out on the very ground chosen by themselves. They instantly determined to attack.

On the north bank of the Danube, at the head of a loop of the river, lies the little village of Blindheim, or, as it was spelt by Marlborough, Blenheim. At the eastern extremity of the loop the Danube is joined by the brook Nebel, shallow and narrow, formed by many rivulets flowing from a range of wooded hills three miles to the north. In those days the ground between these various branches was an undrained swamp. The Nebel flows through two villages, Unterglau a

mile above Blenheim, Oberglau three-quarters of a mile farther north.



Battle of Blenheim, 13th August, 1704.

Tuesday night was spent in preparation for the coming battle. At three o'clock on Wednesday morning the confederate army moved slowly out. A light mist hung over the ground, but after three hours' march they came in sight of the enemy, and the cannon opened fire while the troops deployed into line.

The enemy, west of the Nebel, were in two main divisions, the right under Tallard resting on Blenheim, the left under Marsin and the Elector of Bavaria higher up the brook, occupying the villages of Oberglau and Unterglau, the rear being in the village of Lutzingen. On the confederate side, Eugene commanded the right, opposite Marsin, while Marlborough was opposed to Tallard.

The confederate troops, composed of English, Germans, Dutch, and Danes, were all in the highest spirits. The victory of the Schellenberg had heartened them; they had unbounded confidence in their generals. As he mounted his horse that morning Marlborough said quietly, "This day I conquer or die," and officers and men alike caught the infection of his brave, calm spirit.

The ground on which Prince Eugene's division was to be posted was broken by branches of the Nebel and became uneven as it rose towards the hills. For this

reason it took the prince some time to get his men into position. Marlborough's force was earlier posted, and he occupied the interval until he should hear from Eugene that all was ready by having prayers read at the head of each regiment. About twelve o'clock a message came from Eugene that he was prepared. "Now, gentlemen, to your posts," cried Marlborough to the officers with whom he had been breakfasting. Up sprang the big Lord Cutts, deputed to open the attack on Blenheim—a gallant leader, nicknamed Salamander from his careless daring under fire. Up sprang General Churchill, and galloped off towards Unterglau, already set on fire by the cannonade. Up sprang General Lumley, hero of the cavalry charge at the Schellenberg. From brigadier to bugler, every man was determined to "conquer or die".

Blenheim was filled with French, seventeen battalions of Tallard's best troops hampering each other's movements there. So strongly was the village defended that the English troops were twice compelled to retire. Marlborough's foreseeing eye marked the urgency of the moment. The enemy must be prevented from pursuing their advantage. In spite of artillery fire in flank and cavalry charges in front he got his horse across the stream and the intervening marshes. Tallard was late in meeting the movement. He allowed the first line of English to form up on his own side of the brook before he ordered a strenuous attack. Then Marlborough reinforced his lines, and having assured himself that they could hold their own, galloped to the left to see how things were faring toward Blenheim.

Meanwhile on the right Eugene had fought with varying success. A dashing cavalry charge broke the enemy's front line, but from the second his horse recoiled, and he brought up his Prussian infantry to stem the tide. At Oberglau also the Prince of Holstein's division was thrown into confusion by the gallant Irish brigade, which flung itself upon the Germans with the fierce valour for which these exiles were renowned. Here, too, Marlborough's all-seeing eye marked the crisis. Galloping to the point of danger, he ordered up battalions and squadrons that had not yet been engaged, and in his turn threw the Irish into confusion.

The summer afternoon was drawing on; for five hours the battle had raged, and neither side had yet gained a substantial advantage. But soon after five, having seen all his cavalry across the Nebel, the duke rode along the front, and gave orders to sound the charge. At the trumpets' blare 8000 horsemen, splendidly mounted, moved up the slope in two lines towards the enemy, first at a gentle trot, quickening their pace until it became a gallop. One slight check from the terrible fire of the French musketeers, then they swept forward irresistibly. The enemy recoiled, broke, fell into disorder, and fled, the infantry towards Hochstadt, the cavalry towards Sondersheim, on the river bank. Then was seen Tallard's fatal mistake in crowding so many men into the narrow streets of Blenheim. Catching

the panic from their flying comrades, they turned hither and thither, not knowing how to find safety. Some plunged into the river, only to be borne away on its swift current and drowned. Others sought to escape towards Hochstadt, but every avenue was blocked. In rage and despair they maintained a stubborn fight until the evening dusk descended, and the hopelessness of their plight counselled surrender.

At the head of his shouting cavalry Marlborough himself had chased thirty squadrons down the steep bank of the Danube to destruction. He had but just returned when he was met by an aide-de-camp with a prisoner no less notable than Marshal Tallard himself. The duke put him into his own coach, and sat down to pencil that famous note to his duchess which gave England the first tidings of this glorious victory.

The victorious army bivouacked on the field, taking possession of the enemy's standing tents, with a great store of vegetables and a hundred fat oxen ready skinned for the pot.

During this great action Harry had been hither and thither in all parts of the field, bearing Eugene's orders to his divisional commanders. Of the details of the fight he saw little, but was well pleased at the close of the day when the prince thanked him in the presence of his staff, and invited him to his own supper table.

During the next few weeks the troops marched towards the Rhine, the duke's objective being Landau, which he hoped to take before the close of the campaign. One afternoon Harry went on in advance with Sherebiah from Langenhandel to Weissembourg, to secure quarters for Prince Eugene. His errand accomplished, he was sitting at dinner in the inn when through the open window came the sound of hubbub in the street.

"What is it, Sherry?" he asked.

"'Pears to be a crowd of Germans a-setten on to a wounded Frenchman, sir. He have his arm strapped, and——why, sakes alive! 'tis black John Simmons hisself."

"Indeed!" cried Harry, rising. "Then the captain will be near at hand. Out and bring the fellow in."

Sherebiah issued forth and shouldered his way through the growing crowd. When Simmons caught sight of him, his jaw dropped and he turned to make away; but Sherebiah was at his heels in a twinkling, and soon he dragged him through the throng and into the inn. The man looked even more woebegone than when Harry had last seen him, and his drawn face betokened keen suffering.

"Cotched again!" said Sherebiah. "Stand there afore Master Harry and speak your mind."

"How come you here, Simmons?" asked Harry.

The man explained that after the rout at the castle he had escaped with his master to the Elector's camp and been with the army at the battle of Blenheim. He had ridden out of the fight with Aglionby, but being wounded had fallen from his horse and been callously left to his fate by the captain. Contriving to evade capture, he had wandered from village to village, and, reaching Weissembourg, had been sheltered there by a cottager until all his money was gone. Then he was turned out neck and crop, and was being hustled out of the village when Sherebiah intervened. His wound had not been properly treated, and he was in a sorry plight.

Harry could not help pitying the poor wretch whose service had been so ill-requited by his master. Properly he was a prisoner of war—one of the 13,000 who had fallen into the hands of the victors. But he was a fellow-countryman after all, and possibly had been an honest fellow until he came under Aglionby's sinister influence. Harry had not the heart to let him go to his fate.

"Sherry, look to his arm," he said. "Let us see what sort of a leech Jacob Spinney made of you. Then give him some food and find him a lodging."

Several days passed, and Harry, in the bustle of camp life, had almost forgotten the incident, when one morning Simmons presented himself and asked to be allowed to speak a word. His arm was nearly healed, and he looked a cleaner, trimmer fellow.

"Ah, Simmons!" said Harry, "you're better, I see. What have you got to say?"

"First to thank you, sir, for your kindness, which I know I don't deserve. Sherebiah Minshull has treated me well."

"I'm glad of that. Now is there anything else I can do for you?"

"I've been thinkin', these few days, sir, and ponderin' on my past life; and there's a thing I believe you ought to know."

"Well, speak up, man."

"'Tis summat I heard pass between Cap'n Aglionby and the Frenchman, sir."

"That's enough: I'm not interested in the doings of your rascally employer."

"But you are, sir, unless I be much mistaken. The matter concerns the French lady near Breda, and the young mistress—partickler the young mistress, sir."

Harry was now all attention.

"Speak on then, and use few words."

Simmons then related that, some few days before the battle of Blenheim, Monsieur de Polignac had come secretly into the camp and paid a visit to Aglionby. (Harry remembered the letter making the appointment he had found in the castle.) The opening of the interview had been stormy; Aglionby had ac-

cused Polignac of being a party to the attempt on his life at Breda, and at first refused to accept his assurances that he knew nothing whatever of the matter. But Polignac spoke him fairly, declaring that his connection with Mr. Berkeley had been limited to planning Aglionby's rescue from prison. The Captain's suspicions being at last lulled, Polignac opened up the subject of his visit. Of the remainder of the interview Simmons had but hazy ideas: he had listened through a hole in Aglionby's tent, and the conversation being conducted in low tones and in French, of which he had only a smattering, he had missed a good deal of it. But he had heard enough to know that the Mademoiselle of whom the two spoke was Mademoiselle de Vaudrey, and that Polignac was bargaining with Aglionby to aid him in an attempt to get possession of the young lady.

"One thing I heard plain, sir," said Simmons in conclusion, "and that was that the cap'n was to get a good bit o' gold when the Frenchman married the lady, and a good bit more when he came into the estates."

"What estates?"

"That I can't tell you, sir; 'the estates' was all I heard—*terres* was the word as was used."

"Oh! And why do you betray your master?"

"Well, sir, he've led me a dog's life for years; holds over me that hangin' business on the old road; and then after I'd served him faithful leaves me to shift for myself with a bullet in my arm. I don't owe him no thanks."

Harry stood in thought for a few moments.

"You're a Londoner, I think, Simmons?" he said at length.

"Ay, sir."

"What trade were you bred to?"

"A joiner, sir."

"Well, if you'll promise me to go straight back to London and work at your trade, I'll contrive to send you down the Rhine with the prisoners, and give you a little money to start you."

"Thank 'ee kindly, sir!"

"Very well. Sherebiah shall take you to Hanau and see you safely lodged. Remember, you've your character to build up afresh. If you stick to your trade, and keep out of the way of folk who want to use you for dirty work, you may become a decent citizen yet."

"On my soul I'll try, sir. 'Tisn't every one would give a poor fellow a chance, and I thank 'ee true, sir."

Harry dismissed the man in Sherebiah's care. He was greatly disturbed by his news. It was clear that Polignac, having failed to win Mademoiselle de Vaudrey by fair means, and by the attempt to bring pressure to bear, so happily frustrated by Mynheer Grootz, was now determined to resort to desperate mea-

sures. Something must be done at once to put Madame de Vaudrey on her guard. He would have liked to convey the warning himself, but felt the impossibility of asking from Prince Eugene leave of absence for so long a journey until the campaign was ended. The only other means open to him was to write. Couriers were constantly going backwards and forwards between the armies and the Hague and other towns; he might avail himself of one of these to send his urgent message.

Harry lost no time in putting his decision into effect. He wrote both to Madame de Vaudrey and to Mynheer Grootz, telling them that Aglionby and Polignac were scheming to abduct Mademoiselle, and also that they were in league with the Jacobites in France and England. This latter fact would give Grootz a free hand in dealing with them, even if he detected them in no overt act against Mademoiselle de Vaudrey. It was two days before Harry could send off his letters, which for greater safety he entrusted to an official despatch-rider, by permission of Prince Eugene. The post would take several days; it would be towards the end of the first week in October before a reply could be expected.

Time passed away, and Harry was anxiously waiting, when, two days before the earliest date on which a letter could be received from Grootz, he was unexpectedly sent by Prince Eugene on an urgent private errand to Vienna. He was accompanied by Sherebiah, now again his constant companion. They made as much speed as possible, but nearly a month elapsed before Harry was able to report the success of his mission to the Prince, then in the confederate camp before Landau. As soon as he had seen the prince, he enquired whether a letter had arrived for him during his absence, and felt a great sense of relief when a packet was given him addressed in Grootz's big business hand.

But his feeling was changed to the keenest anxiety when he found that the letter, though written more than a week after the date at which Grootz might reasonably be supposed to have received his letter, made no reference to the news he had sent, and had clearly been despatched in entire ignorance of the threatening danger. Long afterwards he learnt that the courier had been accidentally drowned in crossing a river at night, and his letters had been lost. He dreaded to think what might have happened in the interval. He wrote another urgent letter to Mynheer Grootz, and despatched it by a special messenger; but the bare possibility of a mishap alarmed him, and he could never put the subject from his thoughts. He woke at night under the pressure of his anxiety; if only he could himself go to Lindendaal to see that all was safe! But while the siege was still being prosecuted, and the prince had constant need of his services, he could not bring himself to ask for leave.

His difficulty was solved for him by the prince himself. His evident preoccupation, and a slight mistake he made in noting down a message, attracted

that astute gentleman's attention. He spoke to Harry on the matter; by this time they were on such terms that Harry felt no difficulty in opening his mind; and he explained that having become aware of a plot likely to injure some friends of his, and fearing that his letter of warning had miscarried, he was in considerable anxiety on their behalf.

"Naturally," said the prince. "Who are these friends of yours?"

"A French refugee lady and her daughter, Monseigneur, who live near Breda."

"Ah! What is their name?"

"De Vaudrey, Monseigneur."

"Are they relatives of yours?"

"No, Monseigneur."

"A mere matter of friendship, eh?" The prince's eyes twinkled. "Now, my boy, confess: you are in love."

"No, indeed, Monseigneur."

"Well, the symptoms are not unusual. You ought to know best, of course; but in any case you had better get the matter off your mind. This weary siege cannot last more than a few days longer; we hear that the enemy are on the point of surrender; we shall go into winter quarters immediately, I suppose, and I shall be able to dispense with your services until the spring. Pack off to Breda and see your—friends, holding yourself in readiness, of course, to come back to me when summoned."

Harry was too much pleased at the opportunity of assuring himself that all was well to think it necessary to make any protestation about his motives. Thanking the prince, he finished off one or two small duties and went to arrange with Sherebiah for their journey. Before he left he came across Fanshawe in camp, and, without disclosing his reasons, told him where he was going.

"Then will you do something for me?" asked Fanshawe eagerly. "Will you carry a letter for me? I love that girl, Harry. I can't get over it. I made a mistake last time. I ought to have known that our English ways would not answer with French ladies. I spoke to Adèle herself; I ought to have spoken to her mother. If you will take it, I will write a letter to Madame de Vaudrey asking permission to pay my addresses to her daughter; that may give me a chance; don't you think so, Harry?"

"I don't know," said Harry. He felt strangely unsympathetic with Fanshawe at that moment. "I will take your letter if you are not long about it: I ride for Maintz to-night."

"Thanks, old fellow! Wait till you're in love; then you'll know how a fellow feels; I shall have no peace of mind till I know my fate."

A few hours after this, Harry left the camp with Sherebiah, carrying the

letter on which Fanshawe's fate depended. To save time he had decided to take boat at Maintz, and sail night and day down the Rhine. Ten hours later he had bought a big boat, engaged a man who knew the river, and begun his journey. With the aid of the stream and oars, and proceeding continuously, he could save a day or two on the land journey. His plan was to engage fresh crews at every important stopping-place, so as to have relays of sturdy oarsmen and to get out of them all the work of which they were capable. The Germans were naturally not so eager as himself, and grumbled a good deal at the exertions demanded of them. "Unerhört! unerhört!" was the exclamation he frequently heard from their lips. But he never relaxed his determination, and found liberal pay a ready stimulus.

Thus, without mitigation of pace, the boat rushed down the river. As one after another the river-side towns were passed, Harry felt a satisfaction mingled with an impatience too great to allow of his taking much interest in the scenes. The ugly, dirty garrison town of St. Goar, the fortress of Hesse-Rheinfels, the famous Rat tower of the Hatto legend, Coblentz, Cologne, Düsseldorf, were only so many stages of his uneventful journey.

CHAPTER XXIV
The Wages of Sin

Promenade à Berlin—A Sudden Stop—Grootz Chuckles—Place aux Dames—The Last Two Miles—Polignac Pays the Penalty—Zo!

About four o'clock on a November afternoon, fine for the time of year, two horsemen rode up to the inn at Eyndhoven. Huge clouds of steam rose from their horses into the cold air; the panting of the beasts told of a forced pace. Dismounting, the riders called for refreshment and a change of horses: they were anxious to push on at once.

When their hasty meal was finished, while the master was paying the bill, the man went into the inn yard and tried to enter into conversation with a servant standing there in charge of a large empty travelling carriage.

"Whose carriage is that?" he asked.

"Monsieur de Polignac's," was the surly answer.

The man started slightly, but no one would have suspected anything but pure curiosity from the tone of his next question.

”Who is it waiting for?”

”Monsieur de Polignac.”

The reply was still more surly.

”The roads will be heavy for travelling. Bad enough for horsemen, worse for coaches. Maybe the gentleman is not going far?”

”Maybe not.”

”The Breda road?”

”What is that to you?”

”No offence, comrade. A man may ask a question, to pass the time. Bid you good-day!”

Seeing that he was unlikely to get any further information he sauntered off, but disappeared as quickly as possible into the inn.

”Mounseer’s coach is in yard, sir,” he said quietly, ”and a-waiten for Mounseer.”

”Ah! Are we in time, Sherry? Call the ostler.”

When the man appeared, Harry slipt a coin into his hand.

”Monsieur de Polignac is making a journey. Tell me all you know about it.”

The man replied that the coach had been sent to the inn two days before. Monsieur de Polignac was expected at any moment. He had recently sold his estate and was leaving for Germany. It was thought that he wished to take his departure quietly, for he had always been unpopular with his tenants, and he ran the risk of a hostile demonstration if the time of his setting out were known. He probably intended to slip secretly away from his house and make his real start from Eyndhoven. A large quantity of his baggage had passed through the town a few days before; but, strangely enough, a carter coming in had reported that Monsieur’s wagons were going south, which was certainly not towards Berlin, the alleged destination. On the road they had taken there was great danger of their falling into the hands of the French, for it was not more than five or six leagues from Marshal Villeroy’s lines, and Monsieur as a Huguenot refugee would meet with scant consideration from his countrymen.

”Has Monsieur de Polignac himself been to Eyndhoven lately?” asked Harry.

”No, Mynheer; the arrangements were made for him by an English officer who fought at Blenheim, where the great duke gave the French such a drubbing a few months back. He was a masterful man; gave orders that the horses were to be ready at a moment’s notice and to be kept in good condition. Only this morning a messenger came with instructions for the coach to be ready by eight o’clock to-night, with a stock of wine and provisions which Monsieur will take

with him."

Harry was perturbed at this news. It was clear that Polignac intended to depart in haste; but whether on political grounds, having found his character as spy detected, or in pursuance of the plot hinted at by Simmons, it was impossible to know. If the latter, there was certainly not a moment to lose, and it behoved to push on with all speed to Lindendaal. Fresh horses had been waiting for some minutes. Harry and Sherebiah were soon in the saddle, and set off at a gallop along the miry road, into the gathering night.

Some hours previously a traveller approaching Lindendaal from the opposite direction had passed through Breda. He had found it impossible there to get a change of team for his coach; all the horses in the town were out, conveying to their homes the gentry of the countryside who had come into Breda for a grand ball given the night before by the officers of the garrison, the finale of a week of entertainments. Not even Mynheer Grootz's liberal offers sufficed to secure a team at once. The motive of his journey was clearly urgent, for instead of waiting a few hours until some of the hacks returned, he pushed on at once with his tired animals to Tilburg, four leagues farther on the road. There he succeeded in hiring fresh horses, and without delay continued his journey.

He was himself very much fatigued, having risen from a sick bed on receiving the letter sent him by Harry from Landau. As he drew out of Oerschot, where the team was again changed, he pulled up the wooden slat blinds, and settled himself in the corner of his seat for a short nap. So much exhausted was he that he was still sound asleep when, nearly two hours later, the coach reached the end of the park wall of Lindendaal.

It was now growing dark. All at once Grootz was roused from sleep by the stopping of the coach. In his half-awake condition he thought that he was at his journey's end, and was rising to lower the blinds when there was a shout and the report of a pistol-shot. Wide-awake in an instant he groped in the darkness for his own pistol. But just as he laid his hand upon it the coach jolted on again, throwing him back into his seat. It was rattling and swaying from side to side, the horses being urged to their utmost speed. His first impulse was to let down the blinds and endeavour to get a shot at one of the men who had waylaid him. Then he hesitated; a sudden thought had occurred to him; he gave a quiet chuckle, and peeped through the slats of the blinds, first on one side, then on the other. He could just see that a horseman was riding at each side of the carriage, and through the small window at the back he saw a third following. He smiled grimly, and, holding his pistol ready, waited for what he suspected must happen before long.

His own postilion, he guessed, had been killed or wounded by the pistol-

shot he had heard, and the coach was now driven by a stranger. He was thus one against four. He might shoot one of them, but would clearly be at the mercy of the three others. It was a lonely road; there was nothing for the present to be gained by resistance, and besides, he had a further reason for biding his time. Delay would not worsen his own situation; while if his suspicions were correct the longer he remained passive the better his purpose would be served.

After a headlong, rattling, bumping flight of about two miles, as it seemed to Grootz, he heard the horseman on his right shout an order to the postilion. The coach was pulled up; the horseman threw himself from the saddle, and wrenching open the door peered in.

"I regret, Madame, the necessity——"

He started back, for in the waning light he had just become aware that there was but one figure in the carriage, and that clearly the figure of a man.

"Triché, morbleu!" he cried in fury. "Someone shall pay for this. Come out, or I will empty this pistol into you!"

The only answer was the click of a pistol within the coach, and a flash from the corner. Grootz's weapon had missed fire. Whipping his own pistol from his belt Polignac fired; and the Dutchman fell back, hit in the shoulder. With a cry to his companions Polignac sprang on his horse, and galloped furiously back along the road he had come, the other two horsemen hard at his heels. Immediately afterwards the postilion cut the traces and set off in haste after his employer, leaving Grootz, the coach, and one horse to themselves.

Five minutes later, from the Eyndhoven direction, up rode two horsemen at speed. It was now almost totally dark; the coach could barely be discerned in the middle of the road, and Harry, who was foremost, pulled up only just in time to save his horse's knees. In a moment he was out of the saddle; Sherebiah was by his side, and while the man held the horses, Harry, anxiety tearing at his heart, looked into the coach. There was a huddled heap upon the floor.

"Steel and tinder!" he cried to Sherebiah.

A light was struck.

"Good heavens! it is Mynheer Grootz."

He bent down and touched the wounded man's hand, fearing he might be already dead. The touch revived Grootz from his swoon.

"On to Lindendaal!" he said faintly and brokenly. "Leave me! Ladies in danger. Take care. Desperate men: four; at once!"

Loth as Harry was to leave his friend in so ill a plight, the imminence of the peril to which the ladies were exposed was predominant.

"I will send a man back to you, Mynheer," he said. "Sherebiah, we must hasten."

The short halt had given the horses time to recover their wind. They had

not travelled far, nor had they far to go. The two sprang to their saddles, and as they rode off into the darkness there was a look on Harry's face that boded ill for Polignac or any of his party. Never before, even when carried bound on board the *Merry Maid*, even when his own life had been attempted, had he felt the overmastering desire for vengeance that burnt within him now. The sight of his friend and benefactor wounded and helpless had quickened his indignation with Polignac and his crew into a fury of resentment, and at the back of his consciousness there was another and a subtler feeling which he did not pause to analyse. With eyes staring into the distance, ears strained to catch the slightest sound, every sense on the alert, he led the way over the heavy miry road, Sherebiah a short length behind. If anyone could have seen the riders' faces he would have been struck by the contrast between their expressions. Harry's was grim and tense with white rage; Sherebiah's round cheeks wore their settled look of cheerful placidity—the unruffled carelessness of a man of peace.

It was a furious gallop, over the two miles from the halted coach to the gates of Lindendaal. Harry's eager eyes at length caught a twinkle of light ahead to the right of the road. A moment later the faint sound of a shout came down the wind, then the crack of a pistol-shot. Digging his spurs into his steed's heaving flanks he drew his sword; it was a matter of seconds now. He flew past the ruined barn, standing bare and black on the right; and there, before him on the road, shone a light, from a carriage lamp as he supposed. Now mingled with shouts and oaths he heard the clash of steel; in a moment there loomed up before him at the entrance to the balustraded avenue a dark still mass, and in the yellow glare of the lamp he perceived two men on foot fighting desperately. He was still some yards away when he saw the man farthest from him shorten his sword and run his opponent through the body, then with lightning speed prepare to meet the horseman, whether friend or foe, whose coming the ring of hoofs had announced. As he dashed forward, Harry recognized in the sinister features and the wry mouth the evil face of Polignac. Leaning low over his horse's neck he made a sweeping blow with his heavy cavalry sabre that would have cut the Frenchman's spare frame into halves had he not with rare presence of mind sunk on one knee and allowed the blade to swish harmlessly over his head.

Harry was carried on for some yards before he could check the impetus of his horse, and then he found himself in the thick of a fight in which he could distinguish neither friend nor foe. A fierce oath on his right, however, proclaimed the identity of one of the group, and, turning, he saw the bulky form of Captain Aglionby on horseback outlined against the light from the distant house. Leaving Polignac for the moment Harry made straight for his elder enemy, who was wheeling to deal with the new-comer. It was no moment for nice sword-play on either side; cut and thrust, lunge and parry—thus the two engaged in the dark.

Blade clashed on blade, horse pressed against horse, their hoofs struck sparks; nothing to choose between the combatants except that Aglionby was between Harry and the light.

Suddenly the captain made a supreme effort to quell his assailant by main force for good and all. Rising in his saddle, he brought his sword down with the full weight of his arm. But, thanks to the friendly light from Lindendaal, Harry saw the movement in time. Parrying the swashing blow with ease, he replied with a thrust that tumbled the captain groaning from his saddle. The horse plunged and galloped madly into the night. Harry did not wait to discover the full effect of his blow, but wheeled round to find Polignac, the duel on his left having terminated in the flight of one of the parties and pursuit by the other.

At the moment of wheeling he heard the voice of Sherebiah at his elbow.

"Hold, sir! 'Tis done. Mounseer ha' paid his score."

"You have killed him?"

"My sword went through un. He be on ground: no risin' for he."

"Then secure Aglionby. He fell from his horse a few yards up the road."

He himself sprang from the saddle and ran to the door of the coach. Wrenching it open, he saw by the light of the lamp Adèle de Vaudrey erect on the seat, supporting the unconscious form of her mother. The girl's cheeks were the colour of death; her lips were ashen; upon her face was the fixed look of resigned despair.

"Mademoiselle," cried Harry breathlessly, "all is well. You are safe."

A sob broke from the girl's dry lips; tears welled in her eyes.

"Mother has swooned," she said in a whisper.

Harry darted to the canal side, stuck his handkerchief on the point of his sword and let it down to the water, returning with it dripping wet to the coach. Bathing the lady's temples they revived her, and Adèle whispered the news that they were safe. Madame's nerves were quite unstrung; incapable of heeding what was said to her she wept and laughed alternately, to Harry's great alarm.

"We must get her home," said Adèle.

"Yes; I will find a man to lead the coach. You will not mind my going: Mynheer Grootz is wounded two miles away."

"Oh, Monsieur Harry, go then at once. I can take care of Mother."

Harry ran back to the road to find Sherebiah, who in his absence had made an examination of the ground with the aid of the carriage lamp. Polignac was stone dead; his body lay at the very brink of the canal. There was no sign of Aglionby or of the other two men, though traces of blood were found on the spot where the captain had fallen. Of the house party two men were badly wounded; these Harry despatched to the house for ministration while himself with Sherebiah hurried back at full speed to Mynheer Grootz. The coach stood undisturbed

where they had left it. Grootz lay on the seat, conscious but very weak.

”Well?” he said, as they appeared.

”Well, thank God!” replied Harry. ”The ladies are safe, Polignac is dead, Aglionby and the rest have fled.”

”Zo!”

Quite content, the merchant said no more. He was taken at a walking pace to Lindendaal.

CHAPTER XXV
A Bundle of Letters

Jealousy—Hard Facts—A Special Plea—Family History—Brother and Sister—Marriage Lines—A Fair Claimant—Air Castles

Some hours later, when Madame de Vaudrey had been composed to sleep, and the three patients made as comfortable as possible pending the arrival of the doctor, who had been summoned from the village, Adèle left her mother’s bed-side and joined Harry in the dining-room.

”I must thank you,” she said, advancing to him with outstretched hands. ”We have always to thank you. It seems to be fated that you should save us from that bad man.”

”He will trouble you no more, Mademoiselle.”

Adèle looked a question.

”Yes, he is dead.”

The girl shuddered, and looked involuntarily towards the sword at Harry’s side.

”No, it was not I; it was my man.”

There was a look of relief in Adèle’s face.

”How thankful to God we must be that you came in time, Monsieur!”

”Did Madame not get my letter?”

”Did you write a letter?”

”Yes; I learnt some time ago that this plot was hatching, and I wrote twice. The first letter, I know, must have miscarried, but the second—it should have reached you, for I am sure Mynheer Grootz must have received a letter written

at the same time. That is why he is here now."

"We have been away from home: stay, Monsieur, I will enquire."

She soon returned with the letter unopened.

"It came three days ago," she said. "We have been for a week in Breda; there were festivities given by the officers of the garrison, and the servants did not think to send the letter, knowing that we should soon return. M. de——he must have found out the time of our departure, and so planned to waylay us. But we were late in starting; Mother was fatigued; and I see how it happened. Mynheer Grootz's coach was taken for ours; when the—the man found that it was not, he thought it had been sent on in front to deceive him. Oh, Monsieur Harry, but for your letter to Mynheer Grootz, and your coming so soon yourself——"

"Think no more of it, Mademoiselle. I cannot say how glad I am that I happened to be able to serve you. Forgive me; you are worn out; it will not do to have another invalid, you know——"

Adèle smiled in answer.

"Yes, I will go to bed," she said, "and I do thank you for Mother and myself."

She clasped his hands again, then ran from the room. Harry had never seen her so much moved. Hitherto she had always been so cold, so reserved, seeming to grudge the few words that courtesy demanded. Even when something claimed her active help, as in the stratagem by which Lindendaal had been saved from the raiders nearly eighteen months before, she had acted, indeed, with decision and courage, as a good comrade, but had at once relapsed into her former attitude of aloofness, almost disdain. With Fanshawe, on the contrary, she had been frank and gay, ready with quip and jest, gently correcting his French, merrily laughing at her own attempts to speak English, never wearying of accompanying on the harpsichord his west-country songs, which she quickly picked up by ear. Fanshawe was thoroughly in love with her—and Harry remembered with a pang that he bore a letter from Fanshawe to her mother, once more urging his suit.

"Confound him!" he thought, and, his hands tight clasped behind him, he strode up and down the room with compressed lips and lowering brow.

He had no doubt now of the relationship in which he stood to Fanshawe; he was both his rival and friend. He tried to face the situation calmly. Fanshawe was a good fellow, an officer in the English army, and heir to a baronetcy and a fine estate. He could sell out at any moment, and doubtless enjoy by the liberality of his father an income sufficient to maintain a wife in something more than comfort. It gave Harry a pang to contrast his own position. He had no property, no family influence, nothing beyond his pay and the income so generously allowed by Mynheer Grootz. True, he was now in the service of Prince Eugene, and the circumstances in which he had joined the Austrian service gave him a good prospect of ultimate advancement; but it might be many years before

he could venture to ask a lady to share his fortunes. Besides, if Mademoiselle de Vaudrey was indeed heiress to an estate, as Simmons had reported, a poor man could not seek her hand without incurring the suspicion of being a fortune-hunter: the mere suggestion brought a hot flush to Harry's cheeks. No; he could but stand aside. Fanshawe had failed once; he might yet succeed; and if it should so turn out, Harry could but wish his friend joy and go his way.

"Heigh ho! Some fellows are lucky!" he thought, and, heaving a tremendous sigh, he went to bed.

A good night's rest, and the knowledge that Polignac could never disturb her again, cured Madame de Vaudrey's hysteria, and she came down next morning somewhat pale, but in her usual health. After breakfast Harry took the first opportunity of finding his hostess alone, to deliver Fanshawe's letter. She smiled as she took it and noticed the handwriting.

"From that dear Monsieur Fanshawe, is it not?" she said.

"Yes, Madame."

"What can he have to write about, I wonder? Do you know, Harry?"

"Fanshawe told me, and—well, he asked me—that is, I promised to put in a word for him."

"Vraiment! Then I think I guess the subject of his letter. Come, mon ami, what have you to say for him, then?"

The comtesse watched Harry with a twinkle of enjoyment. Her mother's eye had penetrated the state of the case.

"Godfrey is a good fellow, Madame; amiable—you know that; he will be rich some day; he—sings a good song; he—in short, Madame, he is very fond of Mademoiselle, and—and——"

"And would make a good husband, you think? Well, my dear Harry, I shall tell Adèle that he has written to me, and repeat what you have said in his behalf; but you know her: she has a mind of her own; and I can only give her my advice."

And she left Harry in a tormenting perplexity as to what her advice would be.

It was a week or two before Mynheer Grootz was well enough to leave his room, and during those days his kind attendants were careful to avoid all but the most necessary references to what had happened. He was told that Polignac was dead and the hue and cry was out after Aglionby, and his convalescence was not retarded by any fears on the ladies' behalf. One morning, when the doctor allowed him to come downstairs, he sent Harry to find Madame de Vaudrey. It was time, he said, that the motive of Polignac's recent attempt should be seriously considered.

"Madame," he said in French, when with Harry they were closeted in the reception-room, "it has not yet been told you, but we have reason to believe that

Polignac urged his suit upon Adèle because he had information that she is heiress to some estates."

"As she is—heiress to Lindendaal."

"Yes, but the estates in question must be of greater value. Your little estate here is not of so much worth as to account for Polignac promising large sums to Aglionby, first on his marriage with Adèle, secondly on her succession to her property. Tell me, Madame, know you of anything that could give colour to the beliefs of these wretches?"

"Nothing, my friend. My husband, as you know well, was a refugee, an exile: his family estates in France were confiscated long ago. As for me, I had nothing but my poor little dowry. No relatives of mine are owners of estates."

"But on Monsieur le Comte's side: his mother: she was an Englishwoman, I believe?"

"Yes. I know little of her; she died very soon after the birth of her only child, my dear husband."

"What was her name?"

"I do not remember. Certainly I have heard it, but it is many years ago, and English names are so difficult to keep in mind."

"But Monsieur le Comte—had he not some souvenir of his mother?—some portrait, or heirloom, or family papers?"

"I never saw any. But I have upstairs a box in which I treasure many little things that were his: perhaps you would like to see it?"

"Certainly. It would be as well."

Madame de Vaudrey sent a servant to a private room in the turret, whence he returned presently with a leather-covered brass-studded box. After some search the key was discovered, the box was opened, and the comtesse took out, one after another, various memorials of her dead husband. Among them was a bundle of papers tied up with ribbon; this she laid with trembling hands before her friend.

"You permit me, Madame?" he said.

She nodded through her tears.

Grootz untied the ribbon, and unfolded the topmost paper. A cursory glance showed that it threw no light on the subject all had at heart. Several other papers were examined with a like result; then, nearly at the bottom of the bundle, Grootz came upon a smaller packet separately tied. The outer wrapper bore, in a faded, delicate handwriting, the words: "Dernières letters de la famille de feu ma chère femme". Harry got up and leant towards him in some excitement.

"Wait, my son," said Grootz; "let us proceed with quietness."

He opened the topmost letter, and read it slowly through.

"It tells us nothing," he said. "It begins 'My dear sister', and ends 'Eustace'.

We go to the next."

Unfolding this, he saw at the top the date June 12, 1659, and an address in London.

"This is in the same hand," he said. "It is cramped; Harry, your eyes are young; read it, my boy, aloud."

Harry took the letter and read:

"MY DEARE SISTER,

"It will please you to heare the Affaire goes according to our hopes. The people are well dispos'd to the Gentleman you wot of, & the rule of the Saintes is abhorr'd of the moste. But businesse of State holds lesse in your Estimation than the fortunes of your brother, and I have a peece of Newes that will put your gentle heart all in a Flutter. What do 'ee think, sweete? You never had a sister: will you thanke me if I give you one? There! not to keepe you on tenterhooks, I designe—now is yr heart going pit-a-pat—to wed: ay, Mary, your brother has met his fate. This daye weeke the Knot is to be ty'd. I knowe the questions that at this Newes flocke into your mind: is she black or faire, tall or short, of court or cottage? I am not carefull to answer; you shall love her, my sweet; 'tis the fairest, dearest ladie lucky man ever wonne, yonge, freshe, winsome as you could wishe. I dare not, as you may beleeve, wed in my owne name; 'tis too perilous as yet, my Businesse being what it is; indeede, Lucy herselfe knows not of my family, for being so yonge and simple, she might let fall in an unwatch'd moment what might bring me to the block. She shall knowe all in due season. I have not open'd my Designe to our brother, for in truthe I find no reason to truste him; his warm professions of Zeale for us seeme to me but Flams. I feare he has play'd throughout a Double Game. He stands exceeding well with the Godly Partie, & having been at Paines to enquire thro' a sure friend I can heare of nothing done in our behalfe, but rather of endeavors to feather his owne nest. But enough of that; if our hopes are crown'd, as praye God they may be speedilie, Nicolas will have——"

Harry paused as he read the name.

——"Nicolas will have no choice but to quitte the Hall, and make what Profitte he may of his owne farmes. Ask in yr prayers that the Happie Daie be hasten'd. And now no more from your righte loving Brother EUSTACE."

Harry laid the letter down, and looked at Mynheer Grootz.

"Why did you pause?" asked the Dutchman.

"'Twas a thought I had, Mynheer. It may be vain. Before I say more, will you look at the next paper?"

"Hé!" exclaimed Madame de Vaudrey, "I am becoming curious."

Mynheer Grootz with the same imperturbable calm unfolded the next paper of the bundle.

"This," he said, scanning it over his spectacles, "is not a letter; it is a document. It records the marriage, in the Huguenot church in Paris, on May 2, 1658, of Louis Marie Honoré, Comte de Vaudrey, aged 34, with Mary Berkeley,"—he pronounced the name in three syllables, foreign fashion—"aged 22, daughter of John Berkeley Esquire of Winton Hall, in the county of Wiltshire, England."

"'Tis found!" cried Harry, springing up in excitement. "We call the name Barkley in England; Madame, Monsieur le Comte was the son of Mr. Berkeley's sister; he is the squire of my own village Winton St. Mary; without a doubt it is his estates to which Mademoiselle is heiress. What a discovery we have made!"

"Stay, Harry," said Mynheer Grootz quietly; "did you not tell me that your squire has a son?"

"Yes, yes, but now I remember: at home I have heard it said that Mr. Berkeley was lord of the manor only by default of other heirs: yes, it comes back to me now: the villagers did not like him; they grudged him his estate; he was stepson of the former squire, and step-brother of the lady who became Comtesse de Vaudrey."

"Still I do not understand. The lady had a brother—the gentleman whose name was Eustace; being employed in state business, to do with the restoration of your King Charles, I think, he was doubtless the elder of the two: he would be his father's heir, and his children after him. The letter, you see, announces his approaching marriage."

"You are right, Mynheer. I heard him talked of, too; he was killed in a fray with highwaymen on the Dover road, when he was returning from France, after King Charles came back, to claim his estates. Yes, the squire's family history is well known in the village; but I never heard of a Mistress Eustace Berkeley; perhaps the marriage did not take place after all."

"It would seem so."

"It must be so," cried Harry. "Do you not now see Captain Aglionby's part? When he stayed with you, Madame, six years ago, he must have discovered Monsieur le Comte's relationship with Mr. Berkeley; that explains his hold over the squire; it explains also the scheme arranged between him and Monsieur de Polignac. Indeed, it is clear as daylight: the captain bled Mr. Berkeley on pretence of keeping his secret; and he sold that secret to Polignac."

”The odious man!” exclaimed Madame de Vaudrey, who sat in a state of perfect amazement as link after link was added to the chain.

”A very villain!” said Grootz, smiting the table. ”Madame, it appears that Adèle is indeed the rightful owner of the estates now held by this miscreant Berkeley, and I, Jan Grootz, will make it my business, as soon as I am recovered, to see that right is done.”

”And it is to Harry that we owe it all! Oh, my dear Harry, Adèle shall thank you! If only my dear husband could have lived to bless you too!”

”Zo!” exclaimed Grootz. ”But, Madame, I have a thing to say. Adèle shall thank Harry; yes; but I say tell her nothing until I have been to London, and with the aid of English law have overthrown the villain Berkeley. It will be best; yes, it will be best.”

”Very well, my friend. Dear Adèle! to think of her as lady of an English manor! She has thought much of her English grandmother: she will love to live in England; I have no English blood in me, and I dread the sea; but I must live with her, of course I must.”

Grootz compressed his lips.

”Il ne faut pas vendre la peau de l’ours avant de l’avoir tué,” he said sententiously.

CHAPTER XXVI
The New Squire

Jonahs—Step-brothers—Whose Gain?—The Female Line—The End of the Story—Treason—The Fleet—In Italy with Eugene—Home—Adèle Studies Geography—Lady Bountiful—Minshull Remembers—A Warning from Mr. Tape—Mr. Tape at Hungerford—Exit Harry Rochester—At the Gate—A Royal Feast—What’s in a Name?—A Rustic Moralist—Wedding Bells

Giles Appleyard, giving a flick to the off leader, scraped his well-rasped chin over the stiff collar of his coat and addressed the outside passenger who had just mounted his coach at Basingstoke.

”Why, Willum Nokes,” he said, ”’tis many a long day since I set eyes on your noble frame. How’s the wicked world sarven ’ee, Willum?”

”Fairish, Giles coachman, on’y fairish. A’ve never bin the same man since

that tarrible day when John Simmons gi' me the go-by. Ay, I were constable then, a-sarven the Queen and Sir Godfrey, and wi' the bodies of all the souls in Winton Simmary under me. Now I be on'y parish beadle at Basingstoke, sarvant to pa'son, and rulen over none but the misbehaven childer in church."

He sighed and shook his head.

"Ay, and th' on'y thing as keeps me above ground is a journey once a year to th' old place, where I wanders round a-thinken deep things o' the noble line o' life as used to be."

"Ay, poor soul, 'ee did truly make a gashly fool o' yerself that day, Willum. Well, better a live fool than a dead 'oss, as you med say."

"An' yerself, Giles—you looks hale an' hearty as ever I seed 'ee."

"Ay, Willum, I goos up an' down the world rain or shine, merry as a grig."

"'Ee must see a powerful deal o' life, Giles; all sarts an' perditions o' men, as pa'son sings in church. Who med be your insides to-day, if I med axe so homely a quest'on?"

"Only two to-day, Willum. There be little travellen for a week or two arter Christmas. One on 'em be a Dutch skipper; I mind I carried un once afore; ay, 'twas the same day as young pa'son Rochester and Sherry Minshull rode a-top, all agwine to Lun'on. Young pa'son be now a sojer, so 'tis said, an' hob-a-nob wi' the mighty o' the earth. The way o' the world, Willum; some goos up, like young pa'son; some goos down, like Willum Nokes; some goos steady, like Giles Appleyard; eh, soul?"

"Ay, 'tis constables goos down, a' b'lieve. But who be your other inside, coachman?"

"Why, no one an't telled me, but I'd take my affidavy afore any justice o' peace 'tis a limb o' the law. I knows they sart. They ought to pay double; for why? 'cause bean't safe to carry; last time I carried a lawyer fore off wheel broke as we trundled through Winterslow. When I seed this chap at Angel and Crown this marnen, says I to myself, 'Zooks!' says I, 'what poor mortal soul be agwine to suffer now?'"

For the rest of the journey coachman and passenger exchanged gossip on their common acquaintances. William Nokes alighted at the Queen's Head, at Winton St. Mary, and shook his head in sympathy with Mistress Joplady when he saw the two inside passengers descend from the coach and enter the inn.

"One a furrener, t'other a lawyer!" he muttered. "Ah! what tarrible things some poor souls ha' got to putt up wi'!"

Mistress Joplady, however, welcomed both her guests with her wonted heartiness, and with her own hands plied the warming-pan for their beds.

At ten o'clock next morning the two strangers left the inn together. One of them carried a small portfolio. They went through the village, across the com-

mon, and, entering the park gates of Winton Hall, walked up the long drive to the porch and asked whether Mr. Berkeley was at home. After a few minutes' delay they were invited to step in, and conducted to a little room in the turret, where they found the squire in cassock and skull-cap, warming his withered hands at the fire.

"Mr. Berkeley?" said the elder of the two.

"That is my name. What is your business?"

"My name, sir, Jan Grootz. My friend Mr. Swettenham Tape, of Lincoln's Inn."

"Well?"

"You will permit me to take a chair; dank you! And my friend Mr. Tape; dank you!"

At the mention of his name, Mr. Berkeley flashed a shrewd glance under his bushy white eyebrows at the Dutchman, then gripped the arms of his chair, and waited.

"Mr. Berkeley, my business will not hold you long. You will pardon if I begin at de beginning and tell you a little history?"

The squire kept his eyes fixed on his visitor, but said nothing. Taking his silence as permission to proceed, Grootz settled himself in his chair, with his plump right hand ready to punctuate his sentences.

"Dis history dat I tell you, sir, I hope you will find it interesting. It is ver much about yourself; you are old man, but of dose old men, pardon me, who regard demselves as de most interesting subjeck in de world; zo! De history begin long ago; zixty-vive year indeed, when your shadow first zink over dis place." Grootz's hand made a comprehensive sweep. "You were den Nicolas Heller, an eleven-year boy; your moder, a widow, she had married Mr. John Berkeley, a widower, wid two children, one"—here the forefinger wagged—"Eustace Berkeley, a nine-year boy; de oder, Mary, a child four year. On your moder Mr. Berkeley settle de farms of—of——"

"Winton Chase and Odbury," said Mr. Swettenham Tape, speaking for the first time.

"Zo; de farms of Winton Chase and Odbury; you took de name Berkeley, and after your moder dese farms should become yours. Dree years go, your moder die; Mr. John Berkeley is again a widower, and never marry no more. War had broke out, he take part wid de king and fight in de vield, your stepbroder alzo whenever he is of age to bear arms. But Nicolas, poor boy! is not strong, he is always at home to care for de estates; besides, he do not love de king; no, Nicolas never love nobody—nobody but himself."

Grootz paused and bent a little forward in his chair; the squire had not moved a muscle.

”De king is killed, Oliver Cromwell is ruler in de land, and after de battle of Worcester, Mr. John Berkeley, his son and daughter, go for safety to France. But Nicolas—he find dat he is a Puritan, a saint in heart; he give money—it was not his to give—to de Parliament side, and he speak of his stepfader—of de man, mark you, to whom he owe everyding—as a traitor, a malignant. At same time he write letters to de traitor in France telling how he work to keep his estate for him, if chance come he zall return and enjoy his own. How kind is Nicolas! zo!

”Time flows; de chance come; King Charles wears his fader’s crown, but Mr. John Berkeley is not alive to return alzo. In 1658 he die. But his son, Nicolas’ stepbroder Eustace, what of him? In June 1660 he come back to claim his inheritance, but he never see his home. No, on de road he is set upon and murdered.”

Still the old man sat rigid in grim silence.

”De murder of Eustace Berkeley, whom do it profit? De men who killed him?—not zo; dey stay not to empty his pockets. It profit nobody but Nicolas Berkeley. Dink you not dat is singular? To me it is very singular. Zo!”

The Dutchman spoke always with the same careful deliberation. His tone now became stern.

”I come now, Mr. Berkeley, to someding dat interest you more. Mr. John Berkeley had, not only a son, but alzo a daughter.” The keen-eyed Dutchman noticed a slight twitching of the squire’s brow. ”Ah, I thought dat would interest you! De daughter, Mary, marry in Paris de Comte de Vaudrey, a nobleman, a Huguenot; dat is not long before King Charles come back. Her broder Eustace risk his life to come to England on service for his sovereign; he write letters to his sister; interesting letters; I take leave to read you someding he said.”

He took the portfolio from the lawyer’s hands, selected a paper from it, and read the following passage:—

”’I feare he has play’d throughout a Double Game. He stands exceeding well with the Godly Partie, & having been at Paines to enquire thro’ a sure friend I can heare of nothing done in our behalfe, but rather of endeavors to feather his owne nest. But enough of that; if our hopes are crown’d, as praye God they may be speedilie, Nicolas will have no choice but to quitte the Hall, and make what Profitte he may of his owne farmes.’

”Zo! dis letter, and oders, was received by Madame la Comtesse de Vaudrey—dat is, Mary Berkeley—when her husband was absent from Paris. He return; de poor lady is dying; she leave a little boy. He write to Eustace from Paris; he get no reply; he write again, dree times in all; still no reply, and he dink his wife’s

friends English and care not any more. As for him, he has pride and keep silence, and believe Eustace Berkeley is now lord of Winton Hall.

"Zo time pass. Den come trouble to de Huguenots in France, and de Comte de Vaudrey take refuge wid his son in Holland. He read no English; but he keep dings dat belong to his wife, among dem de letters of Eustace. His son Louis marry in Holland a Huguenot lady. Fader, son, both are dead, but"—he wagged his forefinger impressively—"but Louis Comte de Vaudrey leave a daughter, Adèle, and it is on behalf of Mademoiselle Adèle de Vaudrey I wait upon you to-day. I know well dese dings are not new to you; I know dat. It is now some years when Captain Aglionby—an adventurer, a cut-droat—discover how Mademoiselle Adèle is related to de house of Berkeley. Already he know someding of you; he have an uncle Minshull dat live on your estate. He see a chance to feader his very bare nest, and he take it. You are de squire, he dink; a rich man; you will pay well to keep de secret. He come to you; you do pay well; you become his generous patron, and he do your dirty work. But sometimes you lose temper, and give him hard words and close your purse. Perhaps, dink he, he may find yet anoder rich man who will buy de secret. Such a man is Monsieur de Polignac. Your Aglionby take money from you, and bargain wid Polignac to get more money when he become by marriage owner of dis estate and turn you out. But de plan is found out; we have settle with Polignac; he is dead; we search for Aglionby; he hide himself; and now, Mr. Berkeley, it is your turn. I come to you to demand, on behalf of Mademoiselle Adèle de Vaudrey, possession of her property in seven days from dis present day. My friend Mr. Tape of Lincoln's Inn have copies of all de papers; he will show dem, at proper time, to your lawyer. De history is now at end, Mr. Berkeley. I dank you for your zo-patient hearing. It is now to you; zo!"

Mr. Berkeley had spoken never a word. For a few moments he remained motionless in his chair; then, lengthening his arm, he pulled a bell-rope at his side. A servant entered.

"Thomas," said the squire in his thin hard voice, "show these gentlemen to the door."

Grootz and the lawyer glanced at each other. The latter gave a slight shrug and began to tie up his portfolio. Grootz rose.

"I have de honour, Mr. Berkeley, to wish you good-day."

And with his companion he left the room.

An hour later the village was startled by the news that the squire had had a stroke. A man had ridden to Salisbury for the physician, and the gossips at the Queen's Head were already discussing the expected succession of "young squire"

to the estates. But in the afternoon the report was contradicted. The squire had merely been seized with a fainting fit; he had recovered and was to all appearance his usual self.

A week passed; Mr. Berkeley had received from Mr. Swettenham Tape of Lincoln's Inn a formal demand for the surrender of the property, to which he made no reply. At the end of the week Mr. Tape filed a suit in chancery. But the mills of the law grind slowly. Grootz had returned to Holland, a new campaign had opened, and Harry Rochester was with Prince Eugene in northern Italy before Mr. Swettenham Tape had all his affidavits sworn.

A few weeks before the case was to be opened before Lord Chancellor Cowper, a bailiff armed with a warrant, and accompanied by two strong tipstaves, appeared at the house of a Mistress Consterdine near the Cockpit, Whitehall. The bailiff gained admittance, and when after some time he returned to the street he was accompanied by a tall bulky man in semi-military garb, with whom he and the tipstaves entered a hackney coach and were driven to Newgate. The prisoner was at once brought before the magistrate and charged under the name of Ralph Aglionby with entering into a treasonable conspiracy on behalf of the exiled Stuarts. In addition to the letters taken in his lodging, other papers that had been brought from Germany were put in by the Crown, proving Aglionby to have been in the service of Her Majesty's enemies; and a man Simmons, a joiner in London, who had received a free pardon, gave evidence that Aglionby had fought with the Bavarians at Blenheim and elsewhere, holding a commission in the Elector of Bavaria's forces. His papers were found to include letters from Mr. Nicolas Berkeley of Winton Hall, forwarding sums of money to Aglionby in Holland. The sequel to this discovery was the arrest of Mr. Berkeley at his inn in Soho, and his inclusion in the indictment for conspiracy.

The trial came on in due course. Captain Aglionby's connection with the Jacobites was fully established, and he was sentenced to be transported to the Plantations for twenty years. Mr. Berkeley's complicity was not so clearly shown, though he could bring no evidence to prove his statement that the sums remitted to his fellow-prisoner were payment for private services totally unconnected with the Jacobite cause. The circumstances were suspicious, and the judge considered that he showed great lenience in condemning Mr. Berkeley to pay a fine of £500. Although he had for years enjoyed a large income, he had but little ready money at command. He had spent large sums in purchasing lands adjoining the Winton property, and the extravagance of his son had been a constant drain upon his purse. With the civil action de Vaudrey *v.* Berkeley pending in the court of chancery, he found some difficulty in borrowing sufficient money to pay his fine.

The chancery suit came on for hearing. The claimants had engaged the

highest counsel of the day, and brought a great array of evidence, documentary and oral, from Holland. Mr. Berkeley's case was ably argued, but the evidence was irresistible; the decision was given against him; he was ordered to produce the title deeds of the property, and to render an account of all that he had derived from the estates since his illegal usurpation of them forty-five years before. He wished to appeal; but, discredited by the result of the trial for conspiracy, he was unable to raise the necessary funds. He was moving heaven and earth to overcome his difficulties when payment was demanded of the sum he had borrowed to meet the fine, and as the money was not forthcoming he was arrested and thrown into the debtors' prison in the Fleet.

It was December before the case was finally decided. As soon as Mynheer Grootz was released from his business cares by the armies going into winter quarters, he accompanied Madame de Vaudrey with Adèle and part of their household to England, and saw them installed in Winton Hall. At Adèle's wish, Mr. Berkeley was not pressed for the costs of the suit he had lost; but his other creditors were relentless, and determined to keep him in the Fleet prison until the income from the farms he inherited from his mother should have enabled him to pay his debts.

It was many months before Harry learnt of the success of Grootz's efforts on behalf of Adèle. In March, 1705, he left Austria with Prince Eugene for Italy, where the prince's cousin, Victor Amadeus the Second of Savoy, was maintaining a difficult struggle against Marshal Vendôme. He was with the prince at the indecisive battle of Cassano in August, and spent the winter in Turin. There letters reached him from England telling how Adèle had taken up her residence at Winton as lady of the manor, and when he wrote his warm letter of congratulation he said to himself that his fate was now sealed. At Turin also he received a letter from Fanshawe reporting his father's death and his own determination to sell out and live on his estate. This news gave Harry a fresh pang, for, though he knew that Fanshawe's suit had been again rejected, he felt that as next-door neighbours Adèle and he would see much of each other, and their constant companionship might at length end in a match which on many grounds must be considered excellent.

Next year he served Prince Eugene as aide-de-camp at the battle of Calcinate in April, and again five months later at the brilliant victory of Turin, when the prince, by his total defeat of the Duke of Orleans and Marshal Marsin, finally saved Savoy from the clutches of King Louis. His own services did not go unrewarded. The prince gave him the colonelcy of an imperial dragoon regiment, and held out hopes that if he remained in the emperor's service he might before long gain an estate and a title of nobility. But a few days after the battle, he received from England a letter which altered the whole course of his life. It was

a short note from Madame de Vaudrey, written at Winton nearly three months before. Certain circumstances had come to light, wrote the lady, that rendered his presence at Winton desirable as soon as he could obtain leave. It was nearly four years since the black day on which he had left his home so sadly; he was hungry for a sight of the old scenes and the old faces, and felt something more than curiosity to see Adèle de Vaudrey as lady bountiful of the parish. He went at once to Prince Eugene with the letter; the prince drew from him the whole story of his connection with the family of Lindendaal, and with a twinkling eye consented to his immediate departure for England.

"The French will give us no more trouble here," he said. "My next battle will be fought on other soil. I said before, you remember, that you were in love. You thought not. We shall see. Go home; but the war is not over. I shall hope to see you at the head of your regiment in the next campaign."

Sherebiah was as much delighted as his master at the thought of seeing home again.

"To tell 'ee the truth, sir," he said, when Harry ordered him to make preparations for departure, "I be a-thinken o' Katrinka. I don't feel happy in my mind at the notion o' her at Winton Simmary wi'out me. Why, old feyther o' mine, ancient soul as he be, if he knows what a hand her've got for griddle-cakes—zooks! sir, he'll be a-marryen her hisself, never thinken as I be more'n a boy."

One October day Harry and Sherebiah embarked at Leghorn for the voyage home. Their vessel made quick sailing as far as Gibraltar, where Sir George Rooke had planted the flag of England two years before; but was beset by contrary winds in the Atlantic, beat about for days in the Bay of Biscay, and reached Southampton sadly buffeted six weeks after leaving Leghorn. The travellers lost no time in taking horse, and rode up to Winton Hall late one November evening. Harry was received with a warmth of greeting that made him glow with pleasure. Even Adèle welcomed him with more frankness than she had ever before shown him, though he detected a different constraint, a something new in her manner, that puzzled him. The evening was spent in talking over old times and the strange events that had happened since their last meeting. Mynheer Grootz, Harry learnt, had visited Winton more than once since he had installed Adèle in her property nearly a year before, and was coming over to spend Christmas with them. Godfrey Fanshawe, now Sir Godfrey, was a frequent visitor and had been the means of introducing them to many of the best people in the county, who had welcomed Adèle with open arms. Madame afterwards told Harry privately that Sir Godfrey had once more proposed to Adèle, and been finally refused. Adèle herself looked older and more womanly. She had acquired considerable fluency in English, and was fond of going about among the villagers, taking the keenest interest in ways of life and thought so novel to her.

”But the dear girl is not happy,” said Madame with a sigh. ”No, she is not happy. I fear she is home-sick. We have sold Lindendaal and repaid Mynheer Grootz’s friend who so generously bought up that odious man’s mortgages. But Adèle was happier at Lindendaal than she is here. She has been restless ever since we came to England, and you would be surprised to know, Harry, how she throws herself lately into the details of this horrible war. The *Courant* comes to us every day by the coach from London, and the house is littered, perfectly littered, mon ami, with maps of Italy. Decidedly she is a changed creature.”

”Mamma,” interrupted Adèle, ”don’t give Monsieur Harry a wrong idea. I am happy enough, but——”

”Hé! voila!” exclaimed Madame with a little gesture. ”She is happy, but——”

”And what is this business that required my presence?” said Harry, to relieve the girl of her manifest embarrassment.

”Oh! Adèle must explain that. It has been her affair always.”

”Really, Mamma, I think you should explain. You wrote to Monsieur Harry.”

”Eh bien! but it was you who told me what to say. No, I leave it to you: I have no head for affairs, especially for affairs so complicated. But it is growing late, and Harry must be tired. We will let him have a good night’s rest: then to-morrow, ma chérie, you can have a whole morning together.”

The morning turned out bright, and after breakfast Adèle proposed a walk round the grounds. Harry was nothing loth, and when Madame did not offer to accompany them, he concluded that, living in England, she had decided to conform to English ways. In the course of that ramble Harry heard a story that amazed him.

During the past year Adèle had made many friends among the villagers, and one friend in particular, old Gaffer Minshull. She had been specially gracious to him for the sake of Katrinka, who, however quick she might be in learning how to cook Wiltshire bacon and to sing Wiltshire songs, was certainly slow in learning Wiltshire English. The Lady Squire, as he called her, had become a great favourite with the old man, and, as she grew accustomed to his dialect, he talked to her freely about the village, the late parson, and the late squire, of whom he was no longer ”afeard”. Adèle, like everyone else, had always been puzzled about Mr. Berkeley’s hatred of Harry, and she asked the old man whether he knew of any reason for it beyond his being the son of the squire’s sturdy opponent, Parson Rochester. Minshull confessed that he was as much perplexed as she. The old squire’s man Jock had told him of the incident witnessed at the park gate on the day of Harry’s departure for London, when, seeing him walk by, Mr. Berkeley had looked as if he had had a shock; and he remembered that Squire had left the Hall in a post-chaise the next day, though whither they went Jock never would tell.

This set Adèle thinking. She made further enquiries of the old man. Had not the squire a brother? At the question Minshull looked hard at her, and replied with some hesitation that such was the case; he had a brother, or rather a step-brother. Adèle enquired what had become of him; she knew, for Grootz had made no secret of his discovery; but she asked in order to get more information. He died, said the old man, on the Dover road; a fine young man, though he did hold to that false Charles One and his light son Charles Two. Then insensibly the old man was led on to talk at large; he seemed anxious to ease his mind of a burden; and with the garrulity of old age, and being no longer "afeard" of the squire, he at length poured out the whole pitiful story.

Forty-seven years before, in '59, when he was a Republican trooper and his regiment was stationed at Blackheath, he was passing one morning through London on his way back to camp after—he was ashamed to confess it—a riotous night. Suddenly he was called into a church to witness a marriage. No one was present save the clergy, bride and bridegroom, and the other witness, apparently a lady's-maid. In his half-fuddled state he had no clear recollection of anything beyond the facts that he signed his name and came away with a guinea.

About a year later, after the Restoration, when his regiment was gloomily expecting the order for disbandment, he was strolling one evening in the direction of Shooter's Hill, and attracted by a crowd about an inn door. A young gentleman had been discovered a few miles down the road, lying unconscious, and severely wounded. He had been brought to the inn, and soon afterwards his servant appeared, a Frenchman, who had fled when his master was attacked by footpads. From him it was learnt that the name of the wounded man was Berkeley, and that he was on his way to Winton St. Mary to take possession of the family estates. Minshull, out of sheer curiosity, asked with many other bystanders to be shown the unfortunate gentleman, and to his amazement he recognized him as the bridegroom whose wedding he had witnessed nearly a year before. A message was sent to Winton St. Mary, and two days later Mr. Nicolas Berkeley appeared on the scene. Minshull meanwhile had hung about, partly out of curiosity, partly out of interest in the man whose murder had followed so quickly upon his marriage.

The wounded man never recovered consciousness. He died soon after his brother's arrival. Minshull found an opportunity of speaking to the squire, and condoled with him on the loss of so handsome a brother, and on the sad plight of the young widow left to mourn his loss. Mr. Berkeley had appeared surprised at the mention of a widow, and asked the trooper to tell him all he knew. This was very little; he could not remember the church where the marriage had been performed, nor the name of the bride; all he was sure of was the identity of the bridegroom; he did not even remember the name Berkeley. The squire had shaken his

head and frowned: a secret marriage!—there was something suspicious in that; his brother had some reason to be ashamed of his alliance: he would look into it; but for the present it was best to drop the curtain on the episode. He had then offered the trooper a situation at the Hall, which Minshull, with no settled livelihood after nearly twenty years' military service, eagerly accepted. He received good wages, and by and by a cottage on the estate. He was well aware that the squire treated him thus generously to keep his mouth shut, and though many times he had felt the prick of conscience, he was so comfortable, and, as time went on, so much afraid of the squire, that he had never broken the tacit pact between them.

Old Minshull's story worked so powerfully upon Adèle's imagination that she became at length ill at ease. What had become of the bride whose marriage he had witnessed? Adèle remembered how Eustace Berkeley had spoken of her in his letters to Mary de Vaudrey; she remembered, too, that he had married under a feigned name. Her uneasiness grew so intolerable that she persuaded her mother, not without difficulty, to put the facts before the same lawyer whom Mynheer Grootz had employed—Mr. Swettenham Tape of Lincoln's Inn. He warned her that enquiry might result in the loss of her property, but she insisted on an investigation, and as it promised to be an interesting enquiry, the attorney took it up with enthusiasm.

One of his first steps was to interrogate Mr. Berkeley's man Jock, who had driven with his master to Hungerford on that November day three years before. As the result of the interview, the lawyer himself made a journey to Hungerford, where he called at the parsonage and had a conversation with the vicar, enquiring particularly about his predecessors in the living. He learnt that the former rector had died in 1680 at the age of sixty-eight, leaving a grandson, his only daughter's child, a young man of twenty-one who had just taken deacon's orders. The grandson's name was Rochester. Did the vicar know anything of the young man's father? Nothing but the vaguest rumours; it was generally understood that Lucy Rochester's husband had deserted her a few months after their marriage, and that was naturally a subject on which the family would say nothing. Was the lady still living? She had died ten years before her father. If Mr. Tape desired further details, there was one person who might gratify him if she wished: the wife of the landlord of the Bear Inn, who had been lady's-maid to Mistress Rochester.

The attorney hastened to the inn, engaged a room for the night, and took the first opportunity of having a gossip with Mrs. Pemberton, the hostess, a comely, pleasant old dame of near seventy years. She had the keenest recollection of the one romantic incident of her life. Mistress Lucy!—of course she remembered the sweet pretty creature. She had been with her in London the year

before the King came back, when she was visiting her aunt. And Mr. Rochester, too—ah! such a handsome young gentleman; but a wicked deceiver, she feared. He had protected Mistress Lucy from footpads one evening: that was the beginning of it, and the end was a marriage, and a sad end it was, for Mr. Rochester went away to France three months afterwards, on some urgent business which he did not explain, and he never returned. Mrs. Rochester remained for nearly a year in London, then returned to her father at Hungerford with her infant son, a bonny boy who grew up a blessing to her, and became a parson, and died only three years back at Winton St. Mary, she had heard.

Mr. Tape asked whether she remembered the church in which the wedding had taken place. To be sure she did; it was St. Andrew's Undershaft; she remembered how dark it looked, and how awed the other witness had appeared to be, a rough soldier who was fetched in from the street, and was a little overtaken with liquor. And, strange to say, this was the second time she had been asked about this incident of long ago, a miserable-looking old gentleman having called upon her three years before; after talking with her, he had left the house without so much as asking for a tankard of her home-brewed.

On returning to London, the attorney examined the register of St. Andrew's Undershaft, and made a copy of the entry of a marriage on June 19, 1659, between Eustace Rochester, bachelor, of St. Andrew's parish, and Lucy Fleming, spinster, of Hungerford. The information given by Gaffer Minshull and Mrs. Pemberton was then embodied in affidavits, and the whole case being complete, Mr. Tape laid the result of his investigations before Madame de Vaudrey and her daughter, and asked for their instructions.

Harry had listened to Adèle's story, as they rambled round and round the park, with a strange mixture of emotions. Astonishment was perhaps the dominant one, but there was also the happiness of knowing something about his family, and dismay at the knowledge that he, and not Adèle, was the rightful owner of the Berkeley estates.

"Why, then you are my cousin, Adèle!" he said.

"Yes, Harry,—and you are head of the family."

"How plain it makes everything! And do you know, I pity the wretched old man who has lived for nearly fifty years with these crimes on his conscience. He must have led a miserable life."

"That is why I am glad all is discovered. I should lead a miserable life too if I found I was enjoying what did not belong to me."

"But that is nonsense, Adèle. You don't imagine I shall take the estates? Not I. The good folks here adore you already; I won't take from them their lady squire."

"You must."

”No, no! Only weak or foolish sovereigns abdicate, Adèle: you are not weak or foolish. Besides, I have my career. I am on the high road to preferment. Prince Eugene has given me a regiment, and—I didn’t mean to tell you this—promises me an estate and a title in Austria.”

”And you know perfectly well that you would rather be plain Mr. Berkeley, an English squire, than count or prince or royal highness in Austria. No; I will not listen to you: if you insist on being an Austrian—well, I shall give up the estates to the crown: Queen Anne shall be lady of the manor.”

”You cannot: you are not of age, and Madame would never hear of it.”

”Mr. Henry Berkeley, I have only two years to wait.”

They had come round to the gate leading from the park to the graveyard.

”Come and see the monument the people put up in the church to your father, Harry,” said Adèle, with a change of tone. He opened the gate for her; she passed through, then turned, and said: ”It is you or Queen Anne, Mr. Berkeley.”

Harry was on the other side of the gate. They looked into each other’s eyes. He knew her strength of character: he had no doubt that she would do anything to which she had made up her mind. He was troubled, and, resting his arms on the upper bar of the gate, stood thus pondering.

”Adèle,” he said presently, ”but for me you would stay at the Hall?”

”If I were the rightful owner, certainly; but now it is clearly impossible.”

”Not quite impossible, Adèle, even so.”

He waited for an answer, but she was unexpectedly silent, her eyes cast down.

”Not quite impossible, Adèle. If you will not stay for any other reason—tell me, Adèle, will you not stay for my sake?”

Still she made no answer, only looked up with a shy startled glance. But in that look Harry found courage to repeat his question.

* * * * *

”Never did I ply my fark at such a roaren dinner—never in my born days; I tells ’ee true, souls.”

”Ay, I seed ’ee myself, Lumpy, a-scoopen chidlens an’ plum-pudden an’ furmenty into your thropple till I thowt ’ee’d bust. ’Twere noble eatin’, to be sure.”

”Ay, Soapy, an’ cost a pretty penny, I warrant. Squire Harry be a different sart o’ feller to old Squire as was. Never did he gi’ us a warmen-up, nor never would, if there’d ha’ bin farty weddens.”

”Why bean’t every day a marryen day? ’T’ould keep all our innards warm an’ cosy ’ithout us doen a hand’s turn.”

"'T'ould be the ruin of a poor stunpoll like 'ee, Jemmy. I'm afeard 'ee'll never be a man, an' if 'ee got your vittles so easy 'ee'd be more like a fatted calf 'n ever."

"Ah! I knows my dumb brain be weak by natur'. I mind how dazed I were the black day young pa'son went to Lun'on, and John painter made Mis'ess Joplady's pictur' the colour o' sut."

"An' it'll be the colour o' sut to-morrer, souls, I gi' my word for that. They tells me 'tis treason, but John painter do blot out Queen's yead to-morrer, and inn turns to Berkeley Arms again."

"Like a 'ooman, changes her name at a wedden.—Ah! here be neighbour Minshull; a scantling o' cheese and a mug o' old stingo for gaffer, Mistress Joplady; he'll want a summat to comfort un, poor aged soul, this night o' fearsome joy."

"True, Tom cobbler, I be gone eighty-vive. I ha' seed un home-along, souls; my boy Sherebiah be a man at last, an' I be proud as a grandfeyther a'ready. Never did I think my boy an' young pa'son 'd say the awful words in church the same day. 'I take thee, Addle,' says Master Harry in a feelin' key, and 'I take thee, Katrinka,' says my boy when the gentry was done; and they little small words do have a world o' better or wuss in 'em."

"Ay, gaffer; 'ee can sing 'Now lettest thou thy sarvant depart', wi' a honest mind, hey!"

"Hoy! Not me! I bean't got no vurther 'n 'My soul doth magnify' yet. I'll bide a bit longer afore I goos to churchyard, trust me. My boy as was do say there'll be another wedden afore long; the Dutchman and Mis'ess Addle's mother be a-comen to't. He've been sweet on her, a' b'lieve, for many a forlorn day. My boy ha' carried many a noble gift from the man to th' 'ooman."

"Two furreners makes a better match nor one o' one sart, t'other o' t'other. Mistress Addle be a goodly maid, nesh as a ripe apple; but her be French; that you cannet deny; and French and English be like oil and vinegar."

"And what do mix better in a sallet-dressen?—tell me that, souls."

"Ay, Mistress Joplady, we cannet gainsay 'ee on a matter o' that homeliness; but what med 'ee say o' the name? Addle! it bean't a very coaxen name for a squire's lady, be jowned if it be."

"Dear lamb! to take her name in vain! You, Soapy Dick you, we all knows 'ee for a addle-pate; else your hair wouldn' grow so fiery red. What do a bide-at-home like 'ee know o' high names an' titles? Addle be the true French for a bloomy cheek—Sherry Minshull telled me so hisself. Bean't that the true meanen on't, gaffer?"

"Sherry's yead be full o' rare knowledge, Mis'ess. But daze me, name or no name, 'tis all one: French her were, English her be; and if any twanken feller do

say her bean't good, and comely, and a comforten wife for young Squire—why, old as I be I'll try the thickness of his poll, I will so."

"I'll help 'ee, gaffer. My weak head cannet make no goodness out o' Addle, but her gi' me a zilver zixpence for choppen wood, her did, and if I cracks a poll wi' 'ee, mebbe her'll gi' me another."

"Ay, hers be a good heart, 'tis true. Why, her went along to Grange and begged and prayed young Sir Godfrey to putt poor Willum Nokes back into 's ancient place o' constable. And Sir Godfrey he can't refuse her nothen, for all her have refused he, as 'tis said; and so wi' noo year poor Willum'll be back in his little small cottage, a-rulen over parish in the Queen's name once more."

"Such changes as the world do see! Look 'ee, souls, I be eighty-vive, and I've seed a mort o' things in my time. I ha' growed like a oak from boy well-nigh to grandfeyther, an' seed six high and mighty sovrans goo to yearth: two Jameses, two Charleses, Noll Crum'ell, and Dutch Willum to end the tale. Ay, the world be full o' ups and downs. To think, now, that old Squire—him as once I were so tarrible afeard on—be now eatin' the bread and water of affliction in a Lun'on prison-house! And they do say as how his son Piers be joined in matrimony to a Dutch 'ooman o' great tonnage, full o' years an' goold pieces. An he were a right youth a'd pay his old feyther's debts an' set the captive free; but not he, I warrant: he'll lay out all the goold th' old wife gies un on wigs and furbelows. And there be Squire Harry—young pa'son as was: who'd a thowt, when his poor feyther went under ground, 'twas a rightful squire Bill sexton had dug for, and the boy a-droppen warm tears into his holler grave ought to ha' been squire that minute in his place? Ay, I mind the sermon as pa'son spoke out in church fust Sunday arter news come o' Master Harry bein' true squire. I seed un climb pulpit steps, and I know'd by the spread o' his petticoats summat awful for poor sinners was a-comen, an' I felt all leery down the small o' my back. 'God is the judge,' says pa'son in his slow, tarrifyen way: 'he putteth down one, and setteth up another.' That were the holy text, out of Thy sarvant David's psa'ms, and daze me if pa'son didn't scarify old Squire as if 'twas pa'son hisself was choused out o' his rightful proputty. 'Twas a powerful bit o' preachen; every 'ooman there was took wi' a longen to let the water-drops tummle, but none on 'em durst begin till Mis'ess Addle's mother set the key. Then 'twas a little Noah's flood; you mind, souls?—such a fall o' tears bean't seed in Winton Simmary since pa'son told us Princess Henrietta were dead in France."

"And be Squire Harry a-gwine to gi' up the trade o' killen, and bide at home wi' poor peaceful folks like we as never slays nowt but pigs and other beasts o' the field?"

"Ay, 'tis so. My boy do zay he med ha' been a knight or lard at a word wi' Prince Eugene; but bless 'ee, he've got his lands to look arter, and we poor

folks besides, and like his feyther afore un he have a true heart for home an' friends. Why, he wouldn' gi' up the charge o' we poor souls, not to be the Lord's anointed."

"Hark 'ee, Gaffer Minshull; bean't they the bells at last?"

"Ay, 'tis so. Pa'son commanded a peal at zeven o'clock by way o' holy consolation to bride an' bridegroom. Old Everlasten ha' took his coat off; 'tis he do call the changes; and i' feck, the bells 'll romp through a rare randy afore he've done wi' 'em. Now, sonnies, what d'ye say to wenden out-along an' callen choir and orchestry together? Then we'll march up t' Hall, and sing 'em a lively ditty as 'll cheer 'em up arter the Christian doens o' the day. Sackbut, psalteery, an' all sarts o' music, says the Book; we cannet muster they holy instruments, to be sure, but wi' fiddle and bass-viol and serpent, and a little bit o' tribble an' bass, we'll make a shift to raise a goodish randy toon. What d'ye say, sonnies?"

"Be jowned if it bean't a fine notion for such a old aged martal. Ay, let's out-along and make all the nise we can."

"A thimbleful afore 'ee goos, souls. Mugs all, an' lift up your hearts in a noble cheer for Squire an' Lady Squire, wishen 'em long life an' a happy end. All together now; spet it out o' your wynd-pipes; hurray! hurray! hurray!"

CHAPTER XXVII
Visitors at Winton Hall

Weather-bound—A Home Circle—Marlborough Unbends—Of Princes—A Certain Harry Rochester

One January evening, in the year 1712, a little group was gathered in the turret-room of Winton Hall. The wind was roaring without; snow had been falling steadily all day; but within all was warmth and peace. A big wood fire blazed on the open hearth, lighting up with its ruddy glare as charming a scene as any English country-house could show. It was the children's hour; little Eustace Berkeley, a sturdy boy of five, stood by his mother's knee on one side of the hearth, and on the other, Mary, two years younger, nestled in her father's arms.

Squire Berkeley looked up from his copy of the *Courant.*

"The duke is dismissed from all his offices, Adèle."

"What that mean, Faver?" said the boy instantly.

”The Queen has sent away the great man who fought her battles so bravely; he will hang up his sword and perhaps never use it again.”

”Why did the naughty Queen send the great duke away, Faver?”

”Why naughty tween send dute away?” echoed Mary, a golden-haired fairy, the image, as Mevrouw Grootz was wont to declare, of Adèle at the same age.

”Because the Queen does not like him as she used to do. She likes somebody else better, and there are unkind people who whisper in her ear stories about him that are very likely not true. He is a great man, Eustace, and there are always little men to say unkind things about the great.”

”Are you a great man, Faver?”

”No, my son; I am a plain English squire, that would rather live here with you all than in any king’s palace.”

”But your father might have been a great man,” said Mistress Berkeley. ”A great prince——”

”Nay, nay, my dear,” interrupted the squire, ”leave that story till the children are older. It is bed-time now, my chicks. Hark how the wind roars! Think of the little birds out in the cold; they have no warm cosy cots like yours. In the morning, remember, we are to make a figure of the great duke in the snow.—But what is that?”

The deep-toned house-bell had clanged in the hall below.

”’Tis late for a visitor, and in this snowstorm too!”

He threw open the door, and stood waiting. In a few moments a man appeared.

”An’t please ’ee, sir, a coach be snowed up a hunnerd yards or so beyond church, an’ the travellers be come afoot to axe if ’ee’ll give ’em shelter.”

”Of course! I will come down. Tell Dick to take a couple of horses and haul the coach out of the drift, and ask Sherebiah to prepare some hot cordial.”

He followed the man downstairs. Just within the doorway stood two white figures muffled up to the ears in long cloaks. They doffed their snow-laden hats as Harry appeared, and the elder came forward.

”I crave your pardon, sir,” he said in smooth mellow tones that revived old memories and quickened Harry’s pulse—”I crave your pardon for troubling you at such an unseasonable hour, but my coach is blocked in a drift a hundred yards or so beyond the church, and as my friend Lord Godolphin is far from well, I have come to ask your hospitality until we can free the coach and return to the inn. I am the Duke of Marlborough.”

”Your grace is heartily welcome. But pray do me the honour to accept beds for the night. The inn is near a mile away, and you are cold and wet. Let me remove your things. I have already sent a man to bring your coach to my stables, and there is a good fire above.”

”I thank you. I cannot resist your invitation. To whom are we indebted for our welcome?”

”Henry Berkeley, my lord; this is Winton Hall.”

”Ah! I remember the name. There was some little romance, if I mistake not, about the inheritance a few years since. Thank you, Mr. Berkeley! this is indeed a haven of refuge to worn-out travellers.”

Divested of their outer garments and provided with slippers, the two noblemen preceded their host up the stairs. At the door of the turret-room he advanced a few paces.

”My dear, his grace the Duke of Marlborough and Lord Godolphin. They are our guests to-night.”

Mistress Berkeley rose and made a sweeping curtsy, blushing prettily, and throwing a half-startled, half-amused glance at her husband. The children made round eyes of wonder.

”Madame, ’tis a charming welcome. We were driving to my lord Pembroke’s at Wilton Park, and were besnowed. ’Tis indeed a delightful transformation.”

He patted the children’s cheeks playfully. Lord Godolphin, who was evidently ill, had already thrown himself wearily into a chair.

”Well, my little man, what is your name?” asked Marlborough of the boy.

”Eustace Berkeley, sir.”

”A pretty name, egad. And what would you like to be when you are a man, eh?”

”A soldier, and wear a red coat, and a sword, and fight for the Queen.”

”A proper answer, indeed. Well, if you grow strong, and do what your father and mother tell you, you may be a soldier one day, and perhaps—who knows?—a great man.”

”I do not want to be a great man.”

”Why not, my boy?”

”Faver says people are not kind to great men, and the Queen likes somebody else better, and sends them away.”

”A little philosopher already, Mr. Berkeley,” said my lord, smiling at the child. ”Well, well, my little fellow, be a good man; not even the Queen could wish you better than that.”

”’Tis the children’s bed hour, my lord,” said Mistress Berkeley. ”I pray you excuse me.”

As mother and children left the room, Sherebiah, who as butler at Winton Hall had settled down as a very comfortable man of peace, entered with a tray on which were silver tankards of mulled wine. The good fellow looked not a day older than when he had led Katrinka to the altar six years before. He placed the

tray on a table and silently withdrew. The guests sipped the grateful liquor and sat in tired silence gazing into the fire.

Presently Mistress Berkeley returned.

"Supper is served, my lords," she said.

"A sweet word to famished men."

The duke offered her his arm and led the way to the supper room, followed by Lord Godolphin and Harry. At the table he kept up an animated conversation with his hostess, yielding as all men did to the charm of a rarely gracious personality. Lord Godolphin was as little inclined to talk as to eat. When the cloth was removed, and Sherebiah had placed bottles on the table and left the gentlemen to themselves, Marlborough crossed his knees and said:

"Egad, Mr. Berkeley, you are a lucky man, with such a wife and such children. We could not have fared more happily—eh, my lord?"

"Nay indeed," replied Godolphin, thawing a little. "We could never have reached Wilton to-night. The wind, hark you, is gaining in fury—a sorry night for travellers."

"Ay; that poor wretch at Basingstoke is well quit of his troubles. A sad case, Mr. Berkeley; but too common, I fear. 'Twas a broken soldier; they had clapt him in the stocks as a vagrant; never in my life saw I a more piteous object. He was outside the inn, and hailed me as we alighted to dine and change horses. Had fought at Blenheim, he told me, captain in a Hanoverian regiment, Aglionby by name, and lately returned from the Indies. We had him released; but the poor fellow was even worse than he seemed; for he died of a sudden before we left the inn. He was on his way to this very village to see a cousin, I bethink me he said. 'Tis thus we serve the men who have fought our battles."

There was a note of bitterness in Marlborough's voice.

"Your pity, I fear, was ill-deserved, my lord," said the Squire. "I know the man. He fought at Blenheim, indeed, but on the other side, and for treasonable practices was sent some six years ago on a long term to the Plantations. He must have escaped."

"Poor wretch! He had a miserable end. In spite of what you tell me, Mr. Berkeley, I pity him. Such is the fate of too many loyal soldiers also, the innocent victims of war. You who live a quiet country life have certainly chosen the better part. The prizes of court and camp are in the end but Dead-Sea fruit. 'Put not your trust in princes': 'tis the truest of warnings, as we old stagers—eh, my lord?—have reason to know."

A cheerful fire, good fare, and a fine vintage of much-travelled Madeira had completed the good impression made by the host. The elder men began to talk freely, with none of the constraint which the presence of a younger man and a stranger might in other circumstances have produced. Harry was amused to

find that the passage of years had altered him beyond recognition, and wondered when a suitable opportunity would occur of recalling himself to the recollection of his guests. All at once Lord Godolphin said:

"'Tis strange, Mr. Berkeley, that I am for the second time detained in this village by an accident. My host on that occasion was, I think, a Mr. Fanshawe. Is he still living? It was ten years ago."

"Sir Godfrey Fanshawe is dead, my lord; his son now owns the Grange."

"It all comes back to me. We were travelling to London—Frank and I, Jack—and our coach broke down as we left a cricket match. Sir Godfrey Fanshawe was good enough to give us beds for the night, and we had gone but a few miles on the road next morning when we were pulled up by a fallen tree, and in a trice were looking down the muzzles of half-a-dozen horse pistols. I had sent some of my young men ahead to arrange a change of horses; the others bolted, and there we were in the midst of the gang. 'Twas an uncommonly tight place; Frank, always handy with his pistol, got in a shot, but in another half-minute we should have been stripped or worse when there came from the wall at our left a wild hullabaloo worse than a dozen Thames bargemen touting for a fare. The rascals turned tail and bolted; over the wall sprang a man and a boy, and egad, I remember now how I laughed when they told me they'd done the trick betwixt 'em. 'Twas a rare flam. And the boy——"

"I think, my lord——" began Harry, feeling somewhat uncomfortable; but Marlborough, setting his glass down on the table, bent forward and interrupted.

"Egad, Godolphin, you bring things back to me. The boy—we were always going to do something for him. He found his way to the Low Countries, and showed himself a lad of mettle. I came across him once or twice; noted him—for the second time, by the way—for an ensigncy, and found that he was already a cornet in a Dutch regiment. He did well with Eugene, I believe. Rochester—that was his name—Harry Rochester. I wonder what became of him! Certainly he owed nothing to patronage—yours or mine. Wasn't he the son of the parson here? Mr. Berkeley, has he ever revisited these parts? 'Pon my soul, I should like to meet him again."

"I was about to explain, your grace, that—I am that Harry Rochester."

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