

A Reputed Changeling

Charlotte M. Yonge

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A REPUTED CHANGELING, or, THREE SEVENTH YEARS TWO CENTURIES AGO

PREFACE

I do not think I have here forced the hand of history except by giving Portchester to two imaginary Rectors, and by a little injustice to her whom Princess Anne termed 'the brick-bat woman.'

The trial is not according to present rules, but precedents for its irregularities are to be found in the doings of the seventeenth century, notably in the trial of Spencer Cowper by the same Judge Hatsel, and I have done my best to represent the habits of those country gentry who were not infected by the evils of the later Stewart reigns.

There is some doubt as to the proper spelling of Portchester, but, judging by analogy, the t ought not to be omitted.

C. M. YONGE. 2d May 1889.

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CHAPTER I: THE EXPERIENCES OF GOODY MADGE

"Dear Madam, think me not to blame;
Invisible the fairy came.
Your precious babe is hence conveyed,
And in its place a changeling laid.
Where are the father's mouth and nose,
The mother's eyes as black as sloes?
See here, a shocking awkward creature,
That speaks a fool in every feature."

GAY.

"He is an ugly ill-favoured boy--just like Riquet a la Houppe."

"That he is! Do you not know that he is a changeling?"

Such were the words of two little girls walking home from a school for young ladies kept, at the Cathedral city of Winchester, by two Frenchwomen of quality, refugees from the persecutions preludeing the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes, and who enlivened the studies of their pupils with the Contes de Commere L'Oie.

The first speaker was Anne Jacobina Woodford, who had recently come with her mother, the widow of a brave naval officer, to live with her uncle, the Prebendary then in residence. The other was Lucy Archfield, daughter to a knight, whose home was a few miles from Portchester, Dr. Woodford's parish on the southern coast of Hampshire.

In the seventeenth century, when roads were mere ditches often impassable, and country-houses frequently became entirely isolated in the winter, it was usual with the wealthier county families to move into their local capital, where some owned mansions and others hired prebendal houses, or went into lodgings in the roomy dwellings of the superior tradesmen. For the elders this was the season of social intercourse, for the young people, of education.

The two girls, who were about eight years old, had struck up a rapid friendship, and were walking hand in hand to the Close attended by the nurse in charge of Mistress Lucy. This little lady wore a black silk hood and cape, trimmed with light brown fur, and lined with pink, while Anne Woodford, being still in mourning for her father, was wrapped in a black cloak, unrelieved except by the white border of her round cap, fringed by fair curls, contrasting with her brown eyes. She was taller and had a more upright bearing of head and neck, with more promise of beauty than her companion, who was much more countrified and would not have been taken for the child of higher station.

They had traversed the graveyard of the Cathedral, and were passing through a narrow archway known as the Slype, between the southwestern angle of the Cathedral and a heavy mass of old masonry forming part of the garden wall of the present abode of the Archfield family, when suddenly both children stumbled and fell, while an elfish peal of laughter sounded behind them.

Lucy came down uppermost, and was scarcely hurt, but Anne had fallen prone, striking her chin on the ground, so as to make her bite her lip, and bruising knees and elbows severely. Nurse detected the cause of the fall so as to avoid it herself. It was a cord fastened across the archway, close to the ground, and another shout of derision greeted the discovery; while Lucy, regaining her feet, beheld for a moment a weird exulting grimace on a visage peeping over a neighbouring headstone.

"It is he! it is he! The wicked imp! There's no peace for him! I say," she screamed, "see if you don't get a sound flogging!" and she clenched her little fist as the provoking "Ho! ho! ho!" rang farther and farther off. "Don't cry, Anne dear; the Dean and Chapter shall take order with him, and he shall be soundly beaten. Are you hurt? O nurse, her mouth is all blood."

"I hope she has not broken a tooth," said nurse, who had been attending to the sobbing child. "Come in, my lamb, we will wash your face, and make you well."

Anne, blinded with tears, jarred, bruised, bleeding, and bewildered, submitted to be led by kind nurse the more willingly because she knew that her mother, together with all the quality, were at Sir Thomas Charnock's. They had dined at the fashionable hour of two, and were to stay till supper-time, the elders playing at Ombre, the juniors dancing. As a rule the ordinary clergy did not associate with the county families, but Dr. Woodford was of good birth and a royal chaplain, and his deceased brother had been a favourite officer of the Duke of York, and had been so severely wounded by his side in the battle of Southwold as to be permanently disabled. Indeed Anne Jacobina was godchild to the Duke and his first Duchess, whose favoured attendant her mother had been. Thus Mrs. Woodford was in great request, and though she had not hitherto gone into company since her widowhood, she had yielded to Lady Charnock's entreaty that she would come and show her how to deal with that strange new Chinese infusion, a costly packet of which had been brought to her from town by Sir Thomas, as the Queen's favourite beverage, wherewith the ladies of the place were to be regaled and astonished.

It had been already arranged that the two little girls should spend the evening together, and as they entered the garden before the house a rude voice exclaimed, "Holloa! London Nan whimpering. Has my fine lady met a spider or a cow?" and a big rough lad of twelve, in a college gown, spread out his arms, and danced up and down in the doorway to bar the entrance.

"Don't, Sedley," said a sturdy but more gentlemanlike lad of the same age, thrusting him aside. "Is she hurt? What is it?"

"That spiteful imp, Peregrine Oakshott," said Lucy passionately. "He had a cord across the Slype to trip us up. I heard him laughing like a hobgoblin, and saw him too, grinning over a tombstone like the malicious elf he is."

The college boy uttered a horse laugh, which made Lucy cry, "Cousin Sedley, you are as bad!" but the other boy was saying, "Don't cry, Anne None-so-pretty. I'll give it him well! Though I'm younger,

I'm bigger, and I'll show him reason for not meddling with my little sweetheart."

"Have with you then!" shouted Sedley, ready for a fray on whatever pretext, and off they rushed, as nurse led little Anne up the broad shallow steps of the dark oak staircase, but Lucy stood laughing with exultation in the intended vengeance, as her brother took down her father's hunting-whip.

"He must be wellnigh a fiend to play such wicked pranks under the very Minster!" she said.

"And a rascal of a Whig, and that's worse," added Charles; "but I'll have it out of him!"

"Take care, Charley; if you offend him, and he does really belong to those--those creatures"--Lucy lowered her voice--"who knows what they might do to you?"

Charles laughed long and loud. "I'll take care of that," he said, swinging out at the door. "Elf or no elf, he shall learn what it is to play off his tricks on _my_ sister and my little sweetheart."

Lucy betook herself to the nursery, where Anne was being comforted, her bleeding lip washed with essence, and repaired with a pinch of beaver from a hat, and her other bruises healed with lily leaves steeped in strong waters.

"Charley is gone to serve him out!" announced Lucy as the sovereign remedy.

"Oh, but perhaps he did not mean it," Anne tried to say.

"Mean it? Small question of that, the cankered young slip! Nurse, do you think those he belongs to can do Charley any harm if he angers them?"

"I cannot say, missie. Only 'tis well we be not at home, or there might be elf knots in the horses' manes to-night. I doubt me whether _that sort_ can do much hurt here, seeing as 'tis holy ground."

"But is he really a changeling? I thought there were no such things as--"

"Hist, hist, Missie Anne!" cried the dame; "'tis not good to name them."

"Oh, but we are on the Minster ground, nurse," said Lucy, trembling a little however, looking over her shoulder, and coming closer to the old servant.

"Why do they think so?" asked Anne. "Is it because he is so ugly and mischievous and rude? Not like boys in London."

"Prithee, nurse, tell her the tale," entreated Lucy, who had made large eyes over it many a time before.

"Ay, and who should tell you all about it save me, who had it all

from Goody Madge Bulpett, as saw it all!"

"Goody Madge! It was she that came when poor little Kitty was born and died," suggested Lucy, as Anne, laying her aching head upon nurse's knees, prepared to listen to the story.

"Well, deary darlings, you see poor Madam Oakshott never had her health since the Great Fire in London, when she was bidding with her kinsfolk to be near Major Oakshott, who had got into trouble about some of his nonconforming doings. The poor lady had a mortal fright before she could be got out of Gracechurch Street as was all of a blaze, and she was so afeard of her husband being burnt as he lay in Newgate that she could scarce be got away, and whether it was that, or that she caught cold lying out in a tent on Highgate Hill, she has never had a day's health since."

"And the gentleman--her husband?" asked Anne.

"They all broke prison, poor fellows, as they had need to do, and the Major's time was nearly up. He made himself busy in saving and helping the folk in the streets; and his brother, Sir Peregrine, who was thick with the King, and is in foreign parts now, took the chance to speak of the poor lady's plight and say it would be the death of her if he could not get his discharge, and his Majesty, bless his kind heart, gave the order at once. So they took madam home to the Chace, but she has been but an ailing body ever since."

"But the fairy, the fairy, how did she change the babe?" cried Anne.

"Hush, hush, dearie! name them not. I am coming to it all in good time. I was telling you how the poor lady failed and pined from that hour, and was like to die. My gossip Madge told me how when, next Midsummer, this unlucky babe was born they had to take him from her chamber at once because any sound of crying made her start in her sleep, and shriek that she heard a poor child wailing who had been left in a burning house. Moll Owens, the hind's wife, a comely lass, was to nurse him, and they had him at once to her in the nursery, where was the elder child, two years old, Master Oliver, as you know well, Mistress Lucy, a fine-grown, sturdy little Turk as ever was."

"Yes, I know him," answered Lucy; "and if his brother's a changeling, he is a bear! The Whig bear is what Charley calls him."

"Well, what does that child do but trot out of the nursery, and try to scramble down the stairs.--Never tell me but that they you wot of trained him out--not that they had power over a Christian child, but that they might work their will on the little one. So they must needs trip him up, so that he rolled down the stair hollering and squalling all the way enough to bring the house down, and his poor lady mother, she woke up in a fit. The womenfolk ran, Molly and all, she being but a slip of a girl herself and giddy-pated, and when they came back after quieting Master Oliver, the babe was changed."

"Then they didn't see the--"

"Hush, hush, missie! no one never sees 'em or they couldn't do nothing. They cannot, if a body is looking. But what had been as

likely a child before as you would wish to handle was gone! The poor little mouth was all of a twist, and his eyelid drooped, and he never ceased mourn, mourn, mourn, wail, wail, wail, day and night, and whatever food he took he never was satisfied, but pined and peaked and dwined from day to day, so as his little legs was like knitting pins. The lady was nigh upon death as it seemed, so that no one took note of the child at first, but when Madge had time to look at him, she saw how it was, as plain as plain could be, and told his father. But men are unbelieving, my dears, and always think they know better than them as has the best right, and Major Oakshott would hear of no such thing, only if the boy was like to die, he must be christened. Well, Madge knew that sometimes they flee at touch of holy water, but no; though the thing mourned and moaned enough to curdle your blood and screeched out when the water touched him, there he was the same puny little canker. So when madam was better, and began to fret over the child that was nigh upon three months old, and no bigger than a newborn babe, Madge up and told her how it was, and the way to get her own again."

"What was that, nurse?"

"There be different ways, my dear. Madge always held to breaking five and twenty eggs and have a pot boiling on a good sea-coal fire with the poker in it red hot, and then drop the shells in one by one, in sight of the creature in the cradle. Presently it will up and ask whatever you are about. Then you gets the poker in your hand as you says, "A-brewing of egg shells." Then it says, "I'm forty hundred years old and odd, and yet I never heard of a-brewing of egg shells." Then you ups with the poker and at him to thrust it down his ugly throat, and there's a hissing and a whirling, and he is snatched away, and the real darling, all plump and rosy, is put back in the cradle."

"And did they?"

"No, my dears. Madam was that soft-hearted she could not bring her mind to it, though they promised her not to touch him unless he spoke. But nigh on two years later, Master Robert was born, as fine and lusty and straight-limbed as a chrisom could be, while the other could not walk a step, but sat himself about on the floor, a-moaning and a-fretting with the legs of him for all the world like the drumsticks of a fowl, and his hands like claws, and his face wizened up like an old gaffer of a hundred, or the jackanapes that Martin Boats'n brought from Barbary. So after a while madam saw the rights of it, and gave consent that means should be taken as Madge and other wise folk would have it; but he was too old by that time for the egg shells, for he could talk, talk, and ask questions enough to drive you wild. So they took him out under the privet hedge, Madge and her gossip Deborah Clint, and had got his clothes off to flog him with nettles till they changed him, when the ill-favoured elf began to squall and shriek like a whole litter of pigs, and as ill luck would have it, the master was within hearing, though they had watched him safe off to one of his own 'venticles, but it seems there had been warning that the justices were on the look-out, so home he came. And behold, the thing that never knew the use of his feet before, ups and flies at him, and lays hold of his leg, hollering out, "Sir, father, don't let them," and what not. So then it was all over with them, as though that were not proof enow what manner of thing it was! Madge tried to put him off with washing

with yarbs being good for the limbs, but when he saw that Deb was there, he saith, saith he, as grim as may be, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live," which was hard, for she is but a white witch; and he stormed and raved at them with Bible texts, and then he vowed (men are so headstrong, my dears) that if ever he ketched them at it again, he would see Deb burnt for a witch at the stake, and Madge hung for the murder of the child, and he is well known to be a man of his word. So they had to leave him to abide by his bargain, and a sore handful he has of it."

Anne drew a long sigh and asked whether the real boy in fairyland would never come back.

"There's no telling, missie dear. Some say they are bound there for ever and a day, some that they as holds 'em are bound to bring them back for a night once in seven years, and in the old times if they was sprinkled with holy water, and crossed, they would stay, but there's no such thing as holy water now, save among the Papists, and if one knew the way to cross oneself, it would be as much as one's life was worth."

"If Peregrine was to die," suggested Lucy.

"Bless your heart, dearie, he'll never die! When the true one's time comes, you'll see, if so be you be alive to see it, as Heaven grant, he will go off like the flame of a candle and nothing be left in his place but a bit of a withered sting nettle. But come, my sweetings, 'tis time I got your supper. I'll put some nice rosy-cheeked apples down to roast, to be soft for Mistress Woodford's sore mouth."

Before the apples were roasted, Charles Archfield and his cousin, the colleger Sedley Archfield, a big boy in a black cloth gown, came in with news of having--together with the other boys, including Oliver and Robert Oakshott--hunted Peregrine all round the Close, but he ran like a lapwing, and when they had pinned him up in the corner by Dr. Ken's house, he slipped through their fingers up the ivy, and grinned at them over the wall like the imp he was. Noll said it was always the way, he was no more to be caught than a bit of thistledown, but Sedley meant to call out all the college boys and hunt and bait him down like a badger on 'Hills.'

CHAPTER II: HIGH TREASON

"Whate'er it be that is within his reach,
The filching trick he doth his fingers teach."

Robin Badfellow.

There was often a considerable distance between children and their parents in the seventeenth century, but Anne Woodford, as the only child of her widowed mother, was as solace, comfort, and companion; and on her pillow in early morning the child poured forth in grave earnest the entire story of the changeling, asking whether he could not be "taken to good Dr. Ken, or the Dean, or the Bishop to be ex--ex--what is it, mother? Not whipped with nettles. Oh no! nor burnt

with red hot pokers, but have holy words said so that the right one may come back."

"My dear child, did you really believe that old nurse's tale?"

"O madam, she knew it. The other old woman saw it! I always thought fairies and elves were only in tales, but Lucy's nurse knows it is true. And he is not a bit like other lads, mamma dear. He is lean and small, and his eyes are of different colours, look two ways at once, and his mouth goes awry when he speaks, and he laughs just like--like a fiend. Lucy and I call him Riquet a la Houppe, because he is just like the picture in Mademoiselle's book, with a great stubbly bunch of hair sticking out on one side, and though he walks a little lame, he can hop and skip like a grasshopper, faster than any of the boys, and leap up a wall in a moment, and grin--oh most frightfully. Have you ever seen him, mamma?"

"I think so. I saw a poor boy, who seemed to me to have had a stroke of some sort when he was an infant."

"But, madam, that would not make him so spiteful and malicious!"

"If every one is against him and treats him as a wicked mischievous elf, it is only too likely to make him bitter and spiteful. Nay, Anne, if you come back stuffed with old wives' tales, I shall not allow you to go home with Lucy Archfield."

The threat silenced Anne, who was a grave and rather silent little person, and when she mentioned it to her friend, the answer was, "Did you tell your mother? If I had told mine, I should have been whipped for repeating lying tales."

"Oh then you don't believe it!"

"It must be true, for Madge knew it. But that's the way always if one lets out that one knows more than they think."

"It is not the way with my mother," stoutly said Anne, drawing up her dignified little head. And she kept her resolution, for though a little excited by her first taste of lively youthful companionship, she was naturally a thoughtful reticent child, with a character advanced by companionship with her mother as an only child, through a great sorrow. Thus she was in every respect more developed than her contemporary Lucy, who regarded her with wonder as well as affection, and she was the object of the boyish devotion of Charley, who often defended her from his cousin Sedley's endeavours to put down what he considered upstart airs in a little nobody from London. Sedley teased and baited every weak thing in his way, and Lucy had been his chief butt till Anne Woodford's unconscious dignity and more cultivated manners excited his utmost spleen.

Lucy might be incredulous, but she was eager to tell that when her cousin Sedley Archfield was going back to 'chambers,' down from the Close gate came the imp on his shoulders in the twilight and twisted both legs round his neck, holding tight on in spite of plunges, pinches, and endeavours to scrape him off against the wall, which were frustrated or retaliated by hair pulling, choking, till just ere entering the college gateway, where Sedley looked to get his

revenge among his fellows, he found his shoulders free, and heard "Ho! ho! ho!" from the top of a wall close at hand. All the more was the young people's faith in the changeling story confirmed, and child-world was in those days even more impenetrable to their elders than at present.

Changeling or no, it was certain that Peregrine Oakshott was the plague of the Close, where his father, an ex-officer of the Parliamentary army, had unwillingly hired a house for the winter, for the sake of medical treatment for his wife, a sufferer from a complication of ailments. Oakwood, his home, was about five miles from Dr. Woodford's living of Portchester, and as the families would thus be country neighbours, Mrs. Woodford thought it well to begin the acquaintance at Winchester. While knocking at the door of the house on the opposite side of the Close, she was aware of an elfish visage peering from an upper window. There was the queer mop of dark hair, the squinting light eyes, the contorted grin crooking the mouth, the odd sallow face, making her quite glad to get out of sight of the strange grimaces which grew every moment more hideous.

Mrs. Oakshott sat in an arm-chair beside a large fire in a wainscotted room, with a folding-screen shutting off the window. Her spinning-wheel was near, but it was only too plain that 'feeble was the hand, and silly the thread.' She bent her head in its wadded black velvet hood, but excused herself from rising, as she was crippled by rheumatic pains. She had evidently once been a pretty little person, innocent and inane, and her face had become like that of a withered baby, piteous in its expression of pain and weariness, but otherwise somewhat vacant. At first, indeed, there was a look of alarm. Perhaps she expected every visitor to come with a complaint of her unlucky Peregrine, but when Mrs. Woodford spoke cheerfully of being her neighbour in the country, she was evidently relieved and even gratified, prattling in a soft plaintive tone about her sufferings and the various remedies, ranging from woodlice rolled into natural pills, and grease off the church bells, to diamond dust and Goa stones, since, as she said, there was no cost to which Major Oakshott would not go for her benefit. He had even procured for her a pound of the Queen's new Chinese herb, and it certainly was as nauseous as could be wished, when boiled in milk, but she was told that was not the way it was taken at my Lady Charnock's. She was quite animated when Mrs. Woodford offered to show her how to prepare it.

Therewith the master of the house came in, and the aspect of affairs changed. He was a tall, dark, grave man, plainly though handsomely dressed, and in a gentlemanly way making it evident that visits to his wife were not welcome. He said that her health never permitted her to go abroad, and that his poor house contained nothing that could please a Court lady. Mrs. Oakshott shrank into herself, and became shy and silent, and Mrs. Woodford felt constrained to take leave, courteously conducted to the door by her unwilling host.

She had not taken many steps before she was startled by a sharp shower from a squirt coming sidelong like a blow on her cheek and surprising her into a low cry, which was heard by the Major, so that he hastened out, exclaiming, "Madam, I trust that you are not hurt."

"Oh no, sir! It is nothing--not a stone--only water!" she said, wiping it with her handkerchief.

"I am grieved and ashamed at the evil pranks of my unhappy son, but he shall suffer for it."

"Nay, sir, I pray you. It was only childish mischief."

He had not waited to hear her pleadings, and before she was half across the Close he had overtaken her, dragging the cowering struggling boy in his powerful grasp.

"Now, Peregrine," he commanded, "let me instantly hear you ask the lady's pardon for your dastardly trick. Or--!" and his other hand was raised for a blow.

"I am sure he is sorry," said Mrs. Woodford, making a motion to ward off the stroke, and as the queer eyes glanced up at her in wondering inquiry, she laid her hand on the bony shoulder, saying, "I know you did not mean to hurt me. You are sorry, are you not?"

"Ay," the boy muttered, and she saw a look of surprise on his father's face.

"There," she said, "he has made his amends, and surely that may suffice."

"Nay, madam, it would be a weak and ungodly tenderness that would spare to drive forth the evil spirit which possesses the child by the use of the rod. I should fail in my duty alike to God and man," he added, in reply to a fresh gesture of intercession, "did I not teach him what it is to insult a lady at mine own door."

Mrs. Woodford could only go away, heartily sorry for the boy. From that time, however, both she and her little daughter were untouched by his tricks, though every one else had some complaint. Peas were shot from unknown recesses at venerable canons, mice darted out before shrieking ladies, frogs' clammy forms descended on the nape of their necks, hedgehogs were curled up on their chairs, and though Peregrine Oakshott was not often caught in the act, no mischief ever took place that was not attributed to him; and it was popularly believed in the Close that his father flogged him every morning for what he was about to do, and his tutor repeated the castigation every evening for what he had done, besides interludes at each detection.

Perhaps frequent usage had toughened his skin, or he had become expert in wriggling from the full force of the blow, or else, as many believed, the elfish nature was impervious; for he was as ready as ever for a trick the moment he was released, like, as his brother said, the dog Keeper, who, with a slaughtered chick hung round his neck in penance, rushed murderously upon the rest of the brood.

Yet Mrs. Woodford, on her way through the Cathedral nave, was aware of something leaning against one of the great columns, crouching together so that the dark head, supported on the arms, rested against the pillar which fluted the pier. The organ was pealing softly and plaintively, and the little gray coat seemed to heave as with a sob. She stood, impelled to offer to take him with her into the choir, but a verger, spying him, began rating him in a tone fit for expelling a dog, "Come, master, none of your pranks here! Be

not you ashamed of yourself to be lying in wait for godly folk on their way to prayers? If I catch you here again the Dean shall hear of it, and you shall smart for it."

Mrs. Woodford began, "He was only hearkening to the music," but she caught such a look of malignity cast upon the verger as perfectly appalled her, and in another moment the boy had dashed, head over heels, out at the nearest door.

The next report that reached her related how a cloud of lime had suddenly descended from a broken arch of the cloister on the solemn

verger, on his way to escort the Dean to the Minster, powdering his wig, whitening his black gown from collar to hem, and not a little endangering his eyesight.

The culprit eluded all pursuit on this occasion; but Mrs. Woodford soon after was told that the Major had caught Peregrine listening at the little south door of the choir, had collared him, and flogged him worse than ever, for being seduced by the sounds of the popish and idolatrous worship, and had told all his sons that the like chastisement awaited them if they presumed to cross the threshold of the steeple house.

Nevertheless the Senior Prefect of the college boys, when about to come out of the Cathedral on Sunday morning, found his gown pinned with a skewer so fast to the seat that he was only set free at the expense of a rent. Public opinion decided that the deed had been done by the imp of Oakshott, and accordingly the whole of the Wykeham scholars set on him with hue and cry the first time they saw him outside the Close, and hunted him as far as St. Cross, where he suddenly and utterly vanished from their sight.

Mrs. Woodford agreed with Anne that it was a very strange story. For how could he have been in the Cathedral at service time when it was well known that Major Oakshott had all his family together at his own form of worship in his house? Anne, who had been in hopes that her mother would be thus convinced of his supernatural powers, looked disappointed, but she had afterwards to confess that Charles Archfield had found out that it was his cousin Sedley Archfield who had played the audacious trick, in revenge for a well-merited tunding from the Prefect.

"And then saddled it on young Oakshott?" asked her mother.

"Charley says one such matter more or less makes no odds to the Whig ape; but I cannot endure Sedley Archfield, mamma."

"If he lets another lad bear the blame of his malice he cannot indeed be a good lad."

"So Charley and Lucy say," returned Anne. "We shall be glad to be away from Winchester, for while Peregrine Oakshott torments slyly, Sedley Archfield loves to frighten us openly, and to hurt us to see how much we can bear, and if Charley tries to stand up for us, Sedley calls him a puny wench, and a milksop, and knocks him down. But, dear madam, pray do not tell what I have said to her ladyship, for there is no knowing what Sedley would do to us."

"My little maid has not known before what boys can be!"

"No; but indeed Charles Archfield is quite different, almost as if he had been bred in London. He is a very gentleman. He never is rude to any girl, and he is courteous and gentle and kind. He gathered walnuts for us yesterday, and cracked all mine, and I am to make him a purse with two of the shells."

Mrs. Woodford smiled, but there was a short thrill of anxiety in her motherly heart as her glance brought up a deeper colour into Anne's cheeks. There was a reserve to bring that glow, for the child knew that if she durst say that Charles called her his little sweetheart and wife, and that the walnut-shell purse would be kept as a token, she should be laughed at as a silly child, perhaps forbidden to make it, or else her uncle might hear and make a joke of it. It was not exactly disingenuousness, but rather the first dawn of maidenly reserve and modesty that reddened her cheek in a manner her mother did not fail to observe.

Yet it was with more amusement than misgiving, for children played at courtship like other games in mimicry of being grown up, and a baronet's only son was in point of fact almost as much out of the reach of a sea captain's daughter and clergyman's niece as a prince of the blood royal; and Master Archfield would probably be contracted long before he could choose for himself, for his family were not likely to take into account that if Captain Woodford had not been too severely wounded to come forward after the battle of Southwold Bay he would have been knighted. On the strength of which Anne, as her companions sometimes said, gave herself in consequence more airs than Mistress Lucy ever did.

Sedley, a poor cousin, a destitute cavalier's orphan, who had been placed on the foundation at Winchester College in hopes that he might be provided for in the Church, would have been far more on her level, and indeed Lady Archfield, a notable matchmaker, had already hinted how suitable such a thing would be. However, the present school character of Master Sedley, as well as her own observations, by no means inclined Mrs. Woodford towards the boy, large limbed and comely faced, but with a bullying, scowling air that did not augur well for his wife or his parish.

Whether it were this lad's threats, or more likely, the fact that all the Close was on the alert, Peregrine's exploits were less frequent there, and began to extend to the outskirts of the city. There were some fine yew trees on the southern borders, towards the chalk down, with massive dark foliage upon stout ruddy branches, among which Peregrine, armed with a fishing-rod, line, and hook, sat perched, angling for what might be caught from unconscious passengers along a path which led beneath.

From a market-woman's basket he abstracted thus a fowl! His "Ho! ho! ho!" startled her into looking up, and seeing it apparently resuscitated, and hovering aloft. Full of dismay, she hurried shrieking away to tell the story of the bewitched chick at the market-cross among her gossips.

His next capture was a chop from a butcher boy's tray, but this involved more peril, for with a fierce oath that he would be revenged on the Whiggish imp, the lad darted at the tree, in vain,

however, for Peregrine had dropped down on the other side, and crept unseen to another bush, where he lay perdu, under the thick green branches, rod and all, while the youth, swearing and growling, was shaking his former refuge.

As soon as the coast was clear he went back to his post, and presently was aware of three gentlemen advancing over the down, pointing, measuring, and surveying. One was small and slight, as simply dressed as a gentleman of the period could be; another was clad in a gay coat with a good deal of fluttering ribbon and rich lace; the third, a tall well-made man, had a plain walking suit, surmounted by a flowing periwig and plumed beaver. Coming close beneath Peregrine's tree, and standing with their backs to it, they eagerly conversed. "Such a cascade will drown the honours of the Versailles fountains, if only the water can be raised to such a height. Are you sure of it, Wren?"

"As certain as hydraulics can make me, sir," and the lesser man began drawing lines with his stick in the dust of the path in demonstration.

The opportunity was irresistible, and the hook from above deftly caught the band of the feathered hat of the taller man, slowly and steadily drawing it up, entirely unperceived by the owner, on whose wig it had rested, and who was bending over the dust-traced diagram in absorbed attention. Peregrine deferred his hobgoblin laughter, for success emboldened him farther. Detaching the hat from his hook, and depositing it safely in a fork of the tree, he next cautiously let down his line, and contrived to get a strong hold of one of the black locks on the top of the wig, just as the wearer was observing, "Oliver's Battery, eh? A cupola with a light to be seen out at sea? Our sailors will make another St. Christopher of you! Ha! what's this?"

For feeling as if a branch were touching the structure on his head, he had stepped forward, thus favouring Peregrine's manoeuvres so that the wig dangled in the air, suddenly disclosing the bare skull of a very dark man, with such marked features that it needed not the gentlemen's outcry to show the boy who was the victim of his mischief.

"What imp is there?" cried the King, spying up into the tree, while his attendant drew his sword, "How now?" as Peregrine half climbed, half tumbled down, bringing hat and wig with him, and, whether by design or accident, fell at his feet. "Will nothing content you but royal game?" he continued laughing, as Sir Christopher Wren helped him to resume his wig. "Why, what a shrimp it is! a mere goblin sprite! What's thy name, master wag?"

"Peregrine Oakshott, so please you," the boy answered, raising himself with a face scared indeed, but retaining its queer impishness. "Sir, I never guessed--"

"Young rogue! have you our licence to waylay our loyal subjects?" demanded the King, with an affected fierceness. "Know you not 'tis rank treason to discrown our sacred Majesty, far more to dishevel or destroy our locks? Why! I might behead you on the spot." To his great amazement the boy, with an eager face and clasped hands, exclaimed, "O sir! Oh, please your Majesty, do so."

"Do so!" exclaimed the King astounded. "Didst hear what I said?"

"Yes, sir! You said it was a beheading matter, and I'm willing, sir."

"Of all the petitions that ever were made to me, this is the strangest!" exclaimed Charles. "An urchin like this weary of life! What next? So," with a wink to his companions, "Peregrine Oakshott, we condemn thee for high treason against our most sacred Majesty's beaver and periwig, and sentence thee to die by having thine head severed from thy body. Kneel down, open thy collar, bare thy neck. Ay, so, lay thy neck across that bough. Killigrew, do thy duty."

To the general surprise, the boy complied with all these directions, never flinching nor showing sign of fear, except that his lips were set and his cheek whitened. As he knelt, with closed eyes, the flat cold blade descended on his neck, the tension relaxed, and he sank!

"Hold!" cried the King. "It is gone too far! He has surely not carried out the jest by dying on our hands."

"No, no, sir," said Wren, after a moment's alarm, "he has only swooned. Has any one here a flask of wine to revive him?"

Several gentlemen had come up, and as Peregrine stirred, some wine was held to his lips, and he presently asked in a faint voice, "Is this fairyland?"

"Not yet, my lad," said Charles, "whatever it may be when Wren's work is done."

The boy opened his eyes, and as he beheld the same face, and the too familiar sky and trees, he sighed heavily, and said, "Then it is all the same! O sir, would you but have cut off my head in good earnest, I might be at home again!"

"Home! what means the elf?"

"An elf! That is what they say I am--changed in the cradle," said Peregrine, incited to confidence by the good-natured eyes, "and I thought if I were close on death mine own people might take me home, and bring back the right one."

"He really believes it!" exclaimed Charles much diverted. "Tell me, good Master Elf, who is thy father, I mean not my brother Oberon, but him of the right one, as thou sayst."

"Mr. Robert Oakshott of Oakwood, sir," said Peregrine.

"A sturdy squire of the country party," said the King. "I am much minded to secure the lad for an elfin page," he added aside to Killigrew. "There's a fund of excellent humour and drollery in those queer eyes of his! So, Sir Hobgoblin, if you are proof against cold steel, I know not what is to be done with you. Get you back, and devise some other mode of finding your way home to fairyland."

Peregrine said not a word of his adventure, so that the surprise of

his family was the greater when overtures were made through Sir Christopher Wren for his appointment as a royal page.

"I would as soon send my son at once to be a page to Beelzebub," returned Major Oakshott.

And though Sir Christopher did not return the answer exactly in those terms, he would not say that the Puritan Major did not judge rightly.

CHAPTER III: THE FAIRY KING

"She's turned her right and round about,
And thrice she blew on a grass-green horn,
And she sware by the moon and the stars above
That she'd gar me rue the day I was born."

Old Ballad of Alison Cross.

Dr. Woodford's parish was Portchester, where stood the fine old royal castle at present ungarrisoned, and partly dismantled in the recent troubles, on a chalk peninsula, a spur from Portsdown, projecting above the alluvial flats, and even into the harbour, whose waves at high tide laved the walls. The church and churchyard were within the ample circuit of the fortifications, about two furlongs distant from the main building, where rose the mighty Norman keep, above the inner court, with a gate tower at this date, only inhabited by an old soldier as porter with his family. A massive square tower at each angle of the huge wall likewise defied decay.

It was on Midsummer eve, that nearly about sundown, Dr. Woodford was summoned by the severe illness of the gatekeeper's old father, and his sister-in-law went with him to attempt what her skill could accomplish for the old man's relief.

They were detained there till the sun had long set, though the air, saturated with his redness, was full of soft twilight, while the moon, scarcely past the full, was just high enough to silver the quiet sea, and throw the shadow of the battlements and towers on the sward whitened with dew.

After the close atmosphere of the sickroom the freshness was welcome, and Mrs. Woodford, once a friend of Katherine Phillips, 'the Matchless Orinda,' had an eye and a soul to appreciate the beauty, and she even murmured the lines of *Il Penseroso* as she leant on the arm of her brother-in-law, who, in his turn, thought of Homer.

Suddenly, as they stood in the shadow, they were aware of a small, slight, fantastic figure in the midst of the grass-grown court, where there was a large green mushroom circle or fairy ring. On the borders of this ring it paused with an air of disappointment. Then entering it stood still, took off the hat, whose lopsided appearance had given so strange an outline, and bowed four times in opposite directions, when, as the face was turned towards the spectators,

invisible in the dark shadow, the lady recognised Peregrine Oakshott. She pressed the Doctor's arm, and they both stood still watching the boy bathing his hand in the dew, and washing his face with it, then kneeling on one knee, and clasping his hands, as he cried aloud in a piteous chant--

"Fairy mother, fairy mother! Oh, come, come and take me home! My very life is sore to me. They all hate me! My brothers and the servants, every one of them. And my father and tutor say I am possessed with an evil spirit, and I am beaten daily, and more than daily. I can never, never get a good word from living soul! This is the second seven years, and Midsummer night! Oh, bring the other back again! I'm weary, I'm weary! Good elves, good elves, take me home. Fairy mother! Come, come, come!" Shutting his eyes he seemed to be in a state of intense expectation. Tears filled Mrs. Woodford's eyes. The Doctor moved forward, but no sooner did the boy become conscious of human presence than he started up, and fled wildly towards a postern door, but no sooner had he disappeared in the shadow than there was a cry and a fall.

"Poor child!" exclaimed Dr. Woodford, "he has fallen down the steps to the vault. It is a dangerous pitfall."

They both hurried to the place, and found the boy lying on the steps leading down to the vault, but motionless, and when they succeeded in lifting him up, he was quite unconscious, having evidently struck his head against the mouth of the vault.

"We must carry him home between us," said Mrs. Woodford. "That will be better than rousing Miles Gateward, and making a coil."

Dr. Woodford, however, took the entire weight, which he declared to be very slight. "No one would think the poor child fourteen years old," he observed, "yet did he not speak of a second seven?"

"True," said Mrs. Woodford, "he was born after the Great Fire of London, which, as I have good cause to know, was in the year '66."

There was still little sign of revival about the boy when he had been carried into the Parsonage, undressed and laid in the Doctor's own bed, only a few moans when he was handled, and on his thin, sharp features there was a piteous look of sadness entirely unlike his ordinary expression of malignant fun, and which went to the kind hearts of the Doctor and Mrs. Woodford. After exhausting their own remedies, as soon as the early daylight was available Dr. Woodford called up a couple of servants, and sent one into Portsmouth for a surgeon, and another to Oakwood to the parents.

The doctor was the first to arrive, though not till the morning was well advanced. He found that three ribs were broken against the edge of the stone step, and the head severely injured, and having had sufficient experience in the navy to be a reasonably safe practitioner, he did nothing worse than bleed the patient, and declared that absolute rest was the only hope of recovery.

He was being regaled with cold roast pig and ale when Major Oakshott rode up to the door. Four horses were dragging the great lumbering coach over Portsdown hill, but he had gone on before, to thank Dr. and Mrs. Woodford for their care of his unfortunate son, and to make

preparations for his transport home under the care of his wife's own woman, who was coming in the coach in the stead of the invalid lady.

"Nay, sir. Master Brent here has a word to say to that matter," replied the Doctor.

"Truly, sir, I have," said the surgeon; "in his present state it is as much as your son's life is worth to move him."

"Be that as it may seem to man, he is in the hand of Heaven, and he ought to be at home, whether for life or death."

"For death it will assuredly be, sir, if he be jolted and shaken along the Portsdown roads--yea, I question whether you would get him to Oakwood alive," said Brent, with naval roughness.

"Indeed, sir," added Mrs. Woodford, "Mrs. Oakshott may be assured of my giving him as tender care as though he were mine own son."

"I am beholden to you, madam," said the Major; "I know your kindness of heart; but in good sooth, the unhappy and rebellious lad merits chastisement rather than pity, since what should he be doing at this distance from home, where he was shut up for his misdemeanours, save fleeing like the Prodigal of the parable, or else planning another of his malicious pranks, as I greatly fear, on you or your daughter, madam. If so, he hath fallen into the pit that he made for others."

The impulse was to tell what had occurred, but the surgeon's presence, and the dread of making all worse for the poor boy checked both the hosts, and Mrs. Woodford only declared that since the day of the apology he had never molested her or her little girl.

"Still," said the Major, "it is not possible to leave him in a stranger's house, where at any moment the evil spirit that is in him may break forth."

"Come and see him, and judge," said Dr. Woodford.

When the father beheld the deathly face and motionless form, stern as he was, he was greatly shocked. His heavy tread caused a moan, and when he said "What, Perry, how now?" there was a painful shrinking and twitching, which the surgeon greeted as evidence of returning animation, but which made him almost drag the Major out of the room for fear of immediate consequences.

Major Oakshott, and still more the servant, who had arrived in the coach and come upstairs, could not but be convinced that removal was not to be thought of. The maid was, moreover, too necessary to her mistress to be left to undertake the nursing, much to her master's regret, but to the joy of Mrs. Woodford, who felt certain that by far the best chance for the poor boy was in his entire separation from all associations with the home where he had evidently suffered so much.

There was, perhaps, nothing except the pageship at Court that could have gone more against Major Oakshott's principles than to leave his son in the house of a prelatical minister, but alternative there was none, and he could only express how much he was beholden to the Dr.

and Mrs. Woodford.

All their desire was that he would remain at a distance, for during the long and weary watch they had to keep over the half-conscious lad, the sound of a voice or even a horse's tread from Oakwood occasioned moans and restlessness. The Major rode over, or sent his sons, or a servant daily to inquire during the first fortnight, except on the Sundays, and on each of these the patient made a step towards improvement.

At first he lay in a dull, death-like stupor, only groaning if disturbed, but by and by there was a babbling murmur of words, and soon the sound of his brother's loud voice at the door, demanding from the saddle how it went to-day with Peregrine, caused a shriek of terror and such a fit of trembling that Mrs. Woodford had to go out and make a personal request that Oliver would never again speak under the window. To her great relief, when the balance between life and death had decidedly turned, the inquiries became less frequent, and could often be forestalled by sending messengers to Oakwood.

The boy usually lay still all day in the darkened room, only showing pain at light or noise, but at night he often talked and rambled a good deal. Sometimes it was Greek or Latin, sometimes whole chapters of Scripture, either denouncing portions or genealogies from the First Book of Chronicles, the polysyllabic names pouring from his mouth whenever he was particularly oppressed or suffering, so that when Mrs. Woodford had with some difficulty made out what they were, she concluded that they had been set as tasks of penance.

At other times Peregrine talked as if he absolutely believed himself in fairyland, accepting a strawberry or cherry as elfin food, promising a tester in Anne's shoe when she helped to change his pillow, or conversing in the style of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, on intended pranks. Often he fancied himself the lubber fiend resting at the fire his hairy strength, and watching for cock-crow as the signal for flinging out-of-doors. It was wonderful how in the grim and strict Puritanical household he could have imbibed so much fairy lore, but he must have eagerly assimilated and recollected whatever he heard, holding them as tidings from his true kith and kin; and, indeed, when he was running on thus, Mrs. Woodford sometimes felt a certain awe and chill, as of the preternatural, and could hardly believe that he belonged to ordinary human nature. Either she or the Doctor always took the night-watch after the talking mood set in, for they could not judge of the effect it might have on any of the servants. Indeed they sometimes doubted whether this were not the beginning of permanent insanity, as the delusion seemed to strengthen with symptoms of recovery.

"Then," said Dr. Woodford, "Heaven help the poor lad!"

For sad indeed was the lot in those days of even the most harmless lunatic.

"Yet," said the lady, "I scarcely think anything can be worse than what he undergoes at home. When I hear the terror and misery of his voice, I doubt whether we did him any true kindness by hindering his father from killing him outright by the shaking of his old coach."

"Nay, sister, we strove to do our duty, though it may be we have taken on ourselves a further charge."

CHAPTER IV: IMP OR NO IMP

"But wist I of a woman bold
Who thrice my brow durst sign,
I might regain my mortal mould,
As fair a form as thine."

SCOTT.

At last came a waking with intelligence in the eyes. In the summer morning light that streamed through the chinks of the shutters Mrs. Woodford perceived the glance of inquiry, and when she brought some cool drink, a rational though feeble voice asked those first questions, "Who? and where?"

"I am Mrs. Woodford, my dear child. You remember me at Winchester. You are at Portchester. You fell down and hurt yourself, but you are getting better."

She was grieved to see the look of utter disappointment and weariness that overspread the features, and the boy hardly spoke again all day. There was much drowsiness, but also depression, and more than once Mrs. Woodford detected tears, but at other times he received her attentions with smiles and looks of wondering gratitude, as though ordinary kindness and solicitude were so new to him that he did not know what to make of them, and perhaps was afraid of breaking a happy dream by saying too much.

The surgeon saw him, and declared him so much better that he might soon be taken home, recommending his sitting up for a little while as a first stage. Peregrine, however, seemed far from being cheered, and showed himself so unwilling to undergo the fatigue of being dressed, even when good Dr. Woodford had brought up his own large chair--the only approach to an easy one in the house--that the proposal was dropped, and he was left in peace for the rest of the day.

In the evening Mrs. Woodford was sitting by the window, letting her needlework drop as the light faded, and just beginning to doze, when her repose was broken by a voice saying "Madam."

"Yes, Peregrine."

"Come near, I pray. Will you tell no one?"

"No; what is it?"

In so low a tone that she had to bend over him: "Do you know how the Papists cross themselves?"

"Yes, I have seen the Queen's confessor and some of the ladies make the sign."

"Dear lady, you have been very good to me! If you would only cross me thrice, and not be afraid! They could not hurt you!"

"Who? What do you mean?" she asked, for fairy lore had not become a popular study, but comprehension came when he said in an awe-stricken voice, "You know what I am."

"I know there have been old wives' tales about you, my poor boy, but surely you do not believe them yourself."

"Ah! if you will not believe them, there is no hope. I might have known. You were so good to me;" and he hid his face.

She took his unwilling hand and said, "Be you what you will, my poor child, I am sorry for you, for I see you are very unhappy. Come, tell me all."

"Nay, then you would be like the rest," said Peregrine, "and I could not bear that," and he wrung her hand.

"Perhaps not," she said gently, "for I know that a story is afloat that you were changed in your cradle, and that there are folk ignorant enough to believe it."

"They all know it," he said impressively. "My mother and brothers and all the servants. Every soul knows it except my father and Mr. Horncastle, and they will never hear a word, but will have it that I am possessed with a spirit of evil that is to be flogged out of me. Goody Madge and Moll Owens, they knew how it was at the first, and would fain have forced them--mine own people--to take me home, and bring the other back, but my father found it out and hindered them."

"To save your life."

"Much good does my life do me! Every one hates or fears me. No one has a word for me. Every mischance is laid on me. When the kitchen wench broke a crock, it was because I looked at it. If the keeper misses a deer, he swears at Master Perry! Oliver and Robert will not let me touch a thing of theirs; they bait me for a moon-calf, and grin when I am beaten for their doings. Even my mother quakes and trembles when I come near, and thinks I give her the creeps. As to my father and tutor, it is ever the rod with them, though I can learn my tasks far better than those jolter-heads Noll and Robin. I never heard so many kind words in all my life as you have given me since I have been lying here!"

He stopped in a sort of awe, for tears fell from her eyes, and she kissed his forehead.

"Will you not help me, good madam?" he entreated. "I went down to Goody Madge, and she said there was a chance for me every seven years. The first went by, but this is my fourteenth year. I had a hope when the King spoke of beheading me, but he was only in jest, as I might have known. Then methought I would try what Midsummer night in the fairy ring would do, but that was in vain; and now you, who could cross me if you would, will not believe. Oh, will you not make the trial?"

"Alas! Peregrine, supposing I could do it in good faith, would you

become a mere tricksy sprite, a thing of the elements, and yield up your hopes as a Christian soul, a child of God and heir of Heaven?"

"My father says I am an heir of hell."

"No, no, never," she cried, shuddering at his quiet way of saying it. "You are flesh and blood, christened, and with the hope set before you."

"The christening came too late," he said. "O lady, you who are so good and pitiful, let my mother get back her true Peregrine--a straight-limbed, comely dullard, such as would be welcome to her. She would bless and thank you, and for me, to be a Will-of-the-wisp, or what not, would be far better than the life I lead. Never did I know what my mother calls peace till I lay here."

"Ah, Peregrine, poor lad, your value for peace and for my poor kindness proves that you have a human heart and are no elf."

"Indeed, I meant to flit about and give you good dreams, and keep off all that could hurt or frighten you," he said earnestly.

"Only the human soul could feel so, dear boy," she answered tenderly.

"And you really disbelieve--the other," he said wistfully.

"This is what I verily believe, my child: that there were causes to make you weakly, and that you may have had some palsy stroke or convulsive fit perhaps at the moment you were left alone. Such would explain much of your oddness of face, which made the ignorant nurses deem you changed; and thus it was only your father who, by God's mercy, saved you from a miserable death, to become, as I trust, a good and true man, and servant of God." Then answering a hopeless groan, she added, "Yes, it is harder for you than for many. I see that these silly servants have so nurtured you in this belief that you have never even thought it worth while to strive for goodness, but supposed tricksomeness and waywardness a part of your nature."

"The only pleasure in life is paying folk off," said Peregrine, with a glitter in his eye. "It serves them right."

"And thus," she said sadly, "you have gone on hating and spiting, deeming yourself a goblin without hope or aim; but now you feel that you have a Christian soul you will strive with evil, you will so love as to win love, you will pray and conquer."

"My father and Mr. Horncastle pray," said Peregrine bitterly. "I hate it! They go on for ever, past all bearing; I must do something--stand on my head, pluck some one's stool away, or tickle Robin with a straw, if I am birched the next moment. That's the goblin."

"Yet you love the Minster music."

"Ay! Father calls it rank Popery. I listened many a time he never guessed, hid away in the Holy Hole, or within old Bishop Wykeham's little house."

"Ah, Peregrine, could an imp of evil brook to lie hidden in the Holy Hole behind the very altar?" said Mrs. Woodford. "But I hear Nick bringing in supper, and I must leave you for the present. God in His mercy bless you, His poor child, and lead you in His ways."

As she went Peregrine muttered, "Is that a prayer? It is not like father's."

She was anxious to consult her brother-in-law on the strange mood of her patient. She found that he had heard more than he had told her of what Major Oakshott deemed the hopeless wickedness of his son, the antics at prayers, the hatred of everything good, the spiteful tricks that were the family torment. No doubt much was due to the boy's entire belief in his own elfship, and these two good people seriously considered how to save him from himself.

"If we could only keep him here," said Mrs. Woodford, "I think we might bring him to have some faith and love in God and man."

"You could, dear sister," said the Doctor, smiling affectionately; "but Major Oakshott would never leave his son in our house. He abhors our principles too much, and besides, it is too near home. All the servants have heard rumours of this cruel fable, and would ascribe the least misadventure to his goblin origin. I must ride over to Oakwood and endeavour to induce his father to remove him to safe and judicious keeping."

Some days, however, elapsed before Dr. Woodford could do this, and in the meantime the good lady did her best to infuse into her poor young guest the sense that he had a human soul, responsible for his actions, and with hope set before him, and that he was not a mere frolicsome and malicious sprite, the creature of unreasoning impulse.

It was a matter only to be attempted by gentle hints, for though reared in a strictly religious household, Peregrine's ears seemed to have been absolutely closed, partly by nursery ideas of his own exclusion from the pale of humanity, partly by the harsh treatment that he was continually bringing on himself. Preachings and prayers to him only meant a time of intolerable restraint, usually ending in disgrace and punishment; Scripture and the Westminster Catechism contained a collection of tasks more tedious and irksome than the Latin and Greek Grammar; Sunday was his worst day of the week, and these repugnances, as he had been taught to believe, were so many proofs that he was a being beyond the power of grace.

Mrs. Woodford scrupled to leave him to any one else on this first Sunday of his recovered consciousness, and in hopes of keeping him quiet through fatigue, she contrived that it should be the first day of his being dressed, and seated in the arm-chair, resting against cushions beside the open window, whence he could watch the church-goers, Anne in her little white cap, with her book in one hand, and a posy in the other, tripping demurely beside her uncle, stately in gown, cassock, and scarlet hood.

Peregrine could not refrain from boasting to his hostess how he had once grimaced from outside the church window at Havant, and at the women shrieking that the fiend was there. She would not smile, and

shook her head sadly, so that he said, "I would never do so here."

"Nor anywhere, I hope."

Whereupon, thinking better to please the churchwoman, he related how, when imprisoned for popping a toad into the soup, he had escaped over the leads, and had beaten a drum outside the barn, during a discourse of the godly tinker, John Bunyan, tramping and rattling so that all thought the troopers were come, and rushed out, tumbling one over the other, while he yelled out his "Ho! ho! ho!" from the haystack where he had hidden.

"When you feel how kind and loving God is," said Mrs. Woodford gravely, "you will not like to disturb those who are doing Him honour."

"Is He kind?" asked Peregrine. "I thought He was all wrath and anger."

She replied, "The Lord is loving unto every man, and His mercy is over all His works."

He made no answer. If he were sullen, this subsided into sleepiness, and when he awoke he found the lady on her knees going through the service with her Prayer-book. She encountered his wistful eyes, but no remark was made, though on her return from fetching him some broth, she found him peeping into her book, which he laid down hastily, as though afraid of detection.

She had to go down to the Sunday dinner, where, according to good old custom, half a dozen of the poor and aged were regaled with the parish priest and his household. There she heard inquiries and remarks showing how widely spread and deeply rooted was the notion of Peregrine's elfish extraction. If Daddy Hoskins did ask after the poor young gentleman as if he were a human being, the three old dames present shook their heads, and while the more bashful only groaned, Granny Perkins demanded, "Well, now, my lady, do he eat and sleep like other folk?"

"Exactly, granny, now that he's mending in health."

"And don't he turn and writhe when there's prayers?"

Mrs. Woodford deposed to having observed no such demonstrations.

"Think of that now! Lauk-a-daisy! I've heard tell by my nevvie Davy, as is turnspit at Oak'ood, as how when there's prayers and expounding by Master Horncastle, as is a godly man, saving his Reverence's presence, he have seen him, have Davy--Master Perry, as they calls him, a-twisted round with his heels on the chair, and his head where his heels should be, and a grin on his face enough to give one a turn."

"Did Davy never see a mischievous boy fidgiting at prayers?" asked the Doctor, who was nearer than she thought. "If so, he has been luckier than I have been."

There was a laugh, out of deference to the clergyman, but the old woman held to her point. "Begging your Reverence's pardon, sir,

there be more in this than we knows. They says up at Oakwood, there's no peace in the place for the spite of him, and when they thinks he is safe locked into his chamber, there he be a-clogging of the spit, or changing sugar into pepper, or making the stool break down under one. Oh, he be a strange one, sir, or summat worse. I have heerd him myself hollaing 'Ho! ho! ho!' on the downs enough to make one's flesh creep."

"I will tell you what he is, dame," said the Doctor gravely. "He is a poor child who had a fit in his cradle, and whom all around have joined in driving to folly, evil, and despair through your foolish superstitions. He is my guest, and I will have no more said against him at my table."

The village gossips might be silenced by awe of the parson, but their opinion was unshaken; and Silas Hewlett, a weather-beaten sailor with a wooden leg, was bold enough to answer, "Ay, ay, sir, you parsons and gentlefolk don't believe naught; but you've not seen what I have with my own two bodily eyes--" and this of course was the prelude to the history of an encounter with a mermaid, which alternated with the Flying Dutchman and a combat with the Moors, as regular entertainment at the Sunday meal.

When Mrs. Woodford went upstairs she was met by the servant Nicolas, declaring that she might get whom she would to wait on that there moon-calf, he would not go neist the spiteful thing, and exhibiting a swollen finger, stung by a dead wasp, which Peregrine had cunningly disposed on the edge of his empty plate.

She soothed the man's wrath, and healed his wound as best she might, ere returning to her patient, who looked at her with an impish grin on his lips, and yet human deprecation in his eyes. Feeling unprepared for discussion, she merely asked whether the dinner had been relished, and sat down to her book; but there was a grave, sorrowful expression on her countenance, and, after an interval of lying back uneasily in his chair, he exclaimed, "It is of no use; I could not help it. It is my nature."

"It is the nature of many lads to be mischievous," she answered; "but grace can cure them."

Therewith she began to read aloud. She had bought the Pilgrim's Progress (the first part) from a hawker, and she was glad to have at hand something that could hardly be condemned as frivolous or prelatial. The spell of the marvellous book fell on Peregrine; he listened intently, and craved ever to hear more, not being yet able to read without pain and dizziness. He was struck by hearing that the dream of Christian's adventures had visited that same tinker, whose congregation his own wicked practices had broken up.

"He would take me for one of the hobgoblins that beset Master Christian."

"Nay," said Mrs. Woodford, "he would say you were Christian floundering in the Slough of Despond, and deeming yourself one of its efts or tadpoles."

He made no answer, but on the whole behaved so well that the next day Mrs. Woodford ventured to bring her little daughter in after

having extracted a promise that there should be no tricks nor teasing, a pledge honourably kept.

Anne did not like the prospect of the interview. "Oh, ma'am, don't leave me alone with him!" she said. "Do you know what he did to Mistress Martha Browning, his own cousin, you know, who lives at Emsworth with her aunt? He put a horsehair slyly round her glass of wine, and tipped it over her best gray taffeta, and her aunt whipped her for the stain. She never would say it was his doing, and yet he goes on teasing her the same as ever, though his brother Oliver found it out, and thrashed him for it: you know Oliver is to marry Mistress Martha."

"My dear child, where did you hear all this?" asked Mrs. Woodford, rather overwhelmed with this flood of gossip from her usually quiet daughter.

"Lucy told me, mamma. She heard it from Sedley, who says he does not wonder at any one serving out Martha Browning, for she is as ugly as sin."

"Hush, hush, Anne! Such sayings do not become a young maid. This poor lad has scarce known kindness. Every one's hand has been against him, and so his hand has been against every one. I want my little daughter to be brave enough not to pain and anger him by shrinking from him as if he were not like other people. We must teach him to be happy before we can teach him to be good."

"Madam, I will try," said the child, with a great gulp; "only if you would be pleased not to leave me alone with him the first time!"

This Mrs. Woodford promised. At first the boy lay and looked at Anne as if she were a rare curiosity brought for his examination, and it took all her resolution, even to a heroic exertion of childish fortitude, not to flinch under the gaze of those queer eyes. However, Mrs. Woodford diverted the glances by producing a box of spillekins, and in the interest of the game the children became better acquainted.

Over their next day's game Mrs. Woodford left them, and Anne became at ease since Peregrine never attempted any tricks. She taught him to play at draughts, the elders thinking it expedient not to doubt whether such vanities were permissible at Oakwood.

Soon there was such merriment between them that the kind Doctor said it did his heart good to hear the boy's hearty natural laugh in lieu of the "Ho! ho! ho!" of malice or derision.

They were odd conversations that used to take place between that boy and girl. The King's offer of a pageship had oozed out in the Oakshott family, and Peregrine greatly resented the refusal, which he naturally attributed to his father's Whiggery and spite at all things agreeable, and he was fond of discussing his wrongs and longings with Anne, who, from her childish point of view, thought the walls of Portchester and the sluggish creek a very bad exchange for her enjoyments at Greenwich, where she had lived during her father's years of broken health, after he had been disabled at Southwold by a wound which had prevented his being knighted by the Duke of York for his daring in the excitement of the critical

moment, a fact which Mistress Anne never forgot, though she only knew it by hearsay, as it happened a few weeks after she was born, and her father always averred that he was thankful to have missed the barren and expensive honour, and that the _worst_ which had come of his exploit was the royal sponsorship to his little maid.

Anne had, however, been the pet of her father's old friends, the sea captains, had played with the little Evelyns under the yew hedges of Says Court, had been taken to London to behold the Lord Mayor's show and more than one Court pageant, had been sometimes at the palaces as the plaything of the Ladies Mary and Anne of York, had been more than once kissed by their father, the Duke, and called a pretty little poppet, and had even shared with them a notable game at romps with their good-natured uncle the King, when she had actually caught him at Blind-man's-buff!

Ignorant as she was of evil, her old surroundings appeared to her delightful, and Peregrine, bred in a Puritan home, was at fourteen not much more advanced than she was in the meaning of the vices and corruptions that he heard inveighed against in general or scriptural terms at home, and was only too ready to believe that all that his father proscribed must be enchanting. Thus they built castles together about brilliant lives at a Court of which they knew as little as of that at Timbuctoo.

There was another Court, however, of which Peregrine seemed to know all the details, namely, that of King Oberon and Queen Mab. How much was village lore picked up from Moll Owens and her kind, or how much was the work of his own imagination, no one could tell, probably not himself, certainly not Anne. When he appeared on intimate terms with Hip, Nip, and Skip, and described catching Daddy Long Legs to make a fence with his legs, or dwelt upon a terrible fight between two armies of elves mounted on grasshoppers and crickets, and armed with lances tipped with stings of bees and wasps, she would exclaim, "Is it true, Perry?" and he would wink his green eye and look at her with his yellow one till she hardly knew where she was.

He would tell of his putting a hornet in a sluttish maid's shoe, which was credible, if scarcely meriting that elfish laughter which made his auditor shrink, but when he told of dancing over the mud banks with a lantern, like a Will-of-the-wisp, till he lured boats to get stranded, or horsemen to get stuck, in the hopeless mud, Anne never questioned the possibility, but listened with wide open eyes, and a restrained shudder, feeling as if under a spell. That mysterious childish feeling which dreads even what common sense forbids the calmer mind to believe, made her credit Peregrine, for the time at least, with strange affinities to the underground folk, and kept her under a strange fascination, half attraction, half repulsion, which made her feel as if she must obey and follow him if he turned those eyes on her, whether she were willing or not.

Nor did she ever tell her mother of these conversations. She had been rebuked once for repeating nurse's story of the changeling, and again for her shrinking from him; and this was quite enough in an essentially reserved, as well as proud and sensitive, nature, to prevent further confidences on a subject which she knew would be treated as a foolish fancy, bringing both herself and her companion into trouble.

CHAPTER V: PEREGRINE'S HOME

"For, at a word, be it understood,
He was always for ill and never for good."

SCOTT.

A week had passed since any of the family from Oakwood had come to make inquiries after the convalescent at Portchester, when Dr. Woodford mounted his sleek, sober-paced pad, and accompanied by a groom, rode over to make his report and tender his counsel to Major Oakshott. He arrived just as the great bell was clanging to summon the family to the mid-day meal, since he had reckoned on the Squire being more amenable as a 'full man,' especially towards a guest, and he was well aware that the Major was thoroughly a gentleman in behaviour even to those with whom he differed in politics and religion.

Accordingly there was a ready welcome at the door of the old red house, which was somewhat gloomy looking, being on the north side of the hill, and a good deal stifled with trees. In a brief interval the Doctor found himself seated beside the pale languid lady at the head of the long table, placed in a large hall, wainscotted with the blackest of oak, which seemed to absorb into itself all the light from the windows, large enough indeed but heavily mullioned, and with almost as much of leading as of octagons and lozenges--greenish glass--in them, while the coats of arms, repeated in upper portions and at the intersections of beams and rafters, were not more cheerful, being sable chevrons on an argent field. The crest, a horse shoe, was indeed azure, but the blue of this and of the coats of the serving-men only deepened the thunderous effect of the black. Strangely, however, among these sad-coloured men there moved a figure entirely differently. A negro, white turbaned, and with his blue livery of a lighter shade, of fantastic make and relieved by a great deal of white and shining silver, so as to have an entirely different effect.

He placed himself behind the chair of Dr. Woodford's opposite neighbour, a shrewd business-like looking gentleman, soberly but handsomely dressed, with a certain foreign cut about his clothes, and a cravat of rich Flemish lace. He was presented to the Doctor as Major Oakshott's brother, Sir Peregrine. The rest of the party consisted of Oliver and Robert, sturdy, ruddy lads of fifteen and twelve, and their tutor, Mr. Horncastle, an elderly man, who twenty years before had resigned his living because he could not bring himself to accept all the Liturgy.

While Sir Peregrine courteously relieved his sister-in-law of the trouble of carving the gammon of bacon which accompanied the veal which her husband was helping, Dr. Woodford informed her of her son's progress towards recovery.

"Ah," she said, "I knew you had come to tell us that he is ready to be brought home;" and her tone was fretful.

"We are greatly beholden to you, sir," said the Major from the bottom of the table. "The boy shall be fetched home immediately."

"Not so, sir, as yet, I beg of you. Neither his head nor his side can brook the journey for at least another week, and indeed my good sister Woodford will hardly know how to part with her patient."

"She will not long be of that mind after Master Perry gets to his feet again," muttered the chaplain.

"Indeed no," chimed in the mother. "There will be no more peace in the house when he is come back."

"I assure you, madam," said Dr. Woodford, "that he has been a very good child, grateful and obedient, nor have I heard any complaints."

"Your kindness, or else that of Mrs. Woodford, carries you far, sir," answered his host.

"What? Is my nephew and namesake so peevish a scapegrace?" demanded the visitor.

On which anecdotes broke forth from all quarters. Peregrine had greased the already slippery oak stairs, had exchanged Oliver's careful exercise for a ribald broadsheet, had filled Mr. Horncastle's pipe with gunpowder, and mixed snuff with the chocolate specially prepared for the peculiar godly guest Dame Priscilla Waller. Every one had something to adduce, even the serving-men behind the chairs; and if Oliver and Robert did not add their quota, it was because absolute silence at meals was the rule for nonage. However, the subject was evidently distasteful to the father, who changed the conversation by asking his brother questions about the young Prince of Orange and the Grand Pensionary De Witt. For the gentleman had been acting as English attache to the Embassy at the Hague, whence he had come on affairs of State to London, and after being knighted by Charles, had newly arrived at the old home, which he had scarcely seen since his brother's marriage. Dr. Woodford enjoyed his conversation, and his information on foreign politics, and the Major, though now and then protesting, was evidently proud of his brother.

When grace had been pronounced by the chaplain the lady withdrew to her parlour, the two boys, each with an obeisance and request for permission, departed for an hour's recreation, and Dr. Woodford intimated that he wished for some conversation with his host respecting the boy Peregrine.

"Let us discuss it here," said Major Oakshott, turning towards a small table set in the deep bay window, and garnished with wine, fruit, and long slender glasses. "Good Mr. Horncastle," he added, as he motioned his guest to one of the four seats, "is with me in all that concerns my children, and I desire my brother's counsel respecting the untoward lad with whom it has pleased Heaven to afflict me."

When the glasses had been filled with claret Dr. Woodford uttered a diplomatic compliment on the healthful and robust appearance of the eldest and youngest sons, and asked whether any cause had been assigned for the difference between them and the intermediate

brother.

"None, sir," returned the father with a sigh, "save the will of the Almighty to visit us for our sins with a son who has thus far shown himself one of the marred vessels doomed to be broken by the potter. It may be in order to humble me and prove me that this hath been laid upon me."

The chaplain groaned acquiescence, but there was vexation in the brother's face.

"Sir," said the Doctor, "it is my opinion and that of my sister-in-law, an excellent, discreet, and devout woman, that the poor child would give you more cause for hope if the belief had not become fixed in his mind that he is really and truly a fairy elf--yes, in very sooth--a changeling!"

All the auditors broke out into exclamations that it was impossible that a boy of fourteen could entertain so absurd an idea, and the tutor evidently thought it a fresh proof of depravity that he should thus have tried to deceive his kind hosts.

In proof that Peregrine veritably believed it himself, Dr. Woodford related what he had witnessed on Midsummer night, mentioning how in delirium the boy had evidently believed himself in fairyland, and how disappointed he had been, on regaining his senses, to find himself on common earth; telling also of the adventure with the King, which Sir Christopher Wren had described to him, but of which Major Oakshott was unaware, though it explained the offer of the pageship. He was a good deal struck by these revelations, proving misery that he had never suspected, though, as he said, he had often pleaded, "Why will ye revolt more and more? ye will be stricken more and more."

"Have you ever sought his confidence?" asked the travelled brother, a question evidently scarcely understood, for the reply was, "I have always required of my sons to speak the truth, nor have they failed of late years save this unfortunate Peregrine."

"And," said Sir Peregrine, "if the unlucky lad actually supposes himself to be no human being, admonitions and chastisements would naturally be vain."

"I cannot believe it," exclaimed the Major. "'Tis true, as I now remember, I once came on a couple of beldames, my wife's nurse and another, who has since been ducked for witchcraft, and found them about to flog the babe with nettles, and lay him in the thorn hedge because he was a sickly child, whom, forsooth, they took to be a changeling; but I forbade the profane folly to be ever again mentioned in my household, nor did I ever hear thereof again."

"There are a good many more things mentioned in a household, brother, than the master is wont to hear of," remarked Sir Peregrine.

Dr. Woodford then begged as a personal favour for an individual examination of the family and servants on their opinion. The master was reluctant thus, as he expressed it, to go a-fooling, but his brother backed the Doctor up, and further prevented a general

assembly to put one another to shame, but insisted on the witnesses being called in one by one. Oliver, the first summoned, was beginning to be somewhat less overawed by his father than in his earlier boyhood. To the inquiry what he thought of his brother Peregrine, he made a tentative sort of reply, that he was a strange fellow, who never could keep out of disgrace.

"That is not the question," said his father. "I am almost ashamed to speak it! Do you--nay, have you ever supposed him to be a--" he really could not bring out the word.

"A changeling, sir?" returned Oliver. "I do not believe so now, knowing that it is impossible, but as a child I always did."

"Who durst possess you with so foolish and profane a falsehood?"

"Every one, sir. I cannot recollect the time when I did not as entirely deem Peregrine a changeling elf as that Robin was my own brother. He believes so himself."

"You have never striven to disabuse him."

"Indeed, sir, he would scarce have listened to me had I done so; besides, to tell the truth, it has only been of late, since I have been older, and have studied more, that I have come to perceive the folly of it."

Major Oakshott groaned, and bade him call Robert without saying wherefore. The little fellow came in, somewhat frightened, and when asked the question that had been put to his elder, his face lighted up, and he exclaimed, "Oh, have they brought him back again?"

"Whom?"

"Our real brother, sir, who was carried off to fairyland!"

"Who told you so, Robert?"

He looked puzzled, and said, "Sir, they all know it. Molly Owens, that was his foster-mother, saw the fairies bear him off on a broomstick up the chimney."

"Robert, no lying!"

The boy was only restrained from tears by fear of his father, and just managed to say, "'Tis what they all say, and Perry knows."

"Knows!" muttered Major Oakshott in despair, but the uncle, drawing Robin towards him, extracted that Perry had been seen flying out of the loft window, when he had been locked up--Robin had never seen it himself, but the maids had often done so. Moreover, there was proof positive, in the mark on Oliver's head, where he had nearly killed himself by tumbling downstairs, being lured by the fairies while they stole away the babe.

The Major could not listen with patience. "A boy of that age to repeat such blasphemous nonsense!" he exclaimed; and Robert, restraining with difficulty his sobs of terror, was dismissed to fetch the butler.

The old Ironside who now appeared would not avouch his own disbelief in the identity of Master Peregrine, being, as he said, a man who had studied his Bible, listened to godly preachers, and seen the world; but he had no hesitation in declaring that almost every other soul in the household believed in it as firmly as in the Gospel, certainly all the women, and probably all the men, nor was there any doubt that the young gentleman conducted himself more like a goblin than the son of pious Christian parents. In effect both the clergyman and the Diplomat could not help suspecting that in other company the worthy butler's disavowal of all share in the superstition might have been less absolute.

"After this," said Major Oakshott with a sigh, "it seems useless to carry the inquiry farther."

"What says my sister Oakshott?" inquired Sir Peregrine. "She! Poor soul, she is too feeble to be fretted," said her husband. "She has never been the same woman since the Fire of London, and it would be vain to vex her with questions. She would be of one mind while I spoke to her, and another while her women were pouring their tales into her ear. Methinks I now understand why she has always seemed to shrink from this unfortunate child, and to fear rather than love him."

"Even so, sir," added the tutor. "Much is explained that I never before understood. The question is how to deal with him under this fresh light. I will, so please your honour, assemble the family this very night, and expound to them that such superstitions are contrary to the very word of Scripture."

"Much good will that do," muttered the knight.

"I should humbly suggest," put in Dr. Woodford, "that the best hope for the poor lad would be to place him where these foolish tales were unknown, and he could start afresh on the same terms with other youths."

"There is no school in accordance with my principles," said the Squire gloomily. "Godly men who hold the faith as I do are inhibited by the powers that be from teaching in schools."

"And," said his brother, "you hold these principles as more important than the causing your son to be bred up a human being instead of being pointed at and rendered hopeless as a demon."

"I am bound to do so," said the Major.

"Surely," said Dr. Woodford, "some scholar might be found, either here or in Holland, who might share your opinions, and could receive the boy without incurring penalties for opening a school without license."

"It is a matter for prayer and consideration," said Major Oakshott. "Meantime, reverend sir, I thank you most heartily for the goodness with which you have treated my untoward son, and likewise for having opened my eyes to the root of his freakishness."

The Doctor understood this as dismissal, and asked for his horse,

intimating, however, that he would gladly keep the boy till some arrangement had been decided upon. Then he rode home to tell his sister-in-law that he had done his best, and that he thought it a fortunate conjunction that the travelled brother had been present.

CHAPTER VI: A RELAPSE

"A tell-tale in their company
They never could endure,
And whoso kept not secretly
Their pranks was punished sure.
It was a just and Christian deed
To pinch such black and blue;
Oh, how the commonwealth doth need
Such justices as you!"

BISHOP CORBETT.

Several days passed, during which there could be no doubt that Peregrine Oakshott knew how to behave himself, not merely to grown-up people, but to little Anne, who had entirely lost her dread of him, and accepted him as a playfellow. He was able to join the family meals, and sit in the pleasant garden, shaded by the walls of the old castle, as well as by its own apple-trees, and looking out on the little bay in front, at full tide as smooth and shining as a lake.

There, while Anne did her task of spinning or of white seam, Mrs. Woodford would tell the children stories, or read to them from the Pilgrim's Progress, a wonderful romance to both. Peregrine, still tamed by weakness, would lie on the grass at her feet, in a tranquil bliss such as he had never known before, and his fairy romances to Anne were becoming mitigated, when one day a big coach came along the road from Fareham, with two boys riding beside it, escorting Lady Archfield and Mistress Lucy.

The lady was come to study Mrs. Woodford's recipe for preserved cherries, the young people, Charles, Lucy, and their cousin Sedley, now at home for the summer holidays, to spend an afternoon with Mistress Anne.

Great was Lady Archfield's surprise at finding that Major Oakshott's cross-grained slip of a boy was still at Portchester.

"If you were forced to take him in for very charity when he was hurt," she said, "I should have thought you would have been rid of him as soon as he could leave his bed."

"The road to Oakwood is too rough for broken ribs as yet," said Mrs. Woodford, "nor is the poor boy ready for discipline."

"Ay, I fancy that Major Oakshott is a bitter Puritan in his own house; but no discipline could be too harsh for such a boy as that, according to all that I hear," said her ladyship, "nor does he look as if much were amiss with him so far as may be judged of features so strange and writhen."

"He is nearly well, but not yet strong, and we are keeping him here till his father has decided on what is best for him."

"You even trust him with your little maid! And alone! I wonder at you, madam."

"Indeed, my lady, I have seen no harm come of it. He is gentle and kind with Anne, and I think she softens him."

Still Mrs. Woodford would gladly not have been bound to her colander and preserving-pan in her still-room, where her guest's housewifely mind found great scope for inquiry and comment, lasting for nearly two hours.

When at length the operations were over, and numerous little pots of jam tied up as specimens for the Archfield family to taste at home, the children were not in sight. No doubt, said Mrs. Woodford, they would be playing in the castle court, and the visitor accompanied her thither in some anxiety about broken walls and steps, but they were not in sight, nor did calls bring them.

The children had gone out together, Anne feeling altogether at ease and natural with congenial playmates. Even Sedley's tortures were preferable to Peregrine's attentions, since the first were only the tyranny of a graceless boy, the other gave her an indescribable sense of strangeness from which these ordinary mundane comrades were a relief and protection.

However, Charles and Sedley rushed off to see a young colt in which they were interested, and Lucy, in spite of her first shrinking, found Peregrine better company than she could have expected, when he assisted in swinging her and Anne by turns under the old ash tree.

When the other two were seen approaching, the swinging girl hastily sprang out, only too well aware what Sedley's method of swinging would be. Then as the boys came up followed inquiries why Peregrine had not joined them, and jests in schoolboy taste ensued as to elf-locks in the horses' manes, and inquiries when he had last ridden to a witch's sabbath. Little Anne, in duty bound, made her protest, but this only incited Charles to add his word to the teasing, till Lucy joined in the laugh.

By and by, as they loitered along, they came to the Doctor's little boat, and there was a proposal to get in and rock. Lucy refused, out of respect for her company attire, and Anne could not leave her, so the two young ladies turned away with arms round each other's waists, Lucy demonstratively rejoicing to be quit of the troublesome boys.

Before they had gone far an eldritch shout of laughter was responded to by a burst of furious dismay and imprecation. The boat with the two boys was drifting out to sea, and Peregrine capering wildly on the shore, but in another instant he had vanished into the castle.

Anne had presence of mind enough to rush to the nearest fisherman's cottage, and send him out to bring them back, and it was at this juncture that the two mothers arrived on the scene. There was little real danger. A rope was thrown and caught, and after about

half an hour of watching they were safely landed, but the tide had ebbed so far that they had to take off their shoes and stockings and wade through the mud. They were open-mouthed against the imp who had enticed them to rock in the boat, then in one second had cut the painter, bounded out, and sent them adrift with his mocking 'Ho! ho! ho!' Sedley Archfield clenched his fists, and gazed round wildly in search of the goblin to chastise him soundly, and Charles was ready to rush all over the castle in search of him.

"Two to one!" cried Anne, "and he so small; you would never be so cowardly."

"As if he were like an honest fellow," said Charley. "A goblin like that has his odds against a dozen of us."

"I'd teach him, if I could but catch him," cried Sedley.

"I told you," said Anne, "that he would be good if you would let him alone and not plague him."

"Now, Anne," said Charles, as he sat putting on his stockings, "how could I stand being cast off for that hobgoblin, that looks as if he had been cut out of a root of yew with a blunt knife, and all crooked! I that always was your sweetheart, to see you consorting with a mis-shapen squinting Whig of a Nonconformist like that."

"Nonconformist! I'll Nonconform him indeed," added Sedley. "I wish I had the wringing of his neck."

"Now is not that hard!" said Anne; "a poor lad who has been very sick, and that every one baits and spurns."

"Serve him right," said Sedley; "he shall have more of the same sauce!"

"I think he has cast his spell on Anne," added Charles, "or how can she stand up for him?"

"My mamma bade me be kind to him."

"Kind! I would as lief be kind to a toad!" put in Lucy.

"To see you kind to him makes me sick," exclaimed Charles. "You see what comes of it."

"It did not come of my kindness, but of your unkindness," reasoned Anne.

"I told you so," said Charles. "You would have been best pleased if we had been carried out to sea and drowned!"

Anne burst into tears and disavowed any such intention, and Charles was protesting that he would only forgive her on condition of her never showing any kindness to Peregrine again, when a sudden shower of sand and pebbles descended, one of them hitting Sedley pretty sharply on the ear. The boys sprang up with a howl of imprecation and vengeance, but no one was to be seen, only 'Ho! ho! ho!' resounded from the battlements. Off they rushed headlong, but the nearest door was in a square tower a good way off, and when they

reached it the door defied their efforts of frantic rage, whilst another shower descended on them from above, accompanied by the usual shout. But while they were dashing off in quest of another entrance they were met by a servant sent to summon them to return home. Coach and horses were at the door, and Lady Archfield was in haste to get them away, declaring that she should not think their lives safe near that fiendish monster. Considering that Sedley was nearly twice as big as Peregrine, and Charles a strong well-grown lad, this was a tribute to his preternatural powers.

Very unwillingly they went, and if Lady Archfield had not kept a strict watch from her coach window, they would certainly have turned back to revenge the pranks played on them. The last view of them showed Sedley turning round shaking his whip and clenching his teeth in defiance. Mrs. Woodford was greatly concerned, especially as Peregrine could not be found and did not appear at supper.

"Had he run away to sea?" the usual course of refractory lads at Portchester, but for so slight a creature only half recovered it did not seem probable. It was more likely that he had gone home, and that Mrs. Woodford felt as somewhat a mortifying idea. However, on looking into his chamber, as she sought her own, she beheld him in bed, with his face turned into the pillow, whether asleep or feigning slumber there was no knowing.

Later, she heard sounds that induced her to go and look at him. He was starting, moaning, and babbling in his sleep. But with morning all his old nature seemed to have returned.

There was a hedgehog in Anne's bowl of milk, Mrs. Woodford's poultry were cackling hysterically at an unfortunate kitten suspended from an apple tree and let down and drawn up among them. The three-legged stool of the old waiting-woman 'toppled down headlong' as though by the hands of Puck, and even on Anne's arms certain black and blue marks of nails were discovered, and when her mother examined her on them she only cried and begged not to be made to answer.

And while Dr. Woodford was dozing in his chair as usual after the noonday dinner Mrs. Woodford actually detected a hook suspended from a horsehair descending in the direction of his big horn spectacles, and quietly moving across to frustrate the attempt, she unearthed Peregrine on a chair angling from behind the window curtain.

She did not speak, but fixed her calm eyes on him with a look of sad, grave disappointment as she wound up the line. In a few seconds the boy had thrown himself at her feet, rolling as if in pain, and sobbing out, "'Tis all of no use! Let me alone."

Nevertheless he obeyed the hushing gesture of her hand, and held his breath, as she led him out to the garden-seat, where they had spent so many happy quiet hours. Then he flung himself down and repeated his exclamation, half piteous, half defiant. "Leave me alone! Leave me alone! It has me! It is all of no use."

"What has you, my poor child?"

"The evil spirit. You will have it that I'm not one of--one of them--so it must be as my father says, that I am possessed--the evil

spirit. I was at peace with you--so happy--happier than ever I was before--and now--those boys. It has me again--I could not help it--I've even hurt her--Mistress Anne. Let me alone--send me home--to be scorned, and shunned, and brow-beaten--and as bad as ever--then at least she will be safe from me."

All this came out between sobs such that Mrs. Woodford could not attempt to speak, but she kept her hand on him, and at last she said, when he could hear her: "Every one of us has to fight with an evil spirit, and when we are not on our guard he is but too apt to take advantage of us."

The boy rather sullenly repeated that it was of no use to fight against his.

"Indeed! Nay. Were you ever so much grieved before at having let him have the mastery?"

"No--but no one ever was good to me before."

"Yes; all about you lived under a cruel error, and you helped them in it. But if you had not a better nature in you, my poor child, you would not be happy here and thankful for what we can do for you."

"I was like some one else here," said Peregrine, picking a daisy to pieces, "but they stirred it all up. And at home I shall be just the same as ever I was."

She longed to tell him that there was hope of a change in his life, but she durst not till it was more certain, so she said--

"There was One who came to conquer the evil spirit and the evil nature, and to give each one of us the power to get the victory. The harder the victory, the more glorious!" and her eyes sparkled at the thought.

He caught a moment's glow, then fell back. "For those that are chosen," he said.

"You are chosen--you were chosen by your baptism. You have the stirrings of good within you. You can win and beat back the evil side of you in Christ's strength, if you will ask for it, and go on in His might."

The boy groaned. Mrs. Woodford knew that the great point with him would be to teach him to hope and to pray, but the very name of prayer had been rendered so distasteful to him that she scarce durst press the subject by name, and her heart sank at the thought of sending him home again, but she was glad to be interrupted, and said no more.

At night, however, she heard sounds of moaning and stifled babbling that reminded her of his times of delirium, and going into his room she found him tossing and groaning so that it was manifestly a kindness to wake him; but her gentle touch occasioned a scream of terror, and he started aside with open glassy eyes, crying, "Oh take me not!"

"My dear boy! It is I. Perry, do you not know me?"

"Oh, madam!" in infinite relief, "it is you. I thought--I thought I was in elfland and that they were paying me for the tithe to hell;" and he still shuddered all over.

"No elf--no elf, dear boy; a christened boy--God's child, and under His care;" and she began the 121st Psalm.

"Oh, but I am not under His shadow! The Evil One has had me again! He will have me. Aren't those his claws? He will have me!"

"Never, my child, if you will cry to God for help. Say this with me, 'Lord, be Thou my keeper.'"

He did so, and grew more quiet, and she began to repeat Dr. Ken's evening hymn, which had become known in manuscript in Winchester. It soothed him, and she thought he was dropping off to sleep, but no sooner did she move than he started with "There it is again--the black wings--the claws--" then while awake, "Say it again! Oh, say it again. Fold me in your prayers--you can pray." She went back to the verse, and he became quiet, but her next attempt to leave him caused an entreaty that she would remain, nor could she quit him till the dawn, happily very early, was dispelling the terrors of the night, and then, when he had himself murmured once--

"Let no ill dreams disturb my rest,
No powers of darkness me molest,"

he fell asleep at last, with a softer look on his pinched face. Poor boy, would that verse be his first step to prayer and deliverance from his own too real enemy?

CHAPTER VII: THE ENVOY

"I then did ask of her, her changeling child."

Midsummer Night's Dream.

Mrs. Woodford was too good a housewife to allow herself any extra rest on account of her vigil, and she had just put her Juneating apple-tart into the oven when Anne rushed into the kitchen with the warning that there was a grand gentleman getting off his horse at the gateway, and speaking to her uncle--she thought it must be Peregrine's uncle.

Mrs. Woodford was of the same opinion, and asked where Peregrine was.

"Fast asleep in the window-seat of the parlour, mother! I did not waken him, for he looked so tired."

"That was right, my little maiden," said Mrs. Woodford, hastily washing her hands, taking off her cooking apron, letting down her black gown from its pocket holes, and arranging her veil-like widow's coif, after which, in full trim for company, she sallied out

to the front door, to avert, if possible, the waking of the boy, whom she wished to appear to the best advantage.

She met in the garden her brother-in-law, and Sir Peregrine Oakshott, on being presented to her, made such a bow as had seldom been seen in those parts, as he politely said that he was the bearer of his brother's thanks for her care of his nephew.

Mrs. Woodford explained that the boy had had so bad a night that it would be well not to break his present sleep, and invited the guest to walk in the garden or sit in the Doctor's study or in the shade of the castle wall.

This last was what he preferred, and there they seated themselves, with a green slope before them down to the pale gray creek, and the hill beyond lying in the summer sunshine.

"I have been long in coming hither," said the knight, "partly on account of letters on affairs of State, and partly likewise because I desired to come alone, thinking that I might better understand how it is with the lad without the presence of his father or brothers."

"I am very glad you have so done, sir."

"Then, madam, I entreat of you to speak freely and tell me your opinion of him without reserve. You need not fear offence by speaking of the mode in which they have treated him at home. My poor brother has meant to do his duty, but he has stood so far aloof from his sons that he has dealt with them in ignorance, and their mother, between sickliness and timidity, is a mere prey to the folly of her gossips. So speak plainly, madam, I beg of you."

Mrs. Woodford did speak plainly of the boy's rooted belief in his own elfish origin, and how when arguing against it she had found the alternative even sadder and more hopeless, how well he comported himself as long as he was treated as a human and rational being, but how the taunts and jests of the young Archfields had renewed all the mischief, to the poor fellow's own remorse and despair.

Sir Peregrine listened with only a word of comment, or question now and then, like a man of the world well used to hearing all before he committed himself, and the description was only just ended when the clang of the warning dinner-bell sounded and they rose; but as they were passing the window of the dining-parlour a shriek of Anne's startled them all, and as they sprang forward, Mrs. Woodford first, Peregrine's voice was heard, "No, no, Anne, don't be afraid. It is for me he is come; I knew he would."

Something in a strange language was heard. A black face with round eyes and gleaming teeth might be seen bending forward. Anne gave another shriek, but was heard crying, "No, no! Get away, sir. He is our Lord Christ's! He is! You can't! you shan't have him."

And Anne was seen standing over Peregrine, who had dropped shuddering and nearly fainting on the floor, while she stood valiantly up warding off the advance of him whom she took for the Prince of Darkness, and in her excitement not at first aware of those who were come to her aid at the window. In one second the negro was saying something which his master answered, and sent him

off. Mrs. Woodford had called out, "Don't be afraid, dear children. 'Tis Sir Peregrine's black servant"; and the Doctor, "Foolish children! What is this nonsense?" A moment or two more and they were in the room, Anne, all trembling, flying up to her mother and hiding her face against her between fright and shame at not having thought of the black servant, and the while they lifted up Peregrine, who, as he met his kind friend's eyes, said faintly, "Is he gone? Was it the dream again?"

"It was your uncle's blackamoor servant," said Mrs. Woodford. "You woke up, and no wonder you were startled. Come with me, both of you, and make you ready for dinner."

Peregrine had rather collapsed than fainted, for he was able to walk with her hand on his shoulder, and Sir Peregrine understood her sign and did not attempt to accost either of the children, though as the Doctor took him to his chamber he expressed his admiration of the little maiden.

"That's the right woman," he said, "losing herself when there is one to guard. Nay, sir, she needs no excuse. Such a spirit may well redeem a child's mistake."

Mrs. Woodford had reassured the children, so that they were more than half ashamed, though scarce willing to reappear when she had made Peregrine wash his face and hands, smooth the hair ruffled in his nap, freshly tying his little cravat and the ribbons on his shoes and at his knees. To make his hair into anything but elf locks, or to obliterate the bristly tuft that made him like Riquet, was impossible, illness had made him additionally lean and sallow, and his keen eyes, under their black contracted brows and dark lashes, showed all the more the curious variation in their tints, and with an obliquity that varied according to the state of the nerves. There was a satirical mischievous cast in the mould of the face, though individually the features were not amiss except for their thinness, and in fact the unpleasantness of the expression had insensibly been softened during this last month, and there was nothing repellent, though much that was quaint, in the slight figure, with the indescribably one-sided air, and stature more befitting ten than fourteen years. What would the visitor think of him? The Doctor called to him, "Come, Peregrine, your uncle, Sir Peregrine Oakshott, has been good enough to come over to see you."

Peregrine had been well trained enough in that bitter school of home to make a correct bow, though his feelings were betrayed by his yellow eye going almost out of sight.

"My namesake--your father will not let me say my godson," said Sir Peregrine smiling. "We ought to be good friends."

The boy looked up. Perhaps he had never been greeted in so human a manner before, and there was something confiding in the way those bony fingers of his rested a moment in his uncle's clasp.

"And this is your little daughter, madam, Peregrine's kind playmate? You may well be proud of her valour," said the knight, while Anne made her courtesy, which he, in the custom of the day, returned with a kiss; and she, who had been mortally ashamed of her terror, marvelled at his praise.

The pair of fowls were by this time on the table, and good manners required silence on the part of the children, but while Sir Peregrine explained that he had been appointed by his Majesty as Envoy to the Elector of Brandenburg, and gave various interesting particulars of foreign life, Mrs. Woodford saw that he was keeping a quiet watch over his nephew's habits at table, and she was thankful that when unmoved by any wayward spirit of mischief they were quite beyond reproach. Something of the refinement of his poor mother's tastes must have been inherited by Peregrine, for a certain daintiness of taste and habit had probably added to his discomforts in the austere, not to say rude simplicity imposed upon the children of the family.

When the meal was over the children were dismissed to the garden, but bidden to keep within call, in case Sir Peregrine should wish to see his nephew again. The others repaired again to the garden seat, with wine and fruit, but the knight begged Mrs. Woodford not to leave them.

"I am satisfied," he said. "The boy shows gentle blood and breeding. There was cause enough for fright without cowardice, and there is not, what I was led to fear, such uncouthness or ungainliness as should hinder me from having him with me."

"Oh, sir, is that your purpose?" cried the lady, almost as eagerly as if it had been high preferment for her own child.

"I had thought thereon," said the envoy. "There is reason that he should be my charge, and my brother is like to give a ready consent, since he is sorely perplexed what to do with this poor untoward slip."

"He would be less untoward were he happier," said Mrs. Woodford. "Indeed, sir, I do not think you will repent it, if--" and she paused.

"What would you say, madam?"

"If only all your honour's household are absolutely ignorant of all these tales."

"That can well be, madam. I have only one body-servant with me, this unlucky blackamoor, who speaks nothing save Dutch. I had already thought of leaving my grooms here, and returning to London by sea, and this could well be done, and would cut off all channels of gossiping. The boy is, the chaplain tells me, quick-witted, and a fair scholar for his years, and I can find good schooling for him."

"When his head is able to bear it," said Mrs. Woodford.

"Truly, sir," added the Doctor, "you are doing a good work, and I trust that the boy will requite you worthily."

"I tell your reverence," said Sir Peregrine, "crooked stick though they term him, I had ten times rather have the dealing with him than with those comely great lubbers his brothers! The question now is, shall I tell him what is in store for him?"

"I should say," returned Dr. Woodford, "that provided it is certain that the intention can be carried out, nothing would be so good for him as hope. Do you not say so, sister?"

"Indeed I do," she replied. "I believe that he would be a very different boy if he were relieved from the misery he suffers at home and requites by mischievous pranks. I do not say he will or can be a good lad at once, but if your honour can have patience with him, I do believe there is that in him which can be turned to good. If he only can believe in the better nature and higher guidings, and pray, and not give himself up in despair." She had tears in her eyes.

"My good madam, I can believe it all," said Sir Peregrine. "Short of being supposed an elf, I have gone through the same, and it was not my good father's fault that I did not loathe the very name of preaching or prayer. But I had a mother who knew how to deal with me, whereas this poor child's mother, I am sure, believes in her secret heart that he is none of hers, though she has enough sense not to dare to avow it. Alas! I cannot give the boy the woman's tending by which you have already wrought so much," and Mrs. Woodford remembered to have heard that his wife had died at Rotterdam, "but I can treat him like a human being, I hope indeed as a son; and, at any rate, there will be no one to remind him of these old wives' tales."

"I can only say that I am heartily rejoiced," said Mrs. Woodford.

So Peregrine was summoned, and shambled up, his eyes showing that he expected a trying interview, and, moreover, with a certain twinkle of mischief or perverseness in their corners.

"Soh! my lad, we ought to be better acquainted," said the uncle. "D'ye know what our name means?"

"Peregrinus, a vagabond," responded the boy.

"Eh! The translation may be correct, but 'tis scarce the most complimentary. I wonder now if you, like me, were born on a Wednesday. 'Wednesday's child has far to go.'"

"No. I was born on a Sunday, and if to see goblins and oafs--"

"Nay, I read it, 'Sunday's child is full of grace.'"

Peregrine's mouth twitched ironically, but his uncle continued, "Look you, my boy, what say you to fulfilling the augury of your name with me. His Majesty has ordered me off again to represent the British name to the Elector of Brandenburg, and I have a mind to carry you with me. What do you say?"

If any one expected Peregrine to be overjoyed his demeanour was disappointing. He shuffled with his feet, and after two or three "Ehs?" from his uncle, he mumbled, "I don't care," and then shrank together, as one prepared for the stripe with the riding-whip which such a rude answer merited: but his uncle had, as a diplomat, learnt a good deal of patience, and he said, "Ha! don't care to leave home and brothers. Eh?"

Peregrine's chin went down, and there was no answer; his hair dropped over his heavy brow.

"See, boy, this is no jest," said his uncle. "You are too big to be told that 'I'll put you into my pocket and carry you off.' I am in earnest."

Peregrine looked up, and with one sudden flash surveyed his uncle. His lips trembled, but he did not speak.

"It is sudden," said the knight to the other two. "See, boy, I am not about to take you away with me now. In a week or ten days' time I start for London; and there we will fit you out for Konigsberg or Berlin, and I trust we shall make a man of you, and a good man. Your tutor tells me you have excellent parts, and I mean that you shall do me credit."

Dr. Woodford could not help telling the lad that he ought to thank his uncle, whereat he scowled; but Sir Peregrine said, "He is not ready for that yet. Wait till he feels he has something to thank me for."

So Peregrine was dismissed, and his friends exclaimed with some wonder and annoyance that the boy who had been willing to be decapitated to put an end to his wretchedness, should be so reluctant to accept such an offer, but Sir Peregrine only laughed, and said--

"The lad has pith in him! I like him better than if he came like a spaniel to my foot. But I will say no more till I fully have my brother's consent. No one knows what crooks there may be in folks' minds."

He took his leave, and presently Mrs. Woodford had a fresh surprise. She found this strange boy lying flat on the grass, sobbing as if his heart would break, and when she tried to soothe and comfort him it was very hard to get a word from him; but at last, as she asked, "And does it grieve you so much to leave home?" the answer was--

"No, no! not home!"

"What is it, then? What are you sorry to leave?"

"Oh, you don't know! you and Anne--the only ones that ever were good to me--and drove away--it."

"Nay, my dear boy. Your uncle means to be good to you."

"No, no. No one ever will be like you and Anne. Oh, let me stay with you, or they will have me at last!"

He was too much shaken, in his still half-recovered state, by the events of these last days, to be reasoned with. Mrs. Woodford was afraid he would work himself into delirium, and could only soothe him into a calmer state. She found from Anne that the children had some vague hopes of his being allowed to remain at Portchester, and that this was the ground of his disappointment, since he seemed to be attaching himself to them as the first who had ever touched his heart or opened to him a gleam of better things.

By the next day, however, he was in a quieter and more reasonable state, and Mrs. Woodford was able to have a long talk with him. She represented that the difference of opinions made it almost certain that his father would never consent to his remaining under her roof, and that even if this were possible, Portchester was far too much infected with the folly from which he had suffered so much; and his uncle would take care that no one he would meet should ever hear of it.

"There's little good in that," said the boy moodily. "I'm a thing they'll jibe at and bait any way."

"I do not see that, if you take pains with yourself. Your uncle said you showed blood and breeding, and when you are better dressed, and with him, no one will dare to mock his Excellency's nephew. Depend upon it, Peregrine, this is the fresh start that you need."

"If you were there--"

"My boy, you must not ask for what is impossible. You must learn to conquer in God's strength, not mine."

All, however, that passed may not here be narrated, and it apparently left that wayward spirit unconvinced. Nevertheless, when on the second day Major Oakshott himself came over with his brother, and informed Peregrine that his uncle was good enough to undertake the charge of him, and to see that he was bred up in godly ways in a Protestant land, free from prelacy and superstition, the boy seemed reconciled to his fate. Major Oakshott spoke more kindly than usual to him, being free from fresh irritation at his misdemeanours; but even thus there was a contrast with the gentler, more persuasive tones of the diplomatist, and no doubt this tended to increase Peregrine's willingness to be thus handed over.

The next question was whether he should go home first, but both the uncle and the friends were averse to his remaining there, amid the unavoidable gossip and chatter of the household, and it was therefore decided that he should only ride over with Dr. Woodford for an hour or two to take leave of his mother and brothers.

This settled, Mrs. Woodford found him much easier to deal with. He had really, through his midnight invocation of the fairies, obtained an opening into a new world, and he was ready to believe that with no one to twit him with being a changeling or worse, he could avoid perpetual disgrace and punishment and live at peace. Nor was he unwilling to promise Mrs. Woodford to say daily, and especially when tempted, one or two brief collects and ejaculations which she selected to teach him, as being as unlike as possible to the long extempore exercises which had made him hate the very name of prayer. The Doctor gave him a Greek Testament, as being least connected with unpleasant recollections.

"And," entreated Peregrine humbly, in a low voice to Mrs. Woodford on his last Sunday evening, "may I not have something of yours, to lay hold of, and remember you if--when--the evil spirit tries to lay hold of me again?"

She would fain have given him a prayer-book, but she knew that would

be treason to his father, and with tears in her eyes and something of a pang, she gave him a tiny miniature of herself, which had been her husband's companion at sea, and hung it round his neck with the chain of her own hair that had always held it.

"It will always keep my heart warm," said Peregrine, as he hid it under his vest. There was a shade of disappointment on Anne's face when he showed it to her, for she had almost deemed it her own.

"Never mind, Anne," he said; "I am coming back a knight like my uncle to marry you, and then it will be yours again."

"I--I'm not going to wed you--I have another sweetheart," added Anne in haste, lest he should think she scorned him.

"Oh, that lubberly Charles Archfield! No fear of him. He is promised long ago to some little babe of quality in London. You may whistle for him. So you'd better wait for me."

"It is not true. You only say it to plague me."

"It's as true as Gospel! I heard Sir Philip telling one of the big black gowns one day in the Close, when I was sitting up in a tree overhead, how they had fixed a marriage between his son and his old friend's daughter, who would have ever so many estates. So I'd give that"--snapping his fingers--"for your chances of being my Lady Archfield in the salt mud at Fareham."

"I shall ask Lucy. It is not kind of you, Perry, when you are just going away."

"Come, come, don't cry, Anne."

"But I knew Charley ever so long first, and--"

"Oh, yes. Maids always like straight, comely, dull fellows, I know that. But as you can't have Charles Archfield, I mean to have you, Anne--for I shall look to you as the only one as can ever make a good man of me! Ay--your mother--I'd wed her if I could, but as I can't, I mean to have you, Anne Woodford."

"I don't mean to have you! I shall go to Court, and marry some noble earl or gentleman! Why do you laugh and make that face, Peregrine? you know my father was almost a knight--"

"Nobody is long with you without knowing that!" retorted Peregrine; "but a miss is as good as a mile, and you will find the earls and the lords will think so, and be fain to take the crooked stick at last!"

Mistress Anne tossed her head--and Peregrine returned a grimace. Nevertheless they parted with a kiss, and for some time the thought of Peregrine haunted the little girl with a strange, fateful feeling, between aversion and attraction, which wore off, as a folly of her childhood, with her growth in years.

CHAPTER VIII: THE RETURN

"I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour everywhere."

Merchant of Venice.

It was autumn, but in the year 1687, when again Lucy Archfield and Anne Jacobina Woodford were pacing the broad gravel walk along the south side of the nave of Winchester Cathedral. Lucy, in spite of her brocade skirt and handsome gown of blue velvet tucked up over it, was still devoid of any look of distinction, but was a round-faced, blooming, cheerful maiden, of that ladylike thoroughly countrified type happily frequent in English girlhood throughout all time.

Anne, or Jacobina, as she tried to be called, towered above her head, and had never lost that tincture of courtly grace that early breeding had given her, and though her skirt was of gray wool, and the upper gown of cherry tabinet, she wore both with an air that made them seem more choice and stylish than those of her companion, while the simple braids and curls of her brown hair set off an unusually handsome face, pale and clear in complexion, with regular features, fine arched eyebrows over clear brown eyes, a short chin, and a mouth of perfect outline, but capable of looking very resolute.

Altogether she looked fit for a Court atmosphere, and perhaps she was not without hopes of it, for Dr. Woodford had become a royal chaplain under Charles II, and was now continued in the same office; and though this was a sinecure as regarded the present King, yet Tory and High Church views were as much in the ascendant as they could be under a Romanist king, and there were hopes of a canonry at Windsor or Westminster, or even higher preferment still, if he were not reckoned too staunch an Anglican. That Mrs. Woodford's health had been failing for many months past would, her sanguine daughter thought, be remedied by being nearer the best physicians in London, which had been quitted with regret. Meantime Lucy's first experiences of wedding festivities were to be heard. For the Archfield family had just returned from celebrating the marriage of the heir. Long ago Anne Jacobina had learnt to reckon Master Charles's pledges of affection among the sports and follies of childhood, and the strange sense of disappointment and shame with which she recollected them had perhaps added to her natural reserve, and made her feel it due to maidenly dignity to listen with zest to the account of the bride, who was to be brought to supper at Doctor Woodford's that eve.

"She is a pretty little thing," said Lucy, "but my mother was much concerned to find her so mere a child, and would not, if she had seen her, have consented to the marriage for two years to come, except for the sake of having her in our own hands."

"I thought she was sixteen."

"Barely fifteen, my dear, and far younger than we were at that age. She cried because her woman said she must leave her old doll behind her; and when my brother declared that she should have anything she liked, she danced about, and kissed him, and made him kiss its

wooden face with half the paint rubbed off."

"He did?"

"Oh, yes! She is like a pretty fresh plaything to him, and they go about together just like big Towzer and little Frisk at home. He is very much amused with her, and she thinks him the finest possession that ever came in her way."

"Well, so he is."

"That is true; but somehow it is scarcely like husband and wife; and my mother fears that she may be sickly, for she is so small and slight that it seems as if you could blow her away, and so white that you would think she had no blood, except when a little heat brings the purest rose colour to her cheek, and that, my lady says, betokens weakness. You know, of course, that she is an orphan; her father died of a wasting consumption, and her mother not long after, when she was a yearling babe. It was her grandfather who was my father's friend in the old cavalier days, and wrote to propose the contract to my brother not long before his death, when she was but five years old. The pity was that she was not sent to us at once, for the old lord, her grand-uncle, never heeded or cared for her, but left her to servants, who petted her, but understood nothing of care of her health or her education, so that the only wonder is that she is alive or so sweet and winning as she is. She can hardly read without spelling, and I had to make copies for her of Alice Fitzhubert, to show her how to sign the book. All she knew she learnt from the old steward, and only when she liked. My father laughs and is amused, but my lady sighs, and hopes her portion is not dearly bought."

"Is not she to be a great heiress?"

"Not of the bulk of the lands--they go to heirs male; but there is much besides, enough to make Charles a richer man than our father. I wonder what you will think of her. My mother is longing to talk her over with Mrs Woodford."

"And my mother is longing to see my lady."

"I fear she is still but poorly."

"We think she will be much better when we get home," said Anne. "I am sure she is stronger, for she walked round the Close yesterday, and was scarcely tired."

"But tell me, Anne, is it true that poor Master Oliver Oakshott is dead of smallpox?"

"Quite true. Poor young gentleman, he was to have married that cousin of his mother's, Mistress Martha Browning, living at Emsworth. She came on a visit, and they think she brought the infection, for she sickened at once, and though she had it favourably, is much disfigured. Master Oliver caught it and died in three days, and all the house were down with it. They say poor Mrs. Oakshott forgot her ailments and went to and fro among them all. My mother would have gone to help in their need if she had been as well as she used to be."

"How is it with the other son? He was a personable youth enough. I saw him at the ship launch in the spring, and thought both lads would fain have staid for the dance on board but for their grim old father."

"You saw Robert, but he is not the elder."

"What? Is that shocking impish urchin whom we used to call Riquet with the tuft, older than he?"

"Certainly he is. He writes from time to time to my mother, and seems to be doing well with his uncle."

"I cannot believe he would come to good. Do you remember his sending my brother and cousin adrift in the boat?"

"I think that was in great part the fault of your cousin for mocking and tormenting him."

"Sedley Archfield was a bad boy! There's no denying that. I am afraid he had good reason for running away from college."

"Have you heard of him since?"

"Yes; he has been serving with the Life-guards in Scotland, and mayhap he will come home and see us. My father wishes to see whether he is worthy to have a troop procured by money or favour for him, and if they are recalled to the camp at November it will be an opportunity. But see--who is coming through the Slype?"

"My uncle. And who is with him?"

Dr. Woodford advanced, and with him a small slender figure in black. As the broad hat with sable plume was doffed with a sweep on approaching the ladies, a dark head and peculiar countenance appeared, while the Doctor said, "Here is an old acquaintance, young ladies, whom I met dismounting at the White Hart, and have brought home with me."

"Mr. Peregrine Oakshott!" exclaimed Anne, feeling bound to offer in welcome a hand, which he kissed after the custom of the day, while Lucy dropped a low and formal courtesy, and being already close to the gate of the house occupied by her family, took her leave till supper-time.

Even in the few steps before reaching home Anne was able to perceive that a being very unlike the imp of seven years ago had returned, though still short in stature and very slight, with long dark hair hanging straight enough to suggest elf-locks, but his figure was well proportioned, and had a finished air of high breeding and training. His riding suit was point device, from the ostrich feather in his hat, to the toes of his well made boots, and his sword knew its place, as well as did those of the gentlemen that Anne remembered at the Duke of York's when she was a little child. His thin, marked face was the reverse of handsome, but it was keen, shrewd, perhaps satirical, and the remarkable eyes were very bright under dark eyebrows and lashes, and the thin lips, devoid of hair, showed fine white teeth when parted by a smile of gladness--at the

meeting--though he was concerned to hear that Mrs. Woodford had been very ill all the last spring, and had by no means regained her former health, and even in the few words that passed it might be gathered that Anne was far more hopeful than her uncle.

She did indeed look greatly changed, though her countenance was sweeter than ever, as she rose from her seat by the fire and held out her arms to receive the newcomer with a motherly embrace, while the expression of joy and affection was such as could never once have seemed likely to sit on Peregrine Oakshott's features. They were left together, for Anne had the final touches to put to the supper, and Dr. Woodford was sent for to speak to one of the Cathedral staff.

Peregrine explained that he was on his way home, his father having recalled him on his brother's death, but he hoped soon to rejoin his uncle, whose secretary he now was. They had been for the last few months in London, and were thence to be sent on an embassy to the young Czar of Muscovy, an expedition to which he looked forward with eager curiosity. Mrs. Woodford hoped that all danger of infection at Oakwood was at an end.

"There is none for me, madam," he said, with a curious writhed smile. "Did you not know that they thought they were rid of me when I took the disease at seven years old, and lay in the loft over the hen-house with Molly Owens to tend me? and I believe it was thought to be fairy work that I came out of it no more unsightly than before."

"You are seeking for compliments, Peregrine; you are greatly improved."

"Crooked sticks can be pruned and trained," he responded, with a courteous bow.

"You are a travelled man. Let me see, how many countries have you seen?"

"A year at Berlin and Konigsberg--strange places enough, specially the last, two among the scholars and high roofs of Leyden, half a year at Versailles and Paris, another year at Turin, whence back for another half year to wait on old King Louis, then to the Hague, and the last three months at Court. Not much like buying and selling cows, or growing wheat on the slopes, or lying out on a cold winter's night to shoot a few wild fowl; and I have you to thank for it, my first and best friend!"

"Nay, your uncle is surely your best."

"Never would he have picked up the poor crooked stick save for you, madam. Moreover, you gave me my talisman," and he laid his hand on his breast; "it is your face that speaks to me and calls me back when the elf, or whatever it is, has got the mastery of me."

Somewhat startled, Mrs. Woodford would have asked what he meant, but that intelligence was brought that Mr. Oakshott's man had brought his mail, so that he had to repair to his room. Mrs. Woodford had kept up some correspondence with him, for which his uncle's position as envoy afforded unusual facilities, and she knew that on the whole

he had been a very different being from what he was at home. Once, indeed, his uncle had written to the Doctor to express his full satisfaction in the lad, on whom he seemed to look like a son, but from some subsequent letters she had an impression that he had got into trouble of some sort while at the University of Leyden, and she was afraid that she must accept the belief that the wild elfish spirit, as he called it, was by no means extinct in him, any more, she said to herself, than temptation is in any human creature. The question is, What is there to contend therewith?

The guests were, however, about to assemble. The Doctor, in black velvet cap and stately silken cassock, sash, and gown, sailed down to receive them, and again greeted Peregrine, who emerged in black velvet and satin, delicate muslin cravat and cuffs, dainty silk stockings and rosetted shoes, in a style such as made the far taller and handsomer Charles Archfield, in spite of gay scarlet coat, embroidered flowery vest, rich laced cravat, and thick shining brown curls, look a mere big schoolboy, almost bumpkin-like in contrast. However, no one did look at anything but the little creature who could just reach to hang upon that resplendent bridegroom's arm. She was in glistening white brocade, too stiff and cumbrous for so tiny a figure, yet together with the diamonds glistening on her head and breast giving her the likeness of a fairy queen. The whiteness was almost startling, for the neck and arms were like pearl in tint, the hair flowing in full curls on her shoulders was like shining flax or pale silk just unwound from the cocoon, and the only relief of colour was the deep blue of the eyes, the delicate tint of the lips, and the tender rosy flush that was called up by her presentation to her hosts by stout old Sir Philip, in plum-coloured coat and full-bottomed wig, though she did not blush half as much as the husband of nineteen in his new character. Indeed, had it not been for her childish prettiness, her giggle would have been unpleasing to more than Lady Archfield, who, broad and matronly, gave a courtesy and critical glance at Peregrine before subsiding into a seat beside Mrs. Woodford.

Lucy stood among a few other young people from the Close, watching for Anne, who came in, trim and bright, though still somewhat reddened in face and arms from her last attentions to the supper--an elaborate meal on such occasions, though lighter than the mid-day repast. There were standing pies of game, lobster and oyster patties, creams, jellies, and other confections, on which Sir Philip and his lady highly complimented Anne, who had been engaged on them for at least a couple of days, her mother being no longer able to assist except by advice.

"See, daughter Alice, you will learn one day to build up a jelly as well as to eat it," said Sir Philip good-humouredly, whereat the small lady pouted a little and said--

"Bet lets me make shapes of the dough, but I won't stir the pans and get to look like a turkey-cock."

"Ah, ha! and you have always done what you liked, my little madam?"

"Of course, sir! and so I shall," she answered, drawing up her pretty little head, while Lady Archfield gave hers a boding shake.

"Time, and life, and wifhood teach lessons," murmured Mrs. Woodford

in consolation, and the Doctor changed the subject by asking Peregrine whether the ladies abroad were given to housewifery.

"The German dames make a great ado about their Wirthschaft, as they call it," was the reply, "but as to the result! Pah! I know not how we should have fared had not Hans, my uncle's black, been an excellent cook; but it was in Paris that we were exquisitely regaled, and our maitre d'hotel would discourse on ragouts and entremets till one felt as if his were the first of the sciences."

"So it is to a Frenchman," growled Sir Philip. "French and Frenchifications are all the rage nowadays, but what will your father say to your science, my young spark?"

The gesture of head and shoulder that replied had certainly been caught at Paris. Mrs. Woodford rushed into the breach, asking about the Princess of Orange, whom she had often seen as a child.

"A stately and sightly dame is she, madam," Peregrine answered, "towering high above her little mynheer, who outwardly excels her in naught save the length of nose, and has the manners of a boor."

"The Prince of Orange is the hope of the country," said Sir Philip severely.

Peregrine's face wore a queer satirical look, which provoked Sir Philip into saying, "Speak up, sir! what d'ye mean? We don't understand French grins here."

"Nor does he, nor French courtesies either," said Peregrine.

"So much the better!" exclaimed the baronet.

Here the little clear voice broke in, "O Mr. Oakshott, if I had but known you were coming, you might have brought me a French doll in the latest fashion."

"I should have been most happy, madam," returned Peregrine; "but unfortunately I am six months from Paris, and besides, his honour might object lest a French doll should contaminate the Dutch puppets."

"But oh, sir, is it true that French dolls have real hair that will curl?"

"Don't be foolish," muttered Charles impatiently; and she drew up her head and made an indescribably droll moue of disgust at him.

Supper ended, the party broke up into old and young, the two elder gentlemen sadly discussing politics over their tall glasses of wine, the matrons talking over the wedding and Lady Archfield's stay in London at the parlour fire, and the young folk in a window, waiting for the fiddler and a few more of the young people who were to join them in the dance.

The Archfield ladies had kissed the hand of the Queen, and agreed with Peregrine in admiration of her beauty and grace, though they did not go so far as he did, especially when he declared that her eyes were as soft as Mistress Anne's, and nearly of the same

exquisite brown, which made the damsel blush and experience a revival of the old feeling of her childhood, as if he put her under a spell.

He went on to say that he had had the good fortune to pick up and restore to Queen Mary Beatrice a gold and coral rosary which she had dropped on her way to St. James's Palace from Whitehall. She thanked him graciously, letting him kiss her hand, and asking him if he were of the true Church. "Imagine my father's feelings," he added, "when she said, 'Ah! but you will be ere long; I give it you as a pledge.'"

He produced the rosary, handing it first to Anne, who admired the beautiful filigree work, but it was almost snatched from her by Mrs. Archfield, who wound it twice on her tiny wrist, tried to get it over her head, and did everything but ask for it, till her husband, turning round, said roughly, "Give it back, madam. We want no Popish toys here."

Lucy put in a hasty question whether Master Oakshott had seen much sport, and this led to a spirited description of the homely earnest of wild boar hunting under the great Elector of Brandenburg, in contrast with the splendours of la chasse aux sangliers at Fontainebleau with the green and gold uniforms, the fanfares on the curled horns, the ladies in their coaches, forced to attend whether ill or well, the very boars themselves too well bred not to conform to the sport of the great idol of France. And again, he showed the diamond sleeve buttons, the trophies of a sort of bazaar held at Marly, where the stalls were kept by the Dauphin, Monsieur, the Duke of Maine, Madame de Maintenon, and the rest, where the purchases were winnings at Ombre, made not with coin but with nominal sums, and other games at cards, and all was given away that was not purchased. And again the levees, when the King's wig was handed through the curtains on a stick. Peregrine's profane mimicry of the stately march of Louis Quatorze, and the cringing obeisances of his courtiers, together with their strutting majesty towards their own inferiors, convulsed all with merriment; and the bride shrieked out, "Do it again! Oh, I shall die of laughing!"

It was very girlish, with a silvery ring, but the elder ladies looked round, and the bridegroom muttered 'Mountebank.'

The fiddler arrived at that moment, and the young people paired off, the young couple naturally together, and Peregrine, to the surprise and perhaps discomfiture of more than one visitor, securing Anne's hand. The young lady pupils of Madame knew their steps, and Lucy danced correctly, Anne with an easy, stately grace, Charles Archfield performed his devoir seriously, his little wife frisked with childish glee, evidently quite untaught, but Peregrine's light narrow feet sprang, pointed themselves, and bounded with trained agility, set off by the tight blackness of his suit. He was like one of the grotesque figures shaped in black paper, or as Sir Philip, looking in from the dining-parlour, observed, "like a light-heeled French fop."

As a rule partners retained one another all the evening, but little Mrs. Archfield knew no etiquette, and maybe her husband had pushed and pulled her into place a little more authoritatively than she quite approved, for she shook him off, and turning round to

Peregrine exclaimed--

"Now, I will dance with you! You do leap and hop so high and trippingly! Never mind her; she is only a parson's niece!"

"Madam!" exclaimed Charles, in a tone of surprised displeasure; but she only nodded archly at him, and said, "I must dance with him; he can jump so high."

"Let her have her way," whispered Lucy, "she is but a child, and it will be better not to make a pother."

He yielded, though with visible annoyance, asking Anne if she would put up with a poor deserted swain, and as he led her off muttering, "That fellow's friskiness is like to be taken out of him at Oakwood."

Meanwhile the small creature had taken possession of her chosen partner, who, so far as size went, was far better suited to her than any of the other men present. They were dancing something original and unpremeditated, with twirls and springs, sweeps and bends, bounds and footings, just as the little lady's fancy prompted, perhaps guided in some degree by her partner's experience of national dances. White and black, they figured about, she with floating sheeny hair and glistening robes, he trim and tight and jetty, like fairy and imp! It was so droll and pretty that talkers and dancers alike paused to watch them in a strange fascination, till at last, quite breathless and pink as a moss rosebud, Alice dropped upon a chair near her husband. He stood grim, stiff, and vexed, all the more because Peregrine had taken her fan and was using it so as to make it wave like butterfly's wings, while poor Charles looked, as the Doctor whispered to his father, far more inclined to lay it about her ears.

Sir Philip laughed heartily, for both he and the Doctor had been so much entranced and amused as to be far more diverted at the lad's discomfiture than scandalised at the bride's escapade, which they viewed as child's play.

Perhaps, however, he was somewhat comforted by her later observation, "He is as ugly as Old Nick, and looks like always laughing at you; but I wish you could dance like him, Mr. Archfield, only then you wouldn't be my dear old great big husband, or so beautiful to look at. Oh, yes, to be sure, he is nothing but a skipjack such as one makes out of a chicken bone!"

And Anne meanwhile was exclaiming to her mother, "Oh, madam! how could they do such a thing? How could they make poor Charley marry that foolish ill-mannered little creature?"

"Hush, daughter, you must drop that childish name," said Mrs. Woodford gravely.

Anne blushed. "I forgot, madam, but I am so sorry for him."

"There is no reason for uneasiness, my dear. She is a mere child, and under such hands as Lady Archfield she is sure to improve. It is far better that she should be so young, as it will be the more easy to mould her."

"I hope there is any stuff in her to be moulded," sighed the maiden.

"My dear child," returned her mother, "I cannot permit you to talk in this manner. Yes, I know Mr. Archfield has been as a brother to you, but even his sister ought not to allow herself to discuss or dwell on what she deems the shortcomings of his wife."

The mother in her prudence had silenced the girl; but none the less did each fall asleep with a sad and foreboding heart. She knew her child to be good and well principled, but those early days of notice and petting from the young Princesses of the House of York had never faded from the childish mind, and although Anne was dutiful, cheerful, and outwardly contented, the mother often suspected that over the spinning-wheel or embroidery frame she indulged in day dreams of heroism, promotion, and grandeur, which might either fade away in a happy life of domestic duty or become temptations.

Before going away next morning Peregrine entreated that Mistress Anne might have the Queen's rosary, but her mother decidedly refused. "It ought to be an heirloom in your family," said she.

He threw up his hands with one of his strange gestures.

CHAPTER IX: ON HIS TRAVELS

"For Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do."

ISAAC WATTS.

Peregrine went off in good spirits, promising a visit on his return to London, of which he seemed to have no doubt; but no more was heard of him for ten days. At the end of that time the Portsmouth carrier conveyed the following note to Winchester:--

HONOURED AND REVEREND SIR--Seven years since your arguments and intercession induced my father to consent to what I hoped had been the rescue of me, body and soul. I know not whether to ask of your goodness to make the same endeavour again. My father declares that nothing shall induce him again to let me go abroad with my uncle, and persists in declaring that the compact has been broken by our visits to Papist lands, nor will aught that I can say persuade him that the Muscovite abhors the Pope quite as much as he can. He likewise deems that having unfortunately become his heir, I must needs remain at home to thin the timber and watch the ploughmen; and when I have besought him to let me yield my place to Robert he replies that I am playing the part of Esau. I have written to my uncle, who has been a true father to me, and would be loth to part from me for his own sake as well as mine but I know not whether he will be able to prevail; and I entreat of you, reverend sir, to add your persuasions, for I well know that it would be my perdition to remain bound where I am.

Commend me to Mrs. Woodford and Mistress Anne. I trust that the former is in better health.--I remain, reverend sir, Your humble

servant to command, PEREGRINE OAKSHOTT.

Given at Oakwood House,
This 10th of October 1687.

This was very bad news, but Dr. Woodford knew not how to interfere; moreover, being in course at the Cathedral, he could not absent himself long enough for an expedition to Oakwood, through wintry roads in short days. He could only write an encouraging letter to the poor lad, and likewise one to Mr. Horncastle, who under the Indulgence had a chapel of his own. The Doctor had kept up the acquaintance formed by Peregrine's accident, and had come to regard him with much esteem, and as likely to exercise a wholesome influence upon his patron. Nothing more was heard for a week, and then came another visitor to the Doctor's door, Sir Peregrine himself, on his way down, at considerable inconvenience, to endeavour to prevail with his brother to allow him to retain his nephew in his suite.

"Surely," he said, "my brother had enough of camps in his youth to understand that his son will be none the worse squire for having gone a little beyond Hampshire bogs, and learnt what the world is made of."

"I cannot tell," said Dr. Woodford; "I have my fears that he thinks the less known of the world the better."

"That might answer with a heavy clod of a lad such as the poor youth who is gone, and such as, for his own sake and my brother's, I trust the younger one is, fruges consumere natus; but as for this boy, dulness and vacancy are precisely what would be the ruin of him. Let my brother keep Master Robert at home, and give him Oakwood; I will provide for Perry as I always promised to do."

"If he is wise he will accept the offer," said Dr. Woodford; "but 'tis hard to be wise for others."

"Nothing harder, sir. I would that I had gone home with Perry, but mine audience of his Majesty was fixed for the ensuing week, and my brother's summons was peremptory."

"I trust your honour will prevail," said Mrs. Woodford gently. "You have effected a mighty change in the poor boy, and I can well believe that he is as a son to you."

"Well, madam, yes--as sons go," said the knight in a somewhat disappointing tone.

She looked at him anxiously, and ventured to murmur a hope so very like an inquiry, and so full of solicitous hope, that it actually unlocked the envoy's reserve, and he said, "Ah, madam, you have been the best mother that the poor youth has ever had! I will speak freely to you, for should I fail in overcoming my brother's prejudices, you will be able to do more for him than any one else, and I know you will be absolutely secret."

Mrs. Woodford sighed, with forebodings of not long being able to aid any one in this world, but still she listened with earnest interest and sympathy.

"Yes, madam, you implanted in him that which yet may conquer his strange nature. Your name is as it were a charm to conjure up his better spirit."

"Of course," she said, "I never durst hope, that he could be tamed and under control all at once, but--" and she paused.

"He has improved--vastly improved," said the uncle. "Indeed, when first I took him with me, while he was still weak, and moreover much overcome by sea-sickness, while all was strange to him, and he was relieved by not finding himself treated as an outcast, I verily thought him meeker than other urchins, and that the outcry against him was unmerited. But no sooner had we got to Berlin, and while I was as yet too busy to provide either masters or occupations for my young gentleman, than he did indeed make me feel that I had charge of a young imp, and that if I did not watch the better, it might be a case of war with his Spanish Majesty. For would you believe it, his envoy's gardens joined ours, and what must my young master do, but sit atop of our wall, making grimaces at the dons and donnas as they paced the walks, and pelting them from time to time with walnuts. Well, I was mindful of your counsel, and did not flog him, nor let my chaplain do so, though I know the good man's fingers itched to be at him; but I reasoned with him on the harm he was doing me, and would you believe it, the poor lad burst into tears, and implored me to give him something to do, to save him from his own spirit. I set him to write out and translate a long roll of Latin despatches sent up by that pedant Court in Hungary, and I declare to you I had no more trouble with him till next he was left idle. I gave him tutors, and he studied with fervour, and made progress at which they were amazed. He learnt the High Dutch faster than any other of my people, and could soon jabber away in it with the best of the Elector's folk, and I began to think I had a nephew who would do me no small credit. I sent him to perfect his studies at Leyden, but shall I confess it to you? it was to find that no master nor discipline could keep him out of the riotings and quarrels of the worse sort of students. Nay, I found him laid by with a rapier thrust in the side from a duel, for no better cause than biting his thumb at a Scots law student in chapel, his apology being that to sit through a Dutch sermon drove him crazy. 'Tis not that he is not trustworthy. Find employment for the restless demon that is in him, and all is well with him; moreover, he is full of wit and humour, and beguiles a long journey or tedious evening at an inn better than any comrade I ever knew, extracting mirth from all around, even the very discomforts, and searching to the quick all that is to be seen. But if left to himself, the restless demon that preys on him is sure to set him to something incalculable. At Turin it set him to scraping acquaintance with a Capuchin friar, a dirty rogue whom I would have kept on the opposite side of the street. That was his graver mood; but what more must he do, but borrow or steal, I know not how, the ghastly robes of the Confraternity of Death--the white garb and peaked cap with two holes for the eyes, wherewith men of all degrees disguise themselves while doing the pious work of bearing the dead to the grave. None suspected him, for the disguise is complete, and a duke may walk unknown beside a water-carrier, bearing the corpse of a cobbler. All would have been well, but that at the very brink of the grave the boy's fiend--'tis his own word--impelled him to break forth into his wild "Ho! ho! ho!" with an eldritch shriek, and slipping out of his cerements,

dash off headlong over the wall of the cemetery. He was not followed. I believe the poor body belonged to a fellow whose salvation was more than doubtful in spite of all the priests could do, and that the bearers really took him for the foul fiend. It was not till a week or two after that the ring of his voice and laugh caused him to be recognised by one of the Duke of Savoy's gentlemen, happily a prudent man, loth to cause a tumult against one of my suite, and he told me all privately in warning. Ay, and when I spoke to Peregrine, I found him thoroughly penitent at having insulted the dead; he had been unhappy ever since, and had actually bestowed his last pocket-piece on the widow. He made handsome apologies in good Italian, which he had picked up as fast as the German, to the gentleman, who promised that it should go no farther, and kept his word. It was the solemnity, Peregrine assured me, that brought back all the intolerableness of the preachings at home, and awoke the same demon."

"How long ago was this, sir?"

"About eighteen months."

"And has all been well since?"

"Fairly well. He has had fuller and more responsible work to do for me, his turn for languages making him a most valuable secretary; and in the French Court, really the most perilous of all to a young man's virtue, he behaved himself well. It is not debauchery that he has a taste for, but he must be doing something, and if wholesome occupations do not stay his appetite, he will be doing mischief. He brought on himself a very serious rebuke from the Prince of Orange, churlishly and roughly given, I allow, but fully merited, for making grimaces at his acquaintance among the young officers at a military inspection. Heaven help the lad if he be left with his father, whose most lively notion of innocent sport is scratching the heads of his hogs!"

Nothing could be said in answer save earnest wishes that the knight might persuade his brother. Mrs. Woodford wished her brother-in-law to go with him to add force to his remonstrance; but on the whole it was thought better to leave the family to themselves, Dr. Woodford only writing to Major Oakshott, as well as to the youth himself.

The result was anxiously watched for, and in another week, earlier in the day than Mrs. Woodford was able to leave her room, Sir Peregrine's horses stopped at the door, and as Anne ascertained by a peep from the window, he was only accompanied by his servants.

"Yes," he said to the Doctor in his vexation, "one would really think that by force of eating Southdown mutton my poor brother had acquired the brains of one of his own rams! I declare 'tis a piteous sight to see a man resolute on ruining his son and breaking his own heart all for conscience sake!"

"Say you so, sir! I had hoped that the sight of what you have made of your nephew might have had some effect."

"All the effect it has produced is to make him more determined to take him from me. The Hampshire mind abhors foreign breeding, and the old Cromwellian spirit thinks good manners sprung from the

world, and wit from the Evil One!"

"I can quite believe that Peregrine's courtly airs are not welcomed here; I could see what our good neighbour, Sir Philip Archfield, thought of them; but whereas no power on earth could make the young gentleman a steady-going clownish youth after his father's heart, methought he might prefer his present polish to impishness."

"So I told him, but I might as well have talked to the horse block. It is his duty, quotha, to breed his heir up in godly simplicity!"

"Simplicity is all very well to begin with, but once flown, it cannot be restored."

"And that is what my brother cannot see. Well, my poor boy must be left to his fate. There is no help for it, and all I can hope is that you, sir, and the ladies, will stand his friend, and do what may lie in your power to make him patient and render his life less intolerable."

"Indeed, sir, we will do what we can; I wish that I could hope that it would be of much service."

"My brother has more respect for your advice than perhaps you suppose; and to you, madam, the poor lad looks with earnest gratitude. Nay, even his mother reaps the benefit of the respect with which you have inspired him. Peregrine treats her with a gentleness and attention such as she never knew before from her bear cubs. Poor soul! I think she likes it, though it somewhat perplexes her, and she thinks it all French manners. There is one more favour, your reverence, which I scarce dare lay before you. You have seen my black boy Hans?"

"He was with you at Oakwood seven years ago."

"Even so. I bought the poor fellow when a mere child from a Dutch skipper who had used him scurvily, and he has grown up as faithful as a very spaniel, and mightily useful too, not only as body servant, but he can cook as well as any French maitre d'hotel, froth chocolate, and make the best coffee I ever tasted; is as honest as the day, and, I believe, would lay down his life for Peregrine or me. I shall be cruelly at a loss without him, but a physician I met in London tells me it would be no better than murder to take the poor rogue to so cold a country as Muscovy. I would leave him to wait on Perry, but they will not hear of it at Oakwood. My sister-in-law wellnigh had a fit every time she looked at him when I was there before, and I found, moreover, that even when I was at hand, the servants jeered at the poor blackamoor, gave him his meals apart, and only the refuse of their own, so that he would fare but ill if I left him to their mercy. I had thought of offering him to Mr. Evelyn of Says Court, who would no doubt use him well, but it was Peregrine who suggested that if you of your goodness would receive the poor fellow, they could sometimes meet, and that would cheer his heart, and he really is far from a useless knave, but is worth two of any serving-men I ever saw."

To take an additional man-servant was by no means such a great proposal as it would be in most houses at present. Men swarmed in much larger proportion than maids in all families of condition, and

the Doctor was wealthy enough for one--more or less--to make little difference, but the question was asked as to what wages Hans should receive.

The knight laughed. "Wages, poor lad, what should he do with them? He is but a slave, I tell you. Meat, clothes, and fire, that is all he needs, and I will so deal with him that he will serve you in all faithfulness and obedience. He can speak English enough to know what you bid him do, but not enough for chatter with the servants."

So the agreement was made, and poor Hans was to be sent down by the Portsmouth coach together with Peregrine's luggage.

CHAPTER X: THE MENAGERIE

"The head remains unchanged within,
Nor altered much the face,
It still retains its native grin,
And all its old grimace.

"Men with contempt the brute surveyed,
Nor would a name bestow,
But women liked the motley beast,
And called the thing a beau."

The Monkeys, MERRICK.

The Woodford family did not long remain at Winchester. Anne declared the cold to be harming her mother, and became very anxious to bring her to the milder sea breezes of Portchester, and though Mrs. Woodford had little expectation that any place would make much difference to her, she was willing to return to the quiet and repose of her home under the castle walls beside the tranquil sea.

Thus they travelled back, as soon as the Doctor's Residence was ended, plodding through the heavy chalk roads as well as the big horses could drag the cumbrous coach up and down the hills, only halting for much needed rest at Sir Philip Archfield's red house, round three sides of a quadrangle, the fourth with a low wall backed by a row of poplar trees, looking out on the alternate mud and sluggish waters of Fareham creek, but with a beautiful garden behind the house.

The welcome was hearty. Lady Archfield at once conducted Mrs. Woodford to her own bedroom, where she was to rest and be served apart, and Anne disrobed her of her wraps, covered her upon the bed, and at her hostess's desire was explaining what refreshment would best suit her, when there was a shrill voice at the door: "I want Mistress Anne! I want to show her my clothes and jewels."

"Coming, child, she is coming when she has attended to her mother," responded the lady. "White wine, or red, did you say, Anne, and a little ginger?"

"Is she never coming?" was again the call; and Lady Archfield muttering, "Was there ever such an impatient poppet?" released Anne,

who was instantly pounced upon by young Mrs. Archfield. Linking her arm into that of her visitor, and thrusting Lucy into the background, the little heiress proceeded to her own wainscotted bedroom, bare according to modern views, but very luxurious according to those of the seventeenth century, and with the toilette apparatus, scanty indeed, but of solid silver, and with a lavish amount of perfumery. Her 'own woman' was in waiting to display and refold the whole wedding wardrobe, brocade, satin, taffetas, cambric, Valenciennes, and point d'Alencon. Anne had to admire each in detail, and then to give full meed to the whole casket of jewels, numerous and dazzling as befitted a constellation of heirlooms upon one small head. They were beautiful, but it was wearisome to repeat 'Vastly pretty!' 'How exquisite!' 'That becomes you very well,' almost mechanically, when Lucy was standing about all the time, longing to exchange the girlish confidences that were burning to come forth. 'Young Madam,' as every one called her in those times when Christian names were at a discount, seemed to be jealous of attention to any one else, and the instant she saw the guest attempt to converse with her sister-in-law peremptorily interrupted, almost as if affronted.

Perhaps if Anne had enjoyed freedom of speech with Lucy she would not have learnt as much as did her mother, for the young are often more scrupulous as to confidences than their seniors, who view them as still children, and freely discuss their affairs among themselves.

So Lady Archfield poured out her troubles: how her daughter-in-law refused employment, and disdained instruction in needlework, housewifery, or any domestic art, how she jangled the spinnet, but would not learn music, and was unoccupied, fretful, and exacting, a burthen to herself and every one else, and treating Lucy as the slave of her whims and humours. As to such discipline as mothers-in-law were wont to exercise upon young wives, the least restraint or contradiction provoked such a tempest of passion as to shake the tiny, delicate frame to a degree that alarmed the good old matron for the consequences. Her health was a continual difficulty, for her constitution was very frail, every imprudence cost her suffering, and yet any check to her impulses as to food, exertion, or encountering weather was met by a spoiled child's resentment. Moreover, her young husband, and even his father, always thought the ladies were hard upon her, and would not have her vexed; and as their presence always brightened and restrained her, they never understood the full amount of her petulance and waywardness, and when they found her out of spirits, or out of temper, they charged all on her ailments or on want of consideration from her mother and sister-in-law.

Poor Lady Archfield, it was trying for her that her husband should be nearly as blind as his son. The young husband was wonderfully tender, indulgent, and patient with the little creature, but it would not be easy to say whether the affection were not a good deal like that for his dog or his horse, as something absolutely his own, with which no one else had a right to interfere. It was a relief to the family that she always wanted to be out of doors with him whenever the weather permitted, nay, often when it was far from suitable to so fragile a being; but if she came home aching and crying ever so much with chill or fatigue, even if she had to keep her bed afterwards, she was equally determined to rush out as soon

as she was up again, and as angry as ever at remonstrance.

Charles was gone to try a horse; and as the remains of the effects of her last imprudence had prevented her accompanying him, the arrival of the guests had been a welcome diversion to the monotony of the morning.

He was, however, at home again by the time the dinner-bell summoned the younger ladies from the inspection of the trinkets and the gentlemen from the live stock, all to sit round the heavy oaken table draped with the whitest of napery, spun by Lady Archfield in her maiden days, and loaded with substantial joints, succeeded by delicacies manufactured by herself and Lucy.

As to the horse, Charles was fairly satisfied, but 'that fellow, young Oakshott, had been after him, and had the refusal.'

"Don't you be outbid, Mr. Archfield," exclaimed the wife. "What is the matter of a few guineas to us?"

"Little fear," replied Charles. "The old Major is scarcely like to pay down twenty gold caroluses, but if he should, the bay is his."

"Oh, but why not offer thirty?" she cried.

Charles laughed. "That would be a scurvy trick, sweetheart, and if Peregrine be a crooked stick, we need not be crooked too."

"I was about to ask," said the Doctor, "whether you had heard aught of that same young gentleman."

"I have seen him where I never desire to see him again," said Sir Philip, "riding as though he would be the death of the poor hounds."

"Nick Huntsman swears that he bewitches them," said Charles, "for they always lose the scent when he is in the field, but I believe 'tis the wry looks of him that throw them all out."

"And I say," cried the inconsistent bride, "that 'tis all jealousy that puts the gentlemen beside themselves, because none of them can dance, nor make a bow, nor hand a cup of chocolate, nor open a gate on horseback like him."

"What does a man on horseback want with opening gates?" exclaimed Charles.

"That's your manners, sir," said young Madam with a laugh. "What's the poor lady to do while her cavalier flies over and leaves her in the lurch?"

Her husband did not like the general laugh, and muttered, "You know what I mean well enough."

"Yes, so do I! To fumble at the fastening till your poor beast can bear it no longer and swerves aside, and I sit waiting a good half hour before you bring down your pride enough to alight and open it."

"All because you would send Will home for your mask."

"You would like to have had my poor little face one blister with the glare of sun and sea."

"Blisters don't come at this time of the year."

"No, nor to those who have no complexion to lose," she cried, with a triumphant look at the two maidens, who certainly had not the lilies nor the roses that she believed herself to have, though, in truth, her imprudences had left her paler and less pretty than at Winchester.

If this were the style of the matrimonial conversations, Anne again grieved for her old playfellow, and she perceived that Lucy looked uncomfortable; but there was no getting a moment's private conversation with her before the coach was brought round again for the completion of the journey. All that neighbourhood had a very bad reputation as the haunt of lawless characters, prone to violence; and though among mere smugglers there was little danger of an attack on persons well known like the Woodford family, they were often joined by far more desperate men from the seaport, so that it was never desirable to be out of doors after dark.

The journey proved to have been too much for Mrs. Woodford's strength, and for some days she was so ill that Anne never left the house; but she rallied again, and on coming downstairs became very anxious that her daughter should not be more confined by attendance than was wholesome, and insisted on every opportunity of change or amusement being taken.

One day as Anne was in the garden she was surprised by Peregrine dashing up on horseback.

"You would not take the Queen's rosary before," he said. "You must now, to save it. My father has smelt it out. He says it is teraphim! Micah--Rachel, what not, are quoted against it. He would have smashed it into fragments, but that Martha Browning said it would be a pretty bracelet. I'd sooner see it smashed than on her red fist. To think of her giving in to such vanities! But he said she might have it, only to be new strung. When he was gone she said, 'I don't really want the thing, but it was hard you should lose the Queen's keepsake. Can you bestow it safely?' I said I could, and brought it hither. Keep it, Anne, I pray."

Anne hesitated, and referred it to her mother upstairs.

"Tell him," she said, "that we will keep it in trust for him as a royal gift."

Peregrine was disappointed, but had to be content.

A Dutch vessel from the East Indies had brought home sundry strange animals, which were exhibited at the Jolly Mariner at Portsmouth, and thus announced on a bill printed on execrable paper, brought out to Portchester by some of the market people:--

"An Ellefante twice the Bignesse of an Ocks, the Trunke or Probosces whereof can pick up a Needle or roote up an Ellum Tree. Also the Royale Tyger, the same as has slaine and devoured seven yonge Gentoo babes, three men, and two women at the township at Chuttergong, nie

to Bombay, in the Eastern Indies. Also the sacred Ape, worshipped by the heathen of the Indies, the Dancing Serpent which weareth Spectacles, and whose Bite is instantly mortal, with other rare Fish, Fowle, Idols and the like. All to be seene at the Charge of one Groat per head."

Mrs. Woodford declared herself to be extremely desirous that her daughter should see and bring home an account of all these marvels, and though Anne had no great inclination to face the tiger with the formidable appetite, she could not refuse to accompany her uncle.

The Jolly Mariner stood in one of the foulest and narrowest of the streets of the unsavoury seaport, and Dr. Woodford sighed, and fumed, and wished for a good pipe of tobacco more than once as he hesitated to try to force a way for his niece through the throng round the entrance to the stable-yard of the Jolly Mariner, apparently too rough to pay respect to gown and cassock. Anne clung to his arm, ready to give up the struggle, but a voice said, "Allow me, sir. Mistress Anne, deign to take my arm."

It was Peregrine Oakshott with his brother Robert, and she could hardly tell how in a few seconds she had been squeezed through the crowd, and stood in the inn-yard, in a comparatively free space, for a groat was a prohibitory charge to the vulgar.

"Peregrine! Master Oakshott!" They heard an exclamation of pleasure, at which Peregrine shrugged his shoulders and looked expressively at Anne, before turning to receive the salutations of an elderly gentleman and a tall young woman, very plainly but handsomely clad in mourning deeper than his own. She was of a tall, gaunt, angular figure, and a face that never could have been handsome, and now bore evident traces of smallpox in redness and pits.

Dr. Woodford knew the guardian Mr. Browning, and his ward Mistress Martha and Mistress Anne Jacobina were presented to one another. The former gave a good-humoured smile, as if perfectly unconscious of her own want of beauty, and declared she had hoped to meet all the rest here, especially Mistress Anne Woodford, of whom she had heard so much. There was just a little patronage about the tone which repelled the proud spirit that was in Anne, and in spite of the ordinary dread and repulsion she felt for Peregrine, she was naughty enough to have the feeling of a successful beauty when Peregrine most manifestly turned away from the heiress in her silk and velvet to do the honours of the exhibition to the parson's niece.

The elephant was fastened by the leg to a post, which perhaps he could have pulled up, had he thought it worth his while, but he was well contented to wave his trunk about and extend its clever finger to receive contributions of cakes and apples, and he was too well amused to resort to any strong measures. The tiger, to Anne's relief, proved to be only a stuffed specimen. Peregrine, who had seen a good many foreign animals in Holland, where the Dutch captains were in the habit of bringing curiosities home for the delectation of their families in their Lusthausen, was a very amusing companion, having much to tell about bird and beast, while Robert stood staring with open mouth. The long-legged secretary and the beautiful doves were, however, only stuffed, but Anne was much

entertained at second hand with the relation of the numerous objects, which on the word of a Leyden merchant had been known to disappear in the former bird's capacious crop, and with stories of the graceful dancing of the cobra, though she was not sorry that the present specimen was only visible in a bottle of arrack, where his spectacled hood was scarcely apparent. Presently a well known shrill young voice was heard. "Yes, yes, I know I shall swoon at that terrible tiger! Oh, don't! I can't come any farther."

"Why, you would come, madam," said Charles.

"Yes, yes! but--oh, there's a two-tailed monster! I know it is the tiger! It is moving! I shall die if you take me any farther."

"Plague upon your folly, madam! It is only the elephant," said a gruffer, rude voice.

"Oh, it is dreadful! 'Tis like a mountain! I can't! Oh no, I can't!"

"Come, madam, you have brought us thus far, you must come on, and not make fools of us all," said Charles's voice. "There's nothing to hurt you."

Anne, understanding the distress and perplexity, here turned back to the passage into the court, and began persuasively to explain to little Mrs. Archfield that the tiger was dead, and only a skin, and that the elephant was the mildest of beasts, till she coaxed forward that small personage, who had of course never really intended to turn back, supported and guarded as she was by her husband, and likewise by a tall, glittering figure in big boots and a handsome scarlet uniform and white feather who claimed her attention as he strode into the court. "Ha! Mistress Anne and the Doctor on my life. What, don't you know me?"

"Master Sedley Archfield!" said the Doctor; "welcome home, sir! 'Tis a meeting of old acquaintance. You and this gentleman are both so much altered that it is no wonder if you do not recognise one another at once."

"No fear of Mr. Perry Oakshott not being recognised," said Sedley Archfield, holding out his hand, but with a certain sneer in his rough voice that brought Peregrine's eyebrows together. "Kenspeckle enough, as the fools of Whigs say in Scotland."

"Are you long from Scotland, sir?" asked Dr. Woodford, by way of preventing personalities.

"Oh ay, sir; these six months and more. There's not much more sport to be had since the fools of Cameronians have been pretty well got under, and 'tis no loss to be at Hounslow."

"And oh, what a fright!" exclaimed Mrs. Archfield, catching sight of the heiress. "Keep her away! She makes me ill."

They were glad to divert her attention to feeding the elephant, and she was coquetting a little about making up her mind to approach even the defunct tiger, while she insisted on having the number of his victims counted over to her. Anne asked for Lucy, to whom she

wanted to show the pigeons, but was answered that, "my lady wanted Lucy at home over some matter of jellies and blancmanges."

Charles shrugged his shoulders a little and Sedley grumbled to Anne. "The little vixen sets her heart on cates that she won't lay a finger to make, and poor Lucy is like to be no better than a cook-maid, while they won't cross her, for fear of her tantrums."

At that instant piercing screams, shriek upon shriek, rang through the court, and turning hastily round, Anne beheld a little monkey perched on Mrs. Archfield's head, having apparently leapt thither from the pole to which it was chained.

The keeper was not in sight, being in fact employed over a sale of some commodities within. There was a general springing to the rescue. Charles tried to take the creature off, Sedley tugged at the chain fastened to a belt round its body, but the monkey held tight by the curls on the lady's forehead with its hands, and crossed its legs round her neck, clasping the hands so that the effect of the attempts of her husband and his cousin was only to throttle her, so that she could no longer scream and was almost in a fit, when on Peregrine holding out a nut and speaking coaxingly in Dutch, the monkey unloosed its hold, and with another bound was on his arm. He stood caressing and feeding it, talking to it in the same tongue, while it made little squeaks and chatterings, evidently delighted, though its mournful old man's visage still had the same piteous expression. There was something most grotesque and almost weird in the sight of Peregrine's queer figure toying with its odd hands which seemed to be in black gloves, and the strange language he talked to it added to the uncanny effect. Even the Doctor felt it as he stood watching, and would have muttered 'Birds of a feather,' but that the words were spoken more gruffly and plainly by Sedley Archfield, who said something about the Devil and his dam, which the good Doctor did not choose to hear, and only said to Peregrine, "You know how to deal with the jackanapes."

"I have seen some at Leyden, sir. This is a pretty little beast."

Pretty! There was a recoil in horror, for the creature looked to the crowd demoniacal. Something the same was the sensation of Charles, who, assisted by Anne and Martha, had been rather carrying than leading his wife into the inn parlour, where she immediately had a fit of hysterics--vapours, as they called it--bringing all the women of the inn about her, while Martha and Anne soothed her as best they could, and he was reduced to helplessly leaning out at the bay window.

When the sobs and cries subsided, under cold water and essences without and strong waters within, and the little lady in Martha's strong arms, between the matronly coaxing of the fat hostess and the kind soothing of the two young ladies, had been restored to something of equanimity, Mistress Martha laid her down and said with the utmost good humour and placidity to the young husband, "Now I'll go, sir. She is better now, but the sight of my face might set her off again."

"Oh, do not say so, madam. We are infinitely obliged. Let her thank you."

But Martha shook her hand and laughed, turning to leave the room, so that he was fain to give her his arm and escort her back to her guardian.

Then ensued a scream. "Where's he going? Mr. Archfield, don't leave me."

"He is only taking Mistress Browning back to her guardian," said Anne.

"Eh? oh, how can he? A hideous fright!" she cried.

To say the truth, she was rather pleased to have had such a dreadful adventure, and to have made such a commotion, though she protested that she must go home directly, and could never bear the sight of those dreadful monsters again, or she should die on the spot.

"But," said she, when the coach was at the door, and Anne had restored her dress to its dainty gaiety, "I must thank Master Peregrine for taking off that horrible jackanapes."

"Small thanks to him," said Charles crossly. "I wager it was all his doing out of mere spite."

"He is too good a beau ever to spite _me_," said Mrs. Alice, her head a little on one side.

"Then to show off what he could do with the beast--Satan's imp, like himself."

"No, no, Mr. Archfield," pleaded Anne, "that was impossible; I saw him myself. He was with that sailor-looking man measuring the height of the secretary bird."

"I believe you are always looking after him," grumbled Charles. "I can't guess what all the women see in him to be always gazing after him."

"Because he is so charmingly ugly," laughed the young wife, tripping out in utter forgetfulness that she was to die if she went near the beasts again. She met Peregrine half way across the yard with outstretched hands, exclaiming--

"O Mr. Oakshott! it was so good in you to take away that nasty beast."

"I am glad, madam, to have been of use," said Peregrine, bowing and smiling, a smile that might explain something of his fascination.

"The poor brute was only drawn, as all of our kind are. He wanted to see so sweet a lady nearer. He is quite harmless. Will you stroke him? See, there he sits, gazing after you. Will you give him a cake and make friends?"

"No, no, madam, it cannot be; it is too much," grumbled Charles; and though Alice had backed at first, perhaps for the pleasure of teasing him, or for that of being the centre of observation, actually, with all manner of pretty airs and graces, she let herself be led forward, lay a timid hand on the monkey's head, and put a cake in its black fingers, while all the time Peregrine held it fast

and talked Dutch to it; and Charles Archfield hardly contained his rage, though Anne endeavoured to argue the impossibility of Peregrine's having incited the attack; and Sedley blustered that they ought to interfere and make the fellow know the reason why. However, Charles had sense enough to know that though he might exhale his vexation in grumbling, he had no valid cause for quarrelling with young Oakshott, so he contented himself with black looks and grudging thanks, as he was obliged to let Peregrine hand his wife into her carriage amid her nods and becks and wreathed smiles.

They would have taken Dr. Woodford and his niece home in the coach, but Anne had an errand in the town, and preferred to return by boat. She wanted some oranges and Turkey figs to allay her mother's constant thirst, and Peregrine begged permission to accompany them, saying that he knew where to find the best and cheapest. Accordingly he took them to a tiny cellar, in an alley by the boat camber, where the Portugal oranges certainly looked riper and were cheaper than any that Anne had found before; but there seemed to be an odd sort of understanding between Peregrine and the withered old weather-beaten sailor who sold them, such as rather puzzled the Doctor.

"I hope these are not contraband," he said to Peregrine, when the oranges had been packed in the basket of the servant who followed them.

Peregrine shrugged his shoulders.

"Living is hard, sir. Ask no questions."

The Doctor looked tempted to turn back with the fruit, but such doubts were viewed as ultra scruples, and would hardly have been entertained even by a magistrate such as Sir Philip Archfield.

It was not a time for questions, and Peregrine remained with them till they embarked at the point, asking to be commended to Mrs. Woodford, and hoping soon to come and see both her and poor Hans, he left them.

CHAPTER XI: PROPOSALS

"Hear me, ye venerable core,
As counsel for poor mortals,
That frequent pass douce Wisdom's door
For glaikit Folly's portals;
I for their thoughtless, careless sakes
Would here propose defences,
Their doucie tricks, their black mistakes,
Their failings and mischances."

BURNS.

For seven years Anne Woodford had kept Lucy Archfield's birthday with her, and there was no refusing now, though there was more and more unwillingness to leave Mrs. Woodford, whose declining state

became so increasingly apparent that even the loving daughter could no longer be blind to it.

The coach was sent over to fetch Mistress Anne to Fareham, and the invalid was left, comfortably installed in her easy-chair by the parlour fire, with a little table by her side, holding a hand-bell, a divided orange, a glass of toast and water, and the Bible and Prayer-book, wherein lay her chief studies, together with a little needlework, which still amused her feeble hands. The Doctor, divided between his parish, his study, and his garden, had promised to look in from time to time.

Presently, however, the door was gently tapped, and on her call "Come in," Hans, all one grin, admitted Peregrine Oakshott, bowing low in his foreign, courteous manner, and entreating her to excuse his intrusion, "For truly, madam, in your goodness is my only hope."

Then he knelt on one knee and kissed the hand she held out to him, while desiring him to speak freely to her.

"Nay, madam, I fear I shall startle you, when I lay before you the only chance that can aid me to overcome the demon that is in me."

"My poor--"

"Call me your boy, as when I was here seven years ago. Let me sit at your feet as then and listen to me."

"Indeed I will, my dear boy," and she laid her hand on his dark head. "Tell me all that is in your heart."

"Ah, dear lady, that is not soon done! You and Mistress Anne, as you well know, first awoke me from my firm belief that I was none other than an elf, and yet there have since been times when I have doubted whether it were not indeed the truth."

"Nay, Peregrine, at years of discretion you should have outgrown old wives' tales."

"Better be an elf at once--a soulless creature of the elements--than the sport of an evil spirit doomed to perdition," he bitterly exclaimed.

"Hush, hush! You know not what you are saying!"

"I know it too well, madam! There are times when I long and wish after goodness--nay, when Heaven seems open to me--and I resolve and strive after a perfect life; but again comes the wild, passionate dragging, as it were, into all that at other moments I most loathe and abhor, and I become no more my own master. Ah!"

There was misery in his voice, and he clutched the long hair on each side of his face with his hands.

"St. Paul felt the same," said Mrs. Woodford gently.

"'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Ay, ay! how many times have I not groaned that forth! And so, if that Father at Turin were right, I am but as Paul was when he was Saul. Madam, is

it not possible that I was never truly baptized?" he cried eagerly.

"Impossible, Peregrine. Was not Mr. Horncastle chaplain when you were born? Yes; and I have heard my brother say that both he and your father held the same views as the Church upon baptism."

"So I thought; but Father Geronimo says that at the best it was but heretical baptism, and belike hastily and ineffectually performed."

"Put that aside, Peregrine. It is only a temptation and allurement."

"It is an allurement you know not how strong," said the poor youth. "Could I only bring myself to believe all that Father Geronimo does, and fall down before his Madonnas and saints, then could I hope for a new nature, and scourge away the old"--he set his teeth as he spoke--"till naught remains of the elf or demon, be it what it will."

"Ah, Peregrine, scourging will not do it, but grace will, and that grace is indeed yours, as is proved by these higher aspirations."

"I tell you, madam, that if I live on as I am doing now, grace will be utterly stifled, if it ever abode in me at all. Every hour that I live, pent in by intolerable forms and immeasurable dulness, the maddening temper gains on me! Nay, I have had to rush out at night and swear a dozen round oaths before I could compose myself to sit down to the endless supper. Ah, I shock you, madam! but that's not the worst I am driven to do."

"Nor the way to bring the better spirit, my poor youth. Oh, that you would pray instead of swearing!"

"I cannot pray at Oakwood. My father and Mr. Horncastle drive away all the prayers that ever were in me, and I mean nothing, even though I keep my word to you."

"I am glad you do that. While I know you are doing so, I shall still believe the better angel will triumph."

"How can aught triumph but hatred and disgust where I am pinned down? Listen, madam, and hear if good spirits have any chance. We break our fast, ere the sun is up, on chunks of yesterday's half-dressed beef and mutton. If I am seen seeking for a morsel not half raw, I am rated for dainty French tastes; and the same with the sour smallest of beer. I know now what always made me ill-tempered as a child, and I avoid it, but at the expense of sneers on my French breeding, even though my drink be fair water; for wine, look you, is a sinful expense, save for after dinner, and frothed chocolate for a man is an invention of Satan. The meal is sauced either with blame of me, messages from the farm-folk, or Bob's exploits in the chase. Then my father goes his rounds on the farm, and would fain have me with him to stand knee-deep in mire watching the plough, or feeling each greasy and odorous old sheep in turn to see if it be ready for the knife, or gloating over the bullocks or swine, or exchanging auguries with Thomas Vokes on this or that crop. Faugh! And I am told I shall never be good for a country gentleman if I condemn such matters! I say I have no mind to be a country gentleman, whereby I am told of Esau till I am sick of his very name."

"But surely you have not always to follow on this round?"

"Oh no! I may go out birding with Bob, who is about as lively as an old jackass, or meet the country boobies for a hunt, and be pointed at as the Frenchman, and left to ride alone; or there's mine own chamber, when the maids do not see fit to turn me out with their pails and besoms, as they do at least twice a week--I sit there in my cloak and furs (by the way, I am chidden for an effeminate fop if ever I am seen in them). I would give myself to books, as my uncle counselled, but what think you? By ill hap Bob, coming in to ask some question, found me studying the Divina Commedia of Dante Alighieri, and hit upon one of the engravings representing the torments of purgatory. What must he do but report it, and immediately a hue and cry arises that I am being corrupted with Popish books. In vain do I tell them that their admirable John Milton, the only poet save Sternhold and Hopkins that my father deems not absolute pagan, knew, loved, and borrowed from Dante. All my books are turned over as ruthlessly as ever Don Quixote's by the curate and the barber, and whatever Mr. Horncastle's erudition cannot vouch for is summarily handed over to the kitchen wench to light the fires. The best of it is that they have left me my classics, as though old Terence and Lucan were lesser heathens than the great Florentine. However, I have bribed the young maid, and rescued my Dante and Boiardo with small damage, but I dare not read them save with door locked."

Mrs. Woodford could scarcely shake her head at the disobedience, and she asked if there were really no other varieties.

"Such as fencing with that lubber Robert, and trying to bend his stiff limbs to the noble art of l'escrime. But that is after dinner work. There is the mountain of half-raw flesh to be consumed first, and then my father, with Mr. Horncastle and Bob discuss on what they call the news--happy if a poor rogue has been caught by Tom Constable stealing faggots. 'Tis argument for a week--almost equal to the price of a fat mutton at Portsmouth. My father and the minister nod in due time over their ale-cup, and Bob and I go our ways till dark, or till the house bell rings for prayers and exposition. Well, dear good lady, I will not grieve you by telling you how often they make me wish to be again the imp devoid of every shred of self-respect, and too much inured to flogging to heed what my antics might bring on me."

"I am glad you have that shred of self respect; I hope indeed it is some higher respect."

"Well, I can never believe that Heaven meant to be served by mortal dullness. Seven years have only made old Horncastle blow his horn to the same note, only more drearily."

"I can see indeed that it is a great trial to one used to the life of foreign Courts and to interest in great affairs like you, my poor Peregrine; but what can I say but to entreat you to be patient, try to find interest, and endeavour to win your father's confidence so that he may accord you more liberty? Did I not hear that your attention made your mother's life happier?"

Peregrine laughed. "My mother! She has never seen aught but

boorishness all her life, and any departure therefrom seems to her unnatural. I believe she is as much afraid of my courtesy as ever she was of my mischief, and that in her secret heart she still believes me a changeling. No, Madam Woodford, there is but one way to save me from the frenzy that comes over me."

"Your father has already been entreated to let you join your uncle."

"I know it--I know it; but if it were impossible before, that discovery of Dante has made it impossibilissimo, as the Italian would say, to deal with him now. There is a better way. Give me the good angel who has always counteracted the evil one. Give me Mistress Anne!"

"Anne, my Anne!" exclaimed Mrs. Woodford in dismay. "O Peregrine, it cannot be!"

"I knew that would be your first word," said Peregrine, "but verily, madam, I would not ask it but that I know that I should be another man with her by my side, and that she would have nothing to fear from the evil that dies at her approach."

"Ah, Peregrine! you think so now; but no man can be sure of himself with any mere human care. Besides, my child is not of degree to match with you. Your father would justly be angered if we took advantage of your attachment to us to encourage you in an inclination he could never approve."

"I tell you, madam--yes, I must tell you all--my madness and my ruin will be completed if I am left to my father's will. I know what is hanging over me. He is only waiting till I am of age--at Midsummer, and the year of mourning is over for poor Oliver--I am sure no one mourns for him more heartily than I--to bind me to Martha Browning. If she would only bring the plague, or something worse than smallpox, to put an end to it at once!"

"But that would make any such scheme all the more impossible."

"Listen, madam; do but hear me. Even as children the very sight of Martha Browning's solemn face"--Peregrine drew his countenance down into a portentous length--"her horror at the slightest word or sport, her stiff broomstick carriage, all impelled me to the most impish tricks. And now--letting alone that pock-marks have seamed her grim face till she is as ugly as Alecto--she is a Precisian of the Precisians. I declare our household is in her eyes sinfully free! If she can hammer out a text of Scripture, and write her name in characters as big and gawky as herself, 'tis as far as her education has carried her, save in pickling, preserving, stitchery, and clear starching, the only arts not sinful in her eyes. If I am to have a broomstick, I had rather ride off on one at once to the Witches' Sabbath on the Wartburg than be tied to one for life."

"I should think she would scarce accept you."

"There's no such hope. She has been bred up to regard one of us as her lot, and she would accept me without a murmur if I were Beelzebub himself, horns and tail and all! Why, she ogles me with her gooseberry eyes already, and treats me as a chattel of her own."

"Hush, hush, Peregrine! I cannot have you talk thus. If your father had such designs, it would be unworthy of us to favour you in crossing them."

"Nay, madam, he hath never expressed them as yet. Only my mother and brother both refer to his purpose, and if I could show myself contracted to a young lady of good birth and education, he cannot gainsay; it might yet save me from what I will not and cannot endure. Not that such is by any means my chief and only motive. I have loved Mistress Anne with all my heart ever since she shone upon me like a being from a better world when I lay sick here. She has the same power of hushing the wild goblin within me as you have, madam. I am another man with her, as I am with you. It is my only hope! Give me that hope, and I shall be able to endure patiently.-- Ah! what have I done? Have I said too much?"

He had talked longer and more eagerly than would have been good for the invalid even if the topic had been less agitating, and the emotion caused by this unexpected complication, consternation at the difficulties she foresaw, and the present difficulty of framing a reply, were altogether too much for Mrs. Woodford. She turned deadly white, and gasped for breath, so that Peregrine, in terror, dashed off in search of the maids, exclaiming that their mistress was in a swoon.

The Doctor came out of his study much distressed, and in Anne's absence the household was almost helpless in giving the succours in which she had always been the foremost. Peregrine lingered about in remorse and despair, offering to fetch her or to go for the doctor, and finally took the latter course, thereto impelled by the angry words of the old cook, an enemy of his in former days.

"No better? no, sir, nor 'tis not your fault if ever she be. You've been and frought her nigh to death with your terrifying ways."

Peregrine was Hampshire man enough to know that to terrify only meant to tease, but he was in no mood to justify himself to old Patience, so he galloped off to Portsmouth, and only returned with the doctor to hear that Madam Woodford was in bed, and her daughter with her. She was somewhat better, but still very ill, and it was plain that this was no moment for pressing his suit even had it not been time for him to return home. Going to fetch the doctor might be accepted as a valid reason for missing the evening exhortation and prayer, but there were mistrustful looks that galled him.

Anne's return was more beneficial to Mrs. Woodford than the doctor's visit, and the girl was still too ignorant of all that her mother's attacks of spasms and subsequent weakness implied to be as much alarmed as to depress her hopes. Yet Mrs. Woodford, lying awake in the night, detected that her daughter was restless and unhappy, and asked what ailed her, and how the visit had gone off.

"You do not wish me to speak of such things, madam," was the answer.

"Tell me all that is in your heart, my child."

It all came out with the vehemence of a reserved nature when the flood is loosed. 'Young Madam' had been more than usually peevish and exacting, jealous perhaps at Lucy's being the heroine of the

day, and fretful over a cold which confined her to the house, how she worried and harassed all around her with her whims, megrims and complaints could only too well be imagined, and how the entire pleasure of the day was destroyed. Lucy was never allowed a minute's conversation with her friend without being interrupted by a whine and complaints of unkindness and neglect.

Lady Archfield's ill-usage, as the young wife was pleased to call every kind of restriction, was the favourite theme next to the daughter-in law's own finery, her ailments, and her notions of the treatment befitting her.

And young Mr. Archfield himself, while handing his old friend out to the carriage that had fetched her, could not help confiding to her that he was nearly beside himself. His mother meant to be kind, but expected too much from one so brought up, and his wife--what could be done for her? She made herself miserable here, and every one else likewise. Yet even if his father would consent, she was utterly unfit to be mistress of a house of her own; and poor Charles could only utter imprecations on the guardians who could have had no idea how a young woman ought to be brought up. It was worse than an ill-trained hound."

Mrs. Woodford heard what she extracted from her daughter with grief and alarm, and not only for her friends.

"Indeed, my dear child," she said, "you must prevent such confidences. They are very dangerous things respecting married people."

"It was all in a few moments, mamma, and I could not stop him. He is so unhappy;" and Anne's voice revealed tears.

"The more reason why you should avoid hearing what he will soon be very sorry you have heard. Were he not a mere lad himself, it would be as inexcusable as it is imprudent thus to speak of the troubles and annoyances that often beset the first year of wedded life. I am sorry for the poor youth, who means no harm nor disloyalty, and is only treating you as his old companion and playmate; but he has no right thus to talk of his wife, above all to a young maiden too inexperienced to counsel him, and if he should attempt to do so again, promise me, my daughter, that you will silence him--if by no other means, by telling him so."

"I promise!" said Anne, choking back her tears and lifting her head. "I am sure I never want to go to Fareham again while that Lieutenant Sedley Archfield is there. If those be army manners, they are what I cannot endure. He is altogether mean and hateful, above all when he scoffs at Master Oakshott."

"I am afraid a great many do so, child, and that he often gives some occasion," put in Mrs. Woodford, a little uneasy that this should be the offence.

"He is better than Sedley Archfield, be he what he will, madam," said the girl. "He never pays those compliments, those insolent disgusting compliments, such as he--that Sedley, I mean--when he found me alone in the hall, and I had to keep him at bay from trying to kiss me, only Mr. Archfield--Charley--came down the stairs before

he was aware, and called out, 'I will thank you to behave yourself to a lady in my father's house.' And then he, Sedley, sneered 'The Parson's niece!' with such a laugh, mother, I shall never get it out of my ears. As if I were not as well born as he!"

"That is not quite the way to take it, my child. I had rather you stood on your maidenly dignity and discretion than on your birth. I trust he will soon be away."

"I fear he will not, mamma, for I heard say the troop are coming down to be under the Duke of Berwick at Portsmouth."

"Then, dear daughter, it is the less mishap that you should be thus closely confined by loving attendance on me. Now, goodnight. Compose yourself to sleep, and think no more of these troubles."

Nevertheless mother and daughter lay long awake, side by side, that night; the daughter in all the flutter of nerves induced by offended yet flattered feeling--hating the compliment, yet feeling that it was a compliment to the features that she was beginning to value. She was substantially a good, well-principled maiden, modest and discreet, with much dignified reserve, yet it was impossible that she should not have seen heads turned to look at her in Portsmouth, and know that she was admired above her contemporaries, so that even if it brought her inconvenience it was agreeable. Besides, her heart was beating with pity for the Archfields. The elder ones might have only themselves to blame, but it was very hard for poor Charles to have been blindly coupled to a being who did not know how to value him, still harder that there should be blame for a confidence where neither meant any harm--blame that made her blush on her pillow with indignant shame.

Perhaps Mrs. Woodford divined these thoughts, for she too meditated deeply on the perils of her fair young daughter, and in the morning could not leave her room. In the course of the day she heard that Master Peregrine Oakshott had been to inquire for her, and was not surprised when her brother-in-law sought an interview with her. The gulf between the hierarchy and squirearchy was sufficient for a marriage to be thought a mesalliance, and it was with a smile at the folly as well as with a certain displeased pity that Dr. Woodford mentioned the proposal so vehemently pressed upon him by Peregrine Oakshott for his niece's hand.

"Poor boy!" said Mrs. Woodford, "it is a great misfortune. You forbade him of course to speak of such a thing."

"I told him that I could not imagine how he could think us capable of entertaining any such proposal without his father's consent. He seems to have hoped that to pledge himself to us might extort sanction from his father, not seeing that it would be a highly improper measure, and would only incense the Major."

"All the more that the Major wishes to pass on Mistress Martha Browning to him, poor fellow."

"He did not tell me so."

Mrs. Woodford related what he had said to her, and the Doctor could not but observe: "The poor Major! his whole treatment of that

unfortunate youth is as if he were resolved to drive him to distraction. But even if the Major were ever so willing, I doubt whether Master Peregrine be the husband you would choose for our little maid."

"Assuredly not, poor fellow! though if she loved him as he loves her--which happily she does not--I should scarce dare to stand in the way, lest she should be the appointed instrument for his good."

"He assured me that he had never directly addressed her."

"No, and I trust he never will. Not that she is ever like to love him, although she does not shrink from him quite as much as others do. Yet there is a strain of ambition in my child's nature that might make her seek the elevation. But, my good brother, for this and other reasons we must find another home for my poor child when I am gone. Nay, brother, do not look at me thus; you know as well as I do that I can scarcely look to see the spring come in, and I would fain take this opportunity of speaking to you concerning my dear daughter. No one can be a kinder father to her than you, and I would most gladly leave her to cheer and tend you, but as things stand around us she can scarce remain here without a mother's watchfulness. She is guarded now by her strict attendance on my infirmity, but when I am gone how will it be?"

"She is as good and discreet a maiden as parent could wish."

"Good and discreet as far as her knowledge and experience go, but that is not enough. On the one hand, there is a certain wild temper about that young Master Oakshott such as makes me never know what he might attempt if, as he says, his father should drive him to desperation, and this is a lonely place, with the sea close at hand."

"Lady Archfield would gladly take charge of her."

Mrs. Woodford here related what Anne had said of Sedley's insolence, but this the Doctor thought little of, not quite believing in the regiment coming into the neighbourhood, and Mrs. Woodford most unwillingly was forced to mention her further unwillingness that her daughter should be made a party to the troubles caused by the silly young wife of her old playfellow.

"What more?" said the Doctor, holding up his hands. "I never thought a discreet young maid could be such a care, but I suppose that is the price we pay for her good looks. Three of them, eh? What is it that you propose?"

"I should like to place her in the household of some godly and kindly lady, who would watch over her and probably provide for her marriage. That, as you know, was my own course, and I was very happy in Lady Sandwich's family, till I made the acquaintance of your dear and honoured brother, and my greater happiness began. The first day that I am able I will write to some of my earlier friends, such as Mrs. Evelyn and Mrs. Pepys, and again there is Mistress Eleanor Wall, who, I hear, is married to Sir Theophilus Oglethorpe, and who might accept my daughter for my sake. She is a warm, loving, open-hearted creature of Irish blood, and would certainly be kind to her."

There was no indignity in such a plan. Most ladies of rank or quality entertained one or more young women of the clerical or professional classes as companions, governesses, or ladies' maids, as the case might be. They were not classed with the servants, but had their share of the society and amusements of the house, and a fair chance of marriage in their own degree, though the comfort of their situation varied a good deal according to the amiability of their mistress, from that of a confidential friend to a white slave and souffre douleur.

Dr. Woodford had no cause to object except his own loss of his niece's society and return to bachelor life, after the eight years of companionship which he had enjoyed; but such complications as were induced by the presence of an attractive young girl were, as he allowed, beyond him, and he acquiesced with a sigh in the judgment of the mother, whom he had always esteemed so highly.

The letters were written, and in due time received kind replies. Mrs. Evelyn proposed that the young gentlewoman should come and stay with her till some situation should offer itself, and Lady Oglethorpe, a warm-hearted Irishwoman, deeply attached to the Queen, declared her intention of speaking to the King or the Princess Anne on the first opportunity of the daughter of the brave Captain Woodford. There might very possibly be a nursery appointment to be had either at the Cockpit or at Whitehall in the course of the year.

This was much more than Mrs. Woodford had desired. She had far rather have placed her daughter immediately under some kind matronly lady in a private household; but she knew that her good friend was always eager to promise to the utmost of her possible power. She did not talk much of this to her daughter, only telling her that the kind ladies had promised to befriend her, and find a situation for her; and Anne was too much shocked to find her mother actually making such arrangements to enter upon any inquiries. The perception that her mother was looking forward to passing away so soon entirely upset her; she would not think about it, would not admit the bare idea of the loss. Only there lurked at the bottom of her heart the feeling that when the crash had come, and desolation had overtaken her, it would be more dreary at Portchester than anywhere else; and there might be infinite possibilities beyond for the King's godchild, almost a knight's daughter.

The next time that Mrs. Woodford heard that Major Oakshott was at the door inquiring for her health, she begged as a favour that he would come and see her.

The good gentleman came upstairs treading gently in his heavy boots, as one accustomed to an invalid chamber.

"I am sorry to see you thus, madam," he said, as she held out her wasted hand and thanked him. "Did you desire spiritual consolations? There are times when our needs pass far beyond prescribed forms and ordinances."

"I am thankful for the prayers of good men," said Mrs. Woodford; "but for truth's sake I must tell you that this was not foremost in my mind when I begged for this favour."

He was evidently disappointed, for he was producing from his pocket the little stout black-bound Bible, which, by a dent in one of the lids, bore witness of having been with him in his campaigns; and perhaps half-diplomatically, as well as with a yearning for oneness of spirit, she gratified him by requesting him to read and pray.

With all his rigidity he was too truly pious a man for his ministrations to contain anything in which, Churchwoman as she was, she could not join with all her heart, and feel comforting; but ere he was about to rise from his knees she said, "One prayer for your son, sir."

A few fervent words were spoken on behalf of the wandering sheep, while tears glistened in the old man's eyes, and fell fast from those of the lady, and then he said, "Ah, madam! have I not wrestled in prayer for my poor boy?"

"I am sure you have, sir. I know you have a deep fatherly love for him, and therefore I sent to speak to you as a dying woman."

"And I will gladly hear you, for you have always been good to him, and, as I confess, have done him more good--if good can be called the apparent improvement in one unregenerate--than any other."

"Except his uncle," said Mrs. Woodford. "I fear it is vain to say that I think the best hope of his becoming a good and valuable man, a comfort and not a sorrow to yourself, would be to let him even now rejoin Sir Peregrine."

"That cannot be, madam. My brother has not kept to the understanding on which I entrusted the lad to him, but has carried him into worldly and debauched company, such as has made the sober and godly habits of his home distasteful to him, and has further taken him into Popish lands, where he has become infected with their abominations to a greater extent than I can yet fathom."

Mrs. Woodford sighed and felt hopeless. "I see your view of the matter, sir. Yet may I suggest that it is hard for a young man to find wholesome occupation such as may guard him from temptation on an estate where the master is active and sufficient like yourself?"

"Protection from temptation must come from within, madam," replied the Major; "but I so far agree with you that in due time, when he has attained his twenty-first year, I trust he will be wedded to his cousin, a virtuous and pious young maiden, and will have the management of her property, which is larger than my own."

"But if--if--sir, the marriage were distasteful to him, could it be for the happiness and welfare of either?"

"The boy has been complaining to you? Nay, madam, I blame you not. You have ever been the boy's best friend according to knowledge; but he ought to know that his honour and mine are engaged. It is true that Mistress Martha is not a Court beauty, such as his eyes have unhappily learnt to admire, but I am acting verily for his true good. 'Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain.'"

"Most true, sir; but let me say one more word. I fear, I greatly fear, that all young spirits brook not compulsion."

"That means, they will not bow their stiff necks to the yoke."

"Ah, sir! but on the other hand, 'Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.' Forgive me, sir; I spoke but out of true affection to your son, and the fear that what may seem to him severity may not drive him to some extremity that might grieve you."

"No forgiveness is needed, madam. I thank you for your interest in him, and for your plain speaking according to your lights. I can but act according to those vouchsafed unto me."

"And we both agree in praying for his true good," said Mrs. Woodford.

And with a mutual blessing they parted, Mrs. Woodford deeply sorry for both father and son, for whom she had done what she could.

It was her last interview with any one outside the house. Another attack of spasms brought the end, during the east winds of March, so suddenly as to leave no time for farewells or last words. When she was laid to rest in the little churchyard within the castle walls, no one showed such overwhelming tokens of grief as Peregrine Oakshott, who lingered about the grave after the Doctor had taken his niece home, and was found lying upon it late in the evening, exhausted with weeping.

Yet Sedley Archfield, whose regiment had, after all, been sent to Portsmouth, reported that he had spent the very next afternoon at a cock-fight, ending in a carouse with various naval and military officers at a tavern, not drinking, but contributing to the mirth by foreign songs, tricks, and jests.

CHAPTER XII: THE ONE HOPE

"There's some fearful tie
Between me and that spirit world, which God
Brands with His terrors on my troubled mind."

KINGSLEY.

The final blow had fallen upon Anne Woodford so suddenly that for the first few days she moved about as one in a dream. Lady Archfield came to her on the first day, and showed her motherly kindness, and Lucy was with her as much as was possible under the exactions of young Madam, who was just sufficiently unwell to resent attention being paid to any other living creature. She further developed a jealousy of Lucy's affection for any other friend such as led to a squabble between her and her husband, and made her mother-in-law unwillingly acquiesce in the expediency of Anne's being farther off.

And indeed Anne herself felt so utterly forlorn and desolate that an impatience of the place came over her. She was indeed fond of her uncle, but he was much absorbed in his studies, his parish, and in anxious correspondence on the state of the Church, and was scarcely

a companion to her, and without her mother to engross her love and attention, and cut off from the Archfields as she now was, there was little to counterbalance the restless feeling that London and the precincts of the Court were her natural element. So she wrote her letters according to her mother's desire, and waited anxiously for the replies, feeling as if anything would be preferable to her present unhappiness and solitude.

The answers came in due time. Mrs. Evelyn promised to try to find a virtuous and godly lady who would be willing to receive Mistress Anne Woodford into her family, and Lady Oglethorpe wrote with vaguer promises of high preferment, which excited Anne's imagination during those lonely hours that she had to spend while her strict mourning, after the custom of the time, secluded her from all visitors.

Meantime, in that anxious spring of 1688, when the Church of England was looking to her defences, the Doctor could not be much at home, and when he had time to listen to private affairs, he heard reports which did not please him of Peregrine Oakshott. That the young men in the county all abhorred his fine foreign airs was no serious evil, though it might be suspected that his sharp ironical tongue had quite as much to do with their dislike as his greater refinement of manner.

His father was reported to be very seriously displeased with him, for he openly expressed contempt of the precise ways of the household, and absented himself in a manner that could scarcely be attributed to aught but the licentious indulgences of the time; and as he seldom mingled in the amusements of the young country gentlemen, it was only too probable that he found a lower grade of companions in Portsmouth. Moreover his talk, random though it might be, offended all the Whig opinions of his father. He talked with the dogmatism of the traveller of the glories of Louis XIV, and broadly avowed his views that the grandeur of the nation was best established under a king who asked no questions of people or Parliament, 'that senseless set of chattering pies,' as he was reported to have called the House of Commons.

He sang the praises of the gracious and graceful Queen Mary Beatrice, and derided 'the dried-up Orange stick,' as he called the hope of the Protestants; nor did he scruple to pronounce Popery the faith of chivalrous gentlemen, far preferable to the whining of sullen Whiggery. No one could tell how far all this was genuine opinion, or simply delight in contradiction, especially of his father, who was in a constant state of irritation at the son whom he could so little manage.

And in the height of the wrath of the whole of the magistracy at the expulsion of their lord-lieutenant, the Earl of Gainsborough, and the substitution of the young Duke of Berwick, what must Peregrine do but argue in high praise of that youth, whom he had several times seen and admired. And when not a gentleman in the neighbourhood chose to greet the intruder when he arrived as governor of Portsmouth, Peregrine actually rode in to see him, and dined with him. Words cannot express the Major's anger and shame at such consorting with a person, whom alike, on account of parentage, religion, and education, he regarded as a son of perdition. Yet Peregrine would only coolly reply that he knew many a Protestant who would hardly compare favourably with young Berwick.

It was an anxious period that spring of 1688. The order to read the King's Declaration of Indulgence from the pulpit had come as a thunder-clap upon the clergy. The English Church had only known rest for twenty-eight years, and now, by this unconstitutional assumption of prerogative, she seemed about to be given up to be the prey of Romanists on the one hand and Nonconformists on the other; though for the present the latter were so persuaded that the Indulgence was merely a disguised advance of Rome that they were not at all grateful, expecting, as Mr. Horncastle observed, only to be the last devoured, and he was as much determined as was Dr. Woodford not to announce it from his pulpit, whatever might be the consequence; the latter thus resigning all hopes of promotion.

News letters, public and private, were eagerly scanned. Though the diocesan, Bishop Mew, took no active part in the petition called a libel, being an extremely aged man, the imprisonment of Ken, so deeply endeared to Hampshire hearts when Canon of Winchester and Rector of Brighstone, and with the Bloody Assize and the execution of Alice Lisle fresh in men's memories, there could not but be extreme anxiety.

In the midst arrived the tidings that a son had been born to the king--a son instantly baptized by a Roman Catholic priest, and no doubt destined by James to rivet the fetters of Rome upon the kingdom, destroying at once the hope of his elder sister's accession. Loyal Churchmen like the Archfields still hoped, recollecting how many infants had been born in the royal family only to die; but at Oakwood the Major and his chaplain shook their heads, and spoke of warming pans, to the vehement displeasure of Peregrine, who was sure to respond that the Queen was an angel, and that the Whigs credited every one with their own sly tricks.

The Major groaned, and things seemed to have reached a pass very like open enmity between father and son, though Peregrine still lived at home, and reports were rife that the year of mourning for his brother being expired, he was, as soon as he came of age, to be married to Mistress Martha Browning, and have an establishment of his own at Emsworth.

Under these circumstances, it was with much satisfaction that Dr. Woodford said to his niece: "Child, here is an excellent offer for you. Lady Russell, who you know has returned to live at Stratton, has heard you mentioned by Lady Mildmay. She has just married her eldest daughter, and needs a companion to the other, and has been told of you as able to speak French and Italian, and otherwise well trained. What! do you not relish the proposal?"

"Why, sir, would not my entering such a house do you harm at Court, and lessen your chance of preferment?"

"Think not of that, my child."

"Besides," added Anne, "since Lady Oglethorpe has written, it would not be fitting to engage myself elsewhere before hearing from her again."

"You think so, Anne. Lady Russell's would be a far safer, better home for you than the Court."

Anne knew it, but the thought of that widowed home depressed her. It might, she thought, be as dull as Oakwood, and there would be infinite chances of preferment at Court. What she said, however, was: "It was by my mother's wish that I applied to Lady Oglethorpe."

"That is true, child. Yet I cannot but believe that if she had known of Lady Russell's offer, she would gladly and thankfully have accepted it."

So said the secret voice within the girl herself, but she did not yet yield to it. "Perhaps she would, sir," she answered, "if the other proposal were not made. 'Tis a Whig household though."

"A Whig household is a safer one than a Popish one," answered the Doctor. "Lady Russell is, by all they tell me, a very saint upon earth."

Shall it be owned? Anne thought of Oakwood, and was not attracted towards a saint upon earth. "How soon was the answer to be given?" she asked.

"I believe she would wish you to meet her at Winchester next week, when, if you pleased her, you might return with her to Stratton."

The Doctor hoped that Lady Oglethorpe's application might fail, but before the week was over she forwarded the definite appointment of Mistress Anne Jacobina Woodford as one of the rockers of his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, his Majesty having been graciously pleased to remember her father's services and his own sponsorship. "If your friends consider the office somewhat beneath you," wrote Lady Oglethorpe, "it is still open to you to decline it."

"Oh no; I would certainly not decline it!" cried Anne. "I could not possibly do so; could I, sir?"

"Lady Oglethorpe says you might," returned the Doctor; "and for my part, niece, I should prefer the office of a *gouvernante* to that of a rocker."

"Ah, but it is to a Prince!" said Anne. "It is the way to something further."

"And what may that something further be? That is the question," said her uncle. "I will not control you, my child, for the application to this Court lady was by the wish of your good mother, who knew her well, but I own that I should be far more at rest on your account if you were in a place of less temptation."

"The Court is very different from what it was in the last King's time," pleaded Anne.

"In some degree it may be; but on the other hand, the influence which may have purified it is of the religion that I fear may be a seduction."

"Oh no, never, uncle; nothing could make me a Papist."

"Do not be over confident, Anne. Those who run into temptation are apt to be left to themselves."

"Indeed, sir, I cannot think that the course my mother shaped for me can be a running into temptation."

"Well, Anne, as I say, I cannot withstand you, since it was your mother who requested Lady Oglethorpe's patronage for you, though I tell you sincerely that I believe that had the two courses been set before her she would have chosen the safer and more private one."

"Nay but, dear sir," still pleaded the maiden, "what would become of your chances of preferment if it were known that you had placed me with Lord Russell's widow in preference to the Queen?"

"Let not that weigh with you one moment, child. I believe that no staunch friend of our Protestant Church will be preferred by his Majesty; nay, while the Archbishop and my saintly friend of Bath and Wells are persecuted, I should be ashamed to think of promotion. Spurn the thought from you, child."

"Nay, 'twas only love for you, dear uncle."

"I know it, child. I am not displeased, only think it over, and pray over it, since the post will not go out until to-morrow."

Anne did think, but not quite as her uncle intended. The remembrance of the good-natured young Princesses, the large stately rooms, the brilliant dresses, the radiance of wax lights, had floated before her eyes ever since her removal from Chelsea to the quieter regions of Winchester, and she had longed to get back to them. She really loved her uncle, and whatever he might say, she longed to push his advancement, and thought his unselfish abnegation the greater reason for working for him; and in spite of knowing well that it was only a dull back-stair appointment, she could look to the notice of Princess Anne, when once within her reach, and further, with the confidence of youth, believed that she had that within her which would make her way upwards, and enable her to confer promotion, honour, and dignity, on all her friends. Her uncle should be a Bishop, Charles a Peer (fancy his wife being under obligations to the parson's niece!), Lucy should have a perfect husband, and an appointment should be found for poor Peregrine which his father could not gainsay. It was her bounden duty not to throw away such advantages; besides loyalty to her Royal godfather could not permit his offer to be rejected, and her mother, when writing to Lady Oglethorpe, must surely have had some such expectation. Nor should she be entirely cut off from her uncle, who was a Royal chaplain; and this was some consolation to the good Doctor when he found her purpose fixed, and made arrangements for her to travel up to town in company with Lady Worsley of Gatcombe, whom she was to meet at Southampton on the 1st of July.

Meantime the Doctor did his best to arm his niece against the allurements to Romanism that he feared would be held out. Lady Oglethorpe and other friends had assured him of the matronly care of Lady Powys and Lady Strickland to guard their department from all evil; but he did fear these religious influences and Anne, resolute to resist all, perhaps not afraid of the conflict, was willing to

arm herself for defence, and listened readily. She was no less anxious to provide for her uncle's comfort in his absence, and many small matters of housewifery that had stood over for some time were now to be purchased, as well as a few needments for her own outfit, although much was left for the counsel of her patroness in the matter of garments.

Accordingly her uncle rode in with her to Portsmouth on a shopping expedition, and as the streets of the seaport were scarcely safe for a young woman without an escort, he carried a little book in his pocket wherewith he beguiled the time that she spent in the selection of his frying-pans, fire-irons, and the like, and her own gloves and kerchiefs. They dined at the 'ordinary' at the inn, and there Dr. Woodford met his great friends Mr. Stanbury of Botley, and Mr. Worsley of Gatcombe, in the Isle of Wight, who both, like him, were opposed to the reading of the Declaration of Indulgence, as unconstitutional, and deeply anxious as to the fate of the greatly beloved Bishop of Bath and Wells. It was inevitable that they should fall into deep and earnest council together, and when dinner was over they agreed to adjourn to the house of a friend learned in ecclesiastical law to hunt up the rights of the case, leaving Anne to await them in a private room at the Spotted Dog, shown to her by the landlady.

Anne well knew what such a meeting betided, and with a certain prevision, had armed herself with some knotting, wherewith she sat down in a bay window overlooking the street, whence she could see market-women going home with empty baskets, pigs being reluctantly driven down to provision ships in the harbour, barrels of biscuit, salt meat, or beer, being rolled down for the same purpose, sailors in loose knee-breeches, and soldiers in tall peaked caps and cross-belts, and officers of each service moving in different directions. She sat there day-dreaming, feeling secure in her loneliness, and presently saw a slight figure, daintily clad in gray and black, who catching her eye made an eager gesture, doffing his plumed hat and bowing low to her. She returned his salute, and thought he passed on, but in another minute she was startled to find him at her side, exclaiming: "This is the occasion I have longed and sought for, Mistress Anne; I bless and thank the fates."

"I am glad to see you once more before I depart," said Anne, holding out her hand as frankly as she could to the old playfellow whom she always thought ill-treated, but whom she could never meet without a certain shudder.

"Then it is true?" he exclaimed.

"Yes; I am to go up with Lady Worsley from Southampton next week."

"Ah!" he cried, "but must that be?" and she felt his strange power, so that she drew into herself and said haughtily--

"My dear mother wished me to be with her friends, nor can the King's appointment be neglected, though of course I am extremely grieved to go."

"And you are dazzled with all these gewgaws of Court life, no doubt?"

"I shall not be much in the way of gewgaws just yet," said Anne drily. "It will be dull enough in some back room of Whitehall or St. James's."

"Say you so. You will wish yourself back--you, the lady of my heart--mine own good angel! Hear me. Say but the word, and your home will be mine, to say nothing of your own most devoted servant."

"Hush, hush, sir! I cannot hear this," said Anne, anxiously glancing down the street in hopes of seeing her uncle approaching.

"Nay, but listen! This is my only hope--my only chance--I must speak--you doom me to you know not what if you will not hear me!"

"Indeed, sir, I neither will nor ought!"

"Ought! Ought! Ought you not to save a fellow-creature from distraction and destruction? One who has loved and looked to you ever since you and that saint your mother lifted me out of the misery of my childhood."

Then as she looked softened he went on: "You, you are my one hope. No one else can lift me out of the reach of the demon that has beset me even since I was born."

"That is profane," she said, the more severe for the growing attraction of repulsion.

"What do I care? It is true! What was I till you and your mother took pity on the wild imp? My old nurse said a change would come to me every seven years. That blessed change came just seven years ago. Give me what will make a more blessed--a more saving change--or there will be one as much for the worse."

"But--I could not. No! you must see for yourself that I could not--even if I would," she faltered, really pitying now, and unwilling to give more pain than she could help.

"Could not? It should be possible. I know how to bring it about. Give me but your promise, and I will make you mine--ay, and I will make myself as worthy of you as man can be of saint-like maid."

"No--no! This is very wrong--you are pledged already--"

"No such thing--believe no such tale. My promise has never been given to that grim hag of my father's choice--no, nor should be forced from me by the rack. Look you here. Let me take this hand, call in the woman of the house, give me your word, and my father will own his power to bind me to Martha is at an end."

"Oh, no! It would be a sin--never. Besides--" said Anne, holding her hands tightly clasped behind her in alarm, lest against her will she should let them be seized, and trying to find words to tell him how little she felt disposed to trust her heart and herself to one whom she might indeed pity, but with a sort of shrinking as from something not quite human. Perhaps he dreaded her 'besides'--for he cut her short.

"It would save ten thousand greater sins. See, here are two ways

before us. Either give me your word, your precious word, go silent to London, leave me to struggle it out with my father and your uncle and follow you. Hope and trust will be enough to bear me through the battle without, and within deafen the demon of my nature, and render me patient of my intolerable life till I have conquered and can bring you home."

Her tongue faltered as she tried to say such a secret unsanctioned engagement would be treachery, but he cut off the words.

"You have not heard me out. There is another way. I know those who will aid me. We can meet in early dawn, be wedded in one of these churches in all secrecy and haste, and I would carry you at once to my uncle, who, as you well know, would welcome you as a daughter. Or, better still, we would to those fair lands I have scarce seen, but where I could make my way with sword or pen with you to inspire me. I have the means. My uncle left this with me. Speak! It is death or life to me."

This last proposal was thoroughly alarming, and Anne retreated, drawing herself to her full height, and speaking with the dignity that concealed considerable terror.

"No, indeed, sir. You ought to know better than to utter such proposals. One who can make such schemes can certainly obtain no respect nor regard from the lady he addresses. Let me pass"--for she was penned up in the bay window--"I shall seek the landlady till my uncle returns."

"Nay, Mistress Anne, do not fear me. Do not drive me to utter despair. Oh, pardon me! Nothing but utter desperation could drive me to have thus spoken; but how can I help using every effort to win her whose very look and presence is bliss! Nothing else soothes and calms me; nothing else so silences the demon and wakens the better part of my nature. Have you no pity upon a miserable wretch, who will be dragged down to his doom without your helping hand?"

He flung himself on his knee before her, and tried to grasp her hand.

"Indeed, I am sorry for you, Master Oakshott," said Anne, compassionate, but still retreating as far as the window would let her; "but you are mistaken. If this power be in me, which I cannot quite believe--yes, I see what you want to say, but if I did what I know to be wrong, I should lose it at once; God's grace can save you without me."

"I will not ask you to do what you call wrong; no, nor to transgress any of the ties you respect, you, whose home is so unlike mine; only tell me that I may have hope, that if I deserve you, I may win you; that you could grant me--wretched me--a share of your affection."

This was hardest of all; mingled pity and repugnance, truth and compassion strove within the maiden as well as the strange influence of those extraordinary eyes. She was almost as much afraid of herself as of her suitor. At last she managed to say, "I am very sorry for you; I grieve from my heart for your troubles; I should be very glad to hear of your welfare and anything good of you, but--"

"But, but--I see--it is mere frenzy in me to think the blighted elf can aspire to be aught but loathsome to any lady--only, at least, tell me you love no one else."

"No, certainly not," she said, as if his eyes drew it forcibly from her.

"Then you cannot hinder me from making you my guiding star--hoping that if yet I can--"

"There's my uncle!" exclaimed Anne, in a tone of infinite relief. "Stand up, Mr. Oakshott, compose yourself. Of course I cannot hinder your thinking about me, if it will do you any good, but there are better things to think about which would conquer evil and make you happy more effectually."

He snatched her hand and kissed it, nor did she withhold it, since she really pitied him, and knew that her uncle was near, and all would soon be over.

Peregrine dashed away by another door as Dr. Woodford's foot was on the stairs. "I have ordered the horses," he began. "They told me young Oakshott was here."

"He was, but he is gone;" and she could not quite conceal her agitation.

"Crimson cheeks, my young mistress? Ah, the foolish fellow! You do not care for him, I trust?"

"No, indeed, poor fellow. What, did you know, sir?"

"Know. Yes, truly--and your mother likewise, Anne. It was one cause of her wishing to send you to safer keeping than mine seems to be. My young spark made his proposals to us both, though we would not disturb your mind therewith, not knowing how he would have dealt with his father, nor viewing him, for all he is heir to Oakwood, as a desirable match in himself. I am glad to see you have sense and discretion to be of the same mind, my maid."

"I cannot but grieve for his sad condition, sir," replied Anne, "but as for anything more--it would make me shudder to think of it--he is still too like Robin Goodfellow."

"That's my good girl," said her uncle. "And do you know, child, there are the best hopes for the Bishops. There's a gentleman come down but now from London, who says 'twas like a triumph as the Bishops sat in their barge on the way to the Tower; crowds swarming along the banks, begging for their blessing, and they waving it with tears in their eyes. The King will be a mere madman if he dares to touch a hair of their heads. Well, when I was a lad, Bishops were sent to the Tower by the people; I little thought to live to see them sent thither by the King."

All the way home Dr. Woodford talked of the trial, beginning perhaps to regret that his niece must go to the very focus of Roman influence in England, where there seemed to be little scruple as to the mode of conversion. Would it be possible to alter her destination? was his thought, when he rose the next day, but loyalty

stood in the way, and that very afternoon another event happened which made it evident that the poor girl must leave Portchester as soon as possible.

She had gone out with him to take leave of some old cottagers in the village, and he finding himself detained to minister to a case of unexpected illness, allowed her to go home alone for about a quarter of a mile along the white sunny road at the foot of Portsdown, with the castle full in view at one end, and the cottage where he was at the other. Many a time previously had she trodden it alone, but she had not reckoned on two officers coming swaggering from a cross road down the hill, one of them Sedley Archfield, who immediately called out, "Ha, ha! my pretty maid, no wench goes by without paying toll;" and they spread their arms across the road so as to arrest her.

"Sir," said Anne, drawing herself up with dignity, "you mistake--"

"Not a whit, my dear; no exemption here;" and there was a horse laugh, and an endeavour to seize her, as she stepped back, feeling that in quietness lay her best chance of repelling them, adding--

"My uncle is close by."

"The more cause for haste;" and they began to close upon her. But at that moment Peregrine Oakshott, leaping from his horse, was among them, with the cry--

"Dastards! insulting a lady."

"Lady, forsooth! the parson's niece."

In a few seconds--very long seconds to her--her flying feet had brought her back to the cottage, where she burst in with--"Pardon, pardon, sir; come quick; there are swords drawn; there will be bloodshed if you do not come."

He obeyed the summons without further query, for when all men wore swords the neighbourhood of a garrison were only too liable to such encounters outside. There was no need for her to gasp out more; from the very cottage door he could see the need of haste, for the swords were actually flashing, and the two young men in position to fight. Anne shook her head, unable to do more than sign her thanks to the good woman of the cottage, who offered her a seat. She leant against the door, and watched as her uncle, sending his voice before him, called on them to desist.

There was a start, then each drew back and held down his weapon, but with a menacing gesture on one side, a shrug of the shoulders on the other, which impelled the Doctor to use double speed in the fear that the parting might be with a challenge reserved.

He was in time to stand warning, and arguing that if he pardoned the slighting words and condoned the insult to his niece, no one had a right to exact vengeance; and in truth, whatever were his arguments, he so dealt with the two young men as to force them into shaking hands before they separated, though with a contemptuous look on either side--a scowl from Sedley, a sneer from Peregrine, boding ill for the future, and making him sigh.

"Ah! sister, sister, you judged aright. Would that I could have sent the maid sooner away rather than that all this ill blood should have been bred. Yet I may only be sending her to greater temptation and danger. But she is a good maiden; God bless her and keep her here and there, now and for evermore, as I trust He keepeth our good Dr. Ken in this sore strait. The trial may even now be over. Ah, my child, here you are! Frightened were you by that rude fellow? Nay, I believe you were almost equally terrified by him who came to the rescue. You will soon be out of their reach, my dear."

"Yes, that is one great comfort in going," sighed Anne. One comfort--yes--though she would not have stayed had the choice been given her now. And shall the thought be told that flashed over her and coloured her cheeks with a sort of shame yet of pleasure, "I surely must have power over men! I know mother would say it is a terrible danger one way, and a great gift another. I will not misuse it; but what will it bring me? Or am I only a rustic beauty after all, who will be nobody elsewhere?"

Still heartily she wished that her rescuer had been any one else in the wide world. It was almost uncanny that he should have sprung out of the earth at such a moment.

CHAPTER XIII: THE BONFIRE

"From Eddystone to Berwick bounds,
From Lynn to Milford Bay,
That time of slumber was as
Bright and busy as the day;
For swift to east and swift to west
The fiery herald sped,
High on St. Michael's Mount it shone:
It shone on Beachy Head."

MACAULAY.

Doctor Woodford and his niece had not long reached their own door when the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard, and Charles Archfield was seen, waving his hat and shouting 'Hurrah!' before he came near enough to speak,

"Good news, I see!" said the Doctor.

"Good news indeed! Not guilty! Express rode from Westminster Hall with the news at ten o'clock this morning. All acquitted. Expresses could hardly get away for the hurraing of the people. Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!" cried the young man, throwing up his hat, while Doctor Woodford, taking off his own, gave graver, deeper thanks that justice was yet in England, that these noble and honoured confessors were safe, and that the King had been saved from further injustice and violence to the Church.

"We are to have a bonfire on Portsdown hill," added Charles. "They will be all round the country, in the Island, and everywhere. My father is rid one way to spread the tidings, and give orders. I'm going on into Portsmouth, to see after tar barrels. You'll be

there, sir, and you, Anne?" There was a moment's hesitation after the day's encounters, but he added, "My mother is going, and my little Madam, and Lucy. They will call for you in the coach if you will be at Ryder's cottage at nine o'clock. It will not be dark enough to light up till ten, so there will be time to get a noble pile ready. Come, Anne, 'tis Lucy's last chance of seeing you--so strange as you have made yourself of late."

This plea decided Anne, who had been on the point of declaring that she should have an excellent view from the top of the keep. However, not only did she long to see Lucy again, but the enthusiasm was contagious, and there was an attraction in the centre of popular rejoicing that drew both her and her uncle, nor could there be a doubt of her being sufficiently protected when among the Archfield ladies. So the arrangement was accepted, and then there was the cry--

"Hark! the Havant bells! Ay! and the Cosham! Portsmouth is pealing out. That's Alverstoke. They know it there. A salute! Another."

"Scarce loyal from the King's ships," said the Doctor, smiling.

"Nay, 'tis only loyalty to rejoice that the King can't make a fool of himself. So my father says," rejoined Charles.

And that seemed to be the mood of all England. When Anne and her uncle set forth in the summer sunset light the great hill above them was dark with the multitudes thronging around the huge pyre rising in the midst. They rested for some minutes at the cottage indicated before the arrival of Sir Philip, who rode up accompanying the coach in which his three ladies were seated, and which was quite large enough to receive Dr. Woodford and Mistress Anne. Charles was in the throng, in the midst of most of the younger gentlemen of the neighbourhood, and a good many of the naval and military officers, directing the arrangement of the pile.

What a scene it was, as seen even from the windows of the coach where the ladies remained, for the multitude of sailors, soldiers, town and village people, though all unanimous, were far too tumultuous for them to venture beyond their open door, especially as little Mrs. Archfield was very far from well, and nothing but her eagerness for amusement could have brought her hither, and of course she could not be left. Probably she knew as little of the real bearings of the case or the cause of rejoicing as did the boys who pervaded everything with their squibs, and were only restrained from firing them in the faces of the horses by wholesome fear of the big whips of the coachman and outriders who stood at the horses' heads.

It was hardly yet dark when the match was put to the shavings, and to the sound of the loud 'Hurrahs!' and cries of 'Long live the Bishops!' 'Down with the Pope!' the flame kindled, crackled, and leapt up, while a responsive fire was seen on St. Catherine's Down in the Isle of Wight, and northward, eastward, westward, on every available point, each new light greeted by fresh acclamations, as it shone out against the summer night sky, while the ships in the harbour showed their lights, reflected in the sea, as the sky grew darker. Then came a procession of sailors and other rough folk, bearing between poles a chair with a stuffed figure with a kind of tiara, followed by others with scarlet hats and capes, and with

reiterated shouts of 'Down with the Pope!' these were hurled into the fire with deafening hurrahs, their more gorgeous trappings being cleverly twitched off at the last moment, as part of the properties for the 5th of November.

Little Mrs. Archfield clapped her hands and screamed with delight as each fresh blaze shot up, and chattered with all her might, sometimes about some lace and perfumes which she wanted Anne to procure for her in London at the sign of the Flower Pot, sometimes grumbling at her husband having gone off to the midst of the party closest to the fire, "Just like Mr. Archfield, always leaving her to herself," but generally very well amused, especially when a group of gentlemen, officers, and county neighbours gathered round the open door talking to the ladies within.

Peregrine was there with his hands in his pockets, and a queer ironical smile writhing his features. He was asked if his father and brother were present.

"Not my father," he replied. "He has a logical mind. Martha is up here with her guardian, and I am keeping out of her way, and my brother is full in the thick of the fray. A bonfire is a bonfire to most folks, were it to roast their grandsire!"

"Oh, fie, Mr. Oakshott, how you do talk!" laughed Mrs. Archfield.

"Nay, but you rejoice in the escape of the good Bishops," put in Lucy.

"For what?" asked Peregrine. "For refusing to say live and let live?"

"Not against letting live, but against saying so unconstitutionally, my young friend," said Dr. Woodford, "or tyrannising over our consciences."

Generally Peregrine was more respectful to Dr. Woodford than to any one else; but there seemed to be a reckless bitterness about him on that night, and he said, "I marvel with what face those same Eight Reverend Seigniors will preach against the French King."

"Sir," thrust in Sedley Archfield, "I am not to hear opprobrious epithets applied to the Bishops."

"What was the opprobrium?" lazily demanded Peregrine, and in spite of his unpopularity, the laugh was with him. Sedley grew more angry.

"You likened them to the French King--"

"The most splendid monarch in Europe," said Peregrine coolly.

"A Frenchman!" quoth one of the young squires with withering contempt.

"He has that ill fortune, sir," said Peregrine. "Mayhap he would be sensible of the disadvantage, if he evened himself with some of my reasonable countrymen."

"Do you mean that for an insult, sir?" exclaimed Sedley Archfield, striding forward.

"As you please," said Peregrine. "To me it had the sound of compliment."

"Oh la! they'll fight," cried Mrs. Archfield. "Don't let them! Where's the Doctor? Where's Sir Philip?"

"Hush, my dear," said Lady Archfield; "these gentlemen would not fall out close to us."

Dr. Woodford was out of sight, having been drawn into controversy with a fellow-clergyman on the limits of toleration. Anne looked anxiously for him, but with provoking coolness Peregrine presently said, "There's no crowd near, and if you will step out, the fires on the farther hills are to be seen well from the knoll hard by."

He spoke chiefly to Anne, but even if she had not a kind of shrinking from trusting herself with him in this strange wild scene, she would have been prevented by Mrs. Archfield's eager cry--

"Oh, I'll come, let me come! I'm so weary of sitting here. Thank you, Master Oakshott."

Lady Archfield's remonstrance was lost as Peregrine helped the little lady out, and there was nothing for it but to follow her, as close as might be, as she hung on her cavalier's arm chattering, and now and then giving little screams of delight or alarm. Lady Archfield and her daughter each was instantly squired, but Mistress Woodford, a nobody, was left to keep as near them as she could, and gaze at the sparks of light of the beacons in the distance, thinking how changed the morrow would be to her.

Presently a figure approached, and Charles Archfield's voice said, "Is that you, Anne? Did I hear my wife's voice?"

"Yes, she is there."

"And with that imp of evil! I would his own folk had him!" muttered Charles, dashing forward with "How now, madam? you were not to leave the coach!"

She laughed exultingly. "Ha, sir! see what comes of leaving me to better cavaliers, while you run after your fire! I should have seen nothing but for Master Oakshott."

"Come with me now," said Charles; "you ought not to be standing here in the dew."

"Ha, ha! what a jealous master," she said; but she put her arm into his, saying with a courtesy, "Thank you, Master Oakshott, lords must be obeyed. I should have been still buried in the old coach but for you."

Peregrine fell back to Anne. "That blaze is at St. Helen's," he began. "That--what! will you not wait a moment?"

"No, no! They will want to be going home."

"And have you forgotten that it is only just over Midsummer? This is the week of my third seventh--the moment for change. O Anne! make it a change for the better. Say the word, and the die will be cast. All is ready! Come!"

He tried to take her hand, but the vehemence of his words, spoken under his breath, terrified her, and with a hasty "No, no! you know not what you talk of," she hastened after her friends, and was glad to find herself in the safe haven of the interior of the coach.

Ere long they drove down the hill, and at the place of parting were set down, the last words in Anne's ears being Mrs. Archfield's injunctions not to forget the orange flower-water at the sign of the Flower Pot, drowning Lucy's tearful farewells.

As they walked away in the moonlight a figure was seen in the distance.

"Is that Peregrine Oakshott?" asked the Doctor. "That young man is in a desperate mood, ready to put a quarrel on any one. I hope no harm will come of it."

CHAPTER XIV: GATHERING MOUSE-EAR

"I heard the groans, I marked the tears,
I saw the wound his bosom bore."

SCOTT.

After such an evening it was not easy to fall asleep, and Anne tossed about, heated, restless, and uneasy, feeling that to remain at home was impossible, yet less satisfied about her future prospects, and doubtful whether she had not done herself harm by attending last night's rejoicings, and hoping that nothing would happen to reveal her presence there.

She was glad that the night was not longer, and resolved to take advantage of the early morning to fulfil a commission of Lady Oglethorpe, whose elder children, Lewis and Theophilus, had the whooping-cough. Mouse-ear, namely, the little sulphur-coloured hawk-weed, was, and still is, accounted a specific, and Anne had been requested to bring a supply--a thing easily done, since it grew plentifully in the court of the castle.

She dressed herself in haste, made some of her preparations for the journey, and let herself out of the house, going first for one last look at her mother's green grave in the dewy churchyard, and gathering from it a daisy, which she put into her bosom, then in the fair morning freshness, and exhilaration of the rising sun, crossing the wide tilt-yard, among haycocks waiting to be tossed, and arriving at the court within, filling her basket between the churchyard and the gateway tower and keep, when standing up for a moment she was extremely startled to see Peregrine Oakshott's unmistakable figure entering at the postern of the court.

With vague fears of his intentions, and instinctive terror of meeting him alone, heightened by that dread of his power, she flew in at the great bailey tower door, hoping that he had not seen her, but tolerably secure that even if he had, and should pursue her, she was sufficiently superior in knowledge of the stairs and passages to baffle him, and make her way along the battlements to the tower at the corner of the court nearest the parsonage, where there was a turret stair by which she could escape.

Up the broken stairs she went, shutting behind her every available door in the chambers and passages, but not as quickly as she wished, since attention to her feet was needful in the ruinous state of steps and walls. Through those massive walls she could hear nothing distinctly, but she fancied voices and a cry, making her seek more intricate windings, nor did she dare to look out till she had gained a thick screen of bushy ivy at the corner of the turret, where a little door opened on the broad summit of the battlemented wall.

Then, what horror was it that she beheld? Or was it a dream? She even passed her hands over her face and looked again. Peregrine and Charles, yes, it was Charles Archfield, were fighting with swords in the court beneath. She gave a shriek, in a wild hope of parting them, but at that instant she saw Peregrine fall, and with the impulse of rushing to aid she hurried down, impeded however by stumbles, and by the doors, she herself had shut, and when she emerged, she saw only Charles, standing like one dazed and white as death.

"O Mr Archfield! where is he? What have you done?" The young man pointed to the opening of the vault. Then, speaking with an effort, "He was quite dead; my sword went through him. He forced it on me--he was pursuing you. I withstood him--and--"

He gasped heavily as the words came one by one. She trembled exceedingly, and would have looked into the vault, with, "Are you quite sure?" but he grasped her hand and withheld her.

"Only too sure! Yes, I have done it! It could not be helped. I would give myself up at once, but, Anne, there is my wife. They tell me any shock would kill her as she is now. I should be double murderer. Will you keep the secret, Anne, always my friend? And 'twas for you."

"Indeed, indeed, I will not betray you. I go away in two hours," said Anne; and he caught her hand. "But oh!" and she pointed to the blood on the grass, then with sudden thought, "Heap the hay over it," running to fill her arms with the lately-cut grass.

He mechanically did the same, and then they stood for a moment, awe-stricken.

"God forgive me!" said the poor young man. "How to hide it I hardly know, but for her sake, ah--'twas that brought me here. She could not rest last night till I had promised to be here early enough in the morning to give you a piece of sarcenet to be matched in London. Where is it? Ah! I forget. It seems to be ages ago that she was insisting that I should ride over so as to be in time."

"Lucy must write," said Anne, "O Charley! wipe that dreadful sword,

look like yourself. I am going in a couple of hours. There is no fear of me! but oh! that you should have done such a thing! and through me!"

"Hush! hush! don't talk. I must be gone ere folks are about. My horse is outside." He wrung her hand and kissed it, forgetting to give her the pattern, and Anne, still stunned, walked back to the parsonage, her one thought how to control herself so as to guard Charles's secret.

It must be remembered that in the generation succeeding that which had fought a long civil war, and when duels were common assertions of honour and self-respect among young gentlemen, homicide was not so exceptional and heinous an offence in ordinary eyes as when a higher value has come to be set on life, and acts of violence are far less frequent.

Charles had drawn his sword in fair fight, and in her own defence, and thus it was natural that Anne Woodford should think of his deed, certainly with a shudder, but with more of pity than of horror, and with gratitude that made her feel bound to do her utmost to guard him from the consequences; also there was a sense of relief, and perhaps a feeling as if the victim were scarcely a human creature like others. It never occurred to her till some time after to recollect it would have had an unpleasant sound that she had been the occasion of such an 'unseemly brawl' between two young men, one of them a married man. When the thought occurred to her it made the blood rush hotly to her cheeks.

It was well for her that the pain of leaving home and the bustle of preparation concealed that she had suffered a great shock, and accounted for her not being able to taste any breakfast beyond a draught of milk. Her ears were intent all the time to perceive any token whether the haymakers had come into the court and had discovered any trace of the ghastly thing in the vault, and she hardly heard the kind words of her uncle or the coaxings of his old housekeeper. She dreaded especially the sight of Hans, so fondly attached to his master's nephew, and it was with a sense of infinite relief--instead of the tender grief otherwise natural--that she was seated in the boat for Portsmouth, and her uncle believing her to be crying, left her undisturbed till she had composed herself to wear the front that she knew was needful, however her heart might throb beneath it, and as their boat threaded its way through the ships, even then numerous, she looked wistfully up at the tall tower of the castle, with earnest prayers for the living, and a longing she durst not utter, to ask her uncle whether it were right to pray for the poor strange, struggling soul, always so cruelly misunderstood, and now so summarily dismissed from the world of trial.

Yet presently there was a revulsion of feeling as she was roused from her meditations by the coxswain's answer to her uncle, who had asked what was a smart, swift little smack, which after receiving something from a boat, began stretching her wings and making all sail for the Isle of Wight.

The men looked significant and hesitated.

"Smugglers, eh? Traders in French brandy?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, your reverence, so they says. They be a rough lot out there by at the back of the Island."

"There would be small harm in letting a poor man get a drink of spirits cheap to warm his heart," said one of the other men; "but they say as how 'tis a very nest of 'em out there, and that's how no one can ever pitch on the highwaymen, such as robbed Farmer Vine t'other day a coming home from market."

"They do say," added the other, "that there's them as ought to know better that is thick with them. There's that young master up at Oakwood--that crooked slip as they used to say was a changeling--gets out o' window o' nights and sails with them."

"He has nought to do with the robberies, they say," added the coxswain; "but I could tell of many a young spark who has gone out with the fair traders for the sport's sake, and because gentle folk don't know what to do with their time."

"And they do say the young chap is kept uncommon tight at home."

Here the sight of a vessel of war coming in changed the topic, but it had given Anne something more to think of. Peregrine had spoken of means arranged for making her his own. Could that smuggling yacht have anything to do with them? He could hardly have reckoned on meeting her alone in the morning, but he might have attempted to find her thus--or failing that, he might have run down the boat. If so, she had a great deliverance to be thankful for, and Charles's timely appearance had been a great blessing. But Peregrine! poor Peregrine! it became doubly terrible that he should have perished on the eve of such a deed. It was cruel to entertain such thoughts of the dead, yet it was equally impossible not to feel comfort in being rid for ever of one who had certainly justified the vague alarm which he had always excited in her. She could not grieve for him now that the first shock was over, but she must suppress all tokens of her extreme anxiety on account of Charles Archfield.

Thus she was landed at Portsmouth, and walked up the street to the Spotted Dog, where Lady Worsley was taking an early noonchine before starting for London, having crossed from the little fishing village of Ryde. Here Anne parted with her uncle, who promised an early letter, though she could hardly restrain a shudder at the thought of the tidings that it might contain.

CHAPTER XV: NEWS FROM FAREHAM

"My soul its secret hath, my life too hath its mystery.
Hopeless the evil is, I have not told its history."

JEAN INGELow.

Lady Worsley was a handsome, commanding old dame, who soon made her charge feel the social gulf between a county magnate and a clergyman's niece. She decidedly thought that Mistress Anne Jacobina held her head too high for her position, and was, moreover, conceited of an unfortunate amount of good looks.

Therefore the good lady did her best to repress these dangerous tendencies by making the girl sit on the back seat with two maids, and uttering long lectures on humility, modesty, and discretion which made the blood of the sea-captain's daughter boil with indignation.

Yet she always carried with her the dread of being pursued and called upon to accuse Charles Archfield of Peregrine's death. It was a perpetual cloud, dispersed, indeed, for a time by the events of the day, but returning at night, when not only was the combat acted over again, but when she fell asleep it was only to be pursued by Peregrine through endless vaulted dens of darkness, or, what was far worse, to be trying to hide a stream of blood that could never be stanchèd.

It was no wonder that she looked pale in the morning, and felt so tired and dejected as to make her sensible that she was cast loose from home and friends when no one troubled her with remarks or inquiries such as she could hardly have answered. However, when, on the evening of the second day's journey, Anne was set down at Sir Theophilus Oglethorpe's house at Westminster, she met with a very different reception.

Lady Oglethorpe, a handsome, warm-hearted Irish woman, met her at once in the hall with outstretched hands, and a kiss on each cheek.

"Come in, my dear, my poor orphan, the daughter of one who was very dear to me! Ah, how you have grown! I could never have thought this was the little Anne I recollect. You shall come up to your chamber at once, and rest you, and make ready for supper, by the time Sir Theophilus comes in from attending the King."

Anne found herself installed in a fresh-smelling wainscotted room, where a glass of wine and some cake was ready for her, and where she made herself ready, feeling exhilarated in spirits as she performed her toilette, putting on her black evening dress, and refreshing the curls of her brown hair. It was a simple dress of deep mourning, but it became her well, and the two or three gentlemen who had come in to supper with Sir Theophilus evidently admired her greatly, and complimented her on having a situation at Court, which was all that Lady Oglethorpe mentioned.

"Child," she said afterwards, when they were in private, "if I had known what you looked like I would have sought a different position for you. But, there, to get one's foot--were it but the toe of one's shoe--in at Court is the great point after all, the rest must come after. I warrant me you are well educated too. Can you speak French?"

"Oh yes, madam, and Italian, and dance and play on the spinnet. I was with two French ladies at Winchester every winter who taught such things."

"Well, well, mayhap we may get you promoted to a sub-governess's place--though your religion is against you. You are not a Catholic--eh?"

"No, your ladyship."

"That's the only road to favour nowadays, though for the name of the thing they may have a Protestant or two. You are the King's godchild too, so he will expect it the more from you. However, we may find a better path. You have not left your heart in the country, eh?"

Anne blushed and denied it.

"You will be mewed up close enough in the nursery," ran on Lady Oglethorpe. "Lady Powys keeps close discipline there, and I expect she will be disconcerted to see how fine a fish I have brought to her net; but we will see--we will see how matters go. But, my dear, have you no coloured clothes? There is no appearing in the Royal household in private mourning. It might daunt the Prince's spirits in his cradle!" and she laughed, though Anne felt much annoyed at thus disregarding her mother, as well as at the heavy expense. However, there was no help for it; the gowns and laces hidden in the bottom of her mails were disinterred, and the former were for the most part condemned, so that she had to submit to a fresh outfit, in which Lady Oglethorpe heartily interested herself, but which drained the purse that the Canon had amply supplied.

These arrangements were not complete when the first letter from home arrived, and was opened with a beating heart, and furtive glances as of one who feared to see the contents, but they were by no means what she expected.

I hope you have arrived safely in London, and that you are not displeased with your first taste of life in a Court. Neither town nor country is exempt from sorrow and death. I was summoned only on the second day after your departure to share in the sorrows at Archfield, where the poor young wife died early on Friday morning, leaving a living infant, a son, who, I hope, may prove a blessing to them, if he is spared, which can scarcely be expected. The poor young man, and indeed all the family, are in the utmost distress, and truly there were circumstances that render the event more than usually deplorable, and for which he blames himself exceedingly, even to despair. It appears that the poor young gentlewoman wished to add some trifle to the numerous commissions with which she was entrusting you on the night of the bonfire, and that she could not be pacified except by her husband undertaking to ride over to give the patterns and the orders to you before your setting forth. You said nothing of having seen him--nor do I see how it was possible that you could have done so, seeing that you only left your chamber just before the breakfast that you never tasted, my poor child. He never returned till long after noon, and what with fretting after him, and disappointment, that happened which Lady Archfield had always apprehended, and the poor fragile young creature worked herself into a state which ended before midnight in the birth of a puny babe, and her own death shortly after. She wanted two months of completing her sixteenth year, and was of so frail a constitution that Dr. Brown had never much hope of her surviving the birth of her child. It was a cruel thing to marry her thus early, ungrown in body or mind, but she had no one to care for her before she was brought hither. The blame, as I tell Sir Philip, and would fain persuade poor Charles, is really with those who bred her up so uncontrolled as to be the victim of her humours; but the

unhappy youth will listen to no consolation. He calls himself a murderer, shuts himself up, and for the most part will see and speak to no one, but if forced by his father's command to unlock his chamber door, returns at once to sit with his head hidden in his arms crossed upon the table, and if father, mother, or sister strive to rouse him and obtain answer from him, he will only murmur forth, "I should only make it worse if I did." It is piteous to see a youth so utterly overcome, and truly I think his condition is a greater distress to our good friends than the loss of the poor young wife. They asked him what name he would have given to his child, but all the answer they could get was, "As you will, only not mine;" and in the enforced absence of my brother of Fareham I baptized him Philip. The funeral will take place to-morrow, and Sir Philip proposes immediately after to take his son to Oxford, and there endeavour to find a tutor of mature age and of prudence, with whom he may either study at New College or be sent on the grand tour. It is the only notion that the poor lad has seemed willing to entertain, as if to get away from his misery, and I cannot but think it well for him. He is not yet twenty, and may, as it were, begin life again the wiser and the better man for his present extreme sorrow. Lady Archfield is greatly wrapped up in the care of the babe, who, I fear, is in danger of being killed by overcare, if by nothing else, though truly all is in the hands of God. I have scarce quitted the afflicted family since I was summoned to them on Friday, since Sir Philip has no one else on whom to depend for comfort or counsel; and if I can obtain the services of Mr. Ellis from Portsmouth for a few Sundays, I shall ride with him to Oxford to assist in the choice of a tutor to go abroad with Mr. Archfield.

One interruption however I had, namely, from Major Oakshott, who came in great perturbation to ask what was the last I had seen of his son Peregrine. It appears that the unfortunate young man never returned home after the bonfire on Portsdown Hill, where his brother Robert lost sight of him, and after waiting as long as he durst, returned home alone. It has become known that after parting with us high words passed between him and Lieutenant Sedley Archfield, insomuch that after the unhappy fashion of these times, blood was demanded, and early in the morning Sedley sent the friend who was to act as second to bear the challenge to young Oakshott. You can conceive the reception that he was likely to receive at Oakwood; but it was then discovered that Peregrine had not been in his bed all night, nor had any one seen or heard of him. Sedley boasts loudly that the youngster has fled the country for fear of him, and truly things have that appearance, although to my mind Peregrine was far from wanting in spirit or courage. But, as he had not received the cartel, he might not have deemed his honour engaged to await it, and I incline to the belief that he is on his way to his uncle in Muscovy, driven thereto by his dread of the marriage with the gentlewoman whom he holds in so much aversion. I have striven to console his father by the assurance that such tidings of him will surely arrive in due time, but the Major is bitterly grieved, and is galled by the accusation of cowardice. "He could not even be true to his own maxims of worldly honour," says the poor gentleman. "So true it is that only by grace we stand fast." The which is true enough, but the poor gentleman unwittingly did his best to make grace unacceptable in his son's eyes. I trust

soon to hear again of you, my dear child. I rejoice that Lady Oglethorpe is so good to you, and I hope that in the palace you will guard first your faith and then your discretion. And so praying always for your welfare, alike spiritual and temporal.--
Your loving uncle, JNO. WOODFORD.

Truly it was well that Anne had secluded herself to read this letter.

So the actual cause for which poor Charles Archfield had entreated silence was at an end. The very evil he had apprehended had come to pass, and she could well understand how, on his return in a horror-stricken, distracted state of mind, the childish petulance of his wife had worried him into loss of temper, so that he hardly knew what he said. And what must not his agony of remorse be? She could scarcely imagine how he had avoided confessing all as a mere relief to his mind, but then she reflected that when he called himself a murderer the words were taken in another sense, and no questions asked, nor would he be willing to add such grief and shame to his parents' present burthen, especially as no suspicion existed.

That Peregrine's fate had not been discovered greatly relieved her. She believed the vault to go down to a considerable depth after a first platform of stone near the opening, and it was generally avoided as the haunt of hobgoblins, fairies, or evil beings, so that no one was likely to be in its immediate neighbourhood after the hay was carried, so that there might have been nothing to attract any one to the near neighbourhood and thus lead to the discovery. If not made by this time, Charles would be far away, and there was nothing to connect him with the deed. No one save herself had even known of his having been near the castle that morning. How strange that the only persons aware of that terrible secret should be so far separated from one another that they could exchange no confidences; and each was compelled to absolute silence. For as long as no one else was suspected, Anne felt her part must be not to betray Charles, though the bare possibility of the accusation of another was agony to her.

She wrote her condolences in due form to Fareham, and in due time was answered by Lucy Archfield. The letter was full of details about the infant, who seemed to absorb her and her mother, and to be as likely to live as any child of those days ever was--and it was in his favour that his grandmother and her old nurse had better notions of management than most of her contemporaries. In spite of all that Lucy said of her brother's overwhelming grief, and the melancholy of thus parting with him, there was a strain of cheerfulness throughout the letter, betraying that the poor young wife of less than a year was no very great loss to the peace and comfort of the family. The letter ended with--

There is a report that Sir Peregrine Oakshott is dead in Muscovy. Nothing has been heard of that unfortunate young man at Oakwood. If he be gone in quest of his uncle, I wonder what will become of him? However, nurse will have it that this being the third seventh year of his life, the fairies have carried off their changeling--you remember how she told us the story of his being changed as an infant, when we were children at Winchester; she believes it as much as ever, and never let little Philip out of her sight before he was baptized. I ask her, if the changeling

be gone, where is the true Peregrine? but she only wags her head in answer.

A day or two later Anne heard from her uncle from Oxford. He was extremely grieved at the condition of his beloved alma mater, with a Roman Catholic Master reigning at University College, a doctor from the Sorbonne and Fellows to match, inflicted by military force on Magdalen, whose lawful children had been ejected with a violence beyond anything that the colleges had suffered even in the time of the Rebellion. If things went on as they were, he pronounced Oxford would be no better than a Popish seminary: and he had the more readily induced his old friend to consent to Charles's desire not to remain there as a student, but to go abroad with Mr. Fellowes, one of the expelled fellows of Magdalen, a clergyman of mature age, but a man of the world, who had already acted as a travelling tutor. Considering that the young widower was not yet twenty, and that all his wife's wealth would be in his hands, also that his cousin Sedley formed a dangerous link with the questionable diversions of the garrison at Portsmouth, both father and friend felt that it was well that he should be out of reach, and have other occupations for the present.

Change of scene had, Dr. Woodford said, brightened the poor youth, and he was showing more interest in passing events, but probably he would never again be the light-hearted boy they used to know.

Anne could well believe it.

CHAPTER XVI: A ROYAL NURSERY

"The duty that I owe unto your Majesty
I seal upon the lips of this sweet babe."

King Richard III.

It was not till the Queen had moved from St. James's, where her son had been born, to take up her abode at Whitehall, that Lady Oglethorpe was considered to be disinfected from her children's whooping-cough, and could conduct Mistress Anne Jacobina Woodford to her new situation.

Anne remembered the place from times past, as she followed the lady up the broad stairs to the state rooms, where the child was daily carried for inspection by the nation to whom, it was assumed, he was so welcome, but who, on the contrary, regarded him with the utmost dislike and suspicion.

Whitehall was, in those days, free to all the world, and though sentries in the Life-guards' uniform with huge grenadier caps were posted here and there, every one walked up and down. Members of Parliament and fine gentlemen in embroidered coats and flowing wigs came to exchange news; country cousins came to stare and wonder, some to admire, some to whisper their disbelief in the Prince's identity; clergy in gown, cassock, and bands came to win what they could in a losing cause; and one or two other clergy, who were looked at askance, whose dress had a foreign air, and whose tonsure

could be detected as they threaded their way with quick, gliding steps to the King's closet.

Lady Oglethorpe, as one to the manner born, made her way through the midst of this throng in the magnificent gallery, and Anne followed her closely, conscious of words of admiration and inquiries who she was. Into the Prince's presence chamber, in fact his day-nursery, they came, and a sweet and gentle-looking lady met them, and embraced Lady Oglethorpe, who made known Mistress Woodford to Lady Strickland, of Sizergh, the second governess, as the fourth rocker who had been appointed.

"You are welcome, Miss Woodford," said the lady, looking at Anne's high, handsome head and well-bred action in courtesying, with a shade of surprise. "You are young, but I trust you are discreet. There is much need thereof."

Following to a kind of alcove, raised by a step or two, Anne found herself before a half-circle of ladies and gentlemen round a chair of state, in front of which stood a nurse, with an infant in her arms, holding him to be caressed and inspected by the lady on the throne. Her beautiful soft dark eyes and hair, and an ivory complexion, with her dignified and graceful bearing, her long, slender throat and exquisite figure, were not so much concealed as enhanced by the simple mob cap and 'night-gown,' as it was then the fashion to call a morning wrapper, which she wore, and Anne's first impression was that no wonder Peregrine raved about her. Poor Peregrine! that very thought came like a stab, as, after courtesying low, she stood at the end of the long room--silent, and observing.

A few gentlemen waited by the opposite door, but not coming far into the apartment, and Lady Oglethorpe was announced by one of them. The space was so great that Anne could not hear the words, and she only saw the gracious smile and greeting as Lady Oglethorpe knelt and kissed the Queen's hand. After a long conversation between the mothers, during which Lady Oglethorpe was accommodated with a cushion, Anne was beckoned forward, and was named to the Queen, who honoured her with an inclination of the head and a few low murmured words.

Then there was an announcement of 'His Majesty,' and Anne, following the general example of standing back with low obeisances, beheld the tall active figure and dark heavy countenance of her Royal godfather, under his great black, heavily-curved wig. He returned Lady Oglethorpe's greeting, and his face lighted up with a pleasant smile that greatly changed the expression as he took his child into his arms for a few moments; but the little one began to cry, whereupon he was carried off, and the King began to consult Lady Oglethorpe upon the water-gruel on which the poor little Prince was being reared, and of which she emphatically disapproved.

Before he left the room, however, Lady Oglethorpe took care to present to him his god-daughter, Mistress Anne Jacobina Woodford, and very low was the girl's obeisance before him, but with far more fright and shyness than before the sweet-faced Queen.

"Oh ay!" he said, "I remember honest Will Woodford. He did good service at Southwold. I wish he had left a son like him. Have you a brother, young mistress?"

"No, please your Majesty, I am an only child."

"More's the pity," he said kindly, and with a smile brightening his heavy features. "'Tis too good a breed to die out. You are Catholic?"

"I am bred in the English Church, so please your Majesty."

His Majesty was evidently less pleased than before, but he only said, "Ha! and my godchild! We must amend that," and waved her aside.

The royal interview over, the newcomer was presented to the State Governess, the Countess of Powys, a fair and gracious matron, who was, however, almost as far removed from her as the Queen. Then she was called on to take a solemn oath before the Master of the Household, of dutiful loyalty to the Prince.

Mrs. Labadie was head nurse as well as being wife to the King's French valet. She was a kindly, portly Englishwoman, who seemed wrapped up in her charge, and she greeted her new subordinate in a friendly way, which, however, seemed strange in one who at home would have been of an inferior degree, expressed hopes of her steadiness and discretion, and called to Miss Dunord to show Miss Woodford her chamber. The abbreviation Miss sounded familiar and unsuitable, but it had just come into use for younger spinsters, though officially they were still termed Mistress.

Mistress or Miss Dunord was sallow and gray-eyed, somewhat older than Anne, and looking thoroughly French, though her English was perfect. She was entirely dressed in blue and white, and had a rosary and cross at her girdle. "This way," she said, tripping up a steep wooden stair. "We sleep above. 'Tis a huge, awkward place. Her Majesty calls it the biggest and most uncomfortable palace she ever was in."

Opening a heavy door, she showed a room of considerable size, hung with faded frayed tapestry, and containing two huge bedsteads, with four heavy posts, and canopies of wood, as near boxes as could well be. Privacy was a luxury not ordinarily coveted, and the arrangement did not surprise Anne, though she could have wished that on that summer day curtains and tapestry had been less fusty. Two young women were busy over a dress spread on one of the beds, and with French ease and grace the guide said, "Here is our new colleague, Miss Jacobina Woodford. Let me present Miss Hester Bridgeman and Miss Jane Humphreys."

"Miss Woodford is welcome," said Miss Bridgeman, a keen, brown, lively, somewhat anxious-looking person, courtesying and holding out her hand, and her example was followed by Jane Humphreys, a stout, rosy, commonplace girl.

"Oh! I am glad," this last cried. "Now I shall have a bedfellow."

This Anne was the less sorry for, as she saw that the bed of the other two was furnished with a holy water stoup and a little shrine with a waxen Madonna. There was only one looking-glass among the four, and not much apparatus either for washing or the toilet, but

Miss Bridgeman believed that they would soon go to Richmond, where things would be more comfortable. Then she turned to consult Miss Dunord on her endeavour to improve the trimmings of a dress of Miss Humphreys.

"Yes, I know you are always in Our Lady's colours, Pauline, but you have a pretty taste, and can convince Jane that rose colour and scarlet cannot go together."

"My father chose the ribbons," said Jane, as if that were unanswerable.

"City taste," said Miss Bridgeman.

"They are pretty, very pretty with anything else," observed Pauline, with more tact. "See, now, with your white embroidered petticoat and the gray train they are ravishing--and the scarlet coat will enliven the black."

There was further a little murmur about what a Mr. Hopkins admired, but it was lost in the arrival of Miss Woodford's mails.

They clustered round, as eager as a set of schoolgirls, over Anne's dresses. Happily even the extreme of fashion had not then become ungraceful.

"Her Majesty will not have the loose drapery that folks used to wear," said Hester Bridgeman.

"No," said Pauline; "it was all very well for those who could dispose it with an artless negligence, but for some I could name, it was as though they had tumbled it on with a hay-fork and had their hair tousled by being tickled in the hay."

"Now we have the tight bodice with plenty of muslin and lace, the gown open below to show the petticoat," said Hester; "and to my mind it is more decorous."

"Decorum was not the vogue then," laughed Pauline, "perhaps it will be now. Oh, what lovely lace! real Flanders, on my word! Where did you get it, Miss Woodford?"

"It was my mother's."

"And this? Why, 'tis old French point, you should hang it to your sleeves."

"My Lady Archfield gave it to me in case I should need it."

"Ah! I see you have good friends and are a person of some condition," put in Hester Bridgeman. "I shall be happy to consort with you. Let us--"

Anne courtesied, and at the moment a bell was heard, Pauline at once crossed herself and fell on her knees before the small shrine with a figure of the Blessed Virgin, and Hester, breaking off her words, followed her example; but Jane Humphreys stood twisting the corner of her apron.

In a very short time, almost before Anne had recovered from her bewilderment, the other two were up and chattering again.

"You are not a Catholic?" demanded Miss Bridgeman.

"I was bred in the Church," said Anne.

"And you the King's godchild!" exclaimed Pauline. "But we shall soon amend that and make a convert of you like Miss Bridgeman there."

Anne shook her head, but was glad to ask, "And what means the bell that is ringing now?"

"That is the supper bell. It rings just after the Angelus," said Hester. "No, it is not ours. The great folks, Lady Powys, Lady Strickland, and the rest sup first. We have the dishes after them, with Nurses Labadie and Royer and the rest--no bad ones either. They are allowed five dishes and two bottles of wine apiece, and they always leave plenty for us, and it is served hot too."

The preparations for going down to the second table now absorbed the party.

As Hester said, the fare at this second table was not to be despised. It was a formal meal shared with the two nurses and the two pages of the backstairs. Not the lads usually associated with the term, but men of mature age, and of gentle, though not noble, birth and breeding; and there were likewise the attendants of the King and Queen of the same grade, such as Mr. Labadie, the King's valet, some English, but besides these, Dusian, the Queen's French page, and Signer and Signora Turini, who had come with her from Modena, Pere Giverlai, her confessor, and another priest. Pere Giverlai said grace, and the conversation went on briskly between the elders, the younger ones being supposed to hold their peace.

Their dishes went in reversion to the inferior class of servants, laundress, sempstress, chambermaids, and the like, who had much more liberty than their betters, and not such a lack of occupation as Anne soon perceived that she should suffer from.

There was, however, a great muster of all the Prince's establishment, who stood round, as many as could, with little garments in their hands, while he was solemnly undressed and laid in his richly inlaid and carved cradle--over which Pere Giverlai pronounced a Latin benediction.

The nursery establishment was then released, except one of the nurses, who was to sleep or wake on a couch by his side, and one of the rockers. These damsels had, two at a time, to divide the night between them, one being always at hand to keep the food warm, touch the rocker at need with her foot, or call up the nurse on duty if the child awoke, but not presume herself to handle his little Royal Highness.

It was the night when Mistresses Dunord and Bridgeman were due, and Anne followed Jane Humphreys to her room, asking a little about the duties of the morrow.

"We must be dressed before seven," said the girl. "One of us will be left on duty while the others go to Mass. I am glad you are a Protestant, Miss Woodford, for the Catholics put everything on me that they can."

"We must do our best to help and strengthen each other," said Anne.

"It is very hard," said Jane; "and the priests are always at me! I would change as Hester Bridgeman has done, but that I know it would break my grand-dame's heart. My father might not care so much, if I got advancement, but I believe it would kill my grandmother."

"Advancement! oh, but faith comes first," exclaimed Anne, recalling the warning.

"Hester says one religion is as good as another to get to Heaven by," murmured Jane.

"Not if we deny our own for the world's sake," said Anne. "Is the chapel here a Popish one?"

"No; the Queen has an Oratory, but the Popish chapel is at St. James's--across the Park. The Protestant one is here at Whitehall, and there are daily prayers at nine o'clock, and on Sunday music with three fiddlers, and my grandmother says it might almost as well be Popish at once."

"Did your grandmother bring you up?"

"Yes. My mother died when I was seven years old, and my grandmother bred us all up. You should hear her talk of the good old times before the Kings came back and there were no Bishops and no book prayers--but my father says we must swim with the stream, or he would not have got any custom at his coffee-house."

"Is that his calling?"

"Ay! No one has a better set of guests than in the Golden Lamb. The place is full. The great Dr. Hammond sees his patients there, and it is all one buzz of the wits. It was because of that that my Lord Sunderland made interest, and got me here. How did you come?"

Anne briefly explained, and Jane broke out--

"Then you will be my friend, and we will tell each other all our secrets. You are a Protestant too. You will be mine, and not Bridgeman's or Dunord's--I hate them."

In point of fact Anne did not feel much attracted by the proffer of friendship, and she certainly did not intend to tell Jane Humphreys all her secrets, nor to vow enmity to the other colleagues, but she gravely answered that she trusted they would be friends and help to maintain one another's faith. She was relieved that Miss Bridgeman here came in to take her first turn of rest till she was to be called up at one o'clock.

As Jane Humphreys had predicted, Mrs. Royer and Anne alone were left in charge of the nursling while every one went to morning Mass. Then followed breakfast and the levee of his Royal Highness, lasting

as on the previous day till dinner-time; and the afternoon was as before, except that the day was fine enough for the child to be carried out with all his attendants behind him to take the air in the private gardens.

If this was to be the whole course of life at the palace, Anne began to feel that she had made a great mistake. She was by no means attracted by her companions, though Miss Bridgeman decided that she must know persons of condition, and made overtures of friendship, to be sealed by calling one another Oriana and Portia. She did not approve of such common names as Princess Anne and Lady Churchill used--Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman! They must have something better than what was used by the Cockpit folks, and she was sure that her dear Portia would soon be of the only true faith.

CHAPTER XVII: MACHINATIONS

"Baby born to woe."

F. T. PALGRAVE.

When Anne Woodford began to wake from the constant thought of the grief and horror she had left at Portchester, and to feel more alive to her surroundings and less as if they were a kind of dream, in which she only mechanically took her part, one thing impressed itself on her gradually, and that was disappointment. If the previous shock had not blunted all her hopes and aspirations, perhaps she would have felt it sooner and more keenly; but she could not help realising that she had put herself into an inferior position whence there did not seem to be the promotion she had once anticipated. Her companion rockers were of an inferior grade to herself. Jane Humphreys was a harmless but silly girl, not much wiser, though less spoiled, than poor little Madam, and full of Cockney vulgarities. Education was unfashionable just then, and though Hester Bridgeman was better born and bred, being the daughter of an attorney in the city, she was not much better instructed, and had no pursuits except that of her own advantage. Pauline Dunord was by far the best of the three, but she seemed to live a life apart, taking very little interest in her companions or anything around her except her devotions and the bringing them over to her Church. The nursery was quite a separate establishment; there was no mingling with the guests of royalty, who were only seen in excited peeps from the window, or when solemnly introduced to the presence chamber to pay their respects to the Prince. As to books, the only secular one that Anne saw while at Whitehall was an odd volume of Parthenissa. The late King's summary of the Roman controversy was to be had in plenty, and nothing was more evident than that the only road to favour or promotion was in being thereby convinced.

"Don't throw it down as if it were a hot chestnut," said her Oriana.

"That's what they all do at first, but they come to it at last."

Anne made no answer, but a pang smote her as she thought of her uncle's warnings. Yet surely she might hope for other modes of prospering, she who was certainly by far the best looking and best

educated of all the four, not that this served her much in her present company, and those of higher rank did not notice her at all. Princess Anne would surely recollect her, and then she might be safe in a Protestant household, where her uncle would be happy about her.

The Princess had been at Bath when first she arrived, but at the end of a week preparations were made at the Cockpit, a sort of appendage to Whitehall, where the Prince and Princess of Denmark lived, and in due time there was a visit to the nursery. Standing in full ceremony behind Lady Powys, Anne saw the plump face and form she recollected in the florid bloom of a young matron, not without a certain royal dignity in the pose of the head, though in grace and beauty far surpassed by the tall, elegant figure and face of Lady Churchill, whose bright blue eyes seemed to be taking in everything everywhere. Anne's heart began to beat high at the sight of a once familiar face, and with hopes of a really kind word from one who as an elder girl had made much of the pretty little plaything. The Princess Anne's countenance was, however, less good-natured than usual; her mouth was made up to a sullen expression, and when her brother was shown to her she did not hold out her arms to him nor vouchsafe a kiss.

The Queen looked at her wistfully, asking--

"Is he not like the King?"

"Humph!" returned Princess Anne, "I see no likeness to any living soul of our family."

"Nay, but see his little nails," said the Queen, spreading the tiny hand over her finger. "See how like your father's they are framed! My treasure, you can clasp me!"

"My brother, Edgar! He was the beauty," said the Princess. "_He_ was exactly like my father; but there's no judging of anything so puny as this!"

"He was very suffering last week, the poor little angel," said the mother sadly; "but they say this water-gruel is very nourishing, and not so heavy as milk."

"It does not look as if it agreed with him," said the Princess. "Poor little mammet! Did I hear that you had the little Woodford here? Is that you, girl?"

Anne courtesied herself forward.

"Ay, I remember you. I never forget a face, and you have grown up fair enough. Where's your mother?"

"I lost her last February, so please your Royal Highness."

"Oh! She was a good woman. Why did she not send you to me? Well, well! Come to my toilette to-morrow."

So Princess Anne swept away in her rich blue brocade. Her behest was obeyed, of course, though it was evidently displeasing to the nursery authorities, and Lady Strickland gave a warning to be discreet and to avoid gossip with the Cockpit folks.

Anne could not but be excited. Perhaps the Princess would ask for her, and take her into the number of her own attendants, where she would no longer be in a Romish household, and would certainly be in a higher position. Why, she remembered that very Lady Churchill as Sarah Jennings in no better a position than she could justly aspire to. Her coming to Court would thus be truly justified.

The Princess sat in a silken wrapper, called a night-gown, in her chamber, which had a richly-curtained bed in the alcove, and a toilet-table with a splendid Venetian mirror, and a good deal of silver sparkling on it, while a strange mixture of perfumes came from the various boxes and bottles. Ladies and tirewomen stood in attendance; a little black boy in a turban and gold-embroidered dress held a salver with her chocolate cup; a cockatoo soliloquised in low whispers in the window; a monkey was chained to a pole at a safe distance from him; a French friseur was manipulating the Princess's profuse brown hair with his tongs; and a needy-looking, pale thin man, in a semi-clerical suit, was half-reading, half-declaming a poem, in which 'Fair Anna' seemed mixed up with Juno, Ceres, and other classical folk, but to which she was evidently paying very little attention.

"Ah! there you are, little one. Thank you, Master--what's name; that is enough. 'Tis a fine poem, but I never can remember which is which of all your gods and goddesses. Oh yes, I accept the dedication. Give him a couple of guineas, Ellis; it will serve him for board and lodging for a fortnight, poor wretch!" Then, after giving a smooth, well-shaped white hand to be kissed, and inviting her visitor to a cushion at her feet, she began a long series of questions, kindly ones at first, though of the minute gossiping kind, and extending to the Archfields, for poor young Madam had been of the rank about which royalty knew everything in those days. The inquiries were extremely minute, and the comments what from any one else, Anne would have thought vulgar, especially in the presence of the hairdresser, but her namesake observed her blush and hesitation, and said, "Oh, never mind a creature like that. He is French, besides, and does not understand a word we say."

Anne, looking over the Princess's head, feared that she saw a twinkle in the man's eye, and could only look down and try to ignore him through the catechism that ensued, on when she came to Whitehall, on the Prince of Wales's health, the management of him, and all the circumstances connected with his birth.

Very glad was Anne that she knew nothing, and had not picked up any information as to what had happened before she came to the palace. As to the present, Lady Strickland's warning and her own sense of honour kept her reticent to a degree that evidently vexed the Princess, for she dropped her caressing manner, and sent her away with a not very kind, "You may go now; you will be turning Papist next, and what would your poor mother say?"

And as Anne departed in backward fashion she heard Lady Churchill say, "You will make nothing of her. She is sharper than she affects, and a proud minx! I see it in her carriage."

The visit had only dashed a few hopes and done her harm with her immediate surroundings, who always disliked and distrusted

intercourse with the other establishment.

However, in another day the nursery was moved to Richmond. This was a welcome move to Anne, who had spent her early childhood near enough to be sometimes taken thither, and to know the Park well, so that there was a home feeling in the sight of the outline of the trees and the scenery of the neighbourhood. The Queen intended going to Bath, so that the establishment was only that of the Prince, and the life was much quieter on the whole; but there was no gratifying any yearning for country walks, for it was not safe nor perhaps decorous for one young woman to be out alone in a park open to the public and haunted by soldiers from Hounslow--nor could either of her fellow-rockers understand her preference for a secluded path through the woods. Miss Dunord never went out at all, except on duty, when the Prince was carried along the walks in the garden, and the other two infinitely preferred the open spaces, where tables were set under the horse-chestnut trees for parties who boated down from London to eat curds and whey, sometimes bringing a fiddler so as to dance under the trees.

Jane Humphreys especially was always looking out for acquaintances, and once, with a cry of joy, a stout, homely-looking young woman started up, exclaiming, "Sister Jane!" and flew into her arms. Upon which Miss Woodford was introduced to 'My sister Coles' and her husband, and had to sit down under a tree and share the festivities, while there was an overflow of inquiries and intelligence, domestic and otherwise. Certainly these were persons whom she would not have treated as equals at home.

Besides, it was all very well to hear of the good old grandmother's rheumatics, and of little Tommy's teething, and even to see Jane hang her head and be teased about remembering Mr. Hopkins; nor was it wonderful to hear lamentations over the extreme dulness of the life where one never saw a creature to speak to who was not as old as the hills; but when it came to inquiries as minute as the Princess's about the Prince of Wales, Anne thought the full details lavishly poured out scarcely consistent with loyalty to their oaths of service and Lady Strickland's warning, and she told Jane so.

She was answered, "Oh la! what harm can it do? You are such a proud peat! Grand-dame and sister like to know all about His Royal Highness."

This was true; but Anne was far more uncomfortable two or three days later. The Prince was ailing, so much so that Lady Powys had sent an express for the Queen, who had not yet started for Bath, when Anne and Jane, being relieved from duty by the other pair, went out for a stroll.

"Oh la!" presently exclaimed Jane, "if that is not Colonel Sands, the Princess's equerry. I do declare he is coming to speak to us, though he is one of the Cockpit folks."

He was a very fine gentleman indeed, all scarlet and gold, and no wonder Jane was flattered and startled, so that she jerked her fan violently up and down as he accosted her with a wave of his cocked hat, saying that he was rejoiced to meet these two fair ladies, having been sent by the Princess of Denmark to inquire for the health of the Prince. She was very anxious to know more than could

be learnt by formal inquiry, he said, and he was happy to have met the young gentlewomen who could gratify him.

The term 'gentlewoman' highly flattered Miss Humphreys, who blushed and bridled, and exclaimed, "Oh la, sir!" but Anne thought it needful to say gravely--

"We are in trust, sir, and have no right to speak of what passes within the royal household."

"Madam, I admire your discretion, but to the--(a-hem)--sister of the--(a-hem)--Prince of Wales it is surely uncalled for."

"Miss Woodford is so precise," said Jane Humphreys, with a giggle; "I do not know what harm can come of saying that His Royal Highness peaks and pines just as he did before."

"He is none the better for country air then?"

"Oh no? except that he cries louder. Such a time as we had last night! Mrs. Royer never slept a wink all the time I was there, but walked about with him all night. You had the best of it, Miss Woodford."

"He slept while I was there," said Anne briefly, not thinking it needful to state that the tired nurse had handed the child over to her, and that he had fallen asleep in her arms. She tried to put an end to the conversation by going indoors, but she was vexed to find that, instead of following her closely, Miss Humphreys was still lingering with the equerry.

Anne found the household in commotion. Pauline met her, weeping bitterly, and saying the Prince had had a fit, and all hope was over, and in the rockers' room, she found Hester Bridgeman exclaiming that her occupation was gone. Water-gruel, she had no doubt, had been the death of the Prince. The Queen was come, and wellnigh distracted. She had sent out in quest of a wet-nurse, but it was too late; he was going the way of all Her Majesty's children.

Going down again together the two girls presently had to stand aside as the poor Queen, seeing and hearing nothing, came towards her own room with her handkerchief over her face. They pressed each other's hands awe-stricken, and went on to the nursery. There Mrs. Labadie was kneeling over the cradle, her hood hanging over her face, crying bitterly over the poor little child, who had a blue look about his face, and seemed at the last gasp, his features contorted by a convulsion.

At that moment Jane Humphreys was seen gently opening the door and letting in Colonel Sands, who moved as quietly as possible, to give a furtive look at the dying child. His researches were cut short, however. Lady Strickland, usually the gentlest of women, darted out and demanded what he was doing in her nursery.

He attempted to stammer some excuse about Princess Anne, but Lady Strickland only answered by standing pointing to the door and he was forced to retreat in a very undignified fashion.

"Who brought him?" she demanded, when the door was shut. "Those

Cockpit folk are not to come prying here, hap what may!"

Miss Humphreys had sped away for fear of questions being asked, and attention was diverted by Mrs. Royer arriving with a stout, healthy-looking young woman in a thick home-spun cloth petticoat, no stockings, and old shoes, but with a clean white cap on her head--a tilemaker's wife who had been captured in the village.

No sooner was the suffering, half-starved child delivered over to her than he became serene and contented. The water-gruel regime was over, and he began to thrive from that time. Even when later in the afternoon the King himself brought in Colonel Sands, whom in the joy of his heart he had asked to dine with him, the babe lay tranquilly on the cradle, waving his little hands and looking happy.

The intrusion seemed to have been forgotten, but that afternoon Anne, who had been sent on a message to one of the Queen's ladies, more than suspected that she saw Jane in a deep recess of a window in confabulation with the Colonel. And when they were alone at bedtime the girl said--

"Is it not droll? The Colonel cannot believe that 'tis the same child. He has been joking and teasing me to declare that we have a dead Prince hidden somewhere, and that the King showed him the brick-bat woman's child."

"How can you prattle in that mischievous way--after what Lady Strickland said, too? You do not know what harm you may do!"

"Oh lack, it was all a jest!"

"I am not so sure that it was."

"But you will not tell of me, dear friend, you will not. I never saw Lady Strickland like that; I did not know she could be in such a rage."

"No wonder, when a fellow like that came peeping and prying like a raven to see whether the poor babe was still breathing," cried Anne indignantly. "How could you bring him in?"

"Fellow indeed! Why he is a colonel in the Life-guards, and the Princess's equerry; and who has a right to know about the child if not his own sister--or half-sister?"

"She is not a very loving sister," replied Anne. "You know well, Jane, how many would not be sorry to make out that it is as that man would fain have you say."

"Well, I told him it was no such thing, and laughed the very notion to scorn."

"It were better not to talk with him at all."

"But you will not speak of it. If I were turned away my father would beat me. Nay, I know not what he might not do to me. You will not tell, dear darling Portia, and I will love you for ever."

"I have no call to tell," said Anne coldly, but she was disgusted

and weary, and moreover not at all sure that she, as the other Protestant rocker, and having been in the Park on that same day, was not credited with some of the mischievous gossip that had passed.

"There, Portia, that is what you get by walking with that stupid Humphreys," said Oriana. "She knows no better than to blab to any one who will be at the trouble to seem sweet upon her, though she may get nothing by it."

"Would it be better if she did?" asked Anne.

"Oh well, we must all look out for ourselves, and I am sure there is no knowing what may come next. But I hear we are to move to Windsor as soon as the child is strong enough, so as to be farther out of reach of the Cockpit tongues."

This proved to be true, but the Prince and his suite were not lodged in the Castle itself, a house in the cloisters being thought more suitable, and here the Queen visited her child daily, for since that last alarm she could not bear to be long absent from him. Such emissaries as Colonel Sands did not again appear, but after that precedent Lady Strickland had become much more unwilling to allow any of those under her authority to go out into any public place, and the rockers seldom got any exercise except as swelling the Prince's train when he was carried out to take the air.

Anne looked with longing eyes at the Park, but a ramble there was a forbidden pleasure. She could not always even obtain leave to attend St. George's Chapel; the wish was treated as a sort of weakness, or folly, and she was always the person selected to stay at home when any religious ceremony called away the rest of the establishment.

As the King's god-daughter it was impressed on her that she ought to conform to his Church, and one of the many priests about the Court was appointed to instruct her. In the dearth of all intellectual intercourse, and the absolute deficiency of books, she could not but become deeply interested in the arguments. Her uncle had forearmed her with instruction, and she wrote to him on any difficulty which arose, and this became the chief occupation of her mind, distracting her thoughts from the one great cloud that hung over her memory. Indeed one of the foremost bulwarks her feelings erected to fortify her conscience against the temptations around, was the knowledge that she would have, though of course under seal of confession, to relate that terrible story to a priest.

Hester Bridgeman could not imagine how her Portia could endure to hear the old English Prayer-book droned out. For her part, she liked one thing or the other, either a rousing Nonconformist sermon in a meeting-house or a splendid Mass.

"But, after all," as Anne overheard her observing to Miss Dunord, "it may be all the better for us. What with her breeding and her foreign tongues, she would be sure to be set over our heads as under-governess, or the like, if she were not such an obstinate heretic, and keeping that stupid Humphreys so. We could have converted her long ago, if it were not for that Woodford and for her City grand-dame! Portia is the King's godchild, too, so it is just as well that she does not see what is for her own advantage."

"I do not care for promotion. I only want to save my own soul and hers," said Pauline. "I wish she would come over to the true Church, for I could love her."

And certainly Pauline Dunord's gentle devotional example, and her perfect rest and peace in the practice of her religion, were strong influences with Anne. She was waiting till circumstances should make it possible to her to enter a convent, and in the meantime she lived a strictly devout life, abstracted as far as duty and kindness permitted from the little cabals and gossipry around.

Anne could not help feeling that the girl was as nearly a saint as any one she had ever seen--far beyond herself in goodness. Moreover, the Queen inspired strong affection. Mary Beatrice was not only a very beautiful person, full of the grace and dignity of the House of Este, but she was deeply religious, good and gentle, kindly and gracious to all who approached her, and devoted to her husband and child. A word or look from her was always a delight, and Anne, by her knowledge of Italian, was able sometimes to obtain a smiling word or remark.

The little Prince, after those first miserable weeks of his life, had begun to thrive, and by and by manifested a decided preference not only for his beautiful mother, but for the fresh face, bright smile, and shining brown eyes of Miss Woodford. She could almost always, with nods and becks, avert a passion of roaring, which sometimes went beyond the powers of even his foster-mother, the tiler's wife. The Queen watched with delight when he laughed and flourished his arms in response, and the King was summoned to see the performance, which he requited by taking out a fat gold watch set with pearls, and presenting it to Anne, as his grave gloomy face lighted up with a smile.

"Are you yet one of us?" he asked, as she received his gift on her knee.

"No, sir, I cannot--"

"That must be amended. You have read his late Majesty's paper?"

"I have, sir."

"And seen Father Giverlai?"

"Yes, please your Majesty."

"And still you are not convinced. That must not be. I would gladly consider and promote you, but I can only have true Catholics around my son. I shall desire Father Crump to see you."

CHAPTER XVIII: HALLOWMAS EVE

"This more strange
Than such a murder is."

Macbeth.

"Bambino mio, bambino mio," wailed Mary Beatrice, as she pressed her child to her bosom, and murmured to him in her native tongue. "And did they say he was not his mother's son, his poor mother, whose dearest treasure he is! Oime, crudeli, crudelissimi! Even his sisters hate him and will not own him, the little jewel of his mother's heart!"

Anne, waiting in the window, was grieved to have overheard the words which the poor Queen had poured out, evidently thinking no one near could understand her.

That evening there were orders to prepare for a journey to Whitehall the next morning.

"And," said Hester Bridgeman, "I can tell you why, in all confidence, but I have it from a sure hand. The Prince of Orange is collecting a fleet and army to come and inquire into certain matters, especially into the birth of a certain young gentleman we wot of."

"How can he have the insolence?" cried Anne.

"'Tis no great wonder, considering the vipers in the Cockpit," said Hester.

"But what will they do to us?" asked Jane Humphreys in terror.

"Nothing to you, my dear, nor to Portia; you are good Protestants," said Hester with a sneer.

"Mrs. Royer told me it was for the christening," said Jane, "and then we shall all have new suits. I am glad we are going back to town. It cannot be so mortal dull as 'tis here, with all the leaves falling--enough to give one the vapours."

There were auguries on either hand in the palace that if the Prince came it would be only another Monmouth affair, and this made Anne shrink, for she had partaken of the grief and indignation of Winchester at the cruel execution of Lady Lisle, and had heard rumours enough of the progress of the Assize to make her start in horror when called to watch the red-faced Lord Chancellor Jeffreys getting out of his coach.

It really seemed for the time as if the royal household were confident in this impression, though as soon as they were again settled in Whitehall there was a very close examination of the witnesses of the Prince's birth, and a report printed of their evidence, enough it might be thought to satisfy any one; but Jane Humphreys, who went to spend a day at the Golden Lamb, her father's warehouse, reported that people only laughed at it.

Anne's spirit burned at the injustice, and warmed the more towards the Queen and little Prince, whose pretty responses to her caresses could not but win her love. Moreover, Pauline's example continued to attract her, and Father Crump was a better controversialist, or perhaps a better judge of character, than Pere Giverlai, and took her on sides where she was more vulnerable, so as to make her begin

to feel unsettled, and wonder whether she were not making a vain sacrifice, and holding out after all against the better way.

The sense of the possible gain, and disgust at the shallow conversions of some around her, helped to keep her back. She could not help observing that while Pauline persuaded, Hester had ceased to persuade, and seemed rather willing to hinder her. Just before the State christening or rather admission into the Church, Lady Powys, in the name of the King and Queen, offered her the post of sub-governess, which really would mean for the present chief playfellow to the little Prince, and would place her on an entirely different platform of society from the comparatively menial one she occupied, but of course on the condition of conformity to Rome.

To be above the familiarity of Jane and Hester was no small temptation, but still she hesitated.

"Madam, I thank you, I thank their Majesties," she said, "but I cannot do it thus."

"I see what you mean, Miss Woodford," said Lady Powys, who was a truly noble woman. "Your motives must be above suspicion even to yourself. I respect you, and would not have made you the offer except by express command, but I still trust that when your disinterestedness is above suspicion you will still join us."

It was sore mortification when Hester Bridgeman was preferred to the office, for which she was far less fitted, being no favourite with the babe, and being essentially vulgar in tastes and habits, and knowing no language save her own, and that ungrammatically and with an accent which no one could wish the Prince to acquire. Yet there she was, promoted to the higher grade of the establishment and at the christening, standing in the front ranks, while Miss Woodford was left far in the rear among the servants.

A report of the Dutch fleet having been destroyed by a storm had restored the spirits of the Court; and in the nursery very little was known of the feelings of the kingdom at large. Dr. Woodford did not venture on writing freely to his niece, lest he should compromise her, and she only vaguely detected that he was uneasy.

So came All Saints' Day Eve, when there was to be a special service late in the evening at the Romanised Chapel Royal at St. James's, with a sermon by a distinguished Dominican, to which all the elder and graver members of the household were eager to go. And there was another very different attraction at the Cockpit, where good-natured Princess Anne had given permission for a supper, to be followed by burning of nuts and all the divinations proper to Halloween Eve, to which were invited all the subordinates of the Whitehall establishment who could be spared.

Pauline Dunord was as eager for the sermon as Jane Humphreys was for the supper, and Hester Bridgeman was in an odd mood of uncertainty, evidently longing after the sports, but not daring to show that she did so, and trying to show great desire to hear the holy man preach, together with a polite profession of self-denial in giving up her place in case there should not be room for all. However, as it appeared that even the two chief nurses meant to combine sermon and the latter end of the supper, she was at ease. The foster-mother

and one of the Protestant rockers were supposed to be enough to watch over the Prince, but the former, who had been much petted and spoiled since she had been at the palace, and was a young creature, untrained and wilful, cried so much at the idea of missing the merrymaking, that as it was reckoned important to keep her in good humour and good spirits, Mrs. Labadie decided on winking at her absence from the nursery, since Miss Woodford was quite competent to the charge for the short time that both the church-goers and the supper-goers would all be absent together.

"But are you not afraid to stay alone?" asked Mrs. Labadie, with a little compunction.

"What is there to be afraid of?" asked Anne. "There are the sentinels at the foot of the stairs, and what should reach us here?"

"I would not be alone here," said more than one voice. "Nor I!"--
"Nor I!"

"And on this night of all others!" said Hester.

"But why?"

"They say he walks!" whispered Jane in a voice of awe.

"Who walks?"

"The old King?" asked Hester.

"No; the last King," said Jane.

"No, no: it was Oliver Cromwell--old Noll himself!" put in another voice.

"I tell you, no such thing," said Jane. "It was the last King. I heard it from them that saw it, at least the lady's cousin. 'Twas in the long gallery, in a suit of plain black velvet, with white muslin ruffles and cravat quilled very neat. Why do you laugh, Miss Woodford?"

This was too much for Anne, who managed to say, "Who was his laundress?"

"I tell you I heard it from them that told no lies. The gentleman could swear to it. He took a candle to him, and there was nought but the wainscot behind. Think of that."

"And that we should be living here!" said another voice. "I never venture about the big draughty place alone at night," said the laundress.

"No! nor I would not for twenty princes," added the sempstress.

"Nay, I have heard steps," said Mrs. Royer, "and wailing--wailing. No wonder after all that has happened here. Oh yes, steps as of the guard being turned out!"

"That is like our Squire's manor-house, where--"

Every one contributed a story, and only the announcement of Her Majesty's approach put an end to these reminiscences.

Anne held to her purpose. She had looked forward to this time of solitude, for she wanted leisure to consider the situation, and fairly to revolve the pleas by which Father Crump had shaken her, more in feeling than in her reason, and made her question whether her allegiance to her mother and uncle, and her disgust at interested conversions, were not making her turn aside from what might be the only true Church, the Mother of Saints, and therewith perversely give up earthly advancement. But, oh! how to write to her uncle.

The very intention made her imagination and memory too powerful for the consideration of controversy. She went back first to a merry Hallowmas Eve long ago, among the Archfield party and other Winchester friends, and how the nuts had bounced in a manner which made the young ones shout in ecstasy of glee, but seemed to displease some of the elders, and had afterwards been the occasion of her being told that it was all folly, and therewith informed of Charles Archfield's contract to poor little Alice Fitzhubert. Then came other scenes. All the various ghostly tales she had heard, and as she sat with her knitting in the shaded room with no sound but the soft breathing of her little charge in his cradle, no light save from a shaded lamp and the fire on the hearth, strange thoughts and dreams floated over her; she started at mysterious cracks in the wainscoting from time to time, and beheld in the dark corners of the great room forms that seemed grotesque and phantom-like till she went up to them and resolved them into familiar bits of furniture or gowns and caps of Mrs. Labadie. She repeated half aloud numerous Psalms and bits of poetry, but in the midst would come some disturbing noise, a step or a shout from the street, though the chamber being at the back of the house looking into the Park few of such sounds penetrated thither. She began to think of King Charles's last walk from St. James's to Whitehall, and of the fatal window of the Banqueting-hall which had been pointed out to her, and then her thoughts flew back again to that vault in the castle yard, and she saw only too vividly in memory that open vault, veiled partly by nettles and mulleins, which was the unblest, unknown grave of the old playfellow who had so loved her mother and herself. Perhaps she had hitherto more dwelt on and pitied the living than the dead, as one whom fears and prayers still concerned, but now as she thought of the lively sprite-like being who had professed such affection for her, and for whom her mother had felt so much, and recollected him so soon and suddenly cut down and consigned to that dreary darkness, the strange yearning spirit dismissed to the unknown world, instead of her old terror and repulsion, a great tenderness and compunction came over her, and she longed to join those who would in two days more be keeping All Souls' Day in intercessions for their departed, so as to atone for her past dislike; and there was that sort of feeling about her which can only be described by the word 'eerie.' To relieve it Anne walked to the window and undid a small wicket in the shutter, so as to look out into the quiet moonlight park where the trees cast their long shadows on the silvery grass, and there was a great calm that seemed to reach her heart and spirits.

Suddenly, across the sward towards the palace there came the slight, impish, almost one-sided figure, with the peculiar walk, swift

though suggestive of a limp, the elfish set of the plume, the foreign adjustment of short cloak. Anne gazed with wide-stretched eyes and beating heart, trying to rally her senses and believe it fancy, when the figure crossed into a broad streak of light cast by the lamp over the door, the face was upturned for a moment. It was deadly pale, and the features were beyond all doubt Peregrine Oakshott's.

She sprang back from the window, dropped on her knees, with her face hidden in her hands, and was hardly conscious till sounds of the others returning made her rally her powers so as to prevent all inquiries or surmises. It was Mrs. Labadie and Pauline Dunord, the former to see that all was well with the Prince before repairing to the Cockpit.

"How pale you are!" she exclaimed. "Have you seen anything?"

"I--It may be nothing. He is dead!" stammered Anne.

"Oh then, 'tis naught but a maid's fancies," said the nurse good-humouredly. "Miss Dunord is in no mind for the sports, so she will stay with His Highness, and you had best come with me and drive the cobwebs out of your brain."

"Indeed, I thank you, ma'am, but I could not," said Anne.

"You had best, I tell you, shake these megrims out of your brain," said Mrs. Labadie; but she was in too great haste not to lose her share of the amusements to argue the point, and the two young women were left together. Pauline was in a somewhat exalted state, full of the sermon on the connection of the Church with the invisible world.

"You have seen one of your poor dead," she said. "Oh, may it not be that he came to implore you to have pity, and join the Church, where you could intercede and offer the Holy Sacrifice for him?"

Anne started. This seemed to chime in with proclivities of poor Peregrine's own, and when she thought of his corpse in that unhallowed vault, it seemed to her as if he must be calling on her to take measures for his rest, both of body and of spirit. Yet something seemed to seal her tongue. She could not open her lips on what she had seen, and while Pauline talked on, repeating the sermon which had so deeply touched her feelings, Anne heard without listening to aught besides her own perturbations, mentally debating whether she could endure to reveal the story to Father Crump, if she confessed to him, or whether she should write to her uncle; and she even began to compose the letter in her own mind, with the terrible revelation that must commence it, but every moment the idea became more formidable. How transfer her own heavy burthen to her uncle, who might feel bound to take steps that would cut young Archfield off from parents, sister, child, and home. Or supposing Dr. Woodford disbelieved the apparition of to-night, the whole would be discredited in his eyes, and he might suppose the summer morning's duel as much a delusion of her fancy as the autumn evening's phantom, and what evidence had she to adduce save Charles's despair, Peregrine's absence, and what there might be in the vault?

Yet if all that Father Crump and Pauline said was true, that dear

uncle might be under a fatal delusion, and it might be the best hope for herself--nay, even for that poor restless spirit--to separate herself from them. Here was Pauline talking of the blessedness of being able to offer prayers on 'All Souls' Day' for all those of whose ultimate salvation there were fears, or who might be in a state of suffering. It even startled her as she thought of her mother, whom she always gave thanks for as one departed in faith and fear. Would Father Crump speak of her as one in a state of inevitable ignorance to be expiated in the invisible world? It shocked the daughter as almost profane. Yet if it were true, and prayers and masses could aid her?

Altogether Anne was in a mood on which the voices broke strangely returning from the supper full of news. Jane Humphreys was voluble on her various experiments. The nuts had burnt quietly together, and that was propitious to the Life-guardsman, Mr. Shaw, who had shared hers; but on the other hand, the apple-paring thrown over her shoulder had formed a P, and he whom she had seen in the vista of looking-glasses had a gold chain but neither a uniform nor a P in his name, and Mrs. Buss declared that it meant that she should be three times married, and the last would be an Alderman, if not Lord Mayor; and Mrs. Royer was joking Miss Bridgeman on the I of her apple-paring, which could stand for nothing but a certain Ince among 'the Cockpit folk,' who was her special detestation.

Princess Anne and her husband had come down to see the nuts flying, and had laughed enough to split their sides, till Lord Cornbury came in and whispered something to Prince George, who said, "Est il possible?" and spoke to the Princess, and they all went away together. Yes, and the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who had been laughing before looked very grave, and went with them.

"Oh!" exclaimed Anne, "is the Bishop of Bath and Wells here?"

"Yes, in spite of his disgrace. I hear he is to preach in your Protestant chapel to-morrow."

Anne had brought a letter of introduction from her uncle in case she should have any opportunity of seeing his old fellow canon, who had often been kind to her when she was a little girl at Winchester. She was in many minds of hope and fear as to the meeting him or speaking to him, under the consciousness of the possible defection from his Church, and the doubt and dread whether to confide her secret and consult him. However, the extreme improbability of her being able to do so made the yearning for the sight of a Winchester face predominate, and her vigil of the night past made the nursery authorities concede that she had fairly earned her turn to go to church in the forenoon, since she was obstinate enough to want to run after an old heretic so-called Bishop who had so pragmatically withstood His Majesty. Jane Humphreys went too, for though she was not fond of week-day services, any escape from the nursery was welcome, and there was a chance of seeing Lady Churchill's new mantle.

In this she was disappointed, for none of the grandees were present, indeed it was whispered as the two girls made their way to the chapel, that there was great excitement over the Declaration of the Prince of Orange, which had arrived last night, that he had been invited by the lords spiritual and temporal to take up the cause of

the liberties of England, and inquire into the evidence of the birth of the Prince of Wales.

People shrugged their shoulders, but looked volumes, though it was no time nor place for saying more; and when in the chapel, that countenance of Bishop Ken, so beautiful in outward form, so expressive of strength, sweetness, and devotion, brought back such a flood of old associations to Anne, that it was enough to change the whole current of her thoughts and make her her own mother's child again, even before he opened his mouth. She caught his sweet voice in the Psalms, and closing her eyes seemed to be in the Cathedral once more among those mighty columns and arches; and when he began his sermon, on the text, 'Let the Saints be joyful with glory, let them rejoice in their beds,' she found the Communion of Saints in Paradise and on earth knit together in one fellowship as truly and precious brought home to her as ever it had been to Pauline, and moreover when she thought of her mother, 'the lurid mist' was dispelled which had so haunted her the night before.

The longing to speak to him awoke; and as he was quitting the chapel in full procession his kindly eye lit upon her with a look of

recognition; and before she had moved from her place, one of the attendant clergy came back by his desire to conduct her to him.

He held out his hand as she courtesied low.

"Mistress Woodford," he said, "my old friend's niece! He wrote to me of you, but I have had no opportunity of seeing you before."

"Oh, my Lord! I was so much longing to see and speak with you."

"I am lodging at Lambeth," said the Bishop, "and it is too far to take you with me thither, but perhaps my good brother here," turning to the chaplain, "can help us to a room where we can be private."

This was done; the chaplain's parlour at the Cockpit was placed at their disposal, and there a few kind words from Bishop Ken led to the unburthening of her heavy heart. Of Ken's replies to the controversial difficulties there is no need to tell. Indeed, ambition was far more her temptation than any real difficulties as to doctrine. Her dissatisfaction at being unable to answer the questions raised by Father Crump was exaggerated as the excuse and cover to herself of her craving for escape from her present subordinate post; and this the Bishop soon saw, and tenderly but firmly drew her to own both this and to confess the ambitious spirit which had led her into this scene of temptation. "It was true indeed," he said, "that trial by our own error is hardest to encounter, but you have repented, and by God's grace, my child, I trust you will be enabled to steer your course aright through the trials of loyalty to our God and to our King that are coming upon us all. Ever remember God and the plain duty first, His anointed next. Is there more that you would like to tell me? for you still bear a troubled look, and I have full time."

Then Anne told him all the strange adventure of Portchester Castle, and even of the apparition of the night before. That gentleness and sympathy seemed to draw out all that was in her heart, and to her surprise, he did not treat the story of that figure as necessarily a

delusion. He had known and heard too much of spiritual manifestations to the outward senses to declare that such things could not be.

What she had seen might be explained by one of four hypotheses. It was either a phantom of her brain, and her being fully awake, although recently dwelling on the recollection, rendered that idea less probable, or the young man had not been killed and she had seen him in propria persona.

She had Charles Archfield's word that the death was certain. He had never been heard of again, and if alive, the walk before Whitehall was the last place where he would be. As to mistaking any one else for him, the Bishop remembered enough of the queer changeling elf to agree with her that it was not a very probable contingency. And if it were indeed a spirit, why should it visit her? There had been one good effect certainly in the revival of home thoughts and turning her mind from the allurements of favour, but that did not seem to account for the spirit seeking her out.

Was it, Anne faltered, a sign that she ought to confess all, for the sake of procuring Christian burial for him. Yet how should she, when she had promised silence to young Archfield? True, it was for his wife's sake, and she was dead; but there were the rest of his family and himself to be considered. What should she do?

The Bishop thought a little while, then said that he did not believe that she ought to speak without Mr. Archfield's consent, unless she saw any one else brought into danger by her silence. If it ever became possible, he thought, that she should ascertain whether the body were in the vault, and if so, it might be possible to procure burial for it, perhaps without identification, or at any rate without making known what could only cause hostility and distress between the two families, unless the young man himself on his return should make the confession. This the Bishop evidently considered the sounder, though the harder course, but he held that Anne had no right to take the initiative. She could only wait, and bear her load alone; but the extreme kindness and compassion with which he talked to her soothed and comforted her so much that she felt infinitely relieved and strengthened when he dismissed her with his blessing, and far happier and more at peace than she had been since that terrible summer morning, though greatly humbled, and taught to repent of her aspirations after earthly greatness, and to accept her present condition as a just retribution, and a trial of constancy.

CHAPTER XIX: THE DAUGHTER'S SECRET

"Thy sister's naught: O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth'd unkindness, like a vulture, _here_:
I can scarce speak to thee."

King Lear.

"Am I--oh! am I going home?" thought Anne. "My uncle will be at Winchester. I am glad of it. I could not yet bear to see Portchester again. That Shape would be there. Yet how shall I deal

with what seems laid on me? But oh! the joy of escaping from this weary, weary court! Oh, the folly that took me hither! Now that the Prince is gone, Lady Strickland will surely speak to the Queen for my dismissal."

There had been seventeen days of alarms, reports, and counter-reports, and now the King, with the Prince of Denmark, had gone to join the army on Salisbury Plain, and at the same time the little Prince of Wales had been sent off to his half-brother, the Duke of Berwick, at Portsmouth, under charge of Lady Powys, there to be embarked for France. Anne had been somewhat disappointed at not going with them, hoping that when at Portsmouth or in passing Winchester she might see her uncle and obtain her release, for she had no desire to be taken abroad; but it was decreed otherwise. Miss Dunord went, rejoicing and thankful to be returning to France, and the other three rockers remained.

There had already been more than one day of alarms and tumults. The Body-guards within were always on duty; the Life-guards without were constantly patrolling; and on the 5th of November, when the Prince of Orange was known to be near at hand, and was in fact actually landing at Torbay, the mob had with difficulty been restrained from burning in effigy, not only Guy Fawkes, but Pope, cardinals, and mitred bishops, in front of the palace, and actually paraded them all, with a figure of poor Sir Edmondbury Godfrey bearing his head in his hand, tied on horseback behind a Jesuit, full before the windows, with yells of

"The Pope, the Pope,
Up the ladder and down the rope,"

and clattering of warming-pans.

Jane Humphreys was dreadfully frightened. Anne found her crouching close to her bed, with the curtains wrapped round her. "Have they got in?" she cried. "O Miss Woodford, how shall we make them believe we are good Protestants?"

And when this terror had subsided, and it was well known that the Dutch were at Exeter, there was another panic, for one of the Life-guardsmen had told her to beware, since if the Royal troops at Hounslow were beaten, the Papists would surely take their revenge.

"I am to scream from the windows to Mr. Shaw," she said; but what good will that do if the priests and the Frenchmen have strangled me? And perhaps he won't be on guard."

"He was only trying to frighten you," suggested Anne.

"Dear me, Miss Woodford, aren't you afraid? You have the stomach of a lion."

"Why, what would be the good of hurting us?"

However, Anne was not at all surprised, when on the very evening of the Prince's departure, old Mrs. Humphreys, a venerable-looking dame in handsome but Puritanically-fashioned garments, came in a hackney coach to request in her son's name that her granddaughter might

return with her, as her occupation was at an end.

Jane was transported with joy.

"Ay, ay," said the grandmother, "look at you now, and think how crazy you were to go to the palace, though 'twas always against my judgment."

"Ah, I little knew how mortal dull it would be!" said Jane.

"Ye've found it no better than the husks that the swine did eat, eh? So much the better and safer for your soul, child."

Nobody wanted to retain Jane, and while she was hastily putting her things together, the grandmother turned to Anne: "And you, Mistress Woodford, from what I hear, you have been very good in keeping my silly child stanch to her religion and true to her duty. If ever on a pinch you needed a friend in London, my son and I would be proud to serve you--Master Joshua Humphreys, at the Golden Lamb, Gracechurch Street, mind you. No one knows what may hap in these strange and troublesome times, and you might be glad of a house to go to till you can send to your own friends--that is, if we are not all murdered by the Papists first."

Though Anne did not expect such a catastrophe as this, she was really grateful for the offer, and thought it possible that she might avail herself of it, as she had not been able to communicate with any of her mother's old friends, and Bishop Ken was not to her knowledge still in London.

She watched anxiously for the opportunity of asking Lady Strickland whether she might apply for her dismissal, and write to her uncle to fetch her home.

"Child," said the lady, "I think you love the Queen."

"Indeed I do, madam."

"It is well that at this juncture all Protestants should not leave her. You are a gentlewoman in manner, and can speak her native tongue, friends are falling from her, scarcely ladies are left enough to make a fit appearance around her; if you are faithful to her, remain, I entreat of you."

There was no resisting such an appeal, and Anne remained in the rooms now left bare and empty, until a message was brought to her to come to the Queen. Mary Beatrice sat in a chair by her fire, looking sad and listless, her eyes red with weeping, but she gave her sweet smile as the girl entered, and held out her hand, saying in her sweet Italian, "You are faithful, Signorina Anna! you remain! That is well; but now my son is gone, Anna, you must be mine. I make you my reader instead of his rocker."

As Anne knelt on one knee to kiss hands with tears in her eyes, the Queen impulsively threw her arms round her neck and kissed her. "Ah, you loved him, and he loved you, il mio tesorino?"

Promotion had come--how strangely. She had to enter on her duties at once, and to read some chapters of an Italian version of the

Imitation. A reader was of a higher grade of importance than a rocker, and for the ensuing days, when not in attendance on the Queen, Anne was the companion of Lady Strickland and Lady Oglethorpe. In the absence of the King and Prince, the Queen received Princess Anne at her own table, and Lady Churchill and Lady Fitzhardinge joined that of her ladies-in-waiting.

Lady Churchill, with her long neck, splendid hair and complexion, short chin, and sparkling blue eyes, was beautiful to look at, but not at all disposed to be agreeable to the Queen's ladies, whom she treated with a sort of blunt scorn, not at all disguised by the forms of courtesy. However, she had, to their relief, a good deal of leave of absence just then to visit her children, as indeed the ladies agreed that she did pretty much as she chose, and that the faithful Mrs. Morley was somewhat afraid of the dear Mrs. Freeman.

One evening in coming up some steps Princess Anne entangled her foot in her pink taffetas petticoat, nearly fell, and tore a large rent, besides breaking the thread of the festoons of seed pearls which bordered it, and scattering them on the floor.

"Lack-a-day! Lack-a-day!" sighed she, as after a little screaming she gathered herself up again. "That new coat! How shall I ever face Danvers again such a figure? She's an excellent tirewoman, but she will be neither to have nor to hold when she sees that gown--that she set such store by! Nay, I can hardly step for it."

"I think I could repair it, with Her Majesty's and your Royal Highness's permission," said Anne, who was creeping about on her knees picking up the pearls."

"Oh! do! do! There's a good child, and then Danvers and Dawson need know nothing about it," cried the Princess in great glee. "You remember Dawson, don't you, little Woodie, as we used to call you, and how she used to rate us when we were children if we soiled our frocks?"

So, in the withdrawing-room, Anne sat on the floor with needle and silk, by the light of the wax candles, deftly repairing the rent, and then threading the scattered pearls, and arranging the festoon so as to hide the darn. The Princess was delighted, and while the poor wife lay back in her chair, thankful that behind her fan she could give way to her terrible anxieties about her little son, who might be crossing to France, and her husband, suffering from fearful nose-bleeding, and wellnigh alone among traitors and deserters, the step-daughter, on the other side of the great hearth, chattered away complacently to 'little Woodford.'

"Do you recollect old Dawson, and how she used to grumble when I went to sup with the Duchess--my own mother--you know, because she used to give me chocolate, and she said it made me scream at night, and be over fat by day? Ah! that was before you used to come among us. It was after I went to France to my poor aunt of Orleans. I remember she never would let us kiss her for fear of spoiling her complexion, and Mademoiselle and I did so hate living maigre on the fast days. I was glad enough to get home at last, and then my sister was jealous because I talked French better than she did."

So the Princess prattled on without needing much reply, until her

namesake had finished her work, with which she was well pleased, and promised to remember her. To Anne it was an absolute marvel how she could thus talk when she knew that her husband had deserted her father in his need, and that things were in a most critical position.

The Queen could not refrain from a sigh of relief when her step-daughter had retired to the Cockpit; and after seeking her sleepless bed, she begged Anne, "if it did not too much incommode her, to read to her from the Gospel."

The next day was Sunday, and Anne felt almost as if deserting her cause, when going to the English service in Whitehall Chapel Royal, now almost emptied except of the Princess's suite, and some of these had the bad taste and profanity to cough and chatter all through the special prayer drawn up by the Archbishop for the King's safety.

People were not very reverent, and as all stood up at the end of the Advent Sunday service to let the Princess sweep by in her glittering green satin petticoat, peach-coloured velvet train, and feather-crowned head, she laid a hand on Anne's arm, and whispered, "Follow me to my closet, little Woodford."

There was no choice but to obey, as the Queen would not require her reader till after dinner, and Anne followed after the various attendants, who did not seem very willing to forward a private interview with a possible rival, though, as Anne supposed, the object must be to convey some message to the Queen. By the time she arrived and had been admitted to the inner chamber or dressing-room, the Princess had thrown off her more cumbrous finery, and sat at ease in an arm-chair. She nodded her be-curled head, and said, "You can keep a secret, little Woodie?"

"I can, madam, but I do not love one," said Anne, thinking of her most burthensome one.

"Well, no need to keep this long. You are a good young maiden, and my own poor mother's godchild, and you are handy and notable. You deserve better preferment than ever you will get in that Popish household, where your religion is in danger. Now, I am not going to be in jeopardy here any longer, nor let myself be kept hostage for his Highness. Come to my rooms at bedtime. Slip in when I wish the Queen good-night, and I'll find an excuse. Then you shall come with me to--no, I'll not say where, and I'll make your fortune, only mum's the word."

"But--Your Royal Highness is very good, but I am sworn to the Prince and Queen. I could not leave them without permission."

"Prince! Prince! Pretty sort of a Prince. Prince of brickbats, as Churchill says. Nay, girl, don't turn away in that fashion. Consider. Your religion is in danger."

"Nay, madam, my religion would not be served by breaking my oath."

"Pooh! What's your oath to a mere pretender? Besides, consider your fortune. Ricker to a puling babe--even if he was what they say he is. And don't build on the Queen's favour--even if she remains what she is now, she is too much beset with Papists and foreigners

to do anything for you."

"I do not," Anne began to say, but the Princess gave her no time.

"Besides, pride will have a fall, and if you are a good maid, and hold your tongue, and serve me well in this strait, I'll make you my maid of honour, and marry you so that you shall put Lady before your name. Ay, and get good preferment for your uncle, who has had only a poor stall from the King here."

Anne repressed an inclination to say this was not the way in which her uncle would wish to get promotion, and only replied, "Your Royal Highness is very good, but--"

Whereat the Princess, in a huff, exclaimed, "Oh, very well, if you choose to be torn to pieces by the mob, and slaughtered by the priests, like poor Godfrey, and burnt by the Papists at last, unless you go to Mass, you may stay for aught I care, and joy go with you. I thought I was doing you a kindness for my poor mother's sake, but it seems you know best. If you like to cast in your lot with the Pope, I wash my hands of you."

Accordingly Anne courtesied herself off, not seriously alarmed as to the various catastrophes foretold by the Princess, though a little shaken in nerves. Here then was another chance of promotion, certainly without treason to her profession of faith, but so offered that honour could not but revolt against it, though in truth poor Princess Anne was neither so foolish nor so heartless a woman as she appeared in the excitement to which an uneasy conscience, the expectation of a great enterprise, and a certain amount of terror had worked her up; but she had high words again in the evening, as was supposed, with the Queen. Certainly Anne found her own Royal Mistress weeping and agitated, though she only owned to being very anxious about the health of the King, who had had a second violent attack of bleeding at the nose, and she did not seem consoled by the assurances of her elder attendants that the relief had probably saved him from a far more dangerous attack. Again Anne read to her till a late hour, but next morning was strangely disturbed.

The Royal household had not been long dressed, and breakfast had just been served to the ladies, when loud screams were heard, most startling in the unsettled and anxious state of affairs. The Queen, pale and trembling, came out of her chamber with her hair on her shoulders. "Tell me at once, for pity's sake. Is it my husband or my son?" she asked with clasped hands, as two or three of the Princess's servants rushed forward.

"The Princess, the Princess!" was the cry, "the priests have murdered her."

"What have you done with her, madam?" rudely demanded Mrs. Buss, one of the lost lady's nurses.

Mary Beatrice drew herself up with grave dignity, saying, "I suppose your mistress is where she likes to be. I know nothing of her, but I have no doubt that you will soon hear of her."

There was something in the Queen's manner that hushed the outcry in her presence, but the women, with Lady Clarendon foremost of them,

continued to seek up and down the two palaces as if they thought the substantial person of the Princess Anne could be hidden in a cupboard.

Anne, in the first impulse, exclaimed, "She is gone!"

In a moment Mrs. Royer turned, "Gone, did you say? Do you know it?"

"You knew it and kept it secret!" cried Lady Strickland.

"A traitor too!" said Lady Oglethorpe, in her vehement Irish tone. "I would not have thought it of Nanny Moore's daughter!" and she turned her eyes in sad reproach on Anne.

"If you know, tell me where she is gone," cried Mrs. Buss, and the cry was re-echoed by the other women, while Anne's startled "I cannot tell! I do not know!" was unheeded.

Only the Queen raising her hand gravely said, "Silence! What is this?"

"Miss Woodford knew."

"And never told!" cried the babble of voices.

"Come hither, Mistress Woodford," said the Queen. "Tell me, do you know where Her Highness is?"

"No, please your Majesty," said Anne, trembling from head to foot. "I do not know where she is."

"Did you know of her purpose?"

"Your Majesty pardon me. She called me to her closet yesterday and pledged me to secrecy before I knew what she would say."

"Only youthful inexperience will permit that pledge to be implied in matters of State," said the Queen. "Continue, Mistress Woodford; what did she tell you?"

"She said she feared to be made a hostage for the Prince of Denmark, and meant to escape, and she bade me come to her chamber at night to go with her."

"And wherefore did you not? You are of her religion," said the Queen bitterly.

"Madam, how could I break mine oath to your Majesty and His Royal Highness?"

"And you thought concealing the matter according to that oath? Nay, nay, child, I blame you not. It was a hard strait between your honour to her and your duty to the King and to me, and I cannot but be thankful to any one who does regard her word. But this desertion will be a sore grief to His Majesty."

Mary Beatrice was fairer-minded than the women, who looked askance at the girl, Princess Anne's people resenting that one of the other household should have been chosen as confidante, and the Queen's

being displeased that the secret had been kept. But at that moment frightful yells and shouts arose, and a hasty glance from the windows showed a mass of men, women, and children howling for their Princess. They would tear down Whitehall if she were not delivered up to them. However, a line of helmeted Life-guards on their heavy horses was drawn up between, with sabres held upright, and there seemed no disposition to rush upon these. Lord Clarendon, uncle to the Princess, had satisfied himself that she had really escaped, and he now came out and assured the mob, in a stentorian voice, that he was perfectly satisfied of his niece's safety, waving the letter she had left on her toilet-table.

The mob shouted, "Bless the Princess! Hurrah for the Protestant faith! No warming-pans!" but in a good-tempered mood; and the poor little garrison breathed more freely; but Anne did not feel herself forgiven. She was in a manner sent to Coventry, and treated as if she were on the enemy's side. Never had her proud nature suffered so much, and she shed bitter tears as she said to herself, "It is very unjust! What could I have done? How could I stop Her Highness from speaking? Could they expect me to run in and accuse her? Oh, that I were at home again! Mother, mother, you little know! Of what use am I now?"

It was the very question asked by Hester Bridgeman, whom she found packing her clothes in her room.

"Take care that this is sent after me," she said, "when a messenger I shall send calls for it."

"What, you have your dismissal?"

"No, I should no more get it than you have done. They cannot afford to let any one go, you see, or they will have to dress up the chambermaids to stand behind the Queen's chair. I have settled it with my cousin, Harry Bridgeman, I shall mix with the throng that come to ask for news, and be off with him before the crowd breaks in, as they will some of these days, for the guards are but half-hearted. My Portia, why did not you take a good offer, and go with the Princess?"

"I thought it would be base."

"And much you gained by it! You are only suspected and accused."

"I can't be a rat leaving a sinking ship."

"That is courteous, but I forgive it, Portia, as I know you will repent of your folly. But you never did know which side to look for the butter."

Perhaps seeing how ugly desertion and defection looked in others made constancy easier to Anne, much as she longed for the Close at Winchester, and she even thought with a hope of the Golden Lamb, Gracechurch, as an immediate haven sure to give her a welcome.

Her occupation of reading to the Queen was ended by the King's return, so physically exhausted by violent nose-bleeding, so despondent at the universal desertion, and so broken-hearted at his daughter's defection, that his wife was absorbed in attending upon

him.

Anne began to watch for an opportunity to demand a dismissal, which she thought would exempt her from all blame, but she was surprised and a little dismayed by being summoned to the King in the Queen's chamber. He was lying on a couch clad in a loose dressing-gown instead of his laced coat, and a red night-cap replacing his heavy peruke, and his face was as white and sallow as if he were recovering from a long illness.

"Little godchild," he said, holding out his hand as Anne made her obeisance, "the Queen tells me you can read well. I have a fancy to hear."

Immensely relieved at the kindness of his tone, Anne courtesied, and murmured out her willingness.

"Read this," he said; "I would fain hear this; my father loved it. Here."

Anne felt her task a hard one when the King pointed to the third Act of Shakespeare's Richard II. She steeled herself and strengthened her voice as best she could, and struggled on till she came to--

"I'll give my jewels for a set of beads,
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
My figured goblets for a dish of wood,
My sceptre for a palmer's walking-staff,
My subjects for a pair of carved saints,
And my large kingdom for a little grave,
A little, little grave."

There she fairly broke down, and sobbed.

"Little one, little one," said James, you are sorry for poor Richard, eh?"

"Oh, sir!" was all she could say.

"And you are in disgrace, they tell me, because my daughter chose to try to entice you away," said James, "and you felt bound not to betray her. Never mind; it was an awkward case of conscience, and there's not too much faithfulness to spare in these days. We shall know whom to trust to another time. Can you continue now? I would take a lesson how, 'with mine own hands to give away my crown.'"

It was well for Anne that fresh tidings were brought in at that moment, and she had to retire, with the sore feeling turned into an enthusiastic pity and loyalty, which needed the relief of sobs and mental vows of fidelity. She felt herself no longer in disgrace with her Royal master and mistress, but she was not in favour with her few companions left--all who could not get over her secrecy, and thought her at least a half traitor as well as a heretic.

Whitehall was almost in a state of siege, the turbulent mob continually coming to shout, 'No Popery!' and the like, though they proceeded no farther. The ministers and other gentlemen came and went, but the priests and the ladies durst not venture out for fear of being recognised and insulted, if not injured. Bad news came in

from day to day, and no tidings of the Prince of Wales being in safety in France. Once Anne received a letter from her uncle, which cheered her much.

DEAR CHILD--So far as I can gather, your employment is at an end, if it be true as reported that the Prince of Wales is at Portsmouth, with the intent that he should be carried to France; but the gentlemen of the navy seem strongly disposed to prevent such a transportation of the heir of the realm to a foreign country. I fear me that you are in a state of doubt and anxiety, but I need not exhort your good mother's child to be true and loyal to her trust and to the Anointed of the Lord in all things lawful at all costs. If you are left in any distress or perplexity, go either to Sir Theophilus Oglethorpe's house, or to that of my good old friend, the Dean of Westminster; and as soon as I hear from you I will endeavour to ride to town and bring you home to my house, which is greatly at a loss without its young mistress.

The letter greatly refreshed Anne's spirits, and gave her something to look forward to, giving her energy to stitch at a set of lawn cuffs and bands for her uncle, and think with the more pleasure of a return that his time of residence at Winchester lay between her and that vault in the castle.

There were no more attempts made at her conversion. Every one was too anxious and occupied, and one or more of the chiefly obnoxious priests were sent privately away from day to day. While summer friends departed, Anne often thought of Bishop Ken's counsel as to loyalty to Heaven and man.

CHAPTER XX: THE FLIGHT

"Storms may rush in, and crimes and woes
Deform that peaceful bower;
They may not mar the deep repose
Of that immortal flower.
Though only broken hearts be found
To watch his cradle by,
No blight is on his slumbers sound,
No touch of harmful eye."

KEBLE.

The news was even worse and worse in that palace of despondency and terror. Notice had arrived that Lord Dartmouth was withheld from despatching the young Prince to France by his own scruples and those of the navy; and orders were sent for the child's return. Then came a terrible alarm. The escort sent to meet him were reported to have been attacked by the rabble on entering London and dispersed, so that each man had to shift for himself.

There was a quarter of an hour which seemed many hours of fearful suspense, while King and Queen both knelt at their altar, praying in agony for the child whom they pictured to themselves in the hands of the infuriated mob, too much persuaded of his being an imposture to

pity his unconscious innocence. No one who saw the blanched cheeks and agonised face of Mary Beatrice, or James's stern, mute misery, could have believed for a moment in the cruel delusion that he was no child of theirs.

The Roman Catholic women were with them. To enter the oratory would in those circumstances have been a surrender of principle, but none the less did Anne pray with fervent passion in her chamber for pity for the child, and comfort for his parents. At last there was a stir, and hurrying out to the great stair, Anne saw a man in plain clothes replying in an Irish accent to the King, who was supporting the Queen with his arm. Happily the escort had missed the Prince of Wales. They had been obliged to turn back to London without meeting him, and from that danger he had been saved.

A burst of tears and a cry of fervent thanksgiving relieved the Queen's heart, and James gave eager thanks instead of the reprimand the colonel had expected for his blundering.

A little later, another messenger brought word that Lord and Lady Powys had halted at Guildford with their charge. A French gentleman, Monsieur de St. Victor, was understood to have undertaken to bring him to London--understood--for everything was whispered rather than told among the panic-stricken women. No one who knew the expectation could go to bed that night except that the King and Queen had--in order to disarm suspicion--to go through the accustomed ceremonies of the coucher. The ladies sat or lay on their beds intently listening, as hour after hour chimed from the clocks.

At last, at about three in the morning, the challenge of the sentinels was heard from point to point. Every one started up, and hurried almost pell-mell towards the postern door. The King and Queen were both descending a stair leading from the King's dressing-room, and as the door was cautiously opened, it admitted a figure in a fur cloak, which he unfolded, and displayed the sleeping face of the infant well wrapped from the December cold.

With rapture the Queen gathered him into her arms, and the father kissed him with a vehemence that made him awake and cry. St. Victor had thought it safer that his other attendants should come in by degrees in the morning, and thus Miss Woodford was the only actually effective nursery attendant at hand. His food was waiting by the fire in his own sleeping chamber, and thither he was carried. There the Queen held him on her lap, while Anne fed him, and he smiled at her and held out his arms.

The King came, and making a sign to Anne not to move, stood watching.

Presently he said, "She has kept one secret, we may trust her with another."

"Oh, not yet, not yet," implored the Queen. "Now I have both my treasures again, let me rest in peace upon them for a little while."

The King turned away with eyes full of tears while Anne was lulling the child to sleep. She wondered, but durst not ask the Queen, where was the tiler's wife; but later she learnt from Miss Dunord,

that the woman had been so terrified by the cries of the multitude against the 'pretender,' and still more at the sight of the sea, that she had gone into transports of fright, implored to go home, and perhaps half wilfully, become useless, so that the weaning already commenced had to be expedited, and the fretfulness of the poor child had been one of the troubles for some days. However, he seemed on his return to have forgotten his troubles, and Anne had him in her arms nearly all the next day.

It was not till late in the evening that Anne knew what the King had meant. Then, while she was walking up and down the room, amusing the little Prince with showing by turns the window and his face in a large mirror, the Queen came in, evidently fresh from weeping, and holding out her arms for him, said, after looking to see that there was no other audience--

"Child, the King would repose a trust in you. He wills that you should accompany me to-night on a voyage to France to put this little angel in safety."

"As your Majesty will," returned Anne; "I will do my best."

"So the King said. He knew his brave sailor's daughter was worthy of his trust, and you can speak French. It is well, for we go under the escort of Messieurs de Lauzun and St. Victor. Be ready at midnight. Lady Strickland or the good Labadie will explain more to you, but do not speak of this to anyone else. You have leave now," she added, as she herself carried the child towards his father's rooms.

The maiden's heart swelled at the trust reposed in her, and the King's kind words, and she kept back the sense of anxiety and doubt as to so vague a future. She found Mrs. Labadie lying on her bed awake, but trying to rest between two busy nights, and she was then told that there was to be a flight from the palace of the Queen and Prince at midnight, Mrs. Labadie and Anne alone going with them, though Lord and Lady Powys and Lady Strickland, with the Queen's Italian ladies, would meet them on board the yacht which was waiting at Gravesend. The nurse advised Anne to put a few necessary equipments into a knapsack bound under a cloak, and to leave other garments with her own in charge of Mr. Labadie, who would despatch them with those of the suite, and would follow in another day with the King. Doubt or refusal there could of course be none in such circumstances, and a high-spirited girl like Anne could not but feel a thrill of heart at selection for such confidential and signal service at her age, scarcely seventeen. Her one wish was to write to her uncle what had become of her. Mrs. Labadie hardly thought it safe, but said her husband would take charge of a note, and if possible, post it when they were safe gone, but nothing of the King's plans must be mentioned.

The hours passed away anxiously, and yet only too fast. So many had quitted the palace that there was nothing remarkable in packing, but as Anne collected her properties, she could not help wondering whether she should ever see them again. Sometimes her spirit rose at the thought of serving her lovely Queen, saving the little Prince, and fulfilling the King's trust; at others, she was full of vague depression at the thought of being cut off from all she knew and loved, with seas between, and with so little notice to her

uncle, who might never learn where she was; but she knew she had his approval in venturing all, and making any sacrifice for the King whom all deserted; and she really loved her Queen and little Prince.

The night came, and she and Mrs. Labadie, fully equipped in cloaks and hoods, waited together, Anne moving about restlessly, the elder woman advising her to rest while she could. The little Prince, all unconscious of the dangers of the night, or of his loss of a throne, lay among his wraps in his cradle fast asleep.

By and by the door opened, and treading softly in came the King in his dressing-gown and night-cap, the Queen closely muffled, Lady Strickland also dressed for a journey, and two gentlemen, the one tall and striking-looking, the other slim and dark, in their cloaks, namely, Lauzun and St. Victor.

It was one of those supreme moments almost beyond speech or manifestation of feeling.

The King took his child in his arms, kissed him, and solemnly said to Lauzun, "I confide my wife and son to you."

Both Frenchmen threw themselves on their knees kissing his hand with a vow of fidelity. Then giving the infant to Mrs. Labadie, James folded his wife in his arms in a long mute embrace; Anne carried the basket containing food for the child; and first with a lantern went St. Victor, then Lauzun, handing the Queen; Mrs. Labadie with the child, and Anne following, they sped down the stairs, along the great gallery, with steps as noiseless as they could make them, down another stair to a door which St. Victor opened.

A sentry challenged, sending a thrill of dismay through the anxious hearts, but St. Victor had the word, and on they went into the privy gardens, where often Anne had paced behind Mrs. Labadie as the Prince took his airing. Startling lights from the windows fell on them, illuminating the drops of rain that plashed round them on that grim December night, and their steps sounded on the gravel, while still the babe, sheltered under the cloak, slept safely. Another door was reached, more sentries challenged and passed; here was a street whose stones and silent houses shone for a little space as St. Victor raised his lantern and exchanged a word with a man on the box of a carriage.

One by one they were handed in, the Queen, the child, the nurse, Anne, and Lauzun, St. Victor taking his place outside. As if in a dream they rattled on through the dark street, no one speaking except that Lauzun asked the Queen if she were wet.

It was not far before they stopped at the top of the steps called the Horseferry. A few lights twinkled here and there, and were reflected trembling in the river, otherwise a black awful gulf, from which, on St. Victor's cautious hail, a whistle ascended, and a cloaked figure with a lantern came up the steps glistening in the rain.

One by one again, in deep silence, they were assisted down, and into the little boat that rocked ominously as they entered it. There the women crouched together over the child unable to see one another, Anne returning the clasp of a hand on hers, believing it Mrs.

Labadie's, till on Lauzun's exclaiming, "Est ce que j'incommode sa Majeste?" the reply showed her that it was the Queen's hand that she held, and she began a startled "Pardon, your Majesty," but the sweet reply in Italian was, "Ah, we are as sisters in this stress."

The eager French voice of Lauzun went on, in undertones certainly, but as if he had not the faculty of silence, and amid the plash of the oars, the rush of the river, and the roar of the rain, it was not easy to tell what he said, his voice was only another of the noises, though the Queen made little courteous murmurs in reply. It was a hard pull against wind and tide towards a little speck of green light which was shown to guide the rowers; and when at last they reached it, St. Victor's hail was answered by Dusions, one of the servants, and they drew to the steps where he held a lantern.

"To the coach at once, your Majesty."

"It is at the inn--ready--but I feared to let it stand."

Lauzun uttered a French imprecation under his breath, and danced on the step with impatience, only restrained so far as to hand out the Queen and her two attendants. He was hotly ordering off Dusions and St. Victor to bring the coach, when the former suggested that they must find a place for the Queen to wait in where they could find her.

"What is that dark building above?"

"Lambeth Church," Dusions answered.

"Ah, your Protestant churches are not open; there is no shelter for us there," sighed the Queen.

"There is shelter in the angle of the buttress; I have been there, your Majesty," said Dusions.

Thither then they turned.

"What can that be?" exclaimed the Queen, starting and shuddering as a fierce light flashed in the windows and played on the wall.

"It is not within, madame," Lauzun encouraged; "it is reflected light from a fire somewhere on the other side of the river."

"A bonfire for our expulsion. Ah! why should they hate us so?" sighed the poor Queen.

"'Tis worse than that, only there's no need to tell Her Majesty so," whispered Mrs. Labadie, who, in the difficulties of the ascent, had been fain to hand the still-sleeping child to Anne. "'Tis the Catholic chapel of St. Roque. The heretic miscreants!"

"Pray Heaven no life be lost," sighed Anne.

Sinister as the light was, it aided the poor fugitives at that dead hour of night to find an angle between the church wall and a buttress where the eaves afforded a little shelter from the rain, which slackened a little, when they were a little concealed from the road, so that the light need not betray them in case any passenger

was abroad at such an hour, as two chimed from the clock overhead.

The women kept together close against the wall to avoid the drip of the eaves. Lauzun walked up and down like a sentinel, his arms folded, and talking all the while, though, as before, his utterances were only an accompaniment to the falling rain and howling wind; Mary Beatrice was murmuring prayers over the sleeping child, which she now held in the innermost corner; Anne, with wide-stretched eyes, was gazing into the light cast beyond the buttress by the fire on the opposite side, when again there passed across it that form she had seen on All Saints' Eve--the unmistakable phantom of Peregrine.

It was gone into the darkness in another second; but a violent start on her part had given a note of alarm, and brought back the Count, whose walk had been in the opposite direction.

"What was it? Any spy?"

"Oh no--no--nothing! It was the face of one who is dead," gasped Anne.

"The poor child's nerve is failing her," said the Queen gently, as Lauzun drawing his sword burst out--

"If it be a spy it shall be the face of one who is dead;" and he darted into the road, but returned in a few moments, saying no one had passed except one of the rowers returning after running up to the inn to hasten the coach; how could he have been seen from the church wall? The wheels were heard drawing up at that moment, so that the only thought was to enter it as quickly as might be in the same order as before, after which the start was made, along the road that led through the marshes of Lambeth; and then came the inquiry--an anxious one--whom or what mademoiselle, as Lauzun called her, had seen.

"O monsieur!" exclaimed the poor girl in her confusion, her best French failing, "it was nothing--no living man."

"Can mademoiselle assure me of that? The dead I fear not, the living I would defy."

"He lives not," said she in an undertone, with a shudder.

"But who is he that mademoiselle can be so certain?" asked the Frenchman.

"Oh! I know him well enough," said Anne, unable to control her voice.

"Mademoiselle must explain herself," said M. de Lauzun. "If he be spirit--or phantom--there is no more to say, but if he be in the flesh, and a spy--then--" There was a little rattle of his sword.

"Speak, I command," interposed the Queen; "you must satisfy M. le Comte."

Thus adjured, Anne said in a low voice of horror: "It was a gentleman of our neighbourhood; he was killed in a duel last

summer!"

"Ah! You are certain?"

"I had the misfortune to see the fight," sighed Anne.

"That accounts for it," said the Queen kindly. "If mademoiselle's nerves were shaken by such a remembrance, it is not wonderful that it should recur to her at so strange a watch as we have been keeping."

"It might account for her seeing this revenant cavalier in any passenger," said Lauzun, not satisfied yet.

"No one ever was like him," said Anne. "I could not mistake him."

"May I ask mademoiselle to describe him?" continued the count.

Feeling all the time as if this first mention were a sort of betrayal, Anne faltered the words: "Small, slight, almost misshapen--with a strange one-sided look--odd, unusual features."

Lauzun's laugh jarred on her. "Eh! it is not a flattering portrait. Mademoiselle is not haunted by a hero of romance, it appears, so much as by a demon."

"And none of those monsieur has employed in our escape answer to that description?" asked the Queen.

"Assuredly not, your Majesty. Crooked person and crooked mind go together, and St. Victor would only have trusted to your big honest rowers of the Tamise. I think we may be satisfied that the demoiselle's imagination was excited so as to evoke a phantom impressed on her mind by a previous scene of terror. Such things have happened in my native Gascony."

Anne was fain to accept the theory in silence, though it seemed to her strange that at a moment when she was for once not thinking of Peregrine, her imagination should conjure him up, and there was a strong feeling within her that it was something external that had flitted across the shadow, not a mere figment of her brain, though the notion was evidently accepted, and she could hear a muttering of Mrs. Labadie that this was the consequence of employing young wenches with their whims and megrims.

The Count de Lauzun did his best to entertain the Queen with stories of revenants in Gascony and elsewhere, and with reminiscences of his eleven years' captivity at Pignerol, and his intercourse with Fouquet; but whenever in aftertimes Anne Woodford tried to recall her nocturnal drive with this strange personage, the chosen and very unkind husband of the poor old Grande Mademoiselle, she never could recollect anything but the fierce glare of his eyes in the light of the lamps as he put her to that terrible interrogation.

The talk was chiefly monologue. Mrs. Labadie certainly slept, perhaps the Queen did so too, and Anne became conscious that she must have slumbered likewise, for she found every one gazing at her in the pale morning dawn and asking why she cried, "O Charles, hold!"

As she hastily entreated pardon, Lauzun was heard to murmur, "Je parie que le revenant se nomme Charles," and she collected her senses just in time to check her contradiction, recollecting that happily such a name as Charles revealed nothing. The little Prince, who had slumbered so opportunely all night, awoke and received infinite praise, and what he better appreciated, the food that had been provided for him. They were near their journey's end, and it was well, for people were awakening and going to their work as they passed one of the villages, and once the remark was heard, "There goes a coach full of Papists."

However, no attempt was made to stop the party, and as it would be daylight when they reached Gravesend, the Queen arranged her disguise to resemble, as she hoped, a washerwoman--taking off her gloves, and hiding her hair, while the Prince, happily again asleep, was laid in a basket of linen. Anne could not help thinking that she thus looked more remarkable than if she had simply embarked as a lady; but she meant to represent the attendant of her Italian friend Countess Almonde, whom she was to meet on board.

Leaving the coach outside a little block of houses, the party reached a projecting point of land, where three Irish officers received them, and conducted them to a boat. Then, wrapped closely in cloaks from the chill morning air, they were rowed to the yacht, on the deck of which stood Lord and Lady Powys, Lady Strickland, Pauline Dunord, and a few more faithful followers, who had come more rapidly. There was no open greeting nor recognition, for the captain and crew were unaware whom they were carrying, and, on the discovery, either for fear of danger or hope of reward, might have captured such a prize.

Therefore all the others, with whispered apologies, were hoisted up before her, and Countess Almonde had to devise a special entreaty that the chair might be lowered again for her poor laundress as well as for the other two women.

The yacht, which had been hired by St. Victor, at once spread her sails; Mrs. Labadie conversed with the captain while the countess took the Queen below into the stifling crowded little cabin. It was altogether a wretched voyage; the wind was high, and the pitching and tossing more or less disabled everybody in the suite. The Queen was exceedingly ill, so were the countess and Mrs. Labadie. Nobody could be the least effective but Signora Turini, who waited on her Majesty, and Anne, who was so far seasoned by excursions at Portsmouth that she was capable of taking sole care of the little Prince, as the little vessel dashed along on her way with her cargo of alarm and suffering through the Dutch fleet of fifty vessels, none of which seemed to notice her--perhaps by express desire not to be too curious as to English fugitives.

Between the care of the little one, who needed in the tossing of the ship to be constantly in arms though he never cried and when awake was always merry, and the giving as much succour as possible to her suffering companions, Anne could not either rest or think, but seemed to live in one heavy dazed dream of weariness and endurance, hardly knowing whether it were day or night, till the welcome sound was heard that Calais was in sight.

Then, as well as they could, the poor travellers crawled from the corners, and put themselves in such array as they could contrive, though the heaving of the waves, as the little yacht lay to, did not conduce to their recovery. The Count de Lauzun went ashore as soon as a boat could be lowered to apprise M. Charot, the Governor of Calais, of the guest he was to receive, and after an interval of considerable discomfort, in full view of the massive fortifications, boats came off to bring the Queen and her attendants on shore, this time as a Queen, though she refused to receive any honours. Lady Strickland, recovering as soon as she was on dry land, resumed her Prince, who was fondled with enthusiastic praises for his excellent conduct on the voyage.

Anne could not help feebly thinking some of the credit might be due to her, since she had held him by land and water nearly ever since leaving Whitehall, but she was too much worn out by her nights of unrest, and too much battered and beaten by the tossings of her voyage, to feel anything except in a languid half-conscious way, under a racking headache; and when the curious old house where they were to rest was reached, and all the rest were eating with ravenous appetites, she could taste nothing, and being conducted by a compassionate Frenchwoman in a snow-white towering cap to a straw mattress spread on the ground, she slept the twenty-four hours round without moving.

CHAPTER XXI: EXILE

"'Oh, who are ye, young man?' she said.
'What country come ye frae?'
'I flew across the sea,' he said;
"Twas but this very day.'"

Old Ballad.

Five months had passed away since the midnight flight from England, when Anne Woodford was sitting on a stone bench flanked with statues in the stately gardens of the Palace of St. Germain, working away at some delicate point lace, destined to cover some of the deficiencies of her dress, for her difficulties were great, and these months had been far from happy ones.

The King was in Ireland, the Queen spent most of the time of his absence in convents, either at Poissy or Chaillot, carrying her son with her to be the darling of the nuns, who had for the most part never even seen a baby, and to whom a bright lively child of a year old was a perfect treasure of delight. Not wishing to encumber the good Sisters with more attendants than were needful, the Queen only took with her one lady governess, one nurse, and one rocker, and this last naturally was Pauline Dunord, both a Frenchwoman and a Roman Catholic.

This was in itself no loss to Anne. Her experience of the nunnery at Boulogne, where had been spent three days in expectation of the King, had not been pleasant. The nuns had shrunk from her as a heretic, and kept their novices and pensionnaires from the taint of communication with her; and all the honour she might have deserved

for the Queen's escape seemed to have been forfeited by that moment of fear, which in the telling had become greatly exaggerated.

It was true that the Queen had never alluded to it; but probably through Mrs. Labadie, it had become current that Miss Woodford had been so much alarmed under the churchyard wall that her fancy had conjured up a phantom and she had given a loud scream, which but for the mercy of the Saints would have betrayed them all.

Anne was persuaded that she had done nothing worse than give an involuntary start, but it was not of the least use to say so, and she began to think that perhaps others knew better than she did. Miss Dunord, who had never been more than distantly polite to her in England, was of course more thrown with her at St. Germain, and examined her closely. Who was it? What was it? Had she seen it before? It was of no use to deny. Pauline knew she had seen something on that All Saints' Eve. Was it true that it was a lover of hers, and that she had seen him killed in a duel on her account? Who would have imagined it in *cette demoiselle si sage*! Would she not say who it was!

But though truth forced more than one affirmative to be pumped out of Anne, she clung to that last shred of concealment, and kept her own counsel as to the time, place, and persons of the duel, and thus she so far offended Pauline as to prevent that damsel from having any scruples in regarding her as an obnoxious and perilous rival, with a dark secret in her life. Certainly Miss Dunord did earnestly assure her that to adopt her Church, invoke the Saints, and have Masses for the dead was the only way to lay such ghosts; but Anne remained obdurate, and thus was isolated, for there were very few Protestants in the fugitive Court, and those were of too high a degree to consort with her. Perhaps that undefined doubt of her discretion was against her; perhaps too her education and knowledge of languages became less useful to the Queen when surrounded by French, for she was no longer called upon to act as reader; and the little Prince, during his residence in the convent, had time to forget her and lose his preference for her. She was not discharged, but except for taking her turn as a nursery-maid when the Prince was at St. Germain, she was a mere supernumerary, nor was there any salary forthcoming. The small amount of money she had with her had dwindled away, and when she applied to Lady Strickland, who was kinder to her than any one else, she was told that the Queen was far too much distressed for money wherewith to aid the King to be able to pay any one, and that they must all wait till the King had his own again. Her clothes were wearing out, and scarcely in condition for attendance on the Prince when he was shown in state to the King of France. Worse than all, she seemed entirely cut off from home. She had written several times to her uncle when opportunity seemed to offer, but had never heard from him, and she did not know whether her letters could reach him, or if he were even aware of what had become of her. People came with passports from England to join the exiled Court, but no one returned thither, or she would even have offered herself as a waiting-maid to have a chance of going back. Lady Strickland would have forwarded her, but no means or opportunity offered, and there was nothing for it but to look to the time that everybody declared to be approaching when the King was to be reinstated, and they would all go home in triumph.

Meanwhile Anne Woodford felt herself a supernumerary, treated with

civility, and no more, as she ate her meals with a very feminine Court, for almost all the gentlemen were in Ireland with the King. She had a room in the entresol to herself, in Pauline's absence, and here she could in turn sit and dream, or mend and furbish up her clothes--a serious matter now--or read the least scrap of printed matter in her way, for books were scarcer than even at Whitehall; and though her 'mail' had safely been forwarded by Mr. Labadie, some jealous censor had abstracted her Bible and Prayer-book. Probably there was no English service anywhere in France at that time, unless among the merchants at Bordeaux--certainly neither English nor Reformed was within her reach--and she had to spend her Sundays in recalling all she could, and going over it, feeling thankful to the mother who had made her store Psalms, Gospels, and Collects in her memory week by week.

She was so far forgotten that active attempts to convert her had been dropped, except by Pauline. Perhaps it was thought that isolation would be effectual, but in fact the sight of popular Romanism not kept in check by Protestant surroundings shocked her, and made her far more averse to change than when she saw it at its best at Whitehall. In fine, the end of her ambition had been neglect and poverty, and the real service that she had rendered was unacknowledged, and marred by that momentary alarm. No wonder she felt sore.

She had never once been to Paris, and seldom beyond the gardens, which happily were free in the absence of the Queen, and always had secluded corners apart from the noble terraces, safe from the intrusion of idle gallants. Anne had found a sort of bower of her own, shaded by honeysuckles and wild roses, where she could sit looking over the slopes and the windings of the Seine and indulge her musings and longings.

The lonely life brought before her all the anxieties that had been stifled for the time by the agitations of the escape. Again and again she lived over the scene in the ruins. Again and again she recalled those two strange appearances, and shivering at the thought of the anniversary that was approaching in another month, still felt sometimes that, alive or dead, Peregrine's would be a home face, and framed to herself imaginary scenes in which she addressed him, and demanded whether he could not rest in his unhallowed grave. What would Bishop Ken say? Sometimes even she recollected the strange theory which had made him crave execution from the late King, seven years, yes, a little more than seven years ago, and marvel whether at that critical epoch he had indeed between life and death been snatched away to his native land of faery. Imagination might well run riot in the solitary, unoccupied condition to which she was reduced; and she also brooded much over the fragments of doubtful news which reached her.

Something was said of all loyal clergy being expelled and persecuted, and this of course suggested those sufferings of the clergy during the Commonwealth, of which she had often heard, making her very anxious about her uncle, and earnestly long for wings to fly to him. The Archfields too! Had Charles returned, and did that secret press upon him as it did upon her? Did Lucy think herself utterly forgotten and cast aside, receiving no word or message from her friend? "Perhaps," thought Anne, "they fancy me sailing about at Court in silks and satins, jewels and curls, and forgetting them

all, as I remember Lucy said I should when she first heard that I was going to Whitehall. Nay, and I even took pleasure in the picture of myself so decked out, though I never, never meant to forget her. Foolish, worse than foolish, that I was! And to think that I might now be safe and happy with good Lady Russell, near my uncle and all of them. I could almost laugh to think how my fine notions of making my fortune have ended in sitting here, neglected, forgotten, banished, almost in rags! I suppose it was all self-seeking, and that I must take it meekly as no more than I deserve. But oh, how different! how different is this captivity! 'Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest.' Swallow, swallow! you are sweeping through the air. Would that my spirit could fly like you! if only for one glimpse to tell me what they are doing. Ah! there's some one coming down this unfrequented walk, where I thought myself safe. A young gentleman! I must rise and go as quietly as I can before he sees me. Nay," as the action following the impulse, she was gathering up her work, "'tis an old abbe with him! no fear! Abbe? Nay, 'tis liker to an English clergyman! Can a banished one have strayed hither? The younger man is in mourning. Could it be? No graver, older, more manly--Oh!"

"Anne! Anne! We have found you!"

"Mr. Archfield! You!"

And as Charles Archfield, in true English fashion, kissed her cheek, Anne fairly choked with tears of joy, and she ever after remembered that moment as the most joyful of her life, though the joy was almost agony.

"This is Mistress Anne Woodford, sir," said Charles, the next moment. "Allow me, madam, to present Mr. Fellowes, of Magdalen College."

Anne held out her hand, and courtesied in response to the bow and wave of the shovel hat.

"How did you know that I was here?" she said.

"Doctor Woodford thought it likely, and begged us to come and see whether we could do anything for you," said Charles; "and you may believe that we were only too happy to do so. A lady to whom we had letters, who is half English, the Vicomtesse de Bellaise, was so good as to go to the convent at Poissy and discover for us from some of the suite where you were."

"My uncle--my dear uncle--is he well?"

"Quite well, when last we heard," said Charles. "That was at Florence, nearly a month ago."

"And all at Fareham, are they well?"

"All just as usual," said Charles, "at the last hearing, which was at the same time. I hoped to have met letters at Paris, but no doubt the war prevents the mails from running."

"Ah! I have never had a single letter," said Anne. "Did my uncle know anything of me? Has he never had one of mine?"

"Up to the time when he wrote, last March, that is to say, he had received nothing. He had gone to London to make inquiries--"

"Ah! my dear good uncle!"

"And had ascertained that you had been chosen to accompany the Queen and Prince in their escape from Whitehall. You have played the heroine, Miss Anne."

"Oh! if you knew--"

"And," said Mr. Fellowes, "both he and Sir Philip Archfield requested us, if we could make our way home through Paris, to come and offer our services to Mistress Woodford, in case she should wish to send intelligence to England, or if she should wish to make use of our escort to return home."

"Oh sir! oh sir! how can I thank you enough! You cannot guess the happiness you have brought me," cried Anne with clasped hands, tears welling up again.

"You will come with us then," cried Charles. "I am sure you ought. They have not used you well, Anne; how pale and thin you have grown."

"That is only pining! I am quite well, only home-sick," she said with a smile. "I am sure the Queen will let me go. I am nothing but a burthen now. She has plenty of her own people, and they do not like a Protestant about the Prince."

"There is Madame de Bellaise," said Mr. Fellowes, "advancing along the walk with Lady Powys. Let me present you to her."

"You have succeeded, I see," a kind voice said, as Anne found herself making her courtesy to a tall and stately old lady, with a mass of hair of the peculiar silvered tint of flaxen mixed with white.

"I am sincerely glad," said Lady Powys, "that Miss Woodford has met her friends."

"Also," said Madame de Bellaise, "Lady Powys is good enough to say that if mademoiselle will honour me with a visit, she gives permission for her to return with me to Paris."

This was still greater joy, except for that one recollection, formidable in the midst of her joy, of her dress. Did Madame de Bellaise divine something? for she said, "These times remind me of my youth, when we poor cavalier families well knew what sore straits were. If mademoiselle will bring what is most needful, the rest can be sent afterwards."

Making her excuses for the moment, Anne with light and gladsome foot sped along the stately alley, up the stairs to her chamber, round which she looked much as if it had been a prison cell, fell on her knees in a gush of intense thankfulness, and made her rapid preparations, her hands trembling with joy, and a fear that she might wake to find all again a dream. She felt as if this

deliverance were a token of forgiveness for her past wilfulness, and as if hope were opened to her once more. Lady Powys met her as she came down, and spoke very kindly, thanking her for her services, and hoping that she would enjoy the visit she was about to make.

"Does your ladyship think Her Majesty will require me any longer?" asked Anne timidly.

"If you wish to return to the country held by the Prince of Orange," said the Countess coldly, "you must apply for dismissal to Her Majesty herself."

Anne perceived from the looks of her friends that it was no time for discussing her loyalty, and all taking leave, she was soon seated beside Madame de Bellaise, while the coach and four rolled down the magnificent avenue, and scene after scene disappeared, beautiful and stately indeed, but which she was as glad to leave behind her as if they had been the fetters and bars of a dungeon, and she almost wondered at the words of admiration of her companions.

Madame de Bellaise sat back, and begged the others to speak English, saying that it was her mother tongue, and she loved the sound of it, but really trying to efface herself, while the eager conversation between the two young people went on about their homes.

Charles had not been there more recently than Anne, and his letters were at least two months old, but the intelligence in them was as water to her thirsty soul. All was well, she heard, including the little heir of Archfield, though the young father coloured a little, and shuffled over the answers to the inquiries with a rather sad smile. Charles was, however, greatly improved. He had left behind him the loutish, unformed boy, and had become a handsome, courteous, well-mannered gentleman. The very sight of him handing Madame de Bellaise in and out of her coach was a wonder in itself when Anne recollected how he had been wont to hide himself in the shrubbery to prevent being called upon for such services, and how uncouthly in the last extremity he would perform them.

Madame de Bellaise was inhabiting her son's great Hotel de Nidemerle. He was absent in garrison, and she was presiding over the family of grandchildren, their mother being in bad health. So much Anne heard before she was conducted to a pleasant little bedroom, far more home-like and comfortable than in any of the palaces she had inhabited. It opened into another, whence merry young voices were heard.

"That is the apartment of my sister's youngest daughter," said Madame de Bellaise, "Noemi Darpent. I borrowed her for a little while to teach her French and dancing, but now that we are gone to war, they want to have her back again, and it will be well that she should avail herself of the same escort as yourself. All will then be selon les convenances, which had been a difficulty to me," she added with a laugh.

Then opening the door of communication she said; "Here, Noemi, we have found your countrywoman, and I put her under your care. Ah! you two chattering little pies, I knew the voices were yours. This is my granddaughter, Marguerite de Nidemerle, and my niece--a la mode de Bretagne--Cecile d'Aubepine, all bestowing their chatter on

their cousin."

Noemi Darpent was a tall, fair, grave-faced maiden, some years over twenty, and so thoroughly English that it warmed Anne's heart to look at her, and the other two were bright little Frenchwomen-- Marguerite a pretty blonde, Cecile pale, dark, and sallow, but full of life. Both were at the age at which girls were usually in convents, but as Anne learnt, Madame de Bellaise was too English at heart to give up the training of her grandchildren, and she had an English governess for them, daughter to a Romanist cavalier ruined by sequestration.

She was evidently the absolute head of the family. Her daughter-in-law was a delicate little creature, who scarcely seemed able to bear the noise of the family at the long supper-table, when all talked with shrill French voices, from the two youths and their abbe tutor down to the little four-year-old Lolotte in her high chair. But to Anne, after the tedious formality of the second table at the palace, stiff without refinement, this free family life was perfectly delightful and refreshing, though as yet she was too much cramped, as it were, by long stiffness, silence, and treatment as an inferior to join, except by the intelligent dancing of her brown eyes, and replies when directly addressed.

After Mrs. Labadie's homeliness, Pauline's exclusive narrowness, Jane's petty frivolity, Hester's vulgar worldliness, and the general want of cultivation in all who treated her on an equality, it was like returning to rational society; and she could not but observe that Mr. Archfield altogether held his own in conversation with the rest, whether in French or English. Little more than a year ago he would hardly have opened his mouth, and would have worn the true bumpkin look of contemptuous sheepishness. Now he laughed and made others laugh as readily and politely as--Ah! With whom was she comparing him? Did the thought of poor Peregrine dwell on his mind as it did upon hers? But perhaps things were not so terrible to a man as to a woman, and he had not seen those apparitions! Indeed, when not animated, she detected a certain thoughtful melancholy on his brow which certainly had not belonged to former times.

Mr. Fellowes early made known to Anne that her uncle had asked him to be her banker, and the first care of her kind hostess was to assist her in supplying the deficiencies of her wardrobe, so that she was able to go abroad without shrinking at her own shabby appearance.

The next thing was to take her to Poissy to request her dismissal from the Queen, without which it would be hardly decorous to depart, though in point of fact, in the present state of affairs, as Noemi said, there was nothing to prevent it.

"No," said Mr. Fellowes; "but for that reason Miss Woodford would feel bound to show double courtesy to the discrowned Queen."

"And she has often been very kind to me--I love her much," said Anne.

"Noemi is a little Whig," said Madame de Bellaise. "I shall not take her with us, because I know her father would not like it, but to me it is only like the days of my youth to visit an exiled queen."

Will these gentlemen think fit to be of the party?"

"Thank you, madam, not I," said the Magdalen man. "I am very sorry for the poor lady, but my college has suffered too much at her husband's hands for me to be very anxious to pay her my respects; and if my young friend will take my advice, neither will he. It might be bringing his father into trouble."

To this Charles agreed, so M. L'Abbe undertook to show them the pictures at the Louvre, and Anne and Madame de Bellaise were the only occupants of the carriage that conveyed them to the great old convent of Poissy, the girl enjoying by the way the comfort of the kindness of a motherly woman, though even to her there could be no confiding of the terrible secret that underlay all her thoughts. Madame de Bellaise, however, said how glad she was to secure this companionship for her niece. Noemi had been more attached than her family realised to Claude Merrycourt, a neighbour who had had the folly, contrary to her prudent father's advice, to rush into Monmouth's rebellion, and it had only been by the poor girl's agony when he suffered under the summary barbarities of Kirke that her mother had known how much her heart was with him. The depression of spirits and loss of health that ensued had been so alarming that when Madame de Bellaise, after some months, paid a long visit to her sister in England, Mrs. Darpent had consented to send the girl to make acquaintance with her French relations, and try the effect of change of scene. She had gone, indifferent, passive, and broken-hearted, but her aunt had watched over her tenderly, and she had gradually revived, not indeed into a joyous girl, but into a calm and fairly cheerful woman.

When she had left home, France and England were only too closely connected, but now they were at daggers drawn, and probably would be so for many years, and the Revolution had come so suddenly that Madame de Bellaise had not been able to make arrangements for her niece's return home, and Noemi was anxiously waiting for an opportunity of rejoining her parents.

The present plan was this. Madame de Bellaise's son, the Marquis de Nidemerle, was Governor of Douai, where his son, the young Baron de Ribbaumont, with his cousin, the Chevalier d'Aubepine, were to join him with their tutor, the Abbe Leblanc. The war on the Flemish frontier was not just then in an active state, and there were often friendly relations between the commandants of neighbouring garrisons, so that it might be possible to pass a party on to the Spanish territory with a flag of truce, and then the way would be easy. This passing, however, would be impossible for Noemi alone, since etiquette would not permit of her thus travelling with the two young gentlemen, nor could she have proceeded after reaching Douai, so that the arrival of the two Englishmen and the company of Miss Woodford was a great boon. Madame de Bellaise had already despatched a courier to ask her son whether he could undertake the transit across the frontier, and hoped to apply for passports as soon as his answer was received. She told Anne her niece's history to prevent painful allusions on the journey.

"Ah, madame!" said Anne, "we too have a sad day connected with that unfortunate insurrection. We grieved over Lady Lisle, and burnt with indignation."

"M. Barillon tells me that her judge, the Lord Chancellor, was actually forced to commit himself to the Tower to escape being torn to pieces by the populace, and it is since reported that he has there died of grief and shame. I should think his prison cell must have been haunted by hundreds of ghosts."

"I pray you, madame! do you believe that there are apparitions?"

"I have heard of none that were not explained by some accident, or else were the produce of an excited brain;" and Anne said no more on that head, though it was a comfort to tell of her own foolish preference for the chances of Court preferment above the security of Lady Russell's household, and Madame de Bellaise smiled, and said her experience of Courts had not been too agreeable.

And thus they reached Poissy, where Queen Mary Beatrice had separate rooms set apart for visitors, and thus did not see them from behind the grating, but face to face.

"You wish to leave me, signorina," she said, using the appellation of their more intimate days, as Anne knelt to kiss her hand. "I

cannot wonder. A poor exile has nothing wherewith to reward the faithful."

"Ah! your Majesty, that is not the cause; if I were of any use to you or to His Royal Highness."

"True, signorina; you have been faithful and aided me to the best of your power in my extremity, but while you will not embrace the true faith I cannot keep you about the person of my son as he becomes more intelligent. Therefore it may be well that you should leave us, until such time as we shall be recalled to our kingdom, when I hope to reward you more suitably. You loved my son, and he loved you--perhaps you would like to bid him farewell."

For this Anne was very grateful, and the Prince was sent for by the mother, who was too proud of him to miss any opportunity of exhibiting him to an experienced mother and grandmother like the vicomtesse. He was a year old, and had become a very beautiful child, with large dark eyes like his mother's, and when Mrs. Labadie carried him in, he held out his arms to Anne with a cry of glad recognition that made her feel that if she could have been allowed the charge of him she could hardly have borne to part with him. And when the final leave-taking came, the Queen made his little hand present her with a little gold locket, containing his soft hair, with a J in seed pearls outside, in memory, said Mary Beatrice, of that night beneath the church wall.

"Ah, yes, you had your moment of fear, but we were all in terror, and you hushed him well."

Thus with another kiss to the white hand, returned on her own forehead, ended Anne Jacobina's Court life. Never would she be Jacobina again--always Anne or sweet Nancy! It was refreshing to be so called, when Charles Archfield let the name slip out, then blushed and apologised, while she begged him to resume it, which he was now far too correct to do in public. Noemi quite readily adopted it.

"I am tired of fine French names," she said: "an English voice is quite refreshing; and do you call me Naomi, not Noemi. I did not mind it so much at first, because my father sometimes called me so, after his good old mother, who was bred a Huguenot, but it is like the first step towards home to hear Naomi--Little Omy, as my brothers used to shout over the stairs."

That was a happy fortnight. Madame de Bellaise said it would be a shame to let Anne have spent a half year in France and have seen nothing, so she took the party to the theatre, where they saw the Cid with extreme delight. She regretted that the season was so far advanced that the winter representations of Esther, at St. Cyr by the young ladies, were over, but she invited M. Racine for an evening, when Mr. Fellowes took extreme pleasure in his conversation, and he was prevailed on to read some of the scenes. She also used her entree at Court to enable them to see the fountains at Versailles, which Winchester was to have surpassed but for King Charles's death.

"Just as well otherwise," remarked Charles to Anne. "These fine feathers and flowers of spray are beautiful enough in themselves, but give me the clear old Itchen not tortured into playing tricks, with all the trout killed; and the open down instead of all these terraces and marble steps where one feels as cramped as if it were a perpetual minuet. And look at the cost! Ah! you will know what I mean when we travel through the country."

Another sight was from a gallery, whence they beheld the King eat his dinner alone at a silver-loaded table, and a lengthy ceremony it was. Four plates of soup to begin with, a whole capon with ham, followed by a melon, mutton, salad, garlic, pate de foie gras, fruit, and confitures. Charles really grew so indignant, that, in spite of his newly-acquired politeness, Anne, who knew his countenance, was quite glad when she saw him safe out of hearing.

"The old glutton!" he said; "I should like to put him on a diet of buckwheat and sawdust like his poor peasants for a week, and then see whether he would go on gormandising, with his wars and his buildings, starving his poor. It is almost enough to make a Whig of a man to see what we might have come to. How can you bear it, madame?"

"Alas! we are powerless," said the Vicomtesse. "A seigneur can do little for his people, but in Anjou we have some privileges, and our peasants are better off than those you have seen, though indeed I grieved much for them when first I came among them from England."

She was perhaps the less sorry that Paris was nearly emptied of fashionable society since her guest had the less chance of uttering dangerous sentiments before those who might have repeated them, and much as she liked him, she was relieved when letters came from her son undertaking to expedite them on their way provided they made haste to forestall any outbreak of the war in that quarter.

Meantime Naomi and Anne had been drawn much nearer together by a common interest. The door between their rooms having some imperfection in the latch swung open as they were preparing for bed, and Anne was aware of a sound of sobbing, and saw one of the white-

capped, short-petticoated femmes de chambre kneeling at Naomi's feet, ejaculating, "Oh, take me! take me, mademoiselle! Madame is an angel of goodness, but I cannot go on living a lie. I shall do something dreadful."

"Poor Suzanne! poor Suzanne!" Naomi was answering: "I will do what I can, I will see if it is possible--"

They started at the sound of the step, Suzanne rising to her feet in terror, but Naomi, signing to Anne and saying, "It is only Mademoiselle Woodford, a good Protestant, Suzanne. Go now; I will see what can be done; I know my aunt would like to send a maid with us."

Then as Suzanne went out with her apron to her eyes, and Anne would have apologised, she said, "Never mind; I must have told you, and asked your help. Poor Suzanne, she is one of the Rotrous, an old race of Huguenot peasants whom my aunt always protected; she would protect any one, but these people had a special claim because they sheltered our great-grandmother, Lady Walwyn, when she fled after the S. Barthelemi. When the Edict of Nantes was revoked, the two brothers fled. I believe she helped them, and they got on board ship, and brought a token to my father; but the old mother was feeble and imbecile, and could not move, and the monks and the dragoons frightened and harassed this poor wench into what they called conforming. When the mother died, my aunt took Suzanne and taught her, and thought she was converted; and indeed if all Papists were like my aunt it would not be so hard to become one."

"Oh yes! I know others like that."

"But this poor Suzanne, knowing that she only was converted out of terror, has always had an uneasy conscience, and the sight of me has stirred up everything. She says, though I do not know if it be true, that she was fast drifting into bad habits, when finding my Bible, though it was English and she could not read it, seems to have revived everything, and recalled the teaching of her good old father and pastor, and now she is wild to go to England with us."

"You will take her?" exclaimed Anne.

"Of course I will. Perhaps that is what I was sent here for. I will ask her of my aunt, and I think she will let me have her. You will keep her secret, Anne."

"Indeed I will."

Madame de Bellaise granted Suzanne to her niece without difficulty, evidently guessing the truth, but knowing the peril of the situation too well to make any inquiry. Perhaps she was disappointed that her endeavours to win the girl to her Church had been ineffectual, but to have any connection with one 'relapsed' was so exceedingly perilous that she preferred to ignore the whole subject, and merely let it be known that Suzanne was to accompany Mademoiselle Darpent, and this was only disclosed to the household on the very last morning, after the passports had been procured and the mails packed, and she hushed any remark of the two English girls in such a decided manner as quite startled them by the manifest need of caution.

"We should have come to that if King James were still allowed to have his own way," said Naomi.

"Oh no! we are too English," said Anne.

"Our generation might not see it," said Naomi; "but who can be safe when a Popish king can override law? Oh, I shall breathe more freely when I am on the other side of the Channel. My aunt is much too good for this place, and they don't approve of her, and keep her down."

CHAPTER XXII: REVENANTS

"But soft, behold! lo, where it comes again!
I'll cross it, though it blast me."

Hamlet.

Floods of tears were shed at the departure of the two young officers of sixteen and seventeen. The sobs of the household made the English party feel very glad when it was over and the cavalcade was in motion. A cavalcade it was, for each gentleman rode and so did his body-servant, and each horse had a mounted groom. The two young officers had besides each two chargers, requiring a groom and horse boy, and each conducted half a dozen fresh troopers to join the army. A coach was the regulation mode of travelling for ladies, but both the English girls had remonstrated so strongly that Madame de Bellaise had consented to their riding, though she took them and Suzanne the first day's journey well beyond the ken of the Parisians in her own carriage, as far as Senlis, where there was a fresh parting with the two lads, fewer tears, and more counsel and encouragement, with many fond messages to her son, many to her sister in England, and with affectionate words to her niece a whisper to her to remember that she would not be in a Protestant country till she reached Holland or England.

The last sight they had of the tall dignified figure of the old lady was under the arch of the cathedral, where she was going to pray for their safety. Suzanne was to ride on a pillion behind the Swiss valet of Mr. Fellowes, whom Naomi had taken into her confidence, and the two young ladies each mounted a stout pony. Mr. Fellowes had made friends with the Abbe Leblanc, who was of the old Gallican type, by no means virulently set against Anglicanism, and also a highly cultivated man, so that they had many subjects in common, besides the question of English Catholicity. The two young cousins, Ribaumont and D'Aubepine, were chiefly engaged in looking out for sport, setting their horses to race with one another, and the like, in which Charles Archfield sometimes took a share, but he usually rode with the two young ladies, and talked to them very pleasantly of his travels in Italy, the pictures and antiquities which had made into an interesting reality the studies that he had hated when a boy, also the condition of the country he had seen with a mind which seemed to have opened and enlarged with a sudden start beyond the interests of the next fox-hunt or game at bowls. All were, as he had predicted, greatly shocked at the aspect of the country through which they passed: the meagre crops ripening for harvest, the hay-

carts, sometimes drawn by an equally lean cow and woman, the haggard women bearing heavy burthens, and the ragged, barefooted children leading a wretched cow or goat to browse by the wayside, the gaunt men toiling at road-mending with their poor starved horses, or at their seigneur's work, alike unpaid, even when drawn off from their own harvests. And in the villages the only sound buildings were the church and presbytere by its side, the dwellings being miserable hovels, almost sunk into the earth, an old crone or two, marvels of skinniness, spinning at the door, or younger women making lace, and nearly naked children rushing out to beg. Sometimes the pepper-box turrets of a chateau could be seen among distant woods, or the walls of a cloister, with a taper spire in the midst, among greener fields; and the towns were approached through long handsome avenues, and their narrow streets had a greater look of prosperity, while their inns, being on the way to the place of warfare, were almost luxurious, with a choice of dainty meats and good wines. Everywhere else was misery, and Naomi said it was the vain endeavour to reform the source of these grievances that had forced her father to become an exile from his native country, and that he had much apprehended that the same blight might gradually be brought over his adopted land, on which Charles stood up for the constitution, and for the resolute character of Englishmen, and Anne, as in duty bound, for the good intentions of her godfather. Thus they argued, and Anne not only felt herself restored to the company of rational beings, but greatly admired Charles's sentiments and the ability with which he put them forward, and now and then the thought struck her, and with a little twinge of pain of which she was ashamed, would Naomi Darpent be the healer of the wound nearly a year old, and find in him consolation for the hero of her girlhood? Somehow there would be a sense of disappointment in them both if so it were.

At length the spires and towers of Douai came in sight, fenced in by stern lines of fortification according to the science of Vauban--smooth slopes of glacis, with the terrible muzzles of cannon peeping out on the summits of the ramparts, and the line of salient angle and ravelin with the moat around, beautiful though formidable. The Marquis de Nidemerle had sent a young officer and sergent's party to meet the travellers several miles off, and bring them unquestioned through the outposts of the frontier town, so closely watched in this time of war, and at about half a mile from the gates he himself, with a few attendants, rode out all glittering and clanking in their splendid uniforms and accoutrements. He doffed his hat with the heavy white plume, and bowed his greeting to the ladies and clergymen, but both the young Frenchmen, after a military salute, hastily dismounted and knelt on one knee, while he sprang from his horse, and then, making the sign of the Cross over his son, raised him, and folding him in his arms pressed him to his breast and kissed him on each cheek, not without tears, then repeated the same greeting with young D'Aubepine. He then kissed the hand of his belle cousine, whom, of course, he knew already, and bowed almost to the ground on being presented to Mademoiselle Woodford, a little less low to Monsieur Archfield, who was glad the embracing was not to be repeated, politely received Mr. Fellowes, and honoured the domestic abbe with a kindly word and nod. The gradation was amusing, and he was a magnificent figure, with his noble horse and grand military dress, while his fine straight features, sunburnt though naturally fair, and his tall, powerful frame, well became his surroundings--'a true white Ribau mont,' as Naomi said, as she looked at the long fair hair drawn back and tied with ribbon. "He is just

like the portrait of our great-grandfather who was almost killed on the S. Barthelemi!" However, Naomi had no more time to talk _of_ him, for he rode by her side inquiring for his mother, wife, and children, but carefully doing the honours to the stranger lady and gentleman.

Moat and drawbridge there were at Portsmouth, and a sentry at the entrance, but here there seemed endless guards, moats, bridges, and gates, and there was a continual presenting of arms and acknowledging of salutes as the commandant rode in with the travellers. It was altogether a very new experience in life. They were lodged in the governor's quarters in the fortress, where the accommodation for ladies was of the slenderest, and M. de Nidemerle made many apologies, though he had evidently given up his own sleeping chamber to the two ladies, who would have to squeeze into his narrow camp-bed, with Suzanne on the floor, and the last was to remain there entirely, there being no woman with whom she could have her meals. The ladies were invited to sup with the staff, and would, as M. de Nidemerle assured them, be welcomed with the greatest delight. So Naomi declared that they must make their toilette do as much justice as possible to their country; and though full dress was not attainable, they did their best with ribbons and laces, and the arrangement of her fair locks and Anne's brown ones, when Suzanne proved herself an adept; the ladies meantime finding no small amusement in the varieties of swords, pistols, spurs, and other accoutrements, for which the marquis had apologised, though Naomi told him that they were the fittest ornaments possible.

"And my cousin Gaspard is a really good man," she said, indicating to her friend the little shrine with holy-water stoup, ivory crucifix, print of the Madonna, two or three devotional books, and the miniatures of mother, wife, and children hung not far off; also of two young cavaliers, one of whom Naomi explained to be the young father whom Gaspard could not recollect, the other, that of the uncle Eustace, last Baron Walwyn and Ribaumont, of whom her own mother talked with such passionate affection, and whose example had always been a guiding star to the young marquis.

He came to their door to conduct them down to supper, giving his arm to Miss Woodford as the greatest stranger, while Miss Darpent was conducted by a resplendent ducal colonel. The supper-room was in festal guise, hung round with flags, and the table adorned with flowers; a band was playing, and never had either Anne or Naomi been made so much of. All were eagerly talking, Charles especially so, and Anne thought, with a thrill, "Did he recollect that this was the very anniversary of that terrible 1st of July?"

It was a beautiful summer evening, and the supper taking place at five o'clock there was a considerable time to spare afterwards, so that M. de Nidemerle proposed to show the strangers the place, and the view from the ramparts.

"In my company you can see all well," he said, "but otherwise there might be doubts and jealousies."

He took them through the narrow Flemish streets of tall houses with projecting upper stories, and showed them that seminary which was popularly supposed in England to be the hotbed of truculent plots, but where they only saw a quiet academic cloister and an exquisite

garden, green turf, roses and white lilies in full perfection, and students flitting about in cassocks and square caps, more like an Oxford scene, as Mr. Fellowes said, than anything he had yet seen. He was joined by an English priest from his own original neighbourhood. The Abbe Leblanc found another acquaintance, and these two accompanied their friends to the ramparts. The marquis had a great deal to hear from his cousin about his home, and thus it happened that Charles Archfield and Anne found themselves more practically alone together than they had yet been. As they looked at the view over the country, he told her of a conversation that he had had with an officer now in the French army, but who had served in the Imperial army against the Turks, and that he had obtained much useful information.

"Useful?" asked Anne.

"Yes. I have been watching for the moment to tell you, Anne; I have resolved what to do. I intend to make a few campaigns there against the enemy of Christendom."

"O Mr. Archfield!" was all she could say.

"See here, I have perceived plainly that to sink down into my lady's eldest son is no wholesome life for a man with all his powers about him. I understand now what a set of oafs we were to despise the poor fellow you wot of, because he was not such a lubber as ourselves. I have no mind to go through the like."

"You are so different; it could not be the same."

"Not quite; but remember there is nothing for me to do. My father is still an active man, and I am not old enough to take my part in public affairs, even if I loved greatly either the Prince of Orange or King James. I could not honestly draw my sword for either. I have no estate to manage, my child's inheritance is all in money, and it would drive me mad, or worse, to go home to be idle. No; I will fight against the common enemy till I have made me a name, and won reputation and standing; or if I should not come back, there's the babe at home to carry on the line."

"Oh, sir! your father and mother--Lucy--all that love you. What will they say?"

"It would only put them to needless pain to ask them. I shall not. I shall write explaining all my motives--all except one, and that you alone know, Anne."

She shuddered a little, and felt him press her arm tightly. They had fallen a good deal behind the marquis and his cousin, and were descending as twilight fell into a narrow, dark, lonely street, with all the houses shut up. "No one has guessed, have they?" she faltered.

"Not that I know of. But I cannot--no! I can_not_ go home, to have that castle near me, and that household at Oakwood. I see enough in my dreams without that."

"See! Ah, yes!"

"Then, Anne, you have suffered then too--guiltless as you are in keeping my terrible secret! I have often thought and marvelled whether it were so with you."

She was about to tell him what she had seen, when he began, "There is one thing in this world that would sweeten and renew my life--and that?"

Her heart was beating violently at what was so suddenly coming on her, when at that instant Charles broke off short with "Good Heavens! What's that?"

On the opposite side of the street, where one of the many churches stood some way back, making an opening, there was a figure,

essentially the same that Anne had seen at Lambeth, but bare-headed, clad apparently in something long and white, and with a pale bluish light on the ghastly but unmistakable features.

She uttered a faint gasping cry scarcely audible, Charles's impulse was to exclaim, "Man or spirit, stand!" and drawing his sword to rush across the street; but in that second all had vanished, and he only struck against closed doors, which he shook, but could not open.

"Mr. Archfield! Oh, come back! I have seen it before," entreated Anne; and he strode back, with a gesture of offering her support, and trembling, she clung to his arm. "It does not hurt," she said. "It comes and goes--"

"You have seen it before!"

"Twice."

No more could be said, for through the gloom the white plume and gold-laced uniform of the marquis were seen. He had missed them, and come back to look for them, beginning to apologise.

"I am confounded at having left Mademoiselle behind.--Comment!"--as the sound betrayed that Charles was sheathing his sword. "I trust that Monsieur has met with no unpleasant adventure from my people."

"Oh, no, Monsieur," was the answer, as he added--

"One can never be sure as to these fiery spirits towards an Englishman in the present state of feeling, and I blame myself extremely for having permitted myself to lose sight of Monsieur and Mademoiselle."

"Indeed, sir, we have met with no cause of complaint," said Charles, adding as if casually, "What is that church?"

"'Tis the Jesuits' Church," replied the governor. "There is the best preaching in the town, they say, and Jansenists as we are, I was struck with the Lenten course."

Anne went at once to her room on returning to the house. Naomi, who was there already, exclaimed at her paleness, and insisted on administering a glass of wine from what the English called the rere

supper, the French an encas, the substantial materials for which had been left in the chamber. Then Anne felt how well it had been for her that her fellows at the palace had been so uncongenial, for she could hardly help disclosing to Naomi the sight she had seen, and the half-finished words she had heard. It was chiefly the feeling that she could not bear Naomi to know of the blood on Charles's hand which withheld her in her tumult of feeling, and made her only entreat, "Do not ask me, I cannot tell you." And Naomi, who was some years older, and had had her own sad experience, guessed perhaps at one cause for her agitation, and spared her inquiries, though as Anne, tired out by the long day, and forced by their close quarters to keep herself still, dropped asleep, strange mutterings fell from her lips about "The vault--the blood--come back. There he is. The secret has risen to forbid. O, poor Peregrine!"

Between the July heat, the narrow bed, and the two chamber fellows, Anne had little time to collect her thoughts, except for the general impression that if Charles finished what he had begun to say, the living and the dead alike must force her to refuse, though something within foreboded that this would cost her more than she yet durst perceive, and her heart was ready to spring forth and enclose him as it were in an embrace of infinite tenderness, above all when she thought of his purpose of going to those fearful Hungarian wars.

But after the hot night, it was a great relief to prepare for an early start. M. de Nidemerle had decided on sending the travellers to Tournay, the nearest Spanish town, on the Scheldt, since he had some acquaintance with the governor, and when no campaign was actually on foot the courtesies of generous enemies passed between them. He had already sent an intimation of his intention of forwarding an English kinswoman of his own with her companions, and bespoken the good offices of his neighbour, and they were now to set off in very early morning under the escort of a flag of truce, a trumpeter, and a party of troopers, commanded by an experienced old officer with white moustaches and the peaked beard of the last generation, contrasting with a face the colour of walnut wood.

The marquis himself and his son, however, rode with the travellers for their first five miles, through a country where the rich green of the natural growth showed good soil, all enamelled with flowers and corn crops run wild; but the villages looked deserted, the remains of burnt barns and houses were frequent, and all along that frontier, it seemed as if no peaceful inhabitants ventured to settle, and only brigands often rendered such by misery might prowl about. The English party felt as if they had never understood what war could be.

However, in a melancholy orchard run wild, under the shade of an apple-tree laden with young fruit, backed by a blackened gable half concealed by a luxuriant untrimmed vine, the avant couriers of the commandant had cleared a space in the rank grass, and spread a morning meal, of cold pate, fowl and light wines, in which the French officers drank to the good journey of their friends, and then when the horses had likewise had their refreshment the parting took place with much affection between the cousins. The young Ribaumont augured that they should meet again when he had to protect Noemi in a grand descent on Dorsetshire in behalf of James, and she merrily shook her fist at him and defied him, and his father allowed that they were a long way from that.

M. de Nidemerle hinted to Mr. Archfield that nobody could tell him more about the war with the Turks than M. le Capitaine Delaune, who was, it appeared, a veteran Swiss who had served in almost every army in Europe, and thus could give information by no means to be neglected. So that, to Anne's surprise and somewhat to her mortification, since she had no knowledge of the cause, she saw Charles riding apart with this wooden old veteran, who sat as upright as a ramrod on his wiry-looking black horse, leaving her to the company of Naomi and Mr. Fellowes. Did he really wish not to pursue the topic which had brought Peregrine from his grave? It would of course be all the better, but it cost her some terrible pangs to think so.

There were far more formalities and delays before the travellers could cross the Tournay bridge across the Scheldt. They were brought to a standstill a furlong off, and had to wait while the trumpeter rode forward with the white flag, and the message was referred to the officer on guard, while a sentry seemed to be watching over them. Then the officer came to the gateway of the bridge, and Captain Delaune rode forward to him, but there was still a long weary waiting in the sun before he came back, after having shown their credentials to the governor, and then he was accompanied by a Flemish officer, who, with much courtesy, took them under his charge, and conducted them through all the defences, over the bridge, and to the gate where their baggage had to be closely examined. Naomi had her Bible in her bosom, or it would not have escaped; Anne heartily wished she had used the same precaution on her flight from England, but she had not, like her friend, been warned beforehand.

When within the city there was more freedom, and the Fleming conducted the party to an inn, where, unlike English inns, they could not have a parlour to themselves, but had to take their meals in common with other guests at a sort of table d'hote, and the ladies had no refuge but their bedroom, where the number of beds did not promise privacy. An orderly soon arrived with an invitation to Don Carlos Arcafila to sup with the Spanish governor, and of course the invitation could not be neglected. The ladies walked about a little in the town with Mr. Fellowes, looking without appreciation at the splendid five-towered cathedral, but recollecting with due English pride that the place had been conquered by Henry VIII. Thence they were to make for Ostend, where they were certain of finding a vessel bound for England.

It was a much smaller party that set forth from Tournay than from Paris, and soon they fell into pairs, Mr. Fellowes and Naomi riding together, sufficiently out of earshot of the others for Charles to begin--

"I have not been able to speak to you, Anne, since that strange interruption--if indeed it were not a dream."

"Oh, sir, it was no dream! How could it be?"

"How could it, indeed, when we both saw it, and both of us awake and afoot, and yet I cannot believe my senses."

"Oh, I can believe it only too truly! I have seen him twice before."

I thought you said you had."

"Merely in dreams, and that is bad enough."

"Are you sure? for I was up and awake."

"Are you sure? I might ask again. I was asleep in bed, and glad enough to shake myself awake. Where were you?"

"Once on Hallowmas Eve, looking from the window at Whitehall; once when waiting with the Queen under the wall of Lambeth Church, on the night of our flight."

"Did others see him then?"

"I was alone the first time. The next time when he flitted across the light, no one else saw him; but they cried out at my start. Why should he appear except to us?"

"That is true," muttered Charles.

"And oh, sir, those two times he looked as he did in life--not ghastly as now. There can be no doubt now that--"

"What, sweet Anne?"

"Sir, I must tell you! I could bear it no longer, and I did consult the Bishop of Bath and Wells."

"Any more?" he asked in a somewhat displeased voice.

"No one, not a soul, and he is as safe as any of the priests here; he regards a confession in the same way. Mr. Archfield, forgive me. He seemed divinely sent to me on that All Saints' day! Oh, forgive me!" and tears were in her eyes.

"He is Dr. Ken--eh? I remember him. I suppose he is as safe as any man, and a woman must have some relief. You have borne enough indeed," said Charles, greatly touched by her tears. "What did he say?"

"He asked, was I certain of the--death," said she, bringing out the word with difficulty; "but then I had only seen it at Whitehall; and these other appearances, in such places too, take away all hope that it is otherwise!"

"Assuredly," said Charles; "I had not the least doubt at the moment. I know I ran my sword through his body, and felt a jar that I believe was his backbone," he said with a shudder, "and he fell prone and breathless; but since I have seen more of fencing, and heard more of wounds, the dread has crossed me that I acted as an inexperienced lad, and that I ought to have tried whether the life was in him, or if he could be recovered. If so, I slew him twice, by launching him into that pit. God forgive me!"

"Is it so deep?" asked Anne, shuddering. "I know there is a sort of step at the top; but I always shunned the place, and never looked in."

"There are two or three steps at the top, but all is broken away below. Sedley and I once threw a ball down, and I am sure it dropped to a depth down which no man could fall and _live_. I believe there once were underground passages leading to the harbour on one hand, and out to Portsdown Hill on the other, but that the communication was broken away and the openings destroyed when Lord Goring was governor of Portsmouth, to secure the castle. Be that as it may, he could not have been living after he reached that floor. I heard the thud, and the jingle of his sword, and it will haunt me to my dying day."

"And yet you never intended it. You did it in defence of me. You did not mean to strike thus hard. It was an accident."

"Would that I could so feel it!" he sighed. "Nay, of course I had no evil design when my poor little wife drove me out to give you her rag of ribbon, or whatever it was; but I hated as well as despised the fellow. He had angered me with his scorn--well deserved, as now I see--of our lubberly ways. She had vexed me with her teasing commendations--out of harmless mischief, poor child. I hated him more every time you looked at him, and when I had occasion to strike him I was glad of it. There was murder in my heart, and I felt as if I were putting a rat or a weasel out of the way when I threw him down that pit. God forgive me! Then, in my madness, I so acted that in a manner I was the death of that poor young thing."

"No, no, sir. Your mother had never thought she would live."

"So they say; but her face comes before me in reproach. There are times when I feel myself a double murderer. I have been on the point of telling all to Mr. Fellowes, or going home to accuse myself. Only the thought of my father and mother, and of leaving such a blight on that poor baby, has withheld me; but I cannot go home to face the sight of the castle."

"No," said Anne, choked with tears.

"Nor is there any suspicion of the poor fellow's fate," he added.

"Not that I ever heard."

"His family think him fled, as was like enough, considering the way in which they treated him," said Charles. "Nor do I see what good it would do them to know the truth."

"It would only be a grief and bitterness to all."

"I hope I have repented, and that God accepts my forgiveness," said Charles sadly. "I am banishing myself from all I love, and there is a weight on me for life; but, unless suspicion falls on others, I do not feel bound to make it worse for all by giving myself up. Yet those appearances--to you, to me, to us both! At such a moment, too, last night!"

"Can it be because of his unhallowed grave?" said Anne, in a low voice of awe.

"If it were!" said Charles, drawing up his horse for a moment in thought. "Anne, if there be one more appearance, the place shall be

searched, whether it incriminate me or not. It would be adding to all my wrongs towards the poor fellow, if that were the case."

"Even if he were found," said Anne, "suspicion would not light on you. And at home it will be known if he haunts the place. I will--"

"Nay, but, Anne, he will not interrupt me now. I have much more to say. I want you to remember that we were sweethearts ere ever I, as a child of twelve, knew that I was contracted to that poor babe, and bidden to think only of her. Poor child! I honestly did my best to love her, so far as I knew how, and mayhap we could have rubbed on through life passably well as things go. But--but--It skills not talking of things gone by, except to show that it is a whole heart--not the reversion of one that is yours for ever, mine only love."

"Oh, but--but--I am no match for you."

"I've had enough of grand matches."

"Your father would never endure it."

"My father would soon rejoice. Besides, if we are wedded here--say at Ostend--and you make me a home at Buda, or Vienna, or some place at our winter quarters, as my brave wench will, my father will be glad enough to see us both at home again."

"No; it cannot be. It would be plain treachery to your parents; Mr. Fellowes would say so. I am sure he would not marry us."

"There are English chaplains. Is that all that holds you back?"

"No, sir. If the Archbishop of Canterbury were here himself, it could not make it other than a sin, and an act of mean ingratitude, for me, the Prince's rocker, to take advantage of their goodness in permitting you to come and bring me home--to do what would be pain, grief, and shame to them."

"Never shame."

"What is wrong is shame! Cannot you see how unworthy it would be in me, and how it would grieve my uncle that I should have done such a thing?"

"Love would override scruples."

"Not _true_ love."

"True! Then you own to some love for me, Anne."

"I do--not--know. I have guarded--I mean--cast away--I mean--never entertained any such thought ever since I was old enough to know how wicked it would be."

"Anne! Anne!" (in an undertone very like rapture), "you have confessed all! It is no sin _now_. Even you cannot say so."

She hung her head and did not answer, but silence was enough for him.

"It is enough!" he said; "you will wait. I shall know you are waiting till I return in such sort that nothing can be denied me. Let me at least have that promise."

"You need not fear," murmured Anne. "How could I need? The secret would withhold me, were there nothing else."

"And there is something else? Eh, sweetheart? Is that all I am to be satisfied with?"

"Oh sir!--Mr. Archfield, I mean--O Charles!" she stammered.

Mr. Fellowes turned round to consult his pupil as to whether the halt should be made at the village whose peaked roofs were seen over the fruit trees.

But when Anne was lifted down from the steed it was with no grasp of common courtesy, and her hand was not relinquished till it had been fervently kissed.

Charles did not again torment her with entreaties to share his exile. Mayhap he recognised, though unwillingly, that her judgment had been right, but there was no small devotion in his whole demeanour, as they dined, rode, and rested on that summer's day amid fields of giant haystacks, and hostels wreathed with vines, with long vistas of sleek cows and plump dappled horses in the sheds behind. The ravages of war had lessened as they rode farther from the frontier, and the rich smiling landscape lay rejoicing in the summer sunshine; the sturdy peasants looked as if they had never heard of marauders, as they herded their handsome cattle and responded civilly when a draught of milk was asked for the ladies.

There was that strange sense of Eden felicity that sometimes comes with the knowledge that the time is short for mutual enjoyment in full peace. Charles and Anne would part, their future was undefined; but for the present they reposed in the knowledge of each other's hearts, and in being together. It was as in their childhood, when by tacit consent he had been Anne's champion from the time she came as a little Londoner to be alarmed at rough country ways, and to be easily scared by Sedley. It had been then that Charles had first awakened to the chivalry of the better part of boyhood's nature, instead of following his cousin's lead, and treating girls as creatures meant to be bullied. Many a happy reminiscence was shared between the two as they rode together, and it was not till the pale breadth of sea filled their horizon, broken by the tall spires and peaked gables and many-windowed steep roofs of Ostend, that the future was permitted to come forward and trouble them. Then Anne's heart began to feel that persistence in her absolute refusal was a much harder thing than at the first, when the idea was new and strange to her. And there were strange yearnings that Charles should renew the proposal, mixed with dread of herself and of her own resolution in case of his doing so. As her affections embraced him more and more she pictured him sick, wounded, dying, out of reach of all, among Germans, Hungarians, Turks,--no one at hand to comfort him or even to know his fate.

There was even disappointment in his acquiescence, though her better mind told her that it was in accordance with her prayer against

temptation. Moreover, he was of a reserved nature, not apt to discuss what was once fixed, and perhaps it showed that he respected her judgment not to try to shake her decision. Though for once love had carried him away, he might perhaps be grateful to her for sparing him the perplexities of dragging her about with him and of giving additional offence to his parents. The affection born of lifelong knowledge is not apt to be of the vehement character that disregards all obstacles or possible miseries to the object thereof. Yet enough feeling was betrayed to make Naomi whisper at night, "Sweet Nan, are you not some one else's sweet?"

And Anne, now with another secret on her heart, only replied with embraces, and, "Do not talk of it! I cannot tell how it is to be. I cannot tell you all."

Naomi was discreet enough only to caress.

With strict formalities at outworks, moat, drawbridge, and gates, and the customary inquisitorial search of the luggage, the travellers were allowed to repair to a lofty inn, with the Lion of Flanders for its sign, and a wide courtyard, the successive outside galleries covered with luxuriant vines. Here, as usual, though the party of females obtained one bedroom together, the gentlemen had to share one vast sleeping chamber with a variety of merchants, Dutch, Flemish, Spanish, and a few English. Meals were at a great table d'hote in the public room, opening into the court, and were shared by sundry Spanish, Belgic, and Swiss officers of the garrison, who made this their mess-room. Two young English gentlemen, like Charles Archfield, making the grand tour, whom he had met in Italy, were delighted to encounter him again, and still more so at the company of English ladies.

"No wonder the forlorn widower has recovered his spirits!" Anne heard one say with a laugh that made her blush and turn away; and there was an outcry that after a monopoly of the fair ones all the way from Paris, the seats next to them must be yielded.

Anne was disappointed, and could not bring herself to be agreeable to the obtrusive cavalier with the rich lace cravat and perfumed hair, both assumed in her honour.

The discussion was respecting the vessels where a passage might be obtained. The cavaliers were to sail in a couple of days for London, but another ship would go out of harbour with the tide on the following day for Southampton, and this was decided on by acclamation by the Hampshire party, though no good accommodation was promised them.

There was little opportunity for a *tete-a-tetes*, for the young men insisted on escorting the ladies to the picture galleries, palaces, and gardens, and Charles did not wish to reawaken the observations that, according to the habits of the time, might not be of the choicest description. Anne watched him under her eyelashes, and wondered with beating heart whether after all he intended to return home, and there plead his cause, for he gave no token of intending to separate from the rest.

The Hampshire Hog was to sail at daybreak, so the passengers went on board over night, after supper, when the summer twilight was sinking

down and the far-off west still had a soft golden tint.

Anne felt Charles's arm round her in the boat and grasping her hand, then pulling off her glove and putting a ring on her finger--all in silence. She still felt that arm on the deck in the confusion of men, ropes, and bales of goods, and the shouts and hails on all sides that nearly deafened her. There was imminent danger of being hurled down, if not overboard, among the far from sober sailors, and Mr. Fellowes urged the ladies to go below at once, conducting Miss Darpent himself as soon as he could ascertain where to go. Anne felt herself almost lifted down. Then followed a strong embrace, a kiss on brow, lips, and either cheek, and a low hoarse whisper--"So best! Mine own! God bless you,"--and as Suzanne came tumbling aft into the narrow cabin, Anne found herself left alone with her two female companions, and knew that these blissful days were over.

CHAPTER XXIII: FRENCH LEAVE

"When ye gang awa, Jamie,
Far across the sea, laddie,
When ye gang to Germanie
What will ye send to me, laddie?"

Huntingtower.

Fides was the posy on the ring. That was all Anne could discover, and indeed only this much with the morning light of the July sun that penetrated the remotest corners. For the cabin was dark and stifling, and there was no leaving it, for both Miss Darpent and her attendant were so ill as to engross her entirely.

She could hardly leave them when there was a summons to a meal in the captain's cabin, and there she found herself the only passenger able to appear, and the rest of the company, though intending civility, were so rough that she was glad to retreat again, and wretched as the cabin was, she thought it preferable to the deck.

Mr. Fellowes, she heard, was specially prostrated, and jokes were passing round that it was the less harm, since it might be the worse for him if the crew found out that there was a parson on board.

Thus Anne had to forego the first sight of her native land, and only by the shouts above and the decreased motion of the vessel knew when she was within lee of the Isle of Wight, and on entering the Solent could encourage her companions that their miseries were nearly over, and help them to arrange themselves for going upon deck.

When at length they emerged, as the ship lay-to in sight of the red roofs and white steeples of Southampton, and of the green mazes of the New Forest, Mr. Fellowes was found looking everywhere for the pupil whom he had been too miserable to miss during the voyage. Neither Charles Archfield nor his servant was visible, but Mr. Fellowes's own man coming forward, delivered to the bewildered tutor a packet which he said that his comrade had put in his charge for the purpose. In the boat, on the way to land, Mr. Fellowes read to himself the letter, which of course filled him with extreme

distress. It contained much of what Charles had already explained to Anne of his conviction that in the present state of affairs it was better for so young a man as himself, without sufficient occupation at home, to seek honourable service abroad, and that he thought it would spare much pain and perplexity to depart without revisiting home. He added full and well-expressed thanks for all that Mr. Fellowes had done for him, and for kindness for which he hoped to be the better all his life. He enclosed a long letter to his father, which he said would, he hoped, entirely exonerate his kind and much-respected tutor from any remissness or any participation in the scheme which he had thought it better on all accounts to conceal till the last.

"And indeed," said poor Mr. Fellowes, "if I had had any inkling of it, I should have applied to the English Consul to restrain him as a ward under trust. But no one would have thought it of him. He had always been reasonable and docile beyond his years, and I trusted him entirely. I should as soon have thought of our President giving me the slip in this way. Surely he came on board with us."

"He handed me into the boat," said Miss Darpent. "Who saw him last? Did you, Miss Woodford?"

Anne was forced to own that she had seen him on board, and her cheeks were in spite of herself such tell-tales that Mr. Fellowes could not help saying, "It is not my part to rebuke you, madam, but if you were aware of this evasion, you will have a heavy reckoning to pay to the young man's parents."

"Sir," said Anne, "I knew indeed that he meant to join the Imperial army, but I knew not how nor when."

"Ah, well! I ask no questions. You need not justify yourself to me, young lady; but Sir Philip and Lady Archfield little knew what they did when they asked us to come by way of Paris. Not that I regret it on all accounts," he added, with a courteous bow to Naomi which set her blushing in her turn. He avoided again addressing Miss Woodford, and she thought with consternation of the prejudice he might excite against her. It had been arranged between the two maidens that Naomi should be a guest at Portchester Rectory till she could communicate with Walwyn, and her father or brother could come and fetch her.

They landed at the little wharf, among the colliers, and made their way up the street to an inn, where, after ordering a meal to satisfy the ravenous sea-appetite, Mr. Fellowes, after a few words with Naomi, left the ladies to their land toilet, while he went to hire horses for the journey.

Then Naomi could not help saying, "O Anne! I did not think you would have done this. I am grieved!"

"You do not know all," said Anne sadly, "or you would not think so hardly."

"I saw you had an understanding with him. I see you have a new ring on your finger; but how could I suppose you would encourage an only son thus to leave his parents?"

"Hush, hush, Naomi!" cried Anne, as the uncontrollable tears broke out. "Don't you believe that it is quite as hard for me as for them that he should have gone off to fight those dreadful blood-thirsty Turks? Indeed I would have hindered him, but that--but that--I know it is best for him. No! I can't tell you why, but I know it is; and even to the very last, when he helped me down the companion-ladder, I hoped he might be coming home first."

"But you are troth-plight to him, and secretly?"

"I am not troth-plight; I know I am not his equal, I told him so, but he thrust this ring on me in the boat, in the dark, and how could I give it back!"

Naomi shook her head, but was more than half-disarmed by her friend's bitter weeping. Whether she gave any hint to Mr. Fellowes Anne did not know, but his manner remained drily courteous, and as Anne had to ride on a pillion behind a servant she was left in a state of isolation as to companionship, which made her feel herself in disgrace, and almost spoilt the joy of dear familiar recognition of hill, field, and tree, after her long year's absence, the longest year in her life, and substituted the sinking of heart lest she should be returning to hear of misfortune and disaster, sickness or death.

Her original plan had been to go on with Naomi to Portchester at once, if by inquiry at Fareham she found that her uncle was at home, but she perceived that Mr. Fellowes decidedly wished that Miss Darpent should go first to the Archfields, and something within her determined first to turn thither in spite of all there was to encounter, so that she might still her misgivings by learning whether her uncle was well. So she bade the man turn his horse's head towards the well-known poplars in front of Archfield House.

The sound of the trampling horses brought more than one well-known old 'blue-coated serving-man' into the court, and among them a woman with a child in her arms. There was the exclamation, "Mistress Anne! Sure Master Charles be not far behind," and the old groom ran to help her down.

"Oh! Ralph, thanks. All well? My uncle?"

"He is here, with his Honour," and in scarcely a moment more Lucy, swift of foot, had flown out, and had Anne in her embrace, and crying out--

"Ah, Charles! my brother! I don't see him."

Anne was glad to have no time to answer before she was in her uncle's arms. "My child, at last! God bless thee! Safe in soul and body!"

Sir Philip was there too, greeting Mr. Fellowes, and looking for his son, and with the cursory assurance that Mr. Archfield was well, and that they would explain, a hasty introduction of Miss Darpent was made, and all moved in to where Lady Archfield, more feeble and slow of movement, had come into the hall, and the nurse stood by with the little heir to be shown to his father, and Sedley Archfield stood in the background. It was a cruel moment for all, when the words came

from Mr. Fellowes, "Sir, I have to tell you, Mr. Archfield is not here. This letter, he tells me, is to explain."

There was an outburst of exclamation, during which Sir Philip withdrew into a window with his spectacles to read the letter, while all to which the tutor or Anne ventured to commit themselves was that Mr. Archfield had only quitted them without notice on board the Hampshire Hog.

The first tones of the father had a certain sound of relief, "Gone to the Imperialist army to fight the Turks in Hungary!"

Poor Lady Archfield actually shrieked, and Lucy turned quite pale, while Anne caught a sort of lurid flush of joy on Sedley Archfield's features, and he was the first to exclaim, "Undutiful young dog!"

"Tut! tut!" returned Sir Philip, "he might as well have come home first, and yet I do not know but that it is the best thing he could do. There might have been difficulties in the way of getting out again, you see, my lady, as things stand now. Ay! ay! you are in the right of it, my boy. It is just as well to let things settle themselves down here before committing himself to one side or the other. 'Tis easy enough for an old fellow like me who has to let nothing go but his Commission of the Peace, but not the same for a stirring young lad; and he is altogether right as to not coming back to idle here as a rich man. It would be the ruin of him. I am glad he has the sense to see it. I was casting about to obtain an estate for him to give him occupation."

"But the wars," moaned the mother; "if he had only come home we could have persuaded him."

"The wars, my lady! Why, they will be a feather in his cap; and may be if he had come home, the Dutchman would have claimed him for his, and let King James be as misguided as he may, I cannot stomach fighting against his father's son for myself or mine. No, no; it was the best thing there was for the lad to do. You shall hear his letter, it does him honour, and you, too, Mr. Fellowes. He could not have written such a letter when he left home barely a year ago."

Sir Philip proceeded to read the letter aloud. There was a full explanation of the motives, political and private, only leaving out one, and that the most powerful of all of those which led Charles Archfield to absent himself for the present. He entreated pardon for having made the decision without obtaining permission from his father on returning home; but he had done so in view of possible obstacles to his leaving England again, and to the belief that a brief sojourn at home would cause more grief and perplexity than his absence. He further explained, as before, his reasons for secrecy towards his travelling companion, and entreated his father not to suppose for a moment that Mr. Fellowes had been in any way culpable for what he could never have suspected; warmly affectionate messages to mother and sister followed, and an assurance of feeling that 'the little one' needed for no care or affection while with them.

Lady Archfield was greatly disappointed, and cried a great deal, making sure that the poor dear lad's heart was still too sore to brook returning after the loss of his wife, who had now become the sweetest creature in the world; but Sir Philip's decision that the

measure was wise, and the secrecy under the circumstances so expedient as to be pardonable, prevented all public blame; Mr. Fellowes, however, was drawn apart, and asked whether he suspected any other motive than was here declared, and which might make his pupil unwilling to face the parental brow, and he had declared that nothing could have been more exemplary than the whole demeanour of the youth, who had at first gone about as one crushed, and though slowly reviving into cheerfulness, had always been subdued, until quite recently, when the meeting with his old companion had certainly much enlivened his spirits. Poor Mr. Fellowes had been rejoicing in the excellent character he should have to give, when this evasion had so utterly disconcerted him, and it was an infinite relief to him to find that all was thought comprehensible and pardonable.

Anne might be thankful that none of the authorities thought of asking her the question about hidden motives; and Naomi, looking about with her bright eyes, thought she had perhaps judged too hardly when she saw the father's approval, and that the mother and sister only mourned at the disappointment at not seeing the beloved one.

The Archfields would not hear of letting any of the party go on to Portchester that evening. Dr. Woodford, who had ridden over for consultation with Sir Philip, must remain, he would have plenty of time for his niece by and by, and she and Miss Darpent must tell them all about the journey, and about Charles; and Anne must tell them hundreds of things about herself that they scarcely knew, for not one letter from St. Germain had ever reached her uncle.

How natural it all looked! the parlour just as when she saw it last, and the hall, with the long table being laid for supper, and the hot sun streaming in through the heavy casements. She could have fancied it yesterday that she had left it, save for the plump rosy little yearling with flaxen curls peeping out under his round white cap, who had let her hold him in her arms and fondle him all through that reading of his father's letter. Charles's child! He was her prince indeed now.

He was taken from her and delivered over to Lady Archfield to be caressed and pitied because his father would not come home 'to see his grand-dame's own beauty,' while Lucy took the guests upstairs to prepare for supper, Naomi and her maid being bestowed in the best guest-chamber, and Lucy taking her friend to her own, the scene of many a confabulation of old.

"Oh, how I love it!" cried Anne, as the door opened on the well-known little wainscotted abode. "The very same beau-pot. One would think they were the same clove gillyflowers as when I went away."

"O Anne, dear, and you are just the same after all your kings and queens, and all you have gone through;" and the two friends were locked in another embrace.

"Kings and queens indeed! None of them all are worth my Lucy."

"And now, tell me all; tell me all, Nancy, and first of all about my brother. How does he look, and is he well?"

"He looks! O Lucy, he is grown such a noble cavalier; most like the picture of that uncle of yours who was killed, and that Sir Philip always grieves for."

"My father always hoped Charley would be like him," said Lucy. "You must tell him that. But I fear he may be grave and sad."

"Graver, but not sad now."

"And you have seen him and talked to him, Anne? Did you know he was going on this terrible enterprise?"

"He spoke of it, but never told me when."

"Ah! I was sure you knew more about it than the old tutor man. You always were his little sweetheart before poor little Madam came in the way, and he would tell you anything near his heart. Could you not have stopped him?"

"I think not, Lucy; he gave his reasons like a man of weight and thought, and you see his Honour thinks them sound ones."

"Oh yes; but somehow I cannot fancy our Charley doing anything for grand, sound, musty reasons, such as look well marshalled out in a letter."

"You don't know how much older he is grown," said Anne, again, with the tell-tale colour in her cheeks. "Besides, he cannot bear to come home."

"Don't tell me that, Nan. My mother does not see it; but though he was fond of poor little Madam in a way, and tried to think himself more so, as in duty bound, she really was fretting and wearing the very life--no, perhaps not the life, but the temper--out of him. What I believe it to be the cause is, that my father must have been writing to him about that young gentlewoman in the island that he is so set upon, because she would bring a landed estate which would give Charles something to do. They say that Peregrine Oakshott ran away to escape wedding his cousin; Charley will banish himself for the like cause."

"He said nothing of it," said Anne.

"O Anne, I wish you had a landed estate! You would make him happier than any other, and would love his poor little Phil! Anne! is it so? I have guessed!" and Lucy kissed her on each cheek.

"Indeed, indeed I have not promised. I know it can never, never be--and that I am not fit for him. Do not speak of it, Lucy? He spoke of it once as we rode together--"

"And you could not be so false as to tell him you did not love him? No, you could not?" and Lucy kissed her again.

"No," faltered Anne; "but I would not do as he wished. I have given him no troth-pledge. I told him it would never be permitted. And he said no more, but he put this ring on my finger in the boat without a word. I ought not to wear it; I shall not."

"Oh yes, you shall. Indeed you shall. No one need understand it but myself, and it makes us sisters. Yes, Anne, Charley was right. My father will not consent now, but he will in due time, if he does not hear of it till he wearies to see Charles again. Trust it to me, my sweet sister that is to be."

"It is a great comfort that you know," said Anne, almost moved to tell her the greater and more perilous secret that lay in the background, but withheld by receiving Lucy's own confidence that she herself was at present tormented by her cousin Sedley's courtship. He was still, more's the pity, she said, in garrison at Portsmouth, but there were hopes of his regiment being ere long sent to the Low Countries, since it was believed to be more than half inclined to King James. In the meantime he certainly had designs on Lucy's portion, and as her father never believed half the stories of his debaucheries that were rife, and had a kindness for his only brother's orphan, she did not feel secure against his yielding so as to provide for Sedley without continuance in the Dutch service.

"I could almost follow the example of running away!" said Lucy.

"I suppose," Anne ventured to say, faltering, "that nothing has been heard of poor Mr. Oakshott."

"Nothing at all. His uncle's people, who have come home from Muscovy, know nothing of him, and it is thought he may have gone off to the plantations. The talk is that Mistress Martha is to be handed on to the third brother, but that she is not willing." It was clear that there could have been no spectres here, and Lucy went on, "But you have told me nothing yet of yourself and your doings, my Anne. How well you look, and more than ever the Court lady, even in your old travelling habit. Is that the watch the King gave you?"

In private and in public there was quite enough to tell on that evening for intimate friends who had not met for a year, and one of whom had gone through so many vicissitudes. Nor were the other two guests by any means left out of the welcome, and the evening was a very happy one.

Mr. Fellowes intimated his intention of going himself to Walwyn with the news of Miss Darpent's arrival, and Naomi accepted the invitation to remain at Portchester till she could be sent for from home.

It was not till the next morning that Anne Woodford could be alone with her uncle. As she came downstairs in the morning she saw him waiting for her; he held out his hands, and drew her out with him into the walled garden that lay behind the house.

"Child! dear child!" said he, "you are welcome to my old eyes. May God bless you, as He has aided you to be faithful alike to Him and to your King through much trial."

"Ah, sir! I have sorely repented the folly and ambition that would not heed your counsel."

"No doubt, my maid; but the spirit of humility and repentance hath worked well in you. I fear me, however, that you are come back to further trials, since probably Portchester may be no longer our

home."

"Nor Winchester?"

"Nor Winchester."

"Then is this new King going to persecute as in the old times you talk of? He who was brought over to save the Church!"

"He accepts the English Church, my maid, so far as it accepts him. All beneficed clergy are required to take the oath of allegiance to him before the first of August, now approaching, under pain of losing their preferments. Many of my brethren, even our own Bishop and Dean, think this merely submission to the powers that be, and that it may be lawfully done; but as I hear neither the Archbishop himself, nor my good old friends Doctors Ken and Frampton can reconcile it to their conscience, any more than my brother Stanbury, of Botley, nor I, to take this fresh oath, while the King to whom we have sworn is living. Some hold that he has virtually renounced our allegiance by his flight. I cannot see it, while he is fighting for his crown in Ireland. What say you, Anne, who have seen him; did he treat his case as that of an abdicated prince?"

"No, sir, certainly not. All the talk was of his enjoying his own again."

"How can I then, consistently with my duty and loyalty, swear to this William and Mary as my lawful sovereigns? I say not 'tis incumbent on me to refuse to live under them a peaceful life, but make oath to them as my King and Queen I cannot, so long as King James shall live. True, he has not been a friend to the Church, and has wofully trampled on the rights of Englishmen, but I cannot hold that this absolves me from my duty to him, any more than David was freed from duty to Saul. So, Anne, back must we go to the poverty in which I was reared with your own good father."

Anne might grieve, but she felt the gratification of being talked to by her uncle as a woman who could understand, as he had talked to her mother.

"The first of August!" she repeated, as if it were a note of doom.

"Yes; I hear whispers of a further time of grace, but I know not what difference that should make. A Christian man's oath may not be broken sooner or later. Well, poverty is the state blessed by our Lord, and it may be that I have lived too much at mine ease; but I could wish, dear child, that you were safely bestowed in a house of your own."

"So do not I," said Anne, "for now I can work for you."

He smiled faintly, and here Mr. Fellowes joined them; a good man likewise, but intent on demonstrating the other side of the question, and believing that the Popish, persecuting King had forfeited his rights, so that there need be no scruple as to renouncing what he had thrown up by his flight. It was an endless argument, in which each man could only act according to his own conscience, and endeavour that this conscience should be as little biassed as possible by worldly motives or animosity.

Mr. Fellowes started at once with his servant for Walwyn, and Naomi accompanied the two Woodfords to Portchester. In spite of the cavalier sentiments of her family, Naomi had too much of the spire of her Frondeur father to understand any feeling for duty towards the King, who had so decidedly broken his covenant with his people, and moreover had so abominably treated the Fellows of Magdalen College; and her pity for Anne as a sufferer for her uncle's whim quite angered her friend into hot defence of him and his cause.

The dear old parsonage garden under the gray walls, the honeysuckle and monthly roses trailing over the porch, the lake-like creek between it and green Portsdown Hill, the huge massive keep and towers, and the masts in the harbour, the Island hills sleeping in blue summer haze--Anne's heart clave to them more than ever for the knowledge that the time was short and that the fair spot must be given up for the right's sake. Certainly there was some trepidation at the thought of the vault, and she had made many vague schemes for ascertaining that which her very flesh trembled at the thought of any one suspecting; but these were all frustrated, for since the war with France had begun, the bailey had been put under repair and garrisoned by a detachment of soldiers, the vault had been covered in, there was a sentry at the gateway of the castle, and the postern door towards the vicarage was fastened up, so that though the parish still repaired to church through the wide court solitary wanderings there were no longer possible, nor indeed safe for a young woman, considering what the soldiery of that period were.

The thought came over her with a shudder as she gazed from her window at the creek where she remembered Peregrine sending Charles and Sedley adrift in the boat.

The tide was out, the mud glistened in the moonlight, but nothing was to be seen more than Anne had beheld on many a summer night before, no phantom was evoked before her eyes, no elfin-like form revealed his presence, nor did any spirit take shape to upbraid her with his unhallowed grave, so close at hand.

No, but Naomi Darpent, yearning for sympathy, came to her side, caressed her on that summer night, and told her that Mr. Fellowes had gone to ask her of her father, and though she could never love again as she had once loved, she thought if her parents wished it, she could be happy with so good a man.

CHAPTER XXIV: IN THE MOONLIGHT

I have had a dream this evening,
While the white and gold were fleeting,
But I need not, need not tell it.
Where would be the good?

Requiescat in Pace.--JEAN INGELow.

Anne Woodford sat, on a sultry summer night, by the open window in Archfield House at Fareham, busily engaged over the tail of a kite, while asleep in a cradle in the corner of the room lay a little boy,

his apple-blossom cheeks and long flaxen curls lying prone upon his pillow as he had tossed when falling asleep in the heat.

The six years since her return had been eventful. Dr. Woodford had adhered to his view that his oath of allegiance could not be forfeited by James's flight; and he therefore had submitted to be ousted from his preferments, resigning his pleasant prebendal house, and his sea-side home, and embracing poverty for his personal oath's sake, although he was willing to acquiesce in the government of William and Mary, and perhaps to rejoice that others had effected what he would not have thought it right to do.

Things had been softened to him as regarded his flock by the appointment of Mr. Fellowes to Portchester, which was a Crown living, though there had been great demur at thus slipping into a friend's shoes, so that Dr. Woodford had been obliged to asseverate that nothing so much comforted him as leaving the parish in such hands, and that he blamed no man for seeing the question of Divine right as he did in common with the Non-jurors. The appointment opened the way to the marriage with Naomi Darpent, and the pair were happily settled at Portchester.

Dr. Woodford and his niece found a tiny house at Winchester, near the wharf, with the clear Itchen flowing in front and the green hills rising beyond, while in the rear were the ruins of Wolvesey, and the buildings of the Cathedral and College. They retained no servant except black Hans, poor Peregrine's legacy, who was an excellent cook, and capable of all that Anne could not accomplish in her hours of freedom.

It was a fall indeed from her ancient aspirations, though there was still that bud of hope within her heart. The united means of uncle and niece were so scanty that she was fain to offer her services daily at Mesdames Reynaud's still flourishing school, where the freshness of her continental experiences made her very welcome.

Dr. Woodford occasionally assisted some student preparing for the university, but this was not regular occupation, and it was poorly paid, so that it was well that fifty pounds a year went at least three times as far as it would do in the present day. Though his gown and cassock lost their richness and lustre, he was as much respected as ever. Bishop Mews often asked him to Wolvesey, and allowed him to assist the parochial clergy when it was not necessary to utter the royal name, the vergers marshalled him to his own stall at daily prayers, and he had free access to Bishop Morley's Cathedral library.

The Archfield family still took a house in the Close for the winter months, and there a very sober-minded and conventional courtship of Lucy took place by Sir Edmund Nutley, a worthy and well-to-do gentleman settled on the borders of Parkhurst Forest, in the Isle of Wight.

Anne, with the thought of her Charles burning within her heart, was a little scandalised at the course of affairs. Sir Edmund was a highly worthy man, but not in his first youth, and ponderous--a Whig, moreover, and an intimate friend of the masterful governor of the island, Lord Cutts, called the "Salamander." He had seen Miss Archfield before at the winter and spring Quarter Sessions, and

though her father was no longer in the Commission of the Peace, the residence at Winchester gave him opportunities, and the chief obstacle seemed to be the party question. He was more in love than was the lady, but she was submissive, and believed that he would be a kind husband. She saw, too, that her parents would be much disappointed and displeased if she made any resistance to so prosperous a settlement, and she was positively glad to be out of reach of Sedley's addresses. Such an entirely unenthusiastic acceptance was the proper thing, and it only remained to provide for Lady Archfield's comfort in the loss of her daughter.

For this the elders turned at once to Anne Woodford. Sir Philip made it his urgent entreaty that the Doctor and his niece would take up their abode with him, and that Anne would share with the grandmother the care of the young Philip, a spirited little fellow who would soon be running wild with the grooms, without the attention that his aunt had bestowed on him.

Dr. Woodford himself was much inclined to accept the office of chaplain to his old friend, who he knew would be far happier for his company; and Anne's heart bounded at the thought of bringing up Charles's child, but that very start of joy made her blush and hesitate, and finally surprise the two old gentlemen by saying, with crimson cheeks--

"Sir, your Honour ought to know what might make you change your mind. There have been passages between Mr. Archfield and me."

Sir Philip laughed. "Ah, the rogue! You were always little sweethearts as children. Why, Anne, you should know better than to heed what a young soldier says."

"No doubt you have other views for your son," said Dr. Woodford, "and I trust that my niece has too much discretion and sense of propriety to think that they can be interfered with on her account."

"Passages!" repeated Sir Philip thoughtfully. "Mistress Anne, how much do you mean by that? Surely there is no promise between you?"

"No, sir," said Anne; "I would not give any; but when we parted in Flanders he asked me to--to wait for him, and I feel that you ought to know it."

"Oh, I understand!" said the baronet. "It was only natural to an old friend in a foreign land, and you have too much sense to dwell on a young man's folly, though it was an honourable scruple that made you tell me, my dear maid. But he is not come or coming yet, more's the pity, so there is no need to think about it at present."

Anne's cheeks did not look as if she had attained that wisdom; but her conscience was clear, since she had told the fact, and the father did not choose to take it seriously. To say how she herself loved Charles would have been undignified and nothing to the purpose, since her feelings were not what would be regarded, and there was no need to mention her full and entire purpose to wed no one else. Time enough for that if the proposal were made.

So the uncle and niece entered on their new life, with some loss of independence, and to the Doctor a greater loss in the neighbourhood

of the Cathedral and its library; for after the first year or two, as Lady Archfield grew rheumatic, and Sir Philip had his old friend to play backgammon and read the Weekly Gazette, they became unwilling to make the move to Winchester, and generally stayed at home all the winter.

Before this, however, Princess Anne had been at the King's House at Winchester for a short time; and Lady Archfield paid due respects to her, with Anne in attendance. With the royal faculty of remembering everybody, the Princess recognised her namesake, gave her hand to be kissed, and was extremely gracious. She was at the moment in the height of a quarrel with her sister, and far from delighted with the present regime. She sent for Miss Woodford, and, to Anne's surprise, laughed over her own escape from the Cockpit, adding, "You would not come, child. You were in the right on't. There's no gratitude among them! Had I known how I should be served I would never have stirred a foot! So 'twas you that carried off the child! Tell me what he is like."

And she extracted by questions all that Anne could tell her of the life at St. Germain, and the appearance of her little half-brother. It was impossible to tell whether she asked from affectionate remorse or gossiping interest, but she ended by inquiring whether her father's god-daughter were content with her position, or desired one--if there were a vacancy--in her own household, where she might get a good husband.

Anne declined courteously and respectfully, and was forced to hint at an engagement which she could not divulge. She had heard Charles's expressions of delight at the arrangement which gave his boy to her tender care, warming her heart.

Lady Archfield had fits of talking of finding a good husband for Anne Woodford among the Cathedral clergy, but the maiden was so necessary to her, and so entirely a mother to little Philip, that she soon let the idea drop. Perhaps it was periodically revived, when, about three times a year, there arrived a letter from Charles. He wrote in good spirits, evidently enjoying his campaigns, and with no lack of pleasant companions, English, Scotch, and Irish Jacobites, with whom he lived in warm friendship and wholesome emulation. He won promotion, and the county Member actually came out of his way to tell Sir Philip what he had heard from the Imperial ambassador of young Archfield's distinguished services at the battle of Salankamen, only regretting that he was not fighting under King William's colours. Little Philip pranced about cutting off Turks' heads in the form of poppies, 'like papa,' for whose safety Anne taught him to pray night and morning.

Pride in his son's exploits was a compensation to the father, who declared them to be better than vegetating over the sheepfolds, like Robert Oakshott, or than idling at Portsmouth, like Sedley Archfield.

That young man's regiment had been ordered to Ireland during the campaign that followed the battle of Boyne Water. He had suddenly returned from thence, cashiered: by his own story, the victim of the enmity of the Dutch General Ginkel; according to another version, on account of brutal excesses towards the natives and insolence to his commanding officer. Courts-martial had only just

been introduced, and Sir Philip could believe in a Whig invention doing injustice to a member of a loyal family, so that his doors were open to his nephew, and Sedley haunted them whenever he had no other resource; but he spent most of his time between Newmarket and other sporting centres, and contrived to get a sort of maintenance by bets at races, cock-fights, and bull-baitings, and by extensive gambling. Evil reports of him came from time to time, but Sir Philip was loth to think ill of the son of his brother, or to forbode that as his grandson grew older, such influence might be dangerous.

In his uncle's presence Sedley was on his good behaviour; but if he caught Miss Woodford without that protection, he attempted rude compliments, and when repelled by her dignified look and manner, sneered at the airs of my lady's waiting-woman, and demanded how long she meant to mope after Charley, who would never look so low. "She need not be so ungracious to a poor soldier. She might have to put up with worse."

Moreover, he deliberately incited Philip to mischief, putting foul words into the little mouth, and likewise giving forbidden food and drink, lauding evil sports, and mocking at obedience to any authority, especially Miss Woodford's. Philip was very fond of his Nana, and in general good and obedient; but what high-spirited boy is proof against the allurements of the only example before him of young manhood, assuring him that it was manly not to mind what the women said, nor to be tied to the apron-strings of his grand-dame's abigail?

The child had this summer thus been actually taken to the outskirts of a bull-fight, whence he had been brought home in great disgrace by Ralph, the old servant who had been charged to look after his out-door amusements, and to ride with him. The grandfather was indeed more shocked at the danger and the vulgarity of the sport than its cruelty, but Philip had received his first flogging, and his cousin had been so sharply rebuked that--to the great relief of Anne and of Lady Archfield--he had not since appeared at Fareham House.

The morrow would be Philip's seventh birthday, a stage which would take him farther out of Anne's power. He was no longer to sleep in her chamber, but in one of his own with Ralph for his protector, and he was to begin Latin with Dr. Woodford. So great was his delight that he had gone to bed all the sooner in order to bring the great day more quickly, and Anne was glad of the opportunity of finishing the kite, which was to be her present, for Ralph to help him fly upon Portsdown Hill.

That great anniversary, so delightful to him, with pony and whip prepared for him--what a day of confusion, distress, and wretchedness did it not recall to his elders? Anne could not choose but recall the time, as she sat alone in the window, looking out over the garden, the moon beginning to rise, and the sunset light still colouring the sky in the north-west, just as it had done when she returned home after the bonfire. The events of that sad morning had faded out of the foreground. The Oakshott family seemed to have resigned themselves to the mystery of Peregrine's fate. Only his mother had declined from the time of his disappearance. When it was ascertained that his uncle had died in Russia, and that nothing had

been heard of him there, it seemed to bring on a fresh stage of her illness, and she had expired at last in Martha Browning's arms, her last words being a blessing not only to Robert, but to Peregrine, and a broken entreaty to her husband to forgive the boy, for he might have been better if they had used him well.

Martha was then found to hold out against the idea of his being dead. Little affection and scant civility as she had received from him, her dutiful heart had attached itself to her destined lord, and no doubt her imagination had been excited by his curious abilities, and her compassion by the persecution he suffered at home. At any rate, when, after a proper interval, the Major tried to transfer her to his remaining son, she held out against it for a long interval, until at last, after full three years, the desolation and disorganisation of Oakwood without a mistress, a severe illness of the Major, and the distress of his son, so worked upon her feelings that she consented to the marriage with Robert, and had ever since been the ruling spirit at Oakwood, and a very different one from what had been expected--sensible, kindly, and beneficent, and allowing the young husband more liberty and indulgence than he had ever known before.

The remembrance of Peregrine seemed to have entirely passed away, and Anne had been troubled with no more apparitions, so that though she thought over the strange scene of that terrible morning, the rapid combat, the hasty concealment, the distracted face of the unhappy youth, it was with the thought that time had been a healer, and that Charles might surely now return home. And what then?

She raised her eyes to the open window, and what did she behold in the moonlight streaming full upon the great tree rose below? It was the same face and figure that had three times startled her before, the figure dark and the face very white in the moonlight, but like nothing else, and with that odd, one-sided feather as of old. It had flitted ere she could point its place--gone in a single flash--but she was greatly startled! Had it come to protest against the scheme she had begun to indulge in on that very night of all nights, or had it merely been her imagination? For nothing was visible, though she leant from the window, no sound was to be heard, though when she tried to complete her work, her hands trembled and the paper rustled, so that Philip showed symptoms of wakening, and she had to defer her task till early morning.

She said nothing of her strange sight, and Phil had a happy successful birthday, flying the kite with a propitious wind, and riding into Portsmouth on his new pony with grandpapa. But there was one strange event. The servants had a holiday, and some of them went into Portsmouth, black Hans, who never returned, being one. The others had lost sight of him, but had not been uneasy, knowing him to be perfectly well able to find his way home; but as he never appeared, the conclusion was that he must have been kidnapped by some ship's crew to serve as a cook. He had not been very happy among the servants at Fareham, who laughed at his black face and Dutch English, and he would probably have gone willingly with Dutchmen; but Anne and her uncle were grieved, and felt as if they had failed in the trust that poor Sir Peregrine had left them.

CHAPTER XXV: TIDINGS FROM THE IRON GATES

"He has more cause to be proud. Where is he wounded?"

Coriolanus.

It was a wet autumn day, when the yellow leaves of the poplars in front of the house were floating down amid the misty rain; Dr. Woodford had gone two days before to consult a book in the Cathedral library, and was probably detained at Winchester by the weather; Lady Archfield was confined to her bed by a sharp attack of rheumatism. Sir Philip was taking his after-dinner doze in his arm-chair; and little Philip was standing by Anne, who was doing her best to keep him from awakening his grandfather, as she partly read, partly romanced, over the high-crowned hatted fishermen in the illustrations to Izaak Walton's Complete Angler.

He had just, caught by the musical sound, made her read to him a second time Marlowe's verses,

'Come live with me and be my love,'

and informed her that his Nana was his love, and that she was to watch him fish in the summer rivers, when the servant who had been sent to meet His Majesty's mail and extract the Weekly Gazette came in, bringing not only that, but a thick, sealed packet, the aspect of which made the boy dance and exclaim, "A packet from my papa! Oh! will he have written an answer to my own letter to him?"

But Sir Philip, who had started up at the opening of the door, had no sooner glanced at the packet than he cried out, "'Tis not his hand!" and when he tried to break the heavy seals and loosen the string, his hands shook so much that he pushed it over to Anne, saying, "You open it; tell me if my boy is dead."

Anne's alarm took the course of speed. She tore off the wrapper, and after one glance said, "No, no, it cannot be the worst; here is something from himself at the end. Here, sir."

"I cannot! I cannot," said the poor old man, as the tears dimmed his spectacles, and he could not adjust them. "Read it, my dear wench, and let me know what I am to tell his poor mother."

And he sank into a chair, holding between his knees his little grandson, who stood gazing with widely-opened blue eyes.

"He sends love, duty, blessing. Oh, he talks of coming home, so do not fear, sir!" cried Anne, a vivid colour on her cheeks.

"But what is it?" asked the father. "Tell me first--the rest after."

"It is in the side--the left side," said Anne, gathering up in her agitation the sense of the crabbed writing as best she could. "They have not extracted the bullet, but when they have, he will do well."

"God grant it! Who writes?"

"Norman Graham of Glendhu--captain in his K. K. Regiment of Volunteer Dragoons. That's his great friend! Oh, sir, he has behaved so gallantly! He got his wound in saving the colours from the Turks, and kept his hands clutched over them as his men carried him out of the battle."

Philip gave another little spring, and his grandfather bade Anne read the letter to him in detail.

It told how the Imperial forces had met a far superior number of Turks at Lippa, and had sustained a terrible defeat, with the loss of their General Veterani, how Captain Archfield had received a scimitar wound in the cheek while trying to save his commander, but had afterwards dashed forward among the enemy, recovered the colours of the regiment, and by a desperate charge of his fellow-soldiers, who were devotedly attached to him, had been borne off the field with a severe wound on the left side. Retreat had been immediately necessary, and he had been taken on an ammunition waggon along rough roads to the fortress called the Iron Gates of Transylvania, whence this letter was written, and sent by the messenger who was to summon the Elector of Saxony to the aid of the remnant of the army. It had not yet been possible to probe the wound, but Charles gave a personal message, begging his parents not to despond but to believe him recovering, so long as they did not see his servant return without him, and he added sundry tender and dutiful messages to his parents, and a blessing to his son, with thanks for the pretty letter he had not been able to answer (but which, his friend said, was lying spread on his pillow, not unstained with blood), and he also told his boy always to love and look up to her who had ever been as a mother to him. Anne could hardly read this, and the scrap in feeble irregular lines she handed to Sir Philip. It was--

With all my heart I entreat pardon for all the errors that have grieved you. I leave you my child to comfort you, and mine own true love, whom yon will cherish. She will cherish you as a daughter, as she will be, with your consent, if God spares me to come home. The love of all my soul to her, my mother, sister, and you."

There was a scrawl for conclusion and signature, and Captain Graham added--

Writing and dictating have greatly exhausted him. He would have said more, but he says the lady can explain much, and he repeats his urgent entreaties that you will take her to your heart as a daughter, and that his son will love and honour her.

There was a final postscript--

The surgeon thinks him better for having disburthened his mind.

"My child," said Sir Philip, with a long sigh, looking up at Anne, who had gathered the boy into her arms, and was hiding her face against his little awe-struck head, "my child, have you read?"

"No," faltered Anne.

"Read then." And as she would have taken it, he suddenly drew her into his embrace and kissed her as the eyes of both overflowed. "My

poor girl!" he said, "this is as hard to you as to us! Oh, my brave boy!" and he let her lay her head on his shoulder and held her hand as they wept together, while little Phil stared for a moment or two at so strange a sight and then burst out with a great cry--

"You shall not cry! you shall not! my papa is not dead!" and he stamped his little foot. "No, he isn't. He will get well; the letter said so, and I will go and tell grandmamma."

The need of stopping this roused them both; Sir Philip, heavily groaning, went away to break the tidings to his wife, and Anne went down on her knees on the hearth to caress the boy, and help him to understand his father's state and realise the valorous deeds that would always be a crown to him, and which already made the little fellow's eye flash and his fair head go higher.

By and by she was sent for to Lady Archfield's room, and there she had again to share the grief and the fears and try to dwell on the glory and the hopes. When in a calmer moment the parents interrogated her on what had passed with Charles, it was not in the spirit of doubt and censure, but rather as dwelling on all that was to be told of one whom alike they loved, and finally Sir Philip said, "I see, dear child, I would not believe how far it had gone before, though you tried to tell me. Whatever betide, you have won a daughter's place."

It was true that naturally a far more distinguished match would have been sought for the heir, and he could hardly have carried out his purpose without more opposition than under their present feelings, his parents supposed themselves likely to make, but they really loved Anne enough to have yielded at last; and Lady Nutley, coming home with a fuller knowledge of her brother's heart, prevented any reaction, and Anne was allowed full sympathies as a betrothed maiden, in the wearing anxiety that continued in the absence of all intelligence. On the principle of doing everything to please him, she was even encouraged to write to Charles in the packet in which he was almost implored to recover, though all felt doubts whether he were alive even while the letters were in hand, and this doubt lasted long and long. It was all very well to say that as long as the servant did not return his master must be safe--perhaps himself on the way home; but the journey from Transylvania was so long, and there were so many difficulties in the way of an Englishman, that there was little security in this assurance. And so the winter set in while the suspense lasted; and still Dr. Woodford spoke Charles's name in the intercessions in the panelled household chapel, and his mother and Anne prayed together and separately, and his little son morning and evening entreated God to "Bless papa, and make him well, and bring him home."

Thus passed more than six weeks, during which Sir Philip's attention was somewhat diverted from domestic anxieties by an uninvited visit to Portchester from Mr. Charnock, who had once been a college mate of Mr. Fellowes, and came professing anxiety, after all these years, to renew the friendship which had been broken when they took different sides on the election of Dr. Hough to the Presidency of Magdalen College. From his quarters at the Rectory Mr. Charnock had gone over to Fareham, and sounded Sir Philip on the practicability of a Jacobite rising, and whether he and his people would join it. The old gentleman was much distressed, his age would not permit him

to exert himself in either cause, and he had been too much disturbed by James's proceedings to feel desirous of his restoration, though his loyal heart would not permit of his opposing it, and he had never overtly acknowledged William of Orange as his sovereign.

He could only reply that in the present state of his family he neither could nor would undertake anything, and he urgently pleaded against any insurrection that could occasion a civil war.

There was reason to think that Sedley had no hesitation in promising to use all his influence over his uncle's tenants, and considerably magnifying their extremely small regard to him--nay, probably, dwelling on his own expectations.

At any rate, even when Charnock was gone, Sedley continued to talk big of the coming changes and his own distinguished part in them. Indeed one very trying effect of the continued alarm about Charles was that he took to haunting the place, and report declared that he had talked loudly and coarsely of his cousin's death and his uncle's dotage, and of his soon being called in to manage the property for the little heir--insomuch that Sir Edmund Nutley thought it expedient to let him know that Charles, on going on active service soon after he had come of age, had sent home a will, making his son, who was a young gentleman of very considerable property on his mother's side, ward to his grandfather first, and then to Sir Edmund Nutley himself and to Dr. Woodford.

CHAPTER XXVI: THE LEGEND OF PENNY GRIM

"O dearest Marjorie, stay at hame,
For dark's the gate ye have to go,
For there's a maikie down yonder glen
Hath frightened me and many me."

HOGG.

"Nana," said little Philip in a meditative voice, as he looked into the glowing embers of the hall fire, "when do fairies leave off stealing little boys?"

"I do not believe they ever steal them, Phil."

"Oh, yes they do;" and he came and stood by her with his great limpid blue eyes wide open. "Goody Dearlove says they stole a little boy, and his name was Penny Grim."

"Goody Dearlove is a silly old body to tell my boy such stories," said Anne, disguising how much she was startled.

"Oh, but Ralph Huntsman says 'tis true, and he knew him."

"How could he know him when he was stolen?"

"They put another instead," said the boy, a little puzzled, but too young to make his story consistent. "And he was an elf--a cross spiteful elf, that was always vexing folk. And they stole him again

every seven years. Yes--that was it--they stole him every seven years."

"Whom, Phil; I don't understand--the boy or the elf?" she said, half-diverted, even while shocked at the old story coming up in such a form.

"The elf, I think," he said, bending his brows; "he comes back, and then they steal him again. Yes; and at last they stole him quite--quite away--but it is seven years, and Goody Dearlove says he is to be seen again!"

"No!" exclaimed Anne, with an irrepressible start of dismay. "Has any one seen him, or fancied so?" she added, though feeling that her chance of maintaining her rational incredulity was gone.

"Goody Dearlove's Jenny did," was the answer. "She saw him stand out on the beach at night by moonlight, and when she screamed out, he was gone like the snuff of a candle."

"Saw him? What was he like?" said Anne, struggling for the dispassionate tone of the governess, and recollecting that Jenny Dearlove was a maid at Portchester Rectory.

"A little bit of a man, all twisty on one side, and a feather sticking out. Ralph said they always were like that;" and Phil's imitation, with his lithe, graceful little figure, of Ralph's clumsy mimicry was sufficient to show that there was some foundation for this story, and she did not answer at once, so that he added, "I am seven, Nana; do you think they will get me?"

"Oh no, no, Phil, there's no fear at all of that. I don't believe fairies steal anybody, but even old women like Goody Dearlove only say they steal little tiny babies if they are left alone before they are christened."

The boy drew a long breath, but still asked, "Was Penny Grim a little baby?"

"So they said," returned Anne, by no means interfering with the name, and with a quailing heart as she thought of the child's ever knowing what concern his father had in that disappearance. She was by no means sorry to have the conversation broken off by Sir Philip's appearance, booted and buskined, prepared for an expedition to visit a flock of sheep and their lambs under the shelter of Portsdown Hill, and in a moment his little namesake was frisking round eager to go with grandpapa.

"Well, 'tis a brisk frost. Is it too far for him, think you, Mistress Anne?"

"Oh no, sir; he is a strong little man and a walk will only be good for him, if he does not stand still too long and get chilled. Run, Phil, and ask nurse for your thick coat and stout shoes and leggings."

"His grandmother only half trusts me with him," said Sir Philip, laughing. "I tell her she was not nearly so careful of his father. I remember him coming in crusted all over with ice, so that he could

hardly get his clothes off, but she fancies the boy may have some of his poor mother's weakness about him."

"I see no tokens of it, sir."

"Grand-dames will be anxious, specially over one chick. Heigho! Winter travelling must be hard in Germany, and posts do not come. How now, my man! Are you rolled up like a very Russian bear? The poor ewes will think you are come to eat up their lambs."

"I'll growl at them," said Master Philip, uttering a sound sufficient to disturb the nerves of any sheep if he were permitted to make it, and off went grandfather and grandson together, Sir Philip only pausing at the door to say--

"My lady wants you, Anne; she is fretting over the delay. I fear, though I tell her it bodes well."

Anne watched for a moment the hale old gentleman briskly walking on, the merry child frolicking hither and thither round him, and the sturdy body-servant Ralph, without whom he never stirred, plodding after, while Keeper, the only dog allowed to follow to the sheepfolds, marched decorously along, proud of the distinction. Then she went up to Lady Archfield, who could not be perfectly easy as to the precious grandchild being left to his own devices in the cold, while Sir Philip was sure to run into a discussion with the shepherd over the turnips, which were too much of a novelty to be approved by the Hampshire mind. It was quite true that she could not watch that little adventurous spirit with the same absence of anxiety as she had felt for her own son in her younger days, and Anne had to devote herself to soothing and diverting her mind, till Dr. Woodford knocked at the door to read and converse with her.

The one o'clock dinner waited for the grandfather and grandson, and when they came at last, little Philip looked somewhat blue with cold and more subdued than usual, and his grandfather observed severely that he had been a naughty boy, running into dangerous places, sliding where he ought not, and then muttered under his breath that Sedley ought to have known better than to have let him go there.

Discipline did not permit even a darling like little Phil to speak at dinner-time; but he fidgeted, and the tears came into his eyes, and Anne hearing a little grunt behind Sir Philip's chair, looked up, and was aware that old Ralph was mumbling what to her ears sounded like: 'Knew too well.' But his master, being slightly deaf, did not hear, and went on to talk of his lambs and of how Sedley had joined them on the road, but had not come back to dinner.

Phil was certainly quieter than usual that afternoon, and sat at Anne's feet by the fire, filling little sacks with bran to be loaded on his toy cart to go to the mill, but not chattering as usual. She thought him tired, and hearing a sort of sigh took him on her knee, when he rested his fair little head on her shoulder, and presently said in a low voice--

"I've seen him."

"Who? Not your father? Oh, my child!" cried Anne, in a sudden horror.

"Oh no--the Penny Grim thing."

"What? Tell me, Phil dear, how or where?"

"By the end of the great big pond; and he threw up his arms, and made a horrid grin." The boy trembled and hid his face against her.

"But go on, Phil. He can't hurt you, you know. Do tell me. Where were you?"

"I was sliding on the ice. Grandpapa was ever so long talking to Bill Shepherd, and looking at the men cutting turnips, and I got cold and tired, and ran about with Cousin Sedley till we got to the big pond, and we began to slide, and the ice was so nice and hard--you can't think. He showed me how to take a good long slide, and said I might go out to the other end of the pond by the copse, by the great old tree. And I set off, but before I got there, out it jumped, out of the copse, and waved its arms, and made that face."

He cowered into her bosom again and almost cried. Anne knew the place, and was ready to start with dismay in her turn. It was such a pool as is frequent in chalk districts--shallow at one end, but deep and dangerous with springs at the other.

"But, Phil dear," she said, "it was well you were stopped; the ice most likely would have broken at that end, and then where would Nana's little man have been?"

"Cousin Sedley never told me not," said the boy in self-defence; "he was whistling to me to go on. But when I tumbled down Ralph and grandpapa and all did scold me so--and Cousin Sedley was gone. Why did they scold me, Nana? I thought it was brave not to mind danger--like papa."

"It is brave when one can do any good by it, but not to slide on bad ice, when one must be drowned," said Anne. "Oh, my dear, dear little fellow, it was a blessed thing you saw that, whatever it was! But why do you call it Pere--Penny Grim?"

"It was, Nana! It was a little man--rather. And one-sided looking, with a bit of hair sticking out, just like the picture of Riquet-with-a-tuft in your French fairy-book."

This last was convincing to Anne that the child must have seen the phantom of seven years ago, since he was not repeating the popular description he had given her in the morning, but one quite as individual. She asked if grandpapa had seen it.

"Oh no; he was in the shed, and only came out when he heard Ralph scolding me. Was it a wicked urchin come to steal me, Nana?"

"No, I think not," she answered. "Whatever it was, I think it came because God was taking care of His child, and warning him from sliding into the deep pool. We will thank him, Phil. 'He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.'" And to that verse she soothed the tired child till he fell asleep, and she could lay him on the settle, and cover him with a cloak, musing the while on the strange story, until presently she started

up and repaired to the buttry in search of the old servant.

"Ralph, what is this Master Philip tells me?" she asked. "What has he seen?"

"Well, Mistress Anne, that is what I can't tell--no, not I; but I knows this, that the child has had a narrow escape of his precious life, and I'd never trust him again with that there Sedley--no, not for hundreds of pounds."

"You really think, Ralph--?"

"What can I think, ma'am? When I finds he's been a-setting that there child to slide up to where he'd be drowned as sure as he's alive, and you see, if we gets ill news of Master Archfield (which God forbid), there's naught but the boy atween him and this here place--and he over head and ears in debt. Be it what it might that the child saw, it saved the life of him."

"Did you see it?"

"No, Mistress Anne; I can't say as I did. I only heard the little master cry out as he fell. I was in the shed, you see, taking a pipe to keep me warm. And when I took him up, he cried out like one dazed. 'Twas Penny Grim, Ralph! Keep me. He is come to steal me." But Sir Philip wouldn't hear nothing of it, only blamed Master Phil for being foolhardy, and for crying for the fall, and me for letting him out of sight."

"And Mr. Sedley--did he see it?"

"Well, mayhap he did, for I saw him as white as a sheet and his eyes staring out of his head; but that might have been his evil conscience."

"What became of him?"

"To say the truth, ma'am, I believe he be at the Brocas Arms, a-drowning of his fright--if fright it were, with Master Harling's strong waters."

"But this apparition, this shape--or whatever it is? What put it into Master Philip's head? What has been heard of it?"

Ralph looked unwilling. "Bless you, Mistress Anne, there's been some idle talk among the women folk, as how that there crooked slip of Major Oakshott's, as they called Master Perry or Penny, and said was a changeling, has been seen once and again. Some says as the fairies have got him, and 'tis the seven year for him to come back again. And some says that he met with foul play, and 'tis the ghost of him, but I holds it all mere tales, and I be sure 'twere nothing bad as stopped little master on that there pond. So I be."

Anne could not but be of the same mind, but her confusion, alarm, and perplexity were great. It seemed strange, granting that this were either spirit or elf connected with Peregrine Oakshott, that it should interfere on behalf of Charles Archfield's child, and on the sweet hypothesis that a guardian angel had come to save the child, it was in a most unaccountable form.

And more pressing than any such mysterious idea was the tangible horror of Ralph's suggestion, too well borne out by the boy's own unconscious account of the adventure. It was too dreadful, too real a peril to be kept to herself, and she carried the story to her uncle on his return, but without speaking of the spectral warning. Not only did she know that he would not attend to it, but the hint, heard for the first time, that Peregrine was supposed to have met with foul play, sealed her lips, just when she still was hoping against hope that Charles might be on the way home. But that Ralph believed, and little Philip's own account confirmed, that his cousin had incited the little heir to the slide that would have been fatal save for his fall, she told with detail, and entreated that the grandfather might be warned, and some means be found of ensuring the safety of her darling, the motherless child!

To her disappointment Dr. Woodford was not willing to take alarm. He did not think so ill of Sedley as to believe him capable of such a secret act of murder, and he had no great faith in Ralph's sagacity, besides that he thought his niece's nerves too much strained by the long suspense to be able to judge fairly. He thought it would be cruel to the grandparents, and unjust to Sedley, to make such a frightful suggestion without further grounds during their present state of anxiety, and as to the boy's safety, which Anne pleaded with an uncontrollable passion of tears, he believed that it was provided for by watchfulness on the part of his two constant guardians, as well as himself, since, even supposing the shocking accusation to be true, Sedley would not involve himself in danger of suspicion, and it was already understood that he was not a fit companion for his little cousin to be trusted with. Philip had already brought home words and asked questions that distressed his grandmother, and nobody was willing to leave him alone with the ex-lieutenant. So again the poor maiden had to hold her peace under an added burthen of anxiety and many a prayer.

When the country was ringing with the tidings of Sir George Barclay's conspiracy for the assassination of William III, it was impossible not to hope that Sedley's boastful tongue might have brought him sufficiently under suspicion to be kept for a while under lock and key; but though he did not appear at Fareham, there was reason to suppose that he was as usual haunting the taverns and cockpits of Portsmouth.

No one went much abroad that winter. Sir Philip, perhaps from anxiety and fretting, had a fit of the gout, and Anne kept herself and her charge within the garden or the street of the town. In fact there was a good deal of danger on the roads. The neighbourhood of the seaport was always lawless, and had become more so since Sir Philip had ceased to act as Justice of the Peace, and there were reports of highway robberies of an audacious kind, said to be perpetrated by a band calling themselves the Black Gang, under a leader known as Piers Pigwiggin, who were alleged to be half smuggler, half Jacobite, and to have their headquarters somewhere in the back of the Isle of Wight, in spite of the Governor, the terrible Salamander, Lord Cutts, who was, indeed, generally absent with the army.

CHAPTER XXVII: THE VAULT

"Heaven awards the vengeance due."

COWPER.

The weary days had begun to lengthen before the door of the hall was flung open, and little Phil, forgetting his bow at the door, rushed in, "Here's a big packet from foreign parts! Harry had to pay ever so much for it."

"I have wellnigh left off hoping," sighed the poor mother. "Tell me the worst at once."

"No fear, my lady," said her husband. "Thank God! 'Tis our son's hand."

There was the silence for a moment of intense relief, and then the little boy was called to cut the silk and break the seals.

Joy ineffable! There were three letters--for Master Philip Archfield, for Mistress Anne Jacobina Woodford, and for Sir Philip himself. The old gentleman glanced over it, caught the words 'better,' and 'coming home,' then failed to read through tears of joy as before through tears of sorrow, and was fain to hand the sheet to his old friend to be read aloud, while little Philip, handling as a treasure the first letter he had ever received, though as yet he was unable to decipher it, stood between his grandfather's knees listening as Dr. Woodford read--

DEAR AND HONOURED SIR--I must ask your pardon for leaving you without tidings so long, but while my recovery still hung in doubt I thought it would only distress you to hear of the fluctuations that I went through, and the pain to which the surgeons put me for a long time in vain. Indeed frequently I had no power either to think or speak, until at last with much difficulty, and little knowledge or volition of my own, my inestimable friend Graham brought me to Vienna, where I have at length been relieved from my troublesome companion, and am enjoying the utmost care and kindness from my friend's mother, a near kinswoman, as indeed he is himself, of the brave and lamented Viscount Dundee. My wound is healing finally, as I hope, and though I have not yet left my bed, my friends assure me that I am on the way to full and complete recovery, for which I am more thankful to the Almighty than I could have been before I knew what suffering and illness meant. As soon as I can ride again, which they tell me will be in a fortnight or three weeks, I mean to set forth on my way home. I cannot describe to you how I am longing after the sight of you all, nor how home-sick I have become. I never had time for it before, but I have lain for hours bringing all your faces before me, my father's, and mother's, my sister's, and that of her whom I hope to call my own; and figuring to myself that of the little one. I have thought much over my past life, and become sensible of much that was amiss, and while earnestly entreating your forgiveness, especially for having absented myself all these years, I hope to return so as to be more of a comfort than I was in the days of my rash and inconsiderate youth. I am of course at present

invalided, but I want to consult you, honoured sir, before deciding whether it be expedient for me to resign my commission. How I thank and bless you for the permission you have given me, and the love you bear to my own heart's joy, no words can tell. It shall be the study of my life to be worthy of her and of you.-- And so no more from your loving and dutiful son, CHARLES ARCHFIELD.

Having drunk in these words with her ears, Anne left Phil to have his note interpreted by his grandparents, and fled away to enjoy her own in her chamber, yet it was as short as could be and as sweet.

Mine own, mine own sweet Anne, sweetheart of good old days, your letter gave me strength to go through with it. The doctors could not guess why I was so much better and smiled through all their torments. These are our first, I hope our last letters, for I shall soon follow them home, and mine own darling will be mine.-- Thine own, C. A.

She had but short time to dwell on it and kiss it, for little Philip was upon her, waving his letter, which he already knew by heart; and galloping all over the house to proclaim the good news to the old servants, who came crowding into the hall, trembling with joy, to ask if there were indeed tidings of Mr. Archfield's return, whereupon the glad father caused his grandson to carry each a full glass of wine to drink to the health of the young master.

Anne had at first felt only the surpassing rapture of the restoration of Charles, but there ensued another delight in the security his recovery gave to the life of his son. Sedley Archfield would not be likely to renew his attempt, and if only on that account the good news should be spread as widely as possible. She was the first to suggest the relief it would be to Mr. Fellowes, who had never divested himself of the feeling that he ought to have divined his pupil's intention.

Dr. Woodford offered to ride to Portchester with the news, and Sir Philip, in the gladness of his heart, proposed that Anne should go with him and see her friend.

Shall it be told how on the way Anne's mind was assailed by feminine misgivings whether three and twenty could be as fair in her soldier's eyes as seventeen had been? Old maidenhood came earlier then than in these days, and Anne knew that she was looked upon as an old waiting-gentlewoman or governess by the belles of Winchester. Her glass might tell her that her eyes were as softly brown, her hair as abundant, her cheek as clear and delicately moulded as ever, but there was no one to assure her that the early bloom had not passed away, and that she had not rather gained than lost in dignity of bearing and the stately poise of the head, which the jealous damsels called Court airs. "And should he be disappointed, I shall see it in his eyes," she said to herself, "and then his promise shall not bind him, though it will break my heart, and oh! how hard to resign my Phil to a strange stepmother." Still her heart was lighter than for many a long year, as she cantered along in the brisk March air, while the drops left by the departing frost glistened in the sunshine, and the sea lay stretched in a delicate gray haze. The old castle rose before her in its familiar home-like massiveness as they turned towards the Rectory, where in that

sheltered spot the well-known clusters of crocuses were opening their golden hearts to the sunshine, and recalling the days when Anne was as sunny-hearted as they, and she felt as if she could be as bright again.

In Mrs. Fellowes's parlour they found an unexpected guest, no other than Mrs. Oakshott.

'Gadding about' not being the fashion of the Archfield household, Anne had not seen the lady for several years, and was agreeably surprised by her appearance. Perhaps the marks of smallpox had faded, perhaps motherhood had given expression, and what had been gaunt ungainliness in the maiden had rounded into a certain importance in the matron, nor had her dress, though quiet, any of the Puritan rigid ugliness that had been complained of, and though certainly not beautiful, she was a person to inspire respect.

It was explained that she was waiting for her husband, who was gone with Mr. Fellowes to speak to the officer in command of the soldiers at the castle. "For," said she, "I am quite convinced that there is something that ought to be brought to light, and it may be in that vault."

Anne's heart gave such a throb as almost choked her.

Dr. Woodford asked what the lady meant.

"Well, sir, when spirits and things 'tis not well to talk of are starting up and about here, there, and everywhere, 'tis plain there must be cause for it."

"I do not quite take your meaning, madam."

"Ah, well! you gentlemen, reverend ones especially, are the last to hear such things. There's the poor old Major, he won't believe a word of it, but you know, Mistress Woodford. I see it in your face. Have you seen anything?"

"Not here, not now," faltered Anne. "You have, Mrs. Fellowes?"

"I have heard of some foolish fright of the maids," said Naomi, "partly their own fancy, or perhaps caught from the sentry. There is no keeping those giddy girls from running after the soldiers."

Perhaps Naomi hoped by throwing out this hint to conduct her visitors off into the safer topic of domestic delinquencies, but Mrs. Oakshott was far too earnest to be thus diverted, and she exclaimed, "Ah, they saw him, I'll warrant!"

"Him?" the Doctor asked innocently.

"Him or his likeness," said Mrs. Oakshott, "my poor brother-in-law, Peregrine Oakshott; you remember him, sir? He always said, poor lad, that you and Mrs. Woodford were kinder to him than his own flesh and blood, except his uncle, Sir Peregrine. For my part, I never did give in to all the nonsense folk talked about his being a changeling or at best a limb of Satan. He had more spirit and sense than the rest of them, and they led him the life of a dog, though they knew no better. If I had had him at Emsworth, I would have

shown them what he was;" and she sighed heavily. "Well, I did not so much wonder when he disappeared, I made sure that he could bear it no longer and had run away. I waited as long as there was any reason, till there should be tidings of him, and only took his brother at last because I found they could not do without me at home."

Remarkable frankness! but it struck both the Doctor and Anne that if Peregrine could have submitted, his life might have been freer and less unhappy than he had expected, though Mrs. Martha spoke the broadest Hampshire.

Naomi asked, "Then you no longer think that he ran away?"

"No, madam; I am certain there was worse than that. You remember the night of the bonfire for the Bishops' acquittal, Miss Woodford?"

"Indeed I do."

"Well, he was never seen again after that, as you know. The place was full of wild folk. There was brawling right and left."

"Were you there?" asked Anne surprised.

"Yes; in my coach with my uncle and aunt that lived with me, though, except Robin, none of the young sparks would come near me, except some that I knew were after my pockets," said Martha, with a good-humoured laugh. "Properly frightened we were too by the brawling sailors ere we got home! Now, what could be more likely than that some of them got hold of poor Perry? You know he always would go about with the rapier he brought from Germany, with amber set in the hilt, and the mosaic snuff-box he got in Italy, and what could be looked for but that the poor dear lad should be put out of the way for the sake of these gewgaws?" This supposition was gratifying to Anne, but her uncle must needs ask why Mrs. Oakshott thought so more than before.

"Because," she said impressively, "there is no doubt but that he has been seen, and not in the flesh, once and again, and always about these ruins."

"By whom, madam, may I ask?"

"Mrs. Fellowes's maids, as she knows, saw him once on the beach at night, just there. The sentry, who is Tom Hart, from our parish, saw a shape at the opening of the old vault before the keep and challenged him, when he vanished out of sight ere there was time to present a musket. There was once more, when one moonlight night our sexton, looking out of his cottage window, saw what he declares was none other than Master Perry standing among the graves of our family, as if, poor youth, he were asking why he was not among them. When I heard that, I said to my husband, 'Depend upon it,' says I, 'he met with his death that night, and was thrown into some hole, and that's the reason he cannot rest. If I pay a hundred pounds for it, I'll not give up till his poor corpse is found to have Christian burial, and I'll begin with the old vault at Portchester!' My good father, the Major, would not hear of it at first, nor my husband either, but 'tis my money, and I know how to tackle Robin."

It was with strangely mingled feelings that Anne listened. That search in the vault, inaugurated by faithful Martha, was what she had always felt ought to be made, and she had even promised to attempt it if the apparitions recurred. The notion of the deed being attributed to lawless sailors and smugglers or highwaymen, who were known to swarm in the neighbourhood, seemed to remove all danger of suspicion. Yet she could not divest herself of a vague sense of alarm at this stirring up of what had slept for seven years. Neither she nor her uncle deemed it needful to mention the appearance seen by little Philip, but to her surprise Naomi slowly and hesitatingly said it was very remarkable, that her husband having occasion to be at the church at dusk one evening just after Midsummer, had certainly seen a figure close to Mrs. Woodford's grave, and lost sight of it before he could speak of it. He thought nothing more of it till these reports began to be spread, but he had then recollected that it answered the descriptions given of the phantom.

Here the ladies were interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Fellowes and Robert Oakshott, now grown into a somewhat heavy but by no means foolish-looking young man.

"Well, madam," said he, in Hampshire as broad as his wife's, "you will have your will. Not that Captain Henslowe believes a word of your ghosts--not he; but he took fire when he heard of queer sights about the castle. He sent for the chap who stood sentry, and was downright sharp on him for not reporting what he had seen, and he is ordering out a sergeant's party to open the vault, so you may come and see, if you have any stomach for it."

"I could not but come!" said Madam Oakshott, who certainly did not look squeamish, but who was far more in earnest than her husband, and perhaps doubted whether without her presence the quest would be thorough. Anne was full of dread, and almost sick at the thought of what she might see, but she was far too anxious to stay away. Mrs. Fellowes made some excuse about the children for not accompanying them.

It always thrilled Anne to enter that old castle court, the familiar and beloved play-place of her childhood, full of memories of Charles and of Lucy, and containing in its wide precincts the churchyard where her mother lay. She moved along in a kind of dream, glad to be let alone, since Mr. Fellowes naturally attended Mrs. Oakshott, and Robert was fully occupied in explaining to the Doctor that he only gave in to this affair for the sake of pacifying madam, since women folk would have their little megrims. Assuredly that tall, solid, resolute figure stalking on in front, looked as little subject to megrims as any of her sex. Her determination had brought her husband thither, and her determination further carried the day, when the captain, after staring at the solid-looking turf, stamping on the one stone that was visible, and trampling down the bunch of nettles beside it, declared that the entrance had been so thoroughly stopped that it was of no use to dig farther. It was Madam Martha who demanded permission to offer the four soldiers a crown apiece if they opened the vault, a guinea each if they found anything. The captain could not choose but grant it, though with something of a sneer, and the work was begun. He walked up and down with Robert, joining in hopes that the lady would be satisfied before dinner-time. The two clergymen likewise walked together, arguing, as was

their wont, on the credibility of apparitions. The two ladies stood in almost breathless watch, as the bricks that had covered in the opening were removed, and the dark hole brought to light. Contrary to expectation, when the opening had been enlarged, it was found that there were several steps of stone, and where they were broken away, there was a rude ladder.

A lantern was fetched from the guard-room in the bailey, and after much shaking and trying of the ladder, one of the soldiers descended, finding the place less deep than was commonly supposed, and soon calling out that he was at the bottom. Another followed him, and presently there was a shout. Something was found! "A rusty old chain, no doubt," grumbled Robert; but his wife shrieked. It was a sword in its sheath, the belt rotted, the clasp tarnished, but of silver. Mrs. Oakshott seized it at once, rubbed away the dust from the handle, and brought to light a glistening yellow piece of amber, which she mutely held up, and another touch of her handkerchief disclosed on a silver plate in the scabbard an oak-tree, the family crest, and the twisted cypher P. O. Her eyes were full of tears, and she did not speak. Anne, white and trembling, was forced to sink down on the stone, unnoticed by all, while Robert Oakshott, convinced indeed, hastily went down himself. The sword had been hidden in a sort of hollow under the remains of the broken stair. Thence likewise came to light the mouldy remnant of a broad hat and the quill of its plume, and what had once been a coat, even in its present state showing that it had been soaked through and through with blood, the same stains visible on the watch and the mosaic snuff-box. That was all; there was no purse, and no other garments, though, considering the condition of the coat, they might have been entirely destroyed by the rats and mice. There was indeed a fragment of a handkerchief, with the cypher worked on it, which Mrs. Oakshott showed to Anne with the tears in her eyes: "There! I worked that, though he never knew it. No! I know he did not like me! But I would have made him do so at last. I would have been so good to him. Poor fellow, that he should have been lying there all this time!"

Lying there; but where, then, was he? No signs of any corpse were to be found, though one after another all the gentlemen descended to look, and Mrs. Oakshott was only withheld by her husband's urgent representations, and promise to superintend a diligent digging in the ground, so as to ascertain whether there had been a hasty burial there.

Altogether, Anne was so much astonished and appalled that she could hardly restrain herself, and her mind reverted to Bishop Ken's theory that Peregrine still lived; but this was contradicted by the appearance at Douai, which did not rest on the evidence of her single perceptions.

Mrs. Fellowes sent out an entreaty that they would come to dinner, and the gentlemen were actually base enough to wish to comply, so that the two ladies had no choice save to come with them, especially as the soldiers were unwilling to work on without their meal. Neither Mrs. Oakshott nor Anne felt as if they could swallow, and the polite pressure to eat was only preferable in Anne's eyes to the conversation on the discoveries that had been made, especially the conclusion arrived at by all, that though the purse and rings had not been found, the presence of the watch and snuff-box precluded

the idea of robbery.

"These would be found on the body," said Mr. Oakshott. "I could swear to the purse. You remember, madam, your uncle bantering him about French ladies and their finery, asking whose token it was, and how black my father looked? Poor Perry, if my father could have had a little patience with him, he would not have gone roaming about and getting into brawls, and we need not be looking for him in yonder black pit."

"You'll never find him there, Master Robert," spoke out the old Oakwood servant, behind Mrs. Oakshott's chair, free and easy after the manner of the time.

"And wherefore not, Jonadab?" demanded his mistress, by no means surprised at the liberty.

"Why, ma'am, 'twas the seven years, you sees, and in course when them you wot of had power to carry him off, they could not take his sword, nor his hat, not they couldn't."

"How about his purse, then?" put in Dr. Woodford.

"I'll be bound you will find it yet, sir," responded Jonadab, by no means disconcerted, "leastways unless some two-legged fairies have got it."

At this some of the party found it impossible not to laugh, and this so upset poor Martha's composure that she was obliged to leave the table, and Anne was not sorry for the excuse of attending her, although there were stings of pain in all her rambling lamentations and conjectures.

Very tardily, according to the feelings of the anxious women, was the dinner finished, and their companions ready to take them out again. Indeed, Madam Oakshott at last repaired to the dining-parlour, and roused her husband from his glass of Spanish wine to renew the search. She would not listen to Mrs. Fellowes's advice not to go out again, and Anne could not abstain either from watching for what could not be other than grievous and mournful to behold.

The soldiers were called out again by their captain, and reinforced by the Rectory servant and Jonadab.

There was an interval of anxious prowling round the opening. Mr. Oakshott and the captain had gone down again, and found, what the military man was anxious about, that if there were passages to the outer air, they had been well blocked up and not re-opened.

Meantime the digging proceeded.

It was just at twilight that a voice below uttered an exclamation. Then came a pause. The old sergeant's voice ordered care and a pause, somewhere below the opening with, "Sir, the spades have hit upon a skull."

There was a shuddering pause. All the gentlemen except Dr. Woodford, who feared the chill, descended again. Mrs. Oakshott and Anne held each other's hands and trembled.

By and by Mr. Fellowes came up first. "We have found," he said, looking pale and grave, "a skeleton. Yes, a perfect skeleton, but no more--no remains except a fine dust."

And Robert Oakshott following, awe-struck and sorrowful, added, "Yes, there he is, poor Perry--all that is left of him--only his bones. No, madam, we must leave him there for the present; we cannot bring it up without preparation."

"You need not fear meddling curiosity, madam," said the captain. "I will post a sentry here to bar all entrance."

"Thanks, sir," said Robert. "That will be well till I can bury the poor fellow with all due respect by my mother and Oliver."

"And then I trust his spirit will have rest," said Martha Oakshott fervently. "And now home to your father. How will he bear it, sir?"

"I verily believe he will sleep the quieter for knowing for a certainty what has become of poor Peregrine," said her husband.

And Anne felt as if half her burthen of secrecy was gone when they all parted, starting early because the Black Gang rendered all the roads unsafe after dark.

CHAPTER XXVIII: THE DISCLOSURE

"He looked about as one betrayed,
What hath he done, what promise made?
Oh! weak, weak moment, to what end
Can such a vain oblation tend?"

WORDSWORTH.

For the most part Anne was able to hold her peace and keep out of sight while Dr. Woodford related the strange revelations of the vault with all the circumstantiality that was desired by two old people living a secluded life and concerned about a neighbour of many years, whom they had come to esteem by force of a certain sympathy in honest opposition. The mystery occupied them entirely, for though the murder was naturally ascribed to some of the lawless coast population, the valuables remaining with the clothes made a strange feature in the case.

It was known that there was to be an inquest held on the remains before their removal, and Dr. Woodford, both from his own interest in the question, and as family intelligencer, rode to the castle. Sir Philip longed to go, but it was a cold wet day, and he had threatenings of gout, so that he was persuaded to remain by the fireside. Inquests were then always held where the body lay, and the court of Portchester Castle was no place for him on such a day.

Dr. Woodford came home just before twilight, looking grave and troubled, and, much to Anne's alarm, desired to speak to Sir Philip

privately in the gun-room. Lady Archfield took alarm, and much distressed her by continually asking what could be the meaning of the interview, and making all sorts of guesses.

When at last they came together into the parlour the poor lady looked so anxious and frightened that her husband went up to her and said, "Do not be alarmed, sweetheart. We shall clear him; but those foolish fellows have let suspicion fall on poor Sedley."

Nobody looked at Anne, or her deadly paleness must have been remarked, and the trembling which she could hardly control by clasping her hands tightly together, keeping her feet hard on the floor, and setting her teeth.

Lady Archfield was perhaps less fond of the scapegrace nephew than was her husband, and she felt the matter chiefly as it affected him, so that she heard with more equanimity than he had done; and as they sat round the fire in the half-light, for which Anne was thankful, the Doctor gave his narration in order.

"I found a large company assembled in the castle court, waiting for the coroner from Portsmouth, though the sentry on guard would allow no one to go down, in spite of some, even ladies, I am ashamed to say, who offered him bribes for the permission. Everything, I heard, had been replaced as we found it. The poor Major himself was there, looking sadly broken, and much needing the help of his son's arm. 'To think that I was blaming my poor son as a mere reprobate, and praying for his conversion,' says he, 'when he was lying here, cut off without a moment for repentance.' There was your nephew, suspecting nothing, Squire Brocas, Mr. Eyre, of Botley Grange, Mr. Biden, Mr. Larcom, and Mr. Bargas, and a good many more, besides Dr. James Yonge, the naval doctor, and the Mayor of Portsmouth, and more than I can tell you. When the coroner came, and the jury had been sworn in, they went down and viewed the spot, and all that was there. The soldiers had put candles round, and a huge place it is, all built up with large stones. Then, as it was raining hard, they adjourned to the great room in the keep and took the evidence. Robert Oakshott identified the clothes and the watch clearly enough, and said he had no doubt that the other remains were Peregrine's; but as to swearing to a brother's bones, no one could do that; and Dr. Yonge said in my ear that if the deceased were so small a man as folks said, the skeleton could scarce be his, for he thought it had belonged to a large-framed person. That struck no one else, for naturally it is only a chirurgeon who is used to reckon the proportion that the bones bear to the body, and I also asked him whether in seven years the other parts would be so entirely consumed, to which he answered that so much would depend on the nature of the soil that there was no telling. However, jury and coroner seemed to feel no doubt, and that old seafaring man, Tom Block, declared that poor Master Peregrine had been hand and glove with a lot of wild chaps, and that the vault had been well known to them before the gentlemen had had it blocked up. Then it was asked who had seen him last, and Robert Oakshott spoke of having parted with him at the bonfire, and never seen him again. There, I fancy, it would have ended in a verdict of wilful murder against some person or persons unknown, but Robert Oakshott must needs say, "I would give a hundred pounds to know who the villain was." And then who should get up but George Rackstone, with "Please your Honour, I could tell summat." The coroner bade swear him, and he deposed to

having seen Master Peregrine going down towards the castle somewhere about four o'clock that morning after the bonfire when he was getting up to go to his mowing. But that was not all. You remember, Anne, that his father's cottage stands on the road towards Portsmouth. Well, he brought up the story of your running in there, frightened, the day before the bonfire, when I was praying with his sick mother, calling on me to stop a fray between Peregrine and young Sedley, and I had to get up and tell of Sedley's rudeness to you, child."

"What was that?" hastily asked Lady Archfield.

"The old story, my lady. The young officer's swaggering attempt to kiss the girl he meets on the road. I doubt even if he knew at the moment that it was my niece. Peregrine was coming by at the moment, and interfered to protect her, and swords were drawn. I could not deny it, nor that there was ill blood between the lads; and then young Brocas, who was later on Portsdown than we were, remembered high words, and had thought to himself that there would be a challenge. And next old Goody Spore recollects seeing Master Sedley and another soldier officer out on the Portsmouth road early that morning. The hay was making in the court then, and Jenny Light remembered that when the haymakers came she raked up something that looked like a bloody spot, and showed it to one of the others, but they told her that most likely a rabbit or a hare had been killed there, and she had best take no heed. Probably there was dread of getting into trouble about a smugglers' fray. Well, every one was looking askance at Master Sedley by this time, and the coroner asked him if he had anything to say. He spoke out boldly enough. He owned to the dispute with Peregrine Oakshott, and to having parted with him that night on terms which would only admit of a challenge. He wrote a cartel that night, and sent it by his friend Lieutenant Ainslie, but doubting whether Major Oakshott might not prevent its delivery, he charged him to try to find Peregrine outside the house, and arrange with him a meeting on the hill, where you know the duellists of the garrison are wont to transact such encounters. Sedley himself walked out part of the way with his friend, but neither of them saw Peregrine, nor heard anything of him. So he avers, but when asked for his witness to corroborate the story, he says that Ainslie, I fear the only person who could have proved an alibi--if so it were--was killed at Landen; but, he added, certainly with too much of his rough way, it was a mere absurdity to charge it upon him. What should a gentleman have to do with private murders and robberies? Nor did he believe the bones to be Perry Oakshott's at all. It was all a bit of Whiggish spite! He worked himself into a passion, which only added to the impression against him; and I own I cannot wonder that the verdict has sent him to Winchester to take his trial. Why, Anne, child, how now?"

"'Tis a terrible story. Take my essences, child," said Lady Archfield, tottering across, and Anne, just saving herself from fainting by a long gasp at them, let herself be led from the room. The maids buzzed about her, and for some time she was sensible of nothing but a longing to get rid of them, and to be left alone to face the grievous state of things which she did not yet understand. At last, with kind good-nights from Lady Archfield, such as she could hardly return, she was left by herself in the darkness to recover from the stunned helpless feeling of the first moment.

Sedley accused! Charles to be sacrificed to save his worthless cousin, the would-be murderer of his innocent child, who morally thus deserved to suffer! Never, never! She could not do so. It would be treason to her benefactors, nay, absolute injustice, for Charles had struck in generous defence of herself; but Sedley had tried to allure the boy to his death merely for his own advantage. Should she not be justified in simply keeping silence? Yet there was like an arrow in her heart, the sense of guilt in so doing, guilt towards God and truth, guilt towards man and justice. She should die under the load, and it would be for Charles. Might it only be before he came home, then he would know that she had perished under his secret to save him. Nay, but would he be thankful at being saved at the expense of his cousin's life? If he came, how should she meet him?

The sense of the certain indignation of a good and noble human spirit often awakes the full perception of what an action would be in the sight of Heaven, and Anne began to realise the sin more than at first, and to feel the compulsion of truth. If only Charles were not coming home she could write to him and warn him, but the thought that he might be already on the way had turned from joy to agony. "And to think," she said to herself, "that I was fretting as to whether he would think me pretty!"

She tossed about in misery, every now and then rising on her knees to pray--at first for Charles's safety--for she shrank from asking for Divine protection, knowing only too well what that would be. Gradually, however, a shudder came over her at the thought that if she would not commit her way unto the Lord, she might indeed be the undoing of her lover, and then once more the higher sense of duty rose on her. She prayed for forgiveness for the thought, and that it might not be visited upon him; she prayed for strength to do what must be her duty, for safety for him, and comfort to his parents, and so, in passing gusts of misery and apprehension, of failing heart and recovered resolution, of anguish and of prayer, the long night at length passed, and with the first dawn she arose, shaken and weak, but resolved to act on her terrible resolution before it again failed her.

Sir Philip was always an early riser, and she heard his foot on the stairs before seven o'clock. She came out on the staircase, which met the flight which he was descending, and tried to speak, but her lips seemed too dry to part.

"Child! child! you are ill," said the old gentleman, as he saw her blanched cheek; "you should be in bed this chilly morning. Go back to your chamber."

"No, no, sir, I cannot. Pray, your Honour, come here, I have something to say;" and she drew him to the open door of his justice-room, called the gun-room.

"Bless me," he muttered, "the wench does not mean that she has got smitten with that poor rogue my nephew!"

"Oh! no, no," said Anne, almost ready for a hysterical laugh, yet letting the old man seat himself, and then dropping on her knees before him, for she could hardly stand, "it is worse than that, sir; I know who it was who did that thing."

"Well, who?" he said hastily; "why have you kept it back so long and let an innocent man get into trouble?"

"O Sir Philip! I could not help it. Forgive me;" and with clasped hands, she brought out the words, "It was your son, Mr. Archfield;" and then she almost collapsed again.

"Child! child! you are ill; you do not know what you are saying. We must have you to bed again. I will call your uncle."

"Ah! sir, it is only too true;" but she let him fetch her uncle, who was sure to be at his devotions in a kind of oratory on the farther side of the hall. She had not gone to him first, from the old desire to keep him clear of the knowledge, but she longed for such support as he might give her, or at least to know whether he were very angry with her.

The two old men quickly came back together, and Dr. Woodford began, "How now, niece, are you telling us dreams?" but he broke off as he saw the sad earnest of her face.

"Sir, it is too true. He charged me to speak out if any one else were brought into danger."

"Come," said Sir Philip, testily; "don't crouch grovelling on the floor there. Get up and let us know the meaning of this. Good heavens! the lad may be here any day."

Anne had much rather have knelt where she was, but her uncle raised her, and placed her in a chair, saying, "Try to compose yourself, and tell us what you mean, and why it has been kept back so long."

"Indeed he did not intend it," pleaded Anne; "it was almost an accident--to protect me--Peregrine was--pursuing me."

"Upon my word, young mistress," burst out the father, "you seem to have been setting all the young fellows together by the ears."

"I doubt if she could help it," said the Doctor. "She tried to be discreet, but it was the reason her mother--"

"Well, go on," interrupted poor Sir Philip, too unhappy to remember manners or listen to the defence; "what was it? when was it?"

Anne was allowed then to proceed. "It was the morning I went to London. I went out to gather some mouse-ear."

"Mouse-ear! mouse-ear!" growled he. "Some one else's ear."

"It was for Lady Oglethorpe."

"It was," said her uncle, "a specific, it seems, for whooping-cough. I saw the letter, and knew--"

"Umph! let us hear," said Sir Philip, evidently with the idea of a tryst in his mind. "No wonder mischief comes of maidens running about at such hours. What next?"

The poor girl struggled on: "I saw Peregrine coming, and hoping he would not see me, I ran into the keep, meaning to get home by the battlements out of his sight, but when I looked down he and Mr. Archfield were fighting. I screamed, but I don't think they heard me, and I ran down; but I had fastened all the doors, and I was a long time getting out, and by that time Mr. Archfield had dragged him to the vault and thrown him in. He was like one distracted, and said it must be hidden, or it would be the death of his wife and his mother, and what could I do?"

"Is that all the truth?" said Sir Philip sternly. "What brought them there--either of them?"

"Mr. Archfield came to bring me a pattern of sarcenet to match for poor young Madam in London."

No doubt Sir Philip recollected the petulant anger that this had been forgotten, but he was hardly appeased. "And the other fellow? Why, he was brawling with my nephew Sedley about you the day before!"

"I do not think she was to blame there," said Dr. Woodford. "The unhappy youth was set against marrying Mistress Browning, and had talked wildly to my sister and me about wedding my niece."

"But why should she run away as if he had the plague, and set the foolish lads to fight?"

"Sir, I must tell you," Anne owned, "he had beset me, and talked so desperately that I was afraid of what he might do in that lonely place and at such an hour in the morning. I hoped he had not seen me."

"Umph!" said Sir Philip, much as if he thought a silly girl's imagination had caused all the mischief.

"When did he thus speak to you, Anne?" asked her uncle, not unkindly.

"At the inn at Portsmouth, sir," said Anne. "He came while you were with Mr. Stanbury and the rest, and wanted me to marry him and flee to France, or I know not where, or at any rate marry him secretly so as to save him from poor Mistress Browning. I could not choose but fear and avoid him, but oh! I would have faced him ten times over rather than have brought this on--us all. And now what shall I do? He, Mr. Archfield, when I saw him in France, said as long as no one was suspected, it would only give more pain to say what I knew, but that if suspicion fell on any one--" and her voice died away.

"He could not say otherwise," returned Sir Philip, with a groan.

"And now what shall I do? what shall I do?" sighed the poor girl. "I must speak truth."

"I never bade you perjure yourself," said Sir Philip sharply, but hiding his face in his hands, and groaning out, "Oh, my son! my son!"

Seeing that his distress so overcame poor Anne that she could

scarcely contain herself, Dr. Woodford thought it best to take her from the room, promising to come again to her. She could do nothing but lie on her bed and weep in a quiet heart-broken way. Sir Philip's anger seemed to fill up the measure, by throwing the guilt back upon her and rousing a bitter sense of injustice, and then she wept again at her cruel selfishness in blaming the broken-hearted old man.

She could hardly have come down to breakfast, so heavy were her limbs and so sick and faint did every movement render her, and she further bethought herself that the poor old father might not brook the sight of her under the circumstances. It was a pang to hear little Philip prancing about the house, and when he had come to her to say his prayers, she sent him down with a message that she was not well enough to come downstairs, and that she wanted nothing, only to be quiet.

The little fellow was very pitiful, and made her cry again by wanting to know whether she had gout like grandpapa or rheumatics like grandmamma, and then stroking her face, calling her his dear Nana, and telling her of the salad in his garden that his papa was to eat the very first day he came home.

By and by Dr. Woodford knocked at her door. He had had a long conversation with poor old Sir Philip, who was calmer now than under the first blow, and somewhat less inclined to anger with the girl, who might indeed be the cause, but surely the innocent cause, of all. The Doctor had done his best to show that her going out had no connection with any of the youths, and he thought Sir Philip would believe it on quieter reflection. He had remembered too, signs of self-reproach mixed with his son's grief for his wife, and his extreme relief at the plan for going abroad, recollecting likewise that Charles had strongly disliked poor Peregrine, and had much resented the liking which young Madam had shown for one whose attentions might have been partly intended to tease the young husband.

"Of course," said Dr. Woodford, "the unhappy deed was no more than an unfortunate accident, and if all had been known at first, probably it would so have been treated. The concealment was an error, but it is impossible to blame either of you for it."

"Oh never mind that, dear uncle! Only tell me! Must he--must Charles suffer to save that man? You know what he is, real murderer in heart! Oh I know. The right must be done! But it is dreadful!"

"The right must be done and the truth spoken at all costs. No one knows that better than our good old patron," said the Doctor; "but, my dear child, you are not called on to denounce this young man as you seem to imagine, unless there should be no other means of saving his cousin, or unless you are so questioned that you cannot help replying for truth's sake. Knowing nothing of all this, it struck others besides myself at the inquest that the evidence against Sedley was utterly insufficient for a conviction, and if he should be acquitted, matters will only be as they were before."

"Then you think I am not bound to speak--The truth, the whole truth, nothing but the truth," she murmured in exceeding grief, yet firmly.

"You certainly may, nay, _must_ keep your former silence till the trial, at the Lent Assizes. I trust you may not be called on as a witness to the fray with Sedley, but that I may be sufficient testimony to that. I could testify to nothing else. Remember, if you are called, you have only to answer what you are asked, nor is it likely, unless Sedley have any suspicion of the truth, that you will be asked any question that will implicate Mr. Archfield. If so, God give you strength my poor child, to be true to Him. But the point of the trial is to prove Sedley guilty or not guilty; and if the latter, there is no more to be said. God grant it."

"But he--Mr. Archfield?"

"His father is already taking measures to send to all the ports to stop him on his way till the trial is over. Thus there will be no actual danger, though it is a sore disappointment, and these wicked attempts of Charnock and Barclay put us in bad odour, so that it may be less easy to procure a pardon than it once would have been. So, my dear child, I do not think you need be in terror for his life, even if you are obliged to speak out plainly."

And then the good old man knelt with Anne to pray for pardon, direction, and firmness, and protection for Charles. She made an entreaty after they rose that her uncle would take her away--her presence must be so painful to their kind hosts. He agreed with her, and made the proposition, but Sir Philip would not hear of it. Perhaps he was afraid of any change bringing suspicion of the facts, and he might have his fears of Anne being questioned into dangerous admissions, besides which, he hoped to keep his poor old wife in ignorance to the last. So Anne was to remain at Fareham, and after that one day's seclusion she gathered strength to be with the family as usual. Poor old Sir Philip treated her with a studied but icy courtesy which cut her to the heart; but Lady Archfield's hopes of seeing her son were almost worse, together with her regrets at her husband's dejection at the situation of his nephew and the family disgrace. As to little Philip, his curious inquiries about Cousin Sedley being in jail for murdering Penny Grim had to be summarily hushed by the assurance that such things were not to be spoken about. But why did Nana cry when he talked of papa's coming home?

All the neighbourhood was invited to the funeral in Havant Churchyard, the burial-place of the Oakshotts. Major Oakshott himself wrote to Dr. Woodford, as having been one of the kindest friends of his poor son, adding that he could not ask Sir Philip Archfield, although he knew him to be no partner in the guilt of his unhappy nephew, who so fully exemplified that Divine justice may be slow, but is sure.

Dr. Woodford decided on accepting the invitation, not only for Peregrine's sake, but to see how the land lay. Scarcely anything remarkable, however, occurred, except that it was painful to perceive the lightness of the coffin. A funeral sermon was previously preached by a young Nonconformist minister in his own chapel, on the text, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed;" and then the burial took place, watched by a huge crowd of people. But just as the procession was starting from the chapel for the churchyard, over the wall there came a strange peal of wild laughter.

"Oh, would not the unquiet spirit be at rest till it was avenged?" thought Anne when she was told of it.

CHAPTER XXIX: THE ASSIZE COURT

"O terror! what hath she perceived? O joy,
What doth she look on? whom hath she perceived?"

WORDSWORTH.

Time wore away, and the Lent Assizes at Winchester had come. Sir Philip had procured the best legal assistance for his nephew, but in criminal cases, though the prisoner was allowed the advice of counsel, the onus of defence rested upon himself. To poor Anne's dismay, a subpoena was sent to her, as well as to her uncle, to attend as a witness at the trial. Sir Philip was too anxious to endure to remain at a distance from Winchester, and they travelled in his coach, Sir Edmund Nutley escorting them on horseback, while Lucy was left with her mother, both still in blissful ignorance. They took rooms at the George Inn. That night was a strange and grievous one to Anne, trying hard to sleep so as to be physically capable of composure and presence of mind, yet continually wakened by ghastly dreams, and then recollecting that the sense of something terrible was by no means all a dream.

Very white, very silent, but very composed, she came to the sitting-room, and was constrained by her uncle and Sir Philip to eat, much as it went against her. On this morning Sir Philip had dropped his sternness towards her, and finding a moment when his son-in-law was absent, he said, "Child, I know that this is wellnigh, nay, quite as hard for you as for me. I can only say, Let no earthly regards hold you back from whatever is your duty to God and man. Speak the truth whatever betide, and leave the rest to the God of truth. God bless you, however it may be;" and he kissed her brow.

The intelligence that the trial was coming on was brought by Sedley's counsel, Mr. Simon Harcourt. They set forth for the County Hall up the sharply-rising street, thronged with people, who growled and murmured at the murderer savagely, Sir Philip, under the care of his son-in-law, and Anne with her uncle. Mr. Harcourt was very hopeful; he said the case for the prosecution had not a leg to stand on, and that the prisoner himself was so intelligent, and had so readily understood the line of defence to take, that he ought to have been a lawyer. There would be no fear except that it might be made a party case, and no stone was likely to be left unturned against a gentleman of good loyal family. Moreover Mr. William Cowper, whom Robert Oakshott, or rather his wife, had engaged at great expense for the prosecution, was one of the most rising of barristers, noted for his persuasive eloquence, and unfortunately Mr. Harcourt had not the right of reply.

The melancholy party were conducted into court, Sir Philip and Sir Edmund to the seats disposed of by the sheriff, beside the judge, strangely enough only divided by him from Major Oakshott. The judge was Mr. Baron Hatsel, a somewhat weak-looking man, in spite of his red robes and flowing wig, as he sat under his canopy beneath King

Arthur's Round Table. Sedley, perhaps a little thinner since his imprisonment, but with the purple red on his face, and his prominent eyes so hard and bold that it was galling to know that this was really the confidence of innocence.

Mr. Cowper was with great ability putting the case. Here were two families in immediate neighbourhood, divided from the first by political opinions of the strongest complexion; and he put the Oakshott views upon liberty, civil and religious, in the most popular light. The unfortunate deceased he described as having been a highly promising member of the suite of the distinguished Envoy, Sir Peregrine Oakshott, whose name he bore. On the death of the eldest brother he had been recalled, and his accomplishments and foreign air had, it appeared, excited the spleen of the young gentlemen of the county belonging to the Tory party, then in the ascendant, above all of the prisoner. There was then little or no etiquette as to irrelevant matter, so that Mr. Cowper could dwell at length on Sedley's antecedents, as abusing the bounty of his uncle, a known bully expelled for misconduct from Winchester College, then acting as a suitable instrument in those violences in Scotland which had driven the nation finally to extremity, noted for his debaucheries when in garrison, and finally broken for insubordination in Ireland.

After this unflattering portrait, which Sedley's looks certainly did not belie, the counsel went back to 1688, proceeded to mention several disputes which had taken place when Peregrine had met Lieutenant Archfield at Portsmouth; but, he added with a smile, that no dart of malice was ever thoroughly winged till Cupid had added his feather; and he went on to describe in strong colours the insult to a young gentlewoman, and the interference of the other young man in her behalf, so that swords were drawn before the appearance of the reverend gentleman her uncle. Still, he said, there was further venom to be added to the bolt, and he showed that the two had parted after the rejoicings on Portsdown Hill with a challenge all but uttered between them, the Whig upholding religious liberty, the Tory hotly defending such honour as the King possessed, and both parting in anger.

Young Mr. Oakshott was never again seen alive, though his family long hoped against hope. There was no need to dwell on the strange appearances that had incited them to the search. Certain it was, that after seven years' silence, the grave had yielded up its secrets. Then came the description of the discovery of the bones, and of the garments and sword, followed by the mention of the evidence as to the blood on the grass, and the prisoner having been seen in the neighbourhood of the castle at that strange hour. He was observed to have an amount of money unusual with him soon after, and, what was still more suspicious, after having gambled this away, he had sold to a goldsmith at Southampton a ruby ring, which both Mr. and Mrs. Oakshott could swear to have belonged to the deceased. In fact, when Mr. Cowper marshalled the facts, and even described the passionate encounter taking place hastily and without witnesses, and the subsequent concealment of guilt in the vault, the purse taken, and whatever could again be identified hidden, while providentially the blocking up of the vault preserved the evidence of the crime so long undetected and unavenged, it was hardly possible to believe the prisoner innocent.

When the examination of the witnesses began, however, Sedley showed himself equal to his own defence. He made no sign when Robert Oakshott identified the clothes, sword, and other things, and their condition was described; but he demanded of him sharply how he knew the human remains to be those of his brother.

"Of course they were," said Robert.

"Were there any remains of clothes with them?"

"No."

"Can you swear to them? Did you ever before see your brother's bones?"

At which, and at the witness's hesitating, "No, but--" the court began to laugh.

"What was the height of the deceased?"

"He reached about up to my ear," said the witness with some hesitation.

"What was the length of the skeleton?"

"Quite small. It looked like a child's."

"My lord," said Sedley, "I have a witness here, a surgeon, whom I request may be called to certify the proportion of a skeleton to the size of a living man."

Though this was done, the whole matter of size was so vague that there was nothing proved, either as to the inches of Peregrine or those of the skeleton, but still Sedley made his point that the identity of the body was unproved at least in some minds. Still, there remained the other articles, about which there was no doubt.

Mr. Cowper proceeded with his examination as to the disputes at Portsmouth, but again the prisoner scored a point by proving that Peregrine had staked the ring against him at a cock-fight at Southampton, and had lost it.

Dr. Woodford was called, and his evidence could not choose but to be most damaging as to the conflict on the road at Portsmouth; but as he had not seen the beginning, 'Mistress Anne Jacobina Woodford' was called for.

There she stood, tall and stately, almost majestic in the stiffness of intense self-restraint, in her simple gray dress, her black silk hood somewhat back, her brown curls round her face, a red spot in each cheek, her earnest brown eyes fixed on the clerk as he gabbled out the words so awful to her, "The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth;" and her soul re-echoed the words, "So help you God."

Mr. Cowper was courteous; he was a gentleman, and he saw she was no light-minded girl. He asked her the few questions needful as to the attack made on her, and the defence; but something moved him to go on and ask whether she had been on Portsdown Hill, and to obtain

from her the account of the high words between the young men. She answered each question in a clear low voice, which still was audible to all. Was it over, or would Sedley begin to torture her, when so much was in his favour? No! Mr. Cowper--oh! why would he? was asking in an affirmative tone, as if to clench the former evidence, "And did you ever see the deceased again?"

"Yes." The answer was at first almost choked, then cleared into sharpness, and every eye turned in surprise on the face that had become as white as her collar.

"Indeed! And when?"

"The next morning," in a voice as if pronouncing her own doom, and with hands clinging tight to the front of the witness-box as though in anguish.

"Where?" said the counsel, like inexorable fate.

"I will save the gentlewoman from replying to that question, sir;" and a gentleman with long brown hair, in a rich white and gold uniform, rose from among the spectators. "Perhaps I may be allowed to answer for her, when I say that it was at Portchester Castle, at five in the morning, that she saw Peregrine Oakshott slain by my hand, and thrown into the vault."

There was a moment of breathless amazement in the court, and the judge was the first to speak. "Very extraordinary, sir! What is your name?"

"Charles Archfield," said the clear resolute voice.

Then came a general movement and sensation, and Anne, still holding fast to the support, saw the newcomer start forward with a cry, "My father!" and with two or three bounds reach the side of Sir Philip, who had sunk back in his seat for a moment, but recovered himself as he felt his son's arm round him.

There was a general buzz, and a cry of order, and in the silence thus produced the judge addressed the witness:--

"Is what this gentleman says the truth?"

And on Anne's reply, "Yes, my Lord," spoken with the clear ring of anguish, the judge added--

"Was the prisoner present?"

"No, my Lord; he had nothing to do with it."

"Then, brother Cowper, do you wish to proceed with the case?"

Mr. Cowper replied in the negative, and the judge then made a brief summing-up, and the jury, without retiring, returned a verdict of 'Not guilty.'

In the meantime Anne had been led like one blinded from the witness-box, and almost dropped into her uncle's arms. "Cheer up, cheer up, my child," he said. "You have done your part bravely, and after so

upright a confession no one can deal hardly with the young man. God will surely protect him."

The acquittal had been followed by a few words from Baron Hatsel, congratulating the late prisoner on his deliverance through this gentleman's generous confession. Then there was a moment's hesitation, ended by the sheriff asking Charles, who stood up by his old father, one arm supporting the trembling form, and the other hand clasped in the two aged ones, "Then, sir, do you surrender to take your trial?"

"Certainly, sir," said Charles. "I ought to have done so long ago, but in the first shock--"

Mr. Harcourt here cautioned him not to say anything that could be used against him, adding in a low tone, much to Sir Philip's relief, "It may be brought in manslaughter, sir."

"He should be committed," another authority said. "Is there a Hampshire magistrate here to sign a warrant?"

Of these there were plenty; and as the clerk asked for his description, all eyes turned on the tall and robust form in the prime of manhood, with the noble resolute expression on his fine features and steadfast eyes, except when, as he looked at his father, they were full of infinite pity. The brown hair hung over the rich gold-laced white coat, faced with black, and with a broad gold-coloured sash fringed with black over his shoulder, and there was a look of distinction about him that made his answer only natural. "Charles Archfield, of Archfield House, Fareham, Lieutenant-Colonel of his Imperial Majesty's Light Dragoons, Knight of the Holy Roman Empire. Must I give up my sword like a prisoner of war?" he asked, with a smile.

Sir Philip rose to his feet with an earnest trembling entreaty that bail might be taken for him, and many voices of gentlemen and men of substance made offers of it. There was a little consultation, and it was ruled that bail might be accepted under the circumstances, and Charles bowed his thanks to the distant and gave his hand to the nearer, while Mr. Eyre of Botley Grange, and Mr. Brocas of Roche Court, were accepted as sureties. The gentle old face of Mr. Cromwell of Hursley, was raised to poor old Sir Philip's with the words, spoken with a remnant of the authority of the Protector: "Your son has spoken like a brave man, sir; God bless you, and bring you well through it."

Charles was then asked whether he wished for time to collect witnesses. "No, my lord," he said. "I thank you heartily, but I have no one to call, and the sooner this is over the better for all."

After a little consultation it was found that the Grand Jury had not been dismissed, and could find a true bill against him; and it was decided that the trial should take place after the rest of the criminal cases were disposed of.

This settled, the sorrowful party with the strangely welcomed son were free to return to their quarters at the George. Mr. Cromwell pressed forward to beg that they would make use of his coach. It

was a kind thought, for Sir Philip hung feebly on his son's arm, and to pass through the curious throng would have been distressing. After helping him in, Charles turned and demanded--

"Where is she, the young gentlewoman, Miss Woodford?"

She was just within, her uncle waiting to take her out till the crowd's attention should be called off. Charles lifted her in, and Sir Edmund and Dr. Woodford followed him, for there was plenty of room in the capacious vehicle.

Nobody spoke in the very short interval the four horses took in getting themselves out of the space in front of the County Hall and down the hill to the George. Only Charles had leant forward, taken Anne's hand, drawn it to his lips, and then kept fast hold of it.

They were all in the room at the inn at last, they hardly knew how; indeed, as Charles was about to shut the door there was a smack on his back, and there stood Sedley holding out his hand.

"So, Charley, old fellow, you were the sad dog after all. You got me out of it, and I owe you my thanks, but you need not have put your neck into the noose. I should have come off with flying colours, and made them all make fools of themselves, if you had only waited."

"Do you think I could sit still and see _her_ put to the torture?" said Charles.

"Torture? You are thinking of your barbarous countries. No fear of the boot here, nor even in Scotland nowadays."

"That's all the torture you understand," muttered Sir Edmund Nutley.

"Not but what I am much beholden to you all the same," went on Sedley. "And look here, sir," turning to his uncle, "if you wish to get him let off cheap you had better send up another special retainer to Harcourt, without loss of time, as he may be off."

Sir Edmund Nutley concurred in the advice, and they hurried off together in search of the family attorney, through whom the great man had to be approached.

The four left together could breathe more freely. Indeed Dr. Woodford would have taken his niece away, but that Charles already had her in his arms in a most fervent embrace, as he said, "My brave, my true maid!"

She could not speak, but she lifted up her eyes, with infinite relief in all her sorrow, as for a moment she rested against him; but they had to move apart, for a servant came up with some wine, and Charles, putting her into a chair, began to wait on her and on his father.

"I have not quite forgotten my manners," he said lightly, as if to relieve the tension of feeling, "though in Germany the ladies serve the gentlemen."

It was very hard not to burst into tears at these words, but Anne

knew that would be the way to distress her companions and to have to leave the room and lose these precious moments. Sir Philip, after swallowing the wine, succeeded in saying, "Have you been at home?"

Charles explained that he had landed at Gravesend, and had ridden thence, sleeping at Basingstoke, and taking the road through Winchester in case his parents should be wintering there, and on arriving a couple of hours previously and inquiring for them, he had heard the tidings that Sir Philip Archfield was indeed there, for his nephew was being tried for his life for the wilful murder of Major Oakshott's son seven years ago.

"And you had none of my warnings? I wrote to all the ports," said his father, "to warn you to wait till all this was over."

No; he had crossed from Sluys, and had met no letter. "I suppose," he said, "that I must not ride home to-morrow. It might make my sureties uneasy; but I would fain see them all."

"It would kill your mother to be here," said Sir Philip. "She knows nothing of what Anne told me on Sedley's arrest. She is grown very feeble;" and he groaned. "But we might send for your sister, if she can leave her, and the boy."

"I should like my boy to be fetched," said Charles. "I should wish him to remember his father--not as a felon convicted!" Then putting a knee to the ground before Sir Philip, he said, "Sir, I ask your blessing and forgiveness. I never before thoroughly understood my errors towards you, especially in hiding this miserable matter, and leaving all this to come on you, while my poor Anne there was left to bear all the load. It was a cowardly and selfish act, and I ask your pardon."

The old man sobbed with his hand on his son's head. "My dear boy! my poor boy! you were distraught."

"I was then. I did it, as I thought, for my poor Alice's sake at first, and as it proved, it was all in vain; but at the year's end, when I was older, it was folly and wrong. I ought to have laid all before you, and allowed you to judge, and I sincerely repent the not having so done. And Anne, my sweetest Anne, has borne the burthen all this time," he added, going back to her. "Let no one say a woman cannot keep secrets, though I ought never to have laid this on her."

"Ah! it might have gone better for you then," sighed Sir Philip. "No one would have visited a young lad's mischance hardly on a loyal house in those days. What is to be done, my son?"

"That we will discuss when the lawyer fellow comes. Is it old Lee? Meantime let us enjoy our meeting. So that is Lucy's husband. Sober and staid, eh? And my mother is feeble, you say. Has she been ill?"

Charles was comporting himself with the cheerfulness that had become habitual to him as a soldier, always in possible danger, but it was very hard to the others to chime in with his tone, and when a message was brought to ask whether his Honour would be served in private, the cheery greeting and shake of the hand broke down the

composure of the old servant who brought it, and he cried, "Oh, sir, to see you thus, and such a fine young gentleman!"

Charles, the only person who could speak, gave the orders, but they did not eat alone, for Sir Edmund Nutley and Sedley arrived with the legal advisers, and it was needful, perhaps even better, to have their company. The chief of the conversation was upon Hungarian and Transylvanian politics and the Turkish war. Mr. Harcourt seeming greatly to appreciate the information that Colonel Archfield was able to give him, and the anecdotes of the war, and descriptions of scenes therein actually brightened Sir Philip into interest, and into forgetting for a moment his son's situation in pride in his conduct, and at the distinction he had gained. "We must save him," said Mr. Harcourt to Sir Edmund. "He is far too fine a fellow to be lost for a youthful mischance."

The meal was a short one, and a consultation was to follow, while Sedley departed. Anne was about to withdraw, when Mr. Lee the attorney said, "We shall need Mistress Woodford's evidence, sir, for the defence."

"I do not see what defence there can be," returned Charles. "I can only plead guilty, and throw myself on the King's mercy, if he chooses to extend it to one of a Tory family."

"Not so fast, sir," said Mr. Harcourt; "as far as I have gathered the facts, there is every reason to hope you may obtain a verdict of manslaughter, and a nominal penalty, although that rests with the judge."

On this the discussion began in earnest. Charles, who had never heard the circumstances which led to the trial, was greatly astonished to hear what remains had been discovered. He said that he could only declare himself to have thrown in the body, full dressed, just as it was, and how it could have been stripped and buried he could not imagine. "What made folks think of looking into the vault?" he asked.

"It was Mrs. Oakshott," said Lee, "the young man's wife, she who was to have married the deceased. She took up some strange notion about stories of phantoms current among the vulgar, and insisted on having the vault searched, though it had been walled up for many years past."

Charles and Anne looked at each other, and the former said, "Again?"

"Oh yes!" said Anne; "indeed there have been enough to make me remember what you bade me do, in case they recurred, only it was impossible."

"Phantoms!" said Mr. Harcourt; "what does this mean?"

"Mere vulgar superstitions, sir," said the attorney.

"But very visible," said Charles; "I have seen one myself, of which I am quite sure, besides many that may be laid to the account of the fever of my wound."

"I must beg to hear," said the barrister. "Do I understand that

these were apparitions of the deceased?"

"Yes," said Charles. "Miss Woodford saw the first, I think."

"May I beg you to describe it?" said Mr. Harcourt, taking a fresh piece of paper to make notes on.

Anne narrated the two appearances in London, and Charles added the story of the figure seen in the street at Douai, seen by both together, asking what more she knew of.

"Once at night last summer, at the very anniversary, I saw his face in the trees in the garden," said Anne; "it was gone in a moment. That has been all I have seen; but little Philip came to me full of stories of people having seen Penny Grim, as he calls it, and very strangely, once it rose before him at the great pond, and his fright saved him from sliding to the dangerous part. What led Mrs. Oakshott to the examination was that it was seen once on the beach, once by the sentry at the vault itself, once by the sexton at Havant Churchyard, and once by my mother's grave."

"Seven?" said the counsel, reviewing the notes he jotted down. "Colonel Archfield, I should recommend you pleading not guilty, and basing your defence, like your cousin, on the strong probability that this same youth is a living man."

"Indeed!" said Charles, starting, "I could have hoped it from these recent apparitions, but what I myself saw forbids the idea. If any sight were ever that of a spirit, it was what we saw at Douai; besides, how should he come thither, a born and bred Whig and Puritan?"

"There is no need to mention that; you can call witnesses to his having been seen within these few months. It would rest with the prosecution to disprove his existence in the body, especially as the bones in the vault cannot be identified."

"Sir," said Charles, "the defence that would have served my innocent cousin cannot serve me, who know what I did to Oakshott. I am now aware that it is quite possible that the sword might not have killed him, but when I threw him into that vault I sealed his fate."

"How deep is the vault?"

Mr. Lee and Dr. Woodford both averred that it was not above twenty or twenty-four feet deep, greatly to Charles's surprise, for as a lad he had thought it almost unfathomable; but then he owned his ideas of Winchester High Street had been likewise far more magnificent than he found it. The fall need not necessarily have been fatal, especially to one insensible and opposing no resistance, but even supposing that death had not resulted, in those Draconian days, the intent to murder was equally subject with its full accomplishment to capital punishment. Still, as Colonel Archfield could plead with all his heart that he had left home with no evil intentions towards young Oakshott, the lawyers agreed that to prove that the death of the victim was uncertain would reduce the matter to a mere youthful brawl, which could not be heavily visited. Mr. Harcourt further asked whether it were possible to prove that the prisoner had been otherwise employed than in meddling with the body;

but unfortunately it had been six hours before he came home.

"I was distracted," said Charles; "I rode I knew not whither, till I came to my senses on finding that my horse was ready to drop, when I led him into a shed at a wayside public-house, bade them feed him, took a drink, then I wandered out into the copse near, and lay on the ground there till I thought him rested, for how long I know not. I think it must have been near Bishops Waltham, but I cannot recollect."

Mr. Lee decided on setting forth at peep of dawn the next morning to endeavour to collect witnesses of Peregrine's appearances. Sir Edmund Nutley intended to accompany him as far as Fareham to fetch little Philip and Lady Nutley, if the latter could leave her mother after the tidings had been broken to them, and also to try to trace whether Charles's arrival at any public-house were remembered.

To her dismay, Anne received another summons from the other party to act as witness.

"I hoped to have spared you this, my sweet," said Charles, "but never mind; you cannot say anything worse of me than I shall own of myself."

The two were left to each other for a little while in the bay window. "Oh, sir! can you endure me thus after all?" murmured Anne, as she felt his arm round her.

"Can you endure me after all I left you to bear?" he returned.

"It was not like what I brought on you," she said.

But they could not talk much of the future; and Charles told how he had rested through all his campaigns in the knowledge that his Anne was watching and praying for him, and how his long illness had brought before him deeper thoughts than he had ever had before, and made him especially dwell on the wrong done to his parents by his long absence, and the lightness with which he had treated home duties and responsibilities, till he had resolved that if his life were then spared, he would neglect them no longer.

"And now," he said, and paused, "all I shall have done is to break their hearts. What is that saying, 'Be sure your sin will find you out.'"

"Oh, sir! they are sure not to deal hardly with you."

"Perhaps the Emperor's Ambassador may claim me. If so, would you go into banishment with the felon, Anne, love? It would not be quite so mad as when I asked you before."

"I would go to the ends of the world with you; and we would take little Phil. Do you know, he is growing a salad, and learning Latin, all for papa?"

And so she told him of little Phil till his father was seen looking wistfully at him.

With Sir Philip, Charles was all cheerfulness and hope, taking such

interest in all there was to hear about the family, estate, and neighbourhood that the old gentleman was beguiled into feeling as if there were only a short ceremony to be gone through before he had his son at home, saving him ease and trouble.

But after Sir Philip had been persuaded to retire, worn out with the day's agitations, and Anne likewise had gone to her chamber to weep and pray, Charles made his arrangements with Mr. Lee for the future for all connected with him in case of the worst; and after the lawyer's departure poured out his heart to Dr. Woodford in deep contrition, as he said he had longed to do when lying in expectation of death at the Iron Gates. "However it may end," he said, "and I expect, as I deserve, the utmost, I am thankful for this opportunity, though unhappily it gives more pain to those about me than if I had died out there. Tell them, when they need comfort, how much better it is for me."

"My dear boy, I cannot believe you will have to suffer."

"There is much against me, sir. My foolish flight, the state of parties, and the recent conspiracy, which has made loyal families suspected and odious. I saw something of that as I came down. The crowd fancied my uniform French, and hooted and hissed me. Unluckily I have no other clothes to wear. Nor can I from my heart utterly disclaim all malice or ill will when I remember the thrill of pleasure in driving my sword home. I have had to put an end to a Janissary or two more than once in the way of duty, but their black eyes never haunted me like those parti-coloured ones. Still I trust, as you tell me I may, that God forgives me, for our Blessed Lord's sake; but I should like, if I could, to take the Holy Sacrament with my love while I am still thus far a free man. I have not done so since the Easter before these troubles."

"You shall, my dear boy, you shall."

There were churches at which the custom freshly begun at the Restoration was not dropped. The next was St. Matthias's Day, and Anne and her uncle had already purposed to go to the quiet little church of St. Lawrence, at no great distance, in the very early morning. They were joined on their way down the stair into the courtyard of the inn by a gentleman in a slouched hat and large dark cloak, who drew Anne's arm within his own.

Truly there was peace on that morning, and strength to the brave man beyond the physical courage that had often before made him bright in the face of danger, and Anne, though weeping, had a sense of respite and repose, if not of hope.

Late in the afternoon, little Philip was lifted down from riding before old Ralph into the arms of the splendid officer, whose appearance transcended all his visions. He fumbled in his small pocket, and held out a handful of something green and limp.

"Here's my salad, papa. I brought it all the way for you to eat."

And Colonel Archfield ate every scrap of it for supper, though it was much fitter for a rabbit, and all the evening he held on his knee the tired child, and responded to his prattle about Nana and dogs and rabbits; nay, ministered to his delight and admiration of

the sheriff's coach, javelin men, and even the judge, with a strange mixture of wonder, delight, and with melancholy only in eyes and undertones.

CHAPTER XXX: SENTENCE

"I have hope to live, and am prepared to die."

Measure for Measure.

Ralph was bidden to be ready to take his young master home early the next morning. At eight o'clock the boy, who had slept with his father, came down the stair, clinging to his father's hand, and Miss Woodford coming closely with him.

"Yes," said Charles, as he held the little fair fellow in his arms, ere seating him on the horse, "he knows all, Ralph. He knows that his father did an evil thing, and that what we do in our youth finds us out later, and must be paid for. He has promised me to be a comfort to the old people, and to look on this lady as a mother. Nay, no more, Ralph; 'tis not good-bye to any of you yet. There, Phil, don't lug my head off, nor catch my hair in your buttons. Give my dutiful love to your grandmamma and to Aunt Nutley, and be a good boy to them."

"And when I come to see you again I'll bring another salad," quoth Philip, as he rode out of the court; and his father, by way of excusing a contortion of features, smoothed the entangled lock of hair, and muttered something about, "This comes of not wearing a periwig." Then he said--

"And to think that I have wasted the company of such a boy as that, all his life except for this mere glimpse!"

"Oh! you will come back to him," was all that could be said.

For it was time for Charles Archfield to surrender himself to take his trial.

He had been instructed over and over again as to the line of his defence, and cautioned against candour for himself and delicacy towards others, till he had more than once to declare that he had no intention of throwing his life away; but the lawyers agreed in heartily deploring the rules that thus deprived the accused of the assistance of an advocate in examining witnesses and defending himself. All depended, as they knew and told Sir Edmund Nutley, on the judge and jury. Now Mr. Baron Hatsel had shown himself a well-meaning but weak and vacillating judge, whose summing up was apt rather to confuse than to elucidate the evidence; and as to the jury, Mr. Lee scanned their stolid countenances somewhat ruefully when they were marshalled before the prisoner, to be challenged if desirable. A few words passed, into which the judge inquired.

"I am reminded, my Lord," said Colonel Archfield, bowing, "that I once incurred Mr. Holt's displeasure as a mischievous boy by throwing a stone which injured one of his poultry; but I cannot

believe such a trifle would bias an honest man in a question of life and death."

Nevertheless the judge put aside Mr. Holt.

"I like his spirit," whispered Mr. Harcourt.

"But," returned Lee, "I doubt if he has done himself any good with those fellows by calling it a trifle to kill an old hen. I should like him to have challenged two or three more moody old Whiggish rascals; but he has been too long away from home to know how the land lies."

"Too generous and high-spirited for this work," sighed Sir Edmund, who sat with them.

The indictment was read, the first count being "That of malice aforethought, by the temptation of the Devil, Charles Archfield did wilfully kill and slay Peregrine Oakshott," etc. The second indictment was that "By misadventure he had killed and slain the said Peregrine Oakshott." To the first he pleaded 'Not guilty;' to the second 'Guilty.'

Tall, well-made, manly, and soldierly he stood, with a quiet set face, while Mr. Cowper proceeded to open the prosecution, with a certain compliment to the prisoner and regret at having to push the case against one who had so generously come forward on behalf of a kinsman; but he must unwillingly state the circumstances that made it doubtful, nay, more than doubtful, whether the prisoner's plea of mere misadventure could stand. The dislike to the unfortunate deceased existing among the young Tory country gentlemen of the county was, he should prove, intensified in the prisoner on account of not inexcusable jealousies, as well as of the youthful squabbles which sometimes lead to fatal results. On the evening of the 30th of June 1688 there had been angry words between the prisoner and the deceased on Portsdown Hill, respecting the prisoner's late lady. At four or five o'clock on the ensuing morning, the 1st of July, the one fell by the sword of the other in the then unfrequented court of Portchester Castle. It was alleged that the stroke was fatal only through the violence of youthful impetuosity; but was it consistent with that supposition that the young gentleman's time was unaccounted for afterwards, and that the body should have been disposed of in a manner that clearly proved the assistance of an accomplice, and with so much skill that no suspicion had arisen for seven years and a half, whilst the actual slayer was serving, not his own country, but a foreign prince, and had only returned at a most suspicious crisis?

The counsel then proceeded to construct a plausible theory. He reminded the jury that at that very time, the summer of 1688, messages and invitations were being despatched to his present Gracious Majesty to redress the wrongs of the Protestant Church, and protect the liberties of the English people. The father of the deceased was a member of a family of the country party, his uncle a distinguished diplomatist, to whose suite he had belonged. What was more obvious than that he should be employed in the correspondence, and that his movements should be dogged by parties connected with the Stewart family? Already there was too much experience of how far even the most estimable and conscientious might be blinded by

the sentiment that they dignified by the title of loyalty. The deceased had already been engaged in a struggle with one of the Archfield family, who had been acquitted of his actual slaughter; but considering the strangeness of the hour at which the two cousins were avowedly at or near Portchester, the condition of the clothes, stripped of papers, but not of valuables, and the connection of the principal witness with the pretended Prince of Wales, he could not help thinking that though personal animosity might have added an edge to the weapon, yet that there were deeper reasons, to prompt the assault and the concealment, than had yet been brought to light.

"He will make nothing of that," whispered Mr. Lee. "Poor Master Peregrine was no more a Whig than old Sir Philip there."

"'Twill prejudice the jury," whispered back Mr. Harcourt, "and discredit the lady's testimony."

Mr. Cowper concluded by observing that half truths had come to light in the former trial, but whole truths would give a different aspect to the affair, and show the unfortunate deceased to have given offence, not only as a man of gallantry, but as a patriot, and to have fallen a victim to the younger bravoës of the so-called Tory party. To his (the counsel's) mind, it was plain that the prisoner, who had hoped that his crime was undiscovered and forgotten, had returned to take his share in the rising against Government so happily frustrated. He was certain that the traitor Charnock had been received at his father's house, and that Mr. Sedley Archfield had used seditious language on several occasions, so that the cause of the prisoner's return at this juncture was manifest, and only to the working of Providence could it be ascribed that the evidence of the aggravated murder should have at that very period been brought to light.

There was an evident sensation, and glances were cast at the upright, military figure, standing like a sentinel, as if the audience expected him to murder them all.

As before, the examination began with Robert Oakshott's identification of the clothes and sword, but Mr. Cowper avoided the subject of the skeleton, and went on to inquire about the terms on which the two young men had lived.

"Well," said Robert, "they quarrelled, but in a neighbourly sort of way."

"What do you call a neighbourly way?"

"My poor brother used to be baited for being so queer. But then we were as bad to him as the rest," said Robert candidly.

"That is, when you were boys?"

"Yes."

"And after his return from his travels?"

"It was the same then. He was too fine a gentleman for any one's taste."

"You speak generally. Was there any especial animosity?"

"My brother bought a horse that Archfield was after."

"Was there any dispute over it?"

"Not that I know of."

"Can you give an instance of displeasure manifested by the prisoner at the deceased?"

"I have seen him look black when my brother held a gate open for his wife."

"Then there were gallant attentions towards Mrs. Archfield?"

Charles's face flushed, and he made a step forward, but Robert gruffly answered: "No more than civility; but he had got Frenchified manners, and liked to tease Archfield."

"Did they ever come to high words before you?"

"No. They knew better."

"Thank you, Mr. Oakshott," said the prisoner, as it was intimated that Mr. Cowper had finished. "You bear witness that only the most innocent civility ever passed between your brother and my poor young wife?"

"Certainly," responded Robert.

"Nothing that could cause serious resentment, if it excited passing annoyance."

"Nothing."

"What were your brother's political opinions?"

"Well"--with some slow consideration--"he admired the Queen as was, and could not abide the Prince of Orange. My father was always _at him_ for it."

"Would you think him likely to be an emissary to Holland?"

"No one less likely."

But Mr. Cowper started up. "Sir, I believe you are the younger brother?"

"Yes."

"How old were you at the time?"

"Nigh upon nineteen."

"Oh!" as if that accounted for his ignorance.

The prisoner continued, and asked whether search was made when the deceased was missed.

"Hardly any."

"Why not?"

"He was never content at home, and we believed he had gone to my uncle in Muscovy."

"What led you to examine the vault?"

"My wife was disquieted by stories of my brother's ghost being seen."

"Did you ever see this ghost?"

"No, never."

That was all that was made of Robert Oakshott, and then again came Anne Woodford's turn, and Mr. Cowper was more satirical and less considerate than the day before. Still it was a less dreadful ordeal than previously, though she had to tell the worst, for she knew her ground better, and then there was throughout wonderful support in Charles's eyes, which told her, whenever she glanced towards him, that she was doing right and as he wished. As she had not heard the speech for the prosecution it was a shock, after identifying herself a niece to a 'non-swearing' clergyman, to be asked about the night of the bonfire, and to be forced to tell that Mrs. Archfield had insisted on getting out of the carriage and walking about with Mr. Oakshott.

"Was the prisoner present?"

"He came up after a time."

"Did he show any displeasure?"

"He thought it bad for her health."

"Did any words pass between him and the deceased?"

"Not that I remember."

"And now, madam, will you be good enough to recur to the following morning, and continue the testimony in which you were interrupted the day before yesterday? What was the hour?"

"The church clock struck five just after."

"May I ask what took a young gentlewoman out at such an untimely hour? Did you expect to meet any one?"

"No indeed, sir," said Anne hotly. "I had been asked to gather some herbs to carry to a friend."

"Ah! And why at that time in the morning?"

"Because I was to leave home at seven, when the tide served."

"Where were you going?"

"To London, sir."

"And for what reason?"

"I had been appointed to be a rocker in the Royal nursery."

"I see. And your impending departure may explain certain strange coincidences. May I ask what was this same herb?" in a mocking tone.

"Mouse-ear, sir," said Anne, who would fain have called it by some less absurd title, but knew no other. "A specific for the whooping-cough."

"Oh! Not 'Love in a mist.' Are your sure?"

"My lord," here Simon Harcourt ventured, "may I ask, is this regular?"

The judge intimated that his learned brother had better keep to the point, and Mr. Cowper, thus called to order, desired the witness to continue, and demanded whether she was interrupted in her quest.

"I saw Mr. Peregrine Oakshott enter the castle court, and I hurried into the tower, hoping he had not seen me."

"You said before he had protected you. Why did you run from him?"

She had foreseen this, and quietly answered, "He had made me an offer of marriage which I had refused, and I did not wish to meet him."

"Did you see any one else?"

"Not till I had reached the door opening on the battlements. Then I heard a clash, and saw Mr. Archfield and Mr. Oakshott fighting."

"Mr. Archfield! The prisoner? Did he come to gather mouse-ear too?"

"No. His wife had sent him over with a pattern of sarcenet for me to match in London."

"Early rising and prompt obedience." And there ensued the inquiries that brought out the history of what she had seen of the encounter, of the throwing the body into the vault, full dressed, and of her promise of silence and its reason. Mr. Cowper did not molest her further except to make her say that she had been five months at the Court, and had accompanied the late Queen to France.

Then came the power of cross-examination on the part of the prisoner. He made no attempt to modify what had been said before, but asked in a gentle apologetic voice: "Was that the last time you ever saw, or thought you saw, Peregrine Oakshott?"

"No." And here every one in court started and looked curious.

"When?"

"The 31st of October 1688, in the evening."

"Where?"

"Looking from the window in the palace at Whitehall, I saw him, or his likeness, walking along in the light of the lantern over the great door."

The appearance at Lambeth was then described, and that in the garden at Archfield House. This strange cross-examination was soon over, for Charles could not endure to subject her to the ordeal, while she equally longed to be able to say something that might not damage him, and dreaded every word she spoke. Moreover, Mr. Cowper looked exceedingly contemptuous, and made the mention of Whitehall and Lambeth a handle for impressing on the jury that the witness had been deep in the counsels of the late royal family, and that she was escorted from St. Germain by the prisoner just before he entered on foreign service.

One of the servants at Fareham was called upon to testify to the hour of his young master's return on the fatal day. It was long past dinner-time, he said. It must have been about three o'clock.

Charles put in an inquiry as to the condition of his horse. "Hard ridden, sir, as I never knew your Honour bring home Black Bess in such a pickle before."

After a couple of young men had been called who could speak to some outbreaks of dislike to poor Peregrine, in which all had shared, the case for the prosecution was completed. Cowper, in a speech that would be irregular now, but was permissible then, pointed out that the jealousy, dislike, and Jacobite proclivities of the Archfield family had been fully made out, that the coincidence of visits to the castle at that untimely hour had been insufficiently explained, that the condition of the remains in the vault was quite inconsistent with the evidence of the witness, Mistress Woodford, unless there were persons waiting below unknown to her, and that the prisoner had been absent from Fareham from four or five o'clock in the morning till nearly three in the afternoon. As to the strange story she had further told, he (Mr. Cowper) was neither superstitious nor philosophic, but the jury would decide whether conscience and the sense of an awful secret were not sufficient to conjure up such phantoms, if they were not indeed spiritual, occurring as they did in the very places and at the very times when the spirit of the unhappy young man, thus summarily dismissed from the world, his corpse left in an unblest den, would be most likely to reappear, haunting those who felt themselves to be most accountable for his lamentable and untimely end.

The words evidently told, and it was at a disadvantage that the prisoner rose to speak in his own defence and to call his witnesses.

"My lord," he said, "and gentlemen of the jury, let me first say that I am deeply grieved and hurt that the name of my poor young wife has been brought into this matter. In justice to her who is gone, I must begin by saying that though she was flattered and gratified by the polite manners that I was too clownish and awkward to emulate, and though I may have sometimes manifested ill-humour,

yet I never for a moment took serious offence nor felt bound to defend her honour or my own. If I showed displeasure it was because she was fatiguing herself against warning. I can say with perfect truth, that when I left home on that unhappy morning, I bore no serious ill-will to any living creature. I had no political purpose, and never dreamt of taking the life of any one. I was a heedless youth of nineteen. I shall be able to prove the commission of my wife's on which this learned gentleman has thought fit to cast a doubt. For the rest, Mistress Anne Woodford was my sister's friend and playfellow from early childhood. When I entered the castle court I saw her hurrying into the keep, pursued by Oakshott, whom I knew her to dread and dislike. I naturally stepped between. Angry words passed. He challenged my right to interfere, and in a passion drew upon me. Though I was the taller and stronger, I knew him to be proud of his skill in fencing, and perhaps I may therefore have pressed him the harder, and the dislike I acknowledge made me drive home my sword. But I was free from all murderous intention up to that moment. In my inexperience I had no doubt but that he was dead, and in a terror and confusion which I regret heartily, I threw him into the vault, and for the sake of my wife and mother bound Miss Woodford to secrecy. I mounted my horse, and scarcely knowing what I did, rode till I found it ready to drop. I asked for rest for it in the first wayside public-house I came to. I lay down meanwhile among some bushes adjoining, and there waited till my horse could take me home again. I believe it was at the White Horse, near Bishops Waltham, but the place has changed hands since that time, so that I can only prove my words, as you have heard, by the state of my horse when I came home. For the condition of the remains in the vault I cannot account; I never touched the poor fellow after throwing him there. My wife died a few hours after my return home, where I remained for a week, nor did I suggest flight, though I gladly availed myself of my father's suggestion of sending me abroad with a tutor. Let me add, to remove misconception, that I visited Paris because my tutor, the Reverend George Fellowes, one of the Fellows of Magdalen College expelled by the late King, and now Rector of Portchester, had been asked to provide for Miss Woodford's return to her home, and he is here to testify that I never had any concern with politics. I did indeed accompany him to St. Germain, but merely to find the young gentlewoman, and in the absence of the late King and Queen, nor did I hold intercourse with any other person connected with their Court. After escorting her to Ostend, I went to Hungary to serve in the army of our ally, the Emperor, against the Turks, the enemies of all Christians. After a severe wound, I have come home, knowing nothing of conspiracies, and I was taken by surprise on arriving here at Winchester at finding that my cousin was on his trial for the unfortunate deed into which I was betrayed by haste and passion, but entirely without premeditation or intent to do more than to defend the young lady. So that I plead that my crime does not amount to murder from malicious intent; and likewise, that those who charge me with the actual death of Peregrine Oakshott should prove him to be dead."

Charles's first witness was Mrs. Lang, his late wife's 'own woman,' who spared him many questions by garrulously declaring 'what a work' poor little Madam had made about the rose-coloured sarcenet, causing the pattern to be searched out as soon as she came home from the bonfire, and how she had 'gone on at' her husband till he promised to give it to Mistress Anne, and how he had been astir at four o'clock in the morning, and had called to her (Mrs. Lang) to look to

her mistress, who might perhaps get some sleep now that she had her will and hounded him out to go over to Portchester about that silk.

Nothing was asked of this witness by the prosecution except the time of Mr. Archfield's return. The question of jealousy was passed over.

Of the pond apparition nothing was said. Anne had told Charles of it, but no one could have proved its identity but Sedley, and his share in it was too painful to be brought forward. Three other ghost seers were brought forward: Mrs. Fellowes's maid, the sentry, and the sexton; but only the sexton had ever seen Master Perry alive, and he would not swear to more than that it was something in his likeness; the sentry was already bound to declare it something unsubstantial; and the maid was easily persuaded into declaring that she did not know what she had seen or whether she had seen anything.

There only remained Mr. Fellowes to bear witness of his pupil's entire innocence of political intrigues, together with a voluntary testimony addressed to the court, that the youth had always appeared to him a well-disposed but hitherto boyish lad, suddenly sobered and rendered thoughtful by a shock that had changed the tenor of his mind.

Mr. Baron Hatsel summed up in his dreary vacillating way. He told the gentlemen of the jury that young men would be young men, especially where pretty wenches were concerned, and that all knew that there was bitterness where Whig and Tory were living nigh together. Then he went over the evidence, at first in a tone favourable to the encounter having been almost accidental, and the stroke an act of passion. But he then added, it was strange, and he did not know what to think of these young sparks and the young gentlewoman all meeting in a lonely place when honest folks were abed, and the hiding in the vault, and the state of the clothes were strange matters scarce agreeing with what either prisoner or witness said. It looked only too like part of a plot of which some one should make a clean breast. On the other hand, the prisoner was a fine young gentleman, an only son, and had been fighting the Turks, though it would have been better to have fought the French among his own countrymen. He had come ingenuously forward to deliver his cousin, and a deliberate murderer was not wont to be so generous, though may be he expected to get off easily on this same plea of misadventure. If it was misadventure, why did he not try to do something for the deceased, or wait to see whether he breathed before throwing him into this same pit? though, to be sure, a lad might be inexperienced. For the rest, as to these same sights of the deceased or his likeness, he (the judge) was no believer in ghosts, though he would not say there were no such things, and the gentlemen of the jury must decide whether it was more likely the poor youth was playing pranks in the body, or whether he were haunting in the spirit those who had most to do with his untimely end. This was the purport, or rather the no-purport, of the charge.

The jury were absent for a very short time, and as it leaked out afterwards, their intelligence did not rise above the idea that the young gentleman was thick with they Frenchies who wanted to bring in murder and popery, warming-pans and wooden shoes. He called stoning poultry a trifle, so of what was he not capable? Of course he spited the poor young chap, and how could the fact be denied when

the poor ghost had come back to ask for his blood?

So the awful suspense ended with 'Guilty, my Lord.'

"Of murder or manslaughter?"

"Of murder."

The prisoner stood as no doubt he had faced Turkish batteries.

The judge asked the customary question whether he had any reason to plead why he should not be condemned to death.

"No, my lord. I am guilty of shedding Peregrine Oakshott's blood, and though I declare before God and man that I had no such purpose, and it was done in the heat of an undesigned struggle, I hated him enough to render the sentence no unjust one. I trust that God will pardon me, if man does not."

The gentlemen around drew the poor old father out of the court so as not to hear the final sentence, and Anne, half stunned, was taken away by her uncle, and put into the same carriage with him. The old man held her hands closely and could not speak, but she found voice, "Sir, sir, do not give up hope. God will save him. I know what I can do. I will go to Princess Anne. She is friendly with the King now. She will bring me to tell him all."

Hurriedly she spoke, her object, as it seemed to be that of every one, to keep up such hope and encouragement as to drown the terrible sense of the actual upshot of the trial. The room at the George was full in a moment of friends declaring that all would go well in the end, and consulting what to do. Neither Sir Philip nor Dr. Woodford could be available, as their refusal to take the oaths to King William made them marked men. The former could only write to the Imperial Ambassador, beseeching him to claim the prisoner as an officer of the Empire, though it was doubtful whether this would be allowed in the case of an Englishman born. Mr. Fellowes undertook to be the bearer of the letter, and to do his best through Archbishop Tenison to let the King know the true bearings of the case. Almost in pity, to spare Anne the misery of helpless waiting, Dr. Woodford consented to let her go under his escort, starting very early the next morning, since the King might immediately set off for the army in Holland, and the space was brief between condemnation and execution.

Sir Edmund proposed to hurry to Carisbrooke Castle, being happily on good terms with that fiery personage, Lord Cutts, the governor of the Isle of Wight as well as a favoured general of the King, whose intercession might do more than Princess Anne's. Moreover, a message came from old Mr. Cromwell, begging to see Sir Edmund. It was on behalf of Major Oakshott, who entreated that Sir Philip might be assured of his own great regret at the prosecution and the result, and his entire belief that the provocation came from his unhappy son. Both he and Richard Cromwell were having a petition for pardon drawn up, which Sir Henry Mildmay and almost all the leading gentlemen of Hampshire of both parties were sure to sign, while the sheriff would defer the execution as long as possible. Pardons, especially in cases of duelling, had been marketable articles in the last reigns, and there could not but be a sigh for

such conveniences. Sir Philip wanted to go at once to the jail, which was very near the inn, but consented on strong persuasion to let his son-in-law precede him.

Anne longed for a few moments to herself, but durst not leave the poor old man, who sat holding her hand, and at each interval of silence saying how this would kill the boy's mother, or something equally desponding, so that she had to talk almost at random of the various gleams of hope, and even to describe how the little Duke of Gloucester might be told of Philip and sent to the King, who was known to be very fond of him. It was a great comfort when Dr. Woodford came and offered to pray with them.

By and by Sir Edmund returned, having been making arrangements for Charles's comfort. Ordinary prisoners were heaped together and miserably treated, but money could do something, and by application to the High Sheriff, permission had been secured for Charles to occupy a private room, on a heavy fee to the jailor, and for his friends to have access to him, besides other necessaries, purchased at more than their weight in gold. Sir Edmund brought word that Charles was in good heart; sent love and duty to his father, whom he would welcome with all his soul, but that as Miss Woodford was--in her love and bravery--going so soon to London, he prayed that she might be his first visitor that evening.

There was little more to do than to cross the street, and Sir Edmund hurried her through the flagged and dirty yard, and the dim, foul hall, filled with fumes of smoke and beer, where melancholy debtors held out their hands, idle scapegraces laughed, heavy degraded faces scowled, and evil sounds were heard, up the stairs to a nail-studded door, where Anne shuddered to hear the heavy key turned by the coarse, rude-looking warder, only withheld from insolence by the presence of a magistrate. Her escort tarried outside, and she saw Charles, his rush-light candle gleaming on his gold lace as he wrote a letter to the ambassador to be forwarded by his father.

He sprang up with outstretched arms and an eager smile. "My brave sweetheart! how nobly you have done. Truth and trust. It did my heart good to hear you."

Her head was on his shoulder. She wanted to speak, but could not without loosing the flood of tears.

"Faith entire," he went on; "and you are still striving for me."

"Princess Anne is--" she began, then the choking came.

"True!" he said. "Come, do not expect the worst. I have not made up my mind to that! If the ambassador will stir, the King will not be disobliging, though it will probably not be a free pardon, but Hungary for some years to come--and you are coming with me."

"If you will have one who might be--may have been--your death. Oh, every word I said seemed to me stabbing you;" and the tears would come now.

"No such thing! They only showed how true my love is to God and me, and made my heart swell with pride to hear her so cheering me through all."

His strength seemed to allow her to break down. She had all along had to bear up the spirits of Sir Philip and Lady Archfield, and though she had struggled for composure, the finding that she had in him a comforter and support set the pent-up tears flowing fast, as he held her close.

"Oh, I did not mean to vex you thus!" she said.

"Vex! no indeed! 'Tis something to be wept for. But cheer up, Anne mine. I have often been in far worse plights than this, when I have ridden up in the face of eight big Turkish guns. The balls went over my head then, by God's good mercy. Why not the same now? Ay! and I was ready to give all I had to any one who would have put a pistol to my head and got me out of my misery, jolting along on the way to the Iron Gates. Yet here I am! Maybe the Almighty brought me back to save poor Sedley, and clear my own conscience, knowing well that though it does not look so, it is better for me to die thus than the other way. No, no; 'tis ten to one that you and the rest of you will get me off. I only meant to show you that supposing it fails, I shall only feel it my due, and much better for me than if I had died out there with it unconfessed. I shall try to get them all to feel it so, and, after all, now the whole is out, my heart feels lighter than it has done these seven years. And if I could only believe that poor fellow alive, I could almost die content, though that sounds strange. It will quiet his poor restless spirit any way."

"You are too brave. Oh! I hoped to come here to comfort you, and I have only made you comfort me."

"The best way, sweetest. Now, I will seal and address this letter, and you shall take it to Mr. Fellowes to carry to the ambassador."

This gave Anne a little time to compose herself, and when he had finished, he took the candle, and saying, "Look here," he held it to the wall, and they read, scratched on the rough bricks, "Alice Lisle, 1685. This is thankworthy."

"Lady Lisle's cell! Oh, this is no good omen!"

"I call it a goodly legacy even to one who cannot claim to suffer wrongfully," said Charles. "There, they knock--one kiss more--we shall meet again soon. Don't linger in town, but give me all the days you can. Yes, take her back, Sir Edmund, for she must rest before her journey. Cheer up, love, and do not lie weeping all night, but believe that your prayers to God and man must prevail one way or another."

CHAPTER XXXI: ELF-LAND

"Three ruffians seized me yestermorn,
Alas! a maiden most forlorn;
They choked my cries with wicked might,
And bound me on a palfrey white."

S. T. COLERIDGE.

Yet after the night it was with more hope than despondency, Anne, in the February morning, mounted en croupe behind Mr. Fellowes's servant, that being decided on as the quickest mode of travelling. She saw the sunrise behind St. Catherine's Hill, and the gray mists filling the valley of the Itchen, and the towers of the Cathedral and College barely peeping beyond them. Would her life rise out of the mist?

Through hoar-frosted hedges, deeply crested with white, they rode, emerging by and by on downs, becoming dully green above, as the sun touched them, but white below. Suddenly, in passing a hollow, overhung by two or three yew-trees, they found themselves surrounded by masked horsemen. The servant on her horse was felled, she herself snatched off and a kerchief covered her face, while she was crying, "Oh sir, let me go! I am on business of life and death."

The covering was stuffed into her mouth, and she was borne along some little way; then there was a pause, and she freed herself enough to say, "You shall have everything; only let me go;" and she felt for the money with which Sir Philip had supplied her, and for the watch given her by King James.

"We want you; nothing of yours," said a voice. "Don't be afraid. No one will hurt you; but we must have you along with us."

Therewith she was pinioned by two large hands, and a bandage was made fast over her eyes, and when she shrieked out, "Mr. Fellowes! Oh! where are you?" she was answered--

"No harm has been done to the parson. He will be free as soon as any one comes by. 'Tis you we want. Now, I give you fair notice, for we don't want to choke you; there's no one to hear a squall. If there were, we should gag you, so you had best be quiet, and you shall suffer no hurt. Now then, by your leave, madam."

She was lifted on horseback again, and a belt passed round her and the rider in front of her. Again she strove, in her natural voice, to plead that to stop her would imperil a man's life, and to implore for release. "We know all that," she was told. It was not rudely said. The voice was not that of a clown; it was a gentleman's pronunciation, and this was in some ways more inexplicable and alarming. The horses were put in rapid motion; she heard the trampling of many hoofs, and felt that they were on soft turf, and she knew that for many miles round Winchester it was possible to keep on the downs so as to avoid any inhabited place. She tried to guess, from the sense of sunshine that came through her bandage, in what direction she was being carried, and fancied it must be southerly. On--on--on--still the turf. It seemed absolutely endless. Time was not measurable under such circumstances, but she fancied noon must have more than passed, when the voice that had before spoken said, "We halt in a moment, and shift you to another horse, madam; but again I forewarn you that our comrades here have no ears for you, and that cries and struggles will only make it the worse for you." Then came the sound as of harder ground and a stop--undertones, gruff and manly, could be heard, the peculiar noise of horses' drinking; and her captor came up this time on foot, saying, "Plaguy little to be had in this accursed hole; 'tis but the choice

between stale beer and milk. Which will you prefer?"

She could not help accepting the milk, and she was taken down to drink it, and a hunch of coarse barley bread was given to her, with it the words, "I would offer you bacon, but it tastes as if Old Nick had smoked it in his private furnace."

Such expressions were no proof that gentle blood was lacking, but whose object could her abduction be--her, a penniless dependent? Could she have been seized by mistake for some heiress? In that moment's hope she asked, "Sir, do you know who I am--Anne Woodford, a poor, portionless maid, not--"

"I know perfectly well, madam," was the reply. "May I trouble you to permit me to mount you again?"

She was again placed behind one of the riders, and again fastened to him, and off they went, on a rougher horse, on harder ground, and, as she thought, occasionally through brushwood. Again a space, to her illimitable, went by, and then came turf once more, and by and by what seemed to her the sound of the sea.

Another halt, another lifting down, but at once to be gathered up again, and then a splashing through water. "Be careful," said the voice. A hand, a gentleman's hand, took hers; her feet were on boards--on a boat; she was drawn down to sit on a low thwart. Putting her hand over, she felt the lapping of the water and tasted that it was salt.

"Oh, sir, where are you taking me?" she asked, as the boat was pushed off.

"That you will know in due time," he answered.

Some more refreshment was offered her in a decided but not discourteous manner, and she partook of it, remembering that exhaustion might add to her perils. She perceived that after pushing off from shore sounds of eating and low gruff voices mingled with the splash of oars. Commands seemed to be given in French, and there were mutterings of some strange language. Darkness was coming on. What were they doing with her? And did Charles's fate hang upon hers?

Yet in spite of terrors and anxieties, she was so much worn out as to doze long enough to lose count of time, till she was awakened by the rocking and tossing of the boat and loud peremptory commands. She became for the first time in her life miserable with sea-sickness, for how long it was impossible to tell, and the pitching of the boat became so violent that when she found herself bound to one of the seats she was conscious of little but a longing to be allowed to go to the bottom in peace, except that some great cause--she could hardly in her bewildered wretchedness recollect what--forbade her to die till her mission was over.

There were loud peremptory orders, oaths, sea phrases, in French and English, sometimes in that unknown tongue. Something expressed that a light was directing to a landing-place, but reaching it was doubtful.

"Unbind her eyes," said a voice; "let her shift for herself."

"Better not."

There followed a fresh upheaval, as if the boat were perpendicular; a sudden sinking, some one fell over and bruised her; another frightful rising and falling, then smoothness; the rope that held her fast undone; the keel grating; hands apparently dragging up the boat. She was lifted out like a doll, carried apparently through water over shingle. Light again made itself visible; she was in a house, set down on a chair, in the warmth of fire, amid a buzz of voices, which lulled as the bandage was untied and removed. Her eyes were so dazzled, her head so giddy, her senses so faint, that everything swam round her, and there that strange vision recurred. Peregrine Oakshott was before her. She closed her eyes again, as she lay back in the chair.

"Take this; you will be better." A glass was at her lips, and she swallowed some hot drink, which revived her so that she opened her eyes again, and by the lights in an apparently richly curtained room, she again beheld that figure standing by her, the glass in his hand.

"Oh!" she gasped. "Are you alive?"

The answer was to raise her still gloved hand with substantial fingers to a pair of lips.

"Then--then--he is safe! Thank God!" she murmured, and shut her eyes again, dizzy and overcome, unable even to analyse her conviction that all would be well, and that in some manner he had come to her rescue.

"Where am I?" she murmured dreamily. "In Elf-land?"

"Yes; come to be Queen of it."

The words blended with her confused fancies. Indeed she was hardly fully conscious of anything, except that a woman's hands were about her, and that she was taken into another room, where her drenched clothes were removed, and she was placed in a warm, narrow bed, where some more warm nourishment was put into her mouth with a spoon, after which she sank into a sleep of utter exhaustion. That sleep lasted long. There was a sensation of the rocking of the boat, and of aching limbs, through great part of the time; also there seemed to be a continual roaring and thundering around her, and such strange misty visions, that when she finally awoke, after a long interval of deeper and sounder slumber, she was incapable of separating the fact from the dream, more especially as head and limbs were still heavy, weary, and battered. The strange roaring still sounded, and sometimes seemed to shake the bed. Twilight was coming in at a curtained window, and showed a tiny chamber, with rafters overhead and thatch, a chest, a chair, and table. There was a pallet on the floor, and Anne suspected that she had been wakened by the rising of its occupant. Her watch was on the chair by her side, but it had not been wound, and the dim light did not increase, so that there was no guessing the time; and as the remembrance of her dreadful adventures made themselves clear, she realised with exceeding terror that she must be a prisoner, while the evening's

apparition relegated itself to the world of dreams.

Being kidnapped to be sent to the plantations was the dread of those days. But if such were the case, what would become of Charles? In the alarm of that thought she sat up in bed and prepared to rise, but could nowhere see her clothes, only the little cloth bag of toilet necessaries that she had taken with her.

At that moment, however, the woman came in with a steaming cup of chocolate in her hand and some of the garments over her arm. She was a stout, weather-beaten, kindly-looking woman with a high white cap, gold earrings, black short petticoat, and many-coloured apron. "Monsieur veut savoir si mademoiselle va bien?" said she in slow careful French, and when questions in that language were eagerly poured out, she shook her head, and said, "Ne comprends pas." She, however, brought in the rest of the clothes, warm water, and a light, so that Anne rose and dressed, exceedingly perplexed, and wondering whether she could be in a ship, for the sounds seemed to say so, and there was no corresponding motion. Could she be in France? Certainly the voyage had seemed interminable, but she did not think it could have been long enough for that, nor that any person in his senses would try to cross in an open boat in such weather. She looked at the window, a tiny slip of glass, too thick to show anything but what seemed to be a dark wall rising near at hand. Alas! she was certainly a prisoner! In whose hands? With what intent? How would it affect that other prisoner at Winchester? Was that vision of last night substantial or the work of her exhausted brain? What could she do? It was well for her that she could believe in the might of prayer.

She durst not go beyond her door, for she heard men's tones, suppressed and gruff, but presently there was a knock, and wonder of wonders, she beheld Hans, black Hans, showing all his white teeth in a broad grin, and telling her that Misse Anne's breakfast was ready. The curtain that overhung the door was drawn back, and she passed into another small room, with a fire on the open hearth, and a lamp hung from a beam, the walls all round covered with carpets or stuffs of thick glowing colours, so that it was like the inside of a tent. And in the midst, without doubt, stood Peregrine Oakshott, in such a dress as was usually worn by gentlemen in the morning--a loose wrapping coat, though with fine lace cuffs and cravat, all, like the shoes and silk stockings, worn with his peculiar daintiness, and, as was usual when full-bottomed wigs were the rule in grande tenue, its place supplied by a silken cap. This was olive green with a crimson tassel, which had assumed exactly the characteristic one-sided Riquet-with-a-tuft aspect. For the rest, these years seemed to have made the slight form slighter and more wiry, and the face keener, more sallow, and more marked.

He bowed low with the foreign courtesy which used to be so offensive to his contemporaries, and offered a delicate, beringed hand to lead the young lady to the little table, where grilled fowl and rolls, both showing the cookery of Hans, were prepared for her.

"I hope you rested well, and have an appetite this morning."

"Sir, what does it all mean? Where am I?" asked Anne, drawing herself up with the native dignity that she felt to be her defence.

"In Elf-land," he said, with a smile, as he heaped her plate.

"Speak in earnest," she entreated. "I cannot eat till I understand. It is no time for trifling! Life and death hang on my reaching London! If you saved me from those men, let me go free."

"No one can move at present," he said. "See here."

He drew back a curtain, opened first one door and then another, and she saw sheets of driving rain, and rising, roaring waves, with surf which came beating in on the force of such a fearful gust of wind that Peregrine hastily shut the door, not without difficulty.

"Nobody can stir at present," he said, as they came into the warm bright room again. "It is a frightful tempest, the worst known here for years, they say. The dead-lights, as they call them, have been put in, or the windows would be driven in. Come and taste Hans's work; you know it of old. Will you drink tea? Do you remember how your mother came to teach mine to brew it, and how she forgave me for being graceless enough to squirt at her?"

There was something so gentle and reassuring in the demeanour of this strange being that Anne, convinced of the utter hopelessness of confronting the storm, as well as of the need of gathering strength, allowed herself to be placed in a chair, and to partake of the food set before her, and the tea, which was served without milk, in an exquisite dragon china cup, but with a saucer that did not match it.

"We don't get our sets perfect," said Peregrine, with a smile, who was waiting on her as if she were a princess.

"I entreat you to tell me where we are!" said Anne. "Not in France?"

"No, not in France! I wish we were."

"Then--can this be the Island?"

"Yes, the Island it is," said Peregrine, both speaking as South Hants folk; "this is the strange cave or chasm called Black Gang Chine."

"Black Gang! Oh! the highwaymen, the pirates! You have saved me from them. Were they going to send me to the plantations?"

"You need have no fears. No one shall touch you, or hurt you. You shall see no one save by your own consent, my queen."

"And when this storm is passed--Oh!" as a more fearful roar and dash sounded as if the waves were about to sweep away their frail shelter--"you will come with me and save Mr. Archfield's life? You cannot know--"

"I know," he interrupted; "but why should I be solicitous for his life? That I am here now is no thanks to him, and why should I give up mine for the sake of him who meant to make an end of me?"

"You little know how he repented. And your own life? What do you mean?"

"People don't haunt the Black Gang Chine when their lives are secure from Dutch Bill," he answered. "Don't be terrified, my queen; though I cannot lay claim, like Prospero, to having raised this storm by my art magic, yet it perforce gives me time to make you understand who and what I am, and how I have recovered my better angel to give her no mean nor desperate career. It will be better thus than with the suddenness with which I might have had to act."

A new alarm seized upon Anne as to his possible intentions, but she would not forestall what she so much apprehended, and, sensible that self-control alone could guard her, since escape at present was clearly impossible, she resigned herself to sit opposite to him by the ample hearth of what she perceived to be a fisherman's hut, thus fitted up luxuriously with, it might be feared, the spoils of the sea.

The story was a long one, and not by any means told consecutively or without interruption, and all the time those eyes were upon her, one yellow the other green, with the effect she knew so well of old in childish days, of repulsion yet compulsion, of terror yet attraction, as if irresistibly binding a reluctant will. Several times Peregrine was called off to speak to some one outside the door, and at noon he begged permission for his friends to dine with them, saying that there was no other place where the dinner could be taken to them comfortably in this storm.

CHAPTER XXXII: SEVEN YEARS

"It was between the night and day,
When the Fairy King has power,
That I sunk down in a sinful fray,
And 'twixt life and death was snatched away
To the joyless Elfin bower."

SCOTT.

This motto was almost the account that the twisted figure, with queer contortions of face, yet delicate feet and hands, and dainty utterance, might have been expected to give, when Anne asked him, "Was it you, really?"

"I--or my double?" he asked. "When?"

She told him, and he seemed amazed.

"So you were there? Well, you shall hear. You know how things stood with me--your mother, my good spirit, dead, my uncle away, my father bent on driving me to utter desperation, and Martha Browning laying her great red hands on me--"

"Oh, sir, she really loved you, and is far wiser and more tolerant than you thought her."

"I know," he smiled grimly. "She buried the huge Scot that was killed in the great smuggling fray under the Protector, with all honours, in our family vault, and had a long-winded sermon preached

on my untimely end. Ha! ha!" with his mocking laugh.

"Don't, sir! If you had seen your father then! Why did no one come forward and explain?"

"Mayhap there were none at hand who knew, or wished to meddle with the law," he said. "Well, things were beyond all bearing at home, and you were going away, and would not so much as look at me. Now, one of the few sports my father did not look askance at was fishing, and he would endure my being out at night with, as he thought, poor man, old Pete Perring, who was as stern a Puritan as himself; but I had livelier friends, and more adventurous. They had connections with French free-traders for brandy and silks, and when they found I was one with them, my French tongue was a boon to them, till I came to have a good many friends among the Norman fishermen, and to know the snug hiding-places about the coast. So at last I made up my mind to be off with them, and make my way to my uncle in Muscovy. I had raised money enough at play and on the jewels one picks up in an envoy's service, and there was one good angel whom I meant to take with me if I could secure her and bind her wings. Now you know with what hopes I saw you gathering flowers alone that morning."

Anne clasped her hands; Charles had truly interfered with good cause.

"I had all arranged," he continued; "my uncle would have given you a hearty welcome, and made our peace with my father, or if not, he would have left us all his goods, and secured my career. What call had that great lout, with a wife of his own too, to come thrusting between us? I thought I should make short work of him, and give him a lesson against meddling--great unlicked cub as he was, while I had had the best training at Berlin and Paris in fencing; but somehow those big strong fellows, from their very clumsiness, throw one out. And he meant mischief--yes, that he did. I saw it in his eyes. I suppose his sulky rustic jealousy was a-fire at a few little civilities to that poor little wife of his. Any way, when he bore me down like the swing of a windmill, he drove his sword home. Talk of his being innocent! Why should he never look whether I were dead or alive, but fling me headlong into that pit?"

Anne could not but utter her eager defence, but it was met with a sinister smile, half of scorn, half of pity, and as she would have gone on, "Hush! your pleading only fills up the measure of my loathing."

Her heart sank, but she let him go on, listening perhaps less attentively as she considered how to take him.

"In fact," he continued, "little as the lubber knew it, 'twas the best he could have done for me. For though I never looked for such luck as your being out in the court at that hour, I did think the chance not to be lost of visiting the garden or the churchyard, and there were waiting in the vault a couple of stout Normans, who were to come at my whistle. It seems that when I came tumbling down in their midst, senseless and bleeding like a calf, they did not take it quite so easily as your champion above, but began doing what they could for me, and were trying to staunch the wound, when they heard a trampling and a rumbling overhead, and being aware that our undertaking might look ugly in the sight of the law, and thinking

this might be pursuers, they carried me off with all speed, not so much as stopping to pick up the things that have made such a commotion. Was there any pursuit?"

"Oh no; it must have been the haymakers."

"No doubt. The place was in no great favour with our own people; they were in awe of the big Scot, who is in comfortable quarters in my grave, and the Frenchmen could not have found their way thither, so it was let alone till Mistress Martha's researches. So I came to myself in the boat in which they took me on board the lugger that was waiting for us; and instead of making for Alderney, as I had intended, so as to get the knot safely tied to your satisfaction, they sailed straight for Havre. They had on board a Jesuit father, whom I had met once or twice among the Duke of Berwick's people, but who had found Portsmouth too hot to hold him in the frenzy of Protestant zeal on the Bishops' account. He had been beset, and owed his life, he says, to the fists of the Breton and Norman sailors, who had taken him on board. It was well for me, for I doubt if ever I was tough enough to have withstood my good friends' treatment. He had me carried to a convent in Havre, where the fathers nursed me well; and before I was on my legs again, I had made up my mind to cast in my lot with them, or rather with their Church."

"Oh!"

"I had been baulked of winning the one being near whom my devil never durst come. And blood-letting had pretty well disposed of him. I was as meek and mild as milk under the good fathers. Moreover, as my good friend at Turin had told me, and they repeated it, such a doubly heretical baptism as mine was probably invalid, and accounted for my being as much a vessel of wrath as even my father was pleased to call me. There was the Queen's rosary drawing me too. Everything else was over with me, and it seemed to open a new life. So, bless me, what a soft and pious frame I was in when they chastened me, water, oil, salt and all, on what my father raged at folks calling Lammas Day, but which it seems really belongs to St. Peter in the Fetters. So I was named Pierre or Piers after him, thus keeping my own initial."

"Piers! oh! not Piers Pigwiggin?"

"Pierre de Pilpignon, if you please. I have a right to that too; but we shall come to it by and by. I can laugh now, or perhaps weep, over the fervid state I was in then, as if I had trodden down my snake, and by giving up everything--you, estate, career, I could keep him down. So it was settled that I would devote myself to the priesthood--don't laugh!--and I was ordered off to their seminary in London, partly, I believe, for the sake of piloting a couple of fathers, who could not speak a word of English. It was, as they rightly judged, the last place where my father would think of looking for me, but they did not as rightly judge that we should long keep possession there. Matters grew serious, and it was not over safe in the streets. There was a letter of importance from a friend in Holland, carrying the Prince of Orange's hypocritical Declaration, which was to be got to Father Petre or the King on the night--Hallowmas Eve it was--and I was told off to put on a secular dress, which I could wear more naturally than most of them, and

convey it."

"Ah, that explains!"

"Apparition number one! I guessed you were somewhere in those parts, and looked up at the windows, and though I did not see you, I believe it was your eyes that first sent a thrill through me that boded ill for Roman orders. After that we lived in a continual state of rumours and alarms, secret messages and expeditions, until I, being strong in the arm and the wind and a feather-weight, was one of those honoured by rowing the Queen and Prince across the river. M. de St. Victor accepted me. He told me there would be two nurses, but never knew or cared who they were, nor did I guess, as we sat in the dark, how near I was to you. And only for one second did I see your face, as you were entering the carriage, and I blessed you the more for what you were doing for Her Majesty."

He proceeded to tell how he had accompanied the Jesuit fathers, on their leaving London, to the great English seminary at Douai, and being for the time convinced by them that his feelings towards Anne were a delusion of the enemy, he had studied with all his might, and as health and monotony of life began to have their accustomed effect in rousing the restlessness and mischievousness of his nature, with all the passions of manhood growing upon him, he strove to force them down by fasting and scourging. He told, in a bitter, almost savage way, of his endeavours to flog his demon out of himself, and of his anger and disappointment at finding Piers Pilgrim in the seminary of Douai, quite as subject to his attacks as ever was Perry Oakshott under a sermon of Mr. Horncastle's.

Then came the information among the students that the governor of the city, the Marquis de Nidemerle, had brought some English gentlemen and ladies to visit the gardens. As most of the students were of British families there was curiosity as to who they were, and thus Peregrine heard that one was young Archfield of the Hampshire family, with his tutor, and the lady was Mistress Darpent, daughter to a French lawyer, who had settled in England after the Fronde. Anne's name had not transpired, for she was viewed merely as an attendant. Peregrine had been out on some errand in the town, and had a distant view of his enemy as he held him, flaunting about with a fine lady on his arm, forgetting the poor little pretty wife whom no doubt he had frightened to death."

"Oh! you little know how tenderly he speaks of her."

"Tenderly!--that's the way they speak of me at Oakwood, eh? Human, not to say elf, nature, could not withstand giving the fellow a start. I sped off, whipped into the Church, popped into a surplice I found ready to hand, caught up a candle, and!--Little did I think who it was that was hanging on his arm. So little did I know it that my heart began to be drawn to St. Germain, where I still imagined you. Altogether, after that prank, all broke out again. I entertained the lads with a few more freaks, for which I did ample penance, but it grew on me that in my case all was a weariness and a sham, and that my demon might get a worse hold of me if I got into a course of hypocrisy. They were very good to me, those fathers, but Jesuits as they were, I doubt whether they ever fathomed me. Any way, perhaps they thought I should be a scandal, but they agreed with me that their order was not my vocation, and that we had better

part before my fiend drove me to do so with dishonour. They even gave me recommendations to the French officers that were besieging Tournay. I knew the Duke of Berwick a little at Portsmouth, and it ended in my becoming under-secretary to the Duke of Chartres. A man who knows languages has his value among Frenchmen, who despise all but their own."

Peregrine did not enter into full details of this stage of his career, and Anne was not fully informed of the habits that the young Duke of Chartres, the future Regent Duke of Orleans, was already developing, but she gathered that, what the young man called his demon, had nearly undisputed sway over him, and she had not spent eight months at St. Germain without knowing by report of the dissolute manners of the substratum of fashionable society at Paris, even though outward decorum had been restored by Madame de Maintenon. Yet he seemed to have been crossed by fits of vehement penitence, and almost the saddest part of the story was the mocking tone in which he alluded to these.

He had sought service at the Court in the hope of meeting Miss Woodford there, and had been grievously disappointed when he found that she had long since returned to England. The sight of the gracious and lovely countenance of the exiled Queen seemed always to have moved and touched him, as in some inexplicable manner her eyes and expression recalled to him those of Mrs. Woodford and Anne; but the thought had apparently only stung him into the sense of being forsaken and abandoned to his own devices or those of his evil spirit.

One incident, occurring some three years previously, he told more fully, as it had a considerable effect on his life. "I was attending the Duke in the gardens at Versailles," he said, "when we were aware of a great commotion. All the gentlemen were standing gazing up into the top of a great chestnut tree, the King and all, and in the midst stood the Abbe de Fenelon with his little pupils, the youngest, the Duke of Anjou, sobbing piteously, and the Duke of Burgundy in a furious passion, stamping and raging, and only withheld from rolling on the ground by the Abbe's hand grasping his shoulder. 'I will not have him killed! He is mine,' he cried. And up in the tree, the object of all their gaze, was a monkey with a paper fluttering in his hand. Some one had made a present of the creature to the King's grandsons; he was the reigning favourite, and having broken his chain, had effected an entrance by the window into the King's cabinet, where after giving himself the airs of a minister of state, on being interrupted, he had made off through the window with an important document, which he was affecting to peruse at his leisure, only interrupting himself to hurl down leaves or unripe chestnuts at those who attempted to pelt him with stones, and this only made him mount higher and higher, entirely out of their reach, for no one durst climb after him. I believe it was a letter from the King of Spain; at any rate the whole Cabinet was in agony lest the brute should proceed to tear it into fragments, and a musqueteer had been sent for to shoot him down. I remembered my success with the monkey on poor little Madam Archfield's back--nay, perhaps 'twas the same, my familiar taking shape. I threw myself at the King's feet, and desired permission to deal with the beast. By good luck it had not been so easy as they supposed to find a musquet fit for immediate use, so I had full time. To ascend the tree was

no more than I had done many times before, and I went high in the branches, but cautiously, not to give Monsieur le Singe the idea of being pursued, lest he should leap to a bough incapable of supporting me. When I had reached a fork tolerably high, and where he could see me, I settled myself, took out a letter, which fortunately was in my pocket, read it with the greatest deliberation, the monkey watching me all the time, and finally I proceeded to fold it neatly in all its creases. The creature imitated me with its black fingers, little aware, poor thing, that the musqueteer had covered him with his weapon, and was waiting for the first sign of tearing the letter to pull the trigger, but withheld by a sign from the King, who did not wish to sacrifice his grandson's pet before his eyes. Finally, after finishing the folding, I doubled it a second time, and threw it at the animal. To my great joy he returned the compliment by throwing the other at my head. I was able to catch it, and moreover, as he was disposed to go in pursuit of his plaything, he swung his chain so near me that I got hold of it, twisted it round my arm, and made the best of my way down the tree, amid the 'Bravos!' started by the royal lips themselves, and repeated with ecstasy by all the crowd, who waved their hats, and made such a hallooing that I had much ado to get the monkey down safely; but finally, all dishevelled, with my best cuffs and cravat torn to ribbons, and my wig happily detached, unlike Absalom's, for it remained in the tree, I had the honour of presenting on my knee the letter to the King, and the monkey to the Princes. I kissed His Majesty's hand, the little Duke of Anjou kissed the monkey, and the Duke of Burgundy kissed me with arms round my neck, then threw himself on his knees before his grandfather to ask pardon for his passion. Every one said my fortune was made, and that my agility deserved at least the cordon bleu. My own Duke of Chartres, who in many points is like his cousin, our late King Charles, gravely assured me that a new office was to be invented for me, and that I was to be Grand Singier du Roi. I believe he pushed my cause, and so did the little Duke of Burgundy, and finally I got the pension without the office, and a good deal of occasional employment besides, in the way of translation of documents. There were moments of success at play. Oh yes, quite fairly, any one with wits about him can make his profit in the long-run among the Court set. And thus I had enough to purchase a pretty little estate and chateau on the coast of Normandy, the confiscated property of a poor Huguenot refugee, so that it went cheap. It gives the title of Pilpignon, which I assumed in kindness to the tongues of my French friends. So you see, I have a station and property to which to carry you, my fair one, won by myself, though only by catching an ape."

He went on to say that the spot had been chosen advisedly, with a view to communication with the opposite coast, where his old connection with the smugglers was likely to be useful in the Jacobite plots. "As you well know," he said, "my father had done his utmost to make Whiggery stink in my nostrils, to say nothing of the kindness I have enjoyed from our good Queen; and I was ready to do my utmost in the cause, especially after I had stolen a glimpse of you, and when Charnock, poor fellow, returning from reconnoitring among the loyal, told me that you were still unmarried, and living as a dependent in the Archfields' house. Our headquarters were in Romney Marsh, but it was as well to have, as it were, a back door here, and as it has turned out it has been the saving of some of us."

"Oh, sir! you were not in that wicked plot?"

"Nay; surely you are not turned Whig."

"But this was assassination."

"Not at all, if they would have listened to me. The Dutchman is no bigger than I am. I could have dropped on him from one of his trees at Hampton Court, or through a window, via presto, and we would have had him off by the river, given him an interview to beg his uncle's pardon, and despatched him for the benefit of his asthma to the company of the Iron Mask at St. Marguerite; then back again, the King to enjoy his own again, Dr. Woodford, archbishop or bishop of whatever you please, and a lady here present to be Marquise de Pilpignon, or Countess of Havant, whichever she might prefer. Yes, truly those were the hopes with which I renewed my communications with the contraband trade on this coast, a good deal more numerous since the Dutchman and his wars have raised the duties and driven many good men to holes and corners.

"Ever since last spring, when the Princess Royal died, and thus extinguished the last spark of forbearance in the King's breast, I have been here, there, and everywhere--Romney Marsh, Drury Lane, Paris, besides this place and Pilpignon, where I have a snug harbour for the yacht, Ma Belle Annik, as the Breton sailors call her. The crew are chiefly Breton; it saves gossip; but I have a boat's crew of our own English folk here, stout fellows, ready for anything by land or sea."

"The Black Gang," said Anne faintly.

"Don't suppose I have meddled in their exploits on the road," he said, "except where a King's messenger or a Royal mail was concerned, and that is war, you know, for the cause. Unluckily my personal charms are not easily disguised, so that I have had to lurk in the background, and only make my private investigations in the guise of my own ghost."

"Then so it was you saved the dear little Philip?" said Anne.

"The Archfield boy? I could not see a child sent to his destruction by that villain Sedley, whoever were his father, for he meant mischief if ever man did. 'Twas superhuman scruple not to hold your peace and let him swing."

"What was it, then, on his cousin's part?"

Peregrine only answered with a shrug. It appeared further, that as long as the conspirators had entertained any expectation of success, he had merely kept a watch over Anne, intending to claim her in the hour of the triumph of his party, when he looked to enjoy such a position as would leave his brother free to enjoy his paternal inheritance. In the failure of all their schemes through Mr. Pendergrast's denunciation, Sir George Barclay, and one or two inferior plotters, had succeeded in availing themselves of the assistance of the Black Gang, and had been conducted by Peregrine to the hut that he had fitted up for himself. Still trusting to the security there, although his name of Piers Pilgrim or de Pilpignon

had been among those given up to the Privy Council, he had insisted on lingering, being resolved that an attempt should be made to carry away the woman he had loved for so many years. Captain Burford had so disguised himself as to be able to attend the trial, loiter about the inn, and collect intelligence, while the others waited on the downs. Peregrine had watched over the capture, but being unwilling to disclose himself, had ridden on faster and crossed direct, traversing the Island on horseback, while the captive was rounding it in the boat. "As should never have been done," he said, "could I have foretold to what stress of weather you would be exposed while I was preparing for your reception. But for this storm--it rages louder than ever--we would have been married by a little parson whom Burford would have fetched from Portsmouth, and we should have been over the Channel, and my people hailing my bride with ecstasy."

"Never!" exclaimed Anne. "Can you suppose I could accept one who would leave an innocent man to suffer?"

"People sometimes are obliged to accept," said Peregrine. Then at her horrified start, "No, no, fear no violence; but is not something due to one who has loved you through exile all these years, and would lay down his life for you? you, the only being who overcomes his evil angel!"

"This is what you call overcoming it," she said.

"Nay; indeed, Mistress Anne, I would let the authorities know that they are hanging a man for murdering one who is still alive if I could; but no one would believe without seeing, and I and all who could bear witness to my existence would be rushing to an end even worse than a simple noose. You were ready enough to denounce him to save that worthless fellow."

"Not ready. It tore my heart. But truth is truth. I could not do that wickedness. Oh! how can you? This is the prompting of the evil spirit indeed, to expect me to join in leaving that innocent, generous spirit to die in cruel injustice. Let me go. I will not betray where you are. You will be safe in France; but there will yet be time for me to bear witness to your life. Write a letter. Your father would thankfully swear to your handwriting, and I think they would believe me. Only let me go."

"And what then becomes of the hopes of a lifetime?" demanded Peregrine. "I, who have waited as long as Jacob, to be defrauded now I have you; and for the sake of the fellow who killed me in will if not in deed, and then ran away like a poltroon leaving you to bear the brunt!"

"He did not act like a poltroon when he saved the life of his general, or when he rescued the colours of his regiment, still less when he stood up to save me from the pain of bearing witness against him, and to save a guiltless man," cried Anne, with flashing eyes.

Before she had finished her indignant words, Hans was coming in from some unknown region to lay the cloth for supper, and Peregrine, with an imprecation under his breath, had gone to the door to admit his two comrades, who came into the narrow entry on a gust of wind as it were, struggling out of their cloaks, stamping and swearing.

In the middle of the day, they had been much more restrained in their behaviour. There had at that time been a slight clearance in the sky, though the wind was as furious as ever, and they were in haste to despatch the meal and go out again to endeavour to stand on the heights and to watch some vessels that were being tossed by the storm. Almost all the conversation had then been on the chances of their weathering the tempest, and the probability of its lasting on, and they had hurried away as soon as possible. Anne had not then known who they were, and only saw that they were fairly civil to her, and kept under a certain constraint by Pilpignon, as they called their host. Now she fully knew the one who was addressed as Sir George to be Barclay, the prime mover in the wicked scheme of assassination of which all honest Tories had been so much ashamed, and she could see Captain Burford to be one of those bravoos who were only too plentiful in those days, attending on dissolute and violent nobles.

She was the less inclined to admit their attentions, and shielded herself with a grave coldness of stately manners; but their talk was far more free than at noon, suggesting the thought that they had anticipated the meal with some of the Nantz or other liquors that seemed to be in plenty.

They began by low bows of affected reverence, coarser and worse in the ruffian of inferior grade, and the knight complimented Pilpignon on being a lucky dog, and hoped he had made the best use of his time in spite of the airs of his duchess. It was his own fault if he were not enjoying such fair society, while they, poor devils, were buffeting with the winds, which had come on more violently than ever. Peregrine broke in with a question about the vessels in sight.

There was an East Indiaman, Dutch it was supposed, laying-to, that was the cause of much excitement. "If she drives ashore our fellows will neither be to have nor to hold," said Sir George.

"They will obey me," said Peregrine quietly.

"More than the sea will just yet," laughed the captain. "However, as soon as this villainous weather is a bit abated, I'll be off across the Island to do your little errand, and only ask a kiss of the bride for my pains; but if the parson be at Portsmouth there will be no getting him to budge till the water is smooth. Never mind, madam, we'll have a merry wedding feast, whichever side of the water it is. I should recommend the voyage first for my part."

All Anne could do was to sit as upright and still as she could, apparently ignoring the man's meaning. She did not know how dignified she looked, and how she was daunting his insolence. When presently Sir George Barclay proposed as a toast a health to the bride of to-morrow, she took her part by raising the glass to her lips as well as the gentlemen, and adding, "May the brides be happy, wherever they may be."

"Coy, upon my soul," laughed Sir George. "You have not made the best of your opportunities, Pil." But with an oath, "It becomes her well."

"A truce with fooling, Barclay," muttered Peregrine.

"Come, come, remember faint heart--no lowering your crest, more than enough to bring that devilish sparkle in the eyes, and turn of the neck!"

"Sir," said Anne rising, "Monsieur de Pilpignon is an old neighbour, and understands how to respect his most unwilling guest. I wish you a good-night, gentlemen. Guennik, venez ici, je vous prie."

Guennik, the Breton boatswain's wife, understood French thus far, and comprehended the situation enough to follow willingly, leaving the remainder of the attendance to Hans, who was fully equal to it. The door was secured by a long knife in the post, but Anne could hear plainly the rude laugh at her entrenchment within her fortress and much of the banter of Peregrine for having proceeded no further. It was impossible to shut out all the voices, and very alarming they were, as well as sometimes so coarse that they made her cheeks glow, while she felt thankful that the Bretonne could not understand.

These three men were all proscribed traitors in haste to be off, but Peregrine, to whom the yacht and her crew belonged, had lingered to obtain possession of the lady, and they were declaring that now they had caught his game and given him his toy, they would brook no longer delay than was absolutely necessitated by the storm, and married or not married, he and she should both be carried off together, let the damsel-errant give herself what haughty airs she would. It was a weak concession on their part to the old Puritan scruples that he might have got rid of by this time, to attempt to bring about the marriage. They jested at him for being afraid of her, and then there were jokes about gray mares.

The one voice she could not hear was Peregrine's, perhaps because he realised more than they did that she was within ear-shot, and besides, he was absolutely sober; but she thought he silenced them; and then she heard sounds of card-playing, which made an accompaniment to her agonised prayers.

CHAPTER XXXIII: BLACK GANG CHINE

"Come, Lady; while Heaven lends us grace,
Let us fly this cursed place,
Lest the sorcerer us entice
With some other new device.
Not a word or needless sound
Till we come to holier ground.
I shall be your faithful guide
Through this gloomy covert wide."

MILTON.

Never was maiden in a worse position than that in which Anne Woodford felt herself when she revolved the matter. The back of the Isle of Wight, all along the Undercliff, had always had a wild reputation, and she was in the midst of the most lawless of men. Peregrine alone seemed to have any remains of honour or conscience, and apparently he was in some degree in the hands of his associates.

Even if the clergyman came, there was little hope in an appeal to him. Naval chaplains bore no good reputation, and Portsmouth and Cowes were haunted by the scum of the profession. All that seemed possible was to commit herself and Charles to Divine protection, and in that strength to resist to the uttermost. The tempest had returned again, and seemed to be raging as much as ever, and the delay was in her favour, for in such weather there could be no putting to sea.

She was unwilling to leave the stronghold of her chamber, but Hans came to announce breakfast to her, telling her that the Mynheeren were gone, all but Massa Perry; and that gentleman came forward to meet her just as before, hoping 'those fellows had not disturbed her last night.'

"I could not help hearing much," she said gravely.

"Brutes!" he said. "I am sick of them, and of this life. Save for the King's sake, I would never have meddled with it."

The roar of winds and waves and the beat of spray was still to be heard, and in the manifest impossibility of quitting the place and the desire of softening him, Anne listened while he talked in a different mood from the previous day. The cynical tone was gone, as he spoke of those better influences. He talked of Mrs. Woodford and his deep affection for her, of the kindness of the good priests at Havre and Douai, and especially of one Father Seyton, who had tried to reason with him in his bitter disappointment, and savage penitence on finding that 'behind the Cross lurks the Devil,' as much at Douai as at Havant. He told how a sermon of the Abbe Fenelon's had moved him, and how he had spent half a Lent in the severest penance, but only to have all swept away again in the wild and wicked revelry with which Easter came in. Again he described how his heart was ready to burst as he stood by Mrs. Woodford's grave at night and vowed to disentangle himself and lead a new life.

"And with you I shall," he said.

"No," she answered; "what you win by a crime will never do you good."

"A crime! 'Tis no crime. You know I mean honourable marriage. You owe no duty to any one."

"It is a crime to leave the innocent to undeserved death," she said.

"Do you love the fellow?" he cried, with a voice rising to a shout of rage.

"Yes," she said firmly.

"Why did not you say so before?"

"Because I hoped to see you act for right and justice sake," was Anne's answer, fixing her eyes on him. "For God's sake, not mine."

"Yours indeed! Think, what can be his love to mine? He who let them marry him to that child, while I struggled and gave up everything. Then he runs away-- runs away--leaving you all the

distress; never came near you all these years. Oh yes! he looks down on you as his child's governess! What's the use of loving him? There's another heiress bespoken for him no doubt."

"No. His parents consent, and we have known one another's love for six years."

"Oh, that's the way he bound you to keep his secret! He would sing another song as soon as he was out of this scrape."

"You little know!" was all she said.

"Ay!" continued Peregrine, pacing up and down the room, "you know that all that was wanting to fill up the measure of my hatred was that he should have stolen your heart."

"You cannot say that, sir. He was my kind protector and helper from our very childhood. I have loved him with all my heart ever since I durst."

"Ay, the great straight comely lubbers have it all their own way with the women," said he bitterly. "I remember how he rushed headlong at me with the horse-whip when I tripped you up at the Slype, and you have never forgiven that."

"Oh! indeed I forgot that childish nonsense long ago. You never served me so again."

"No indeed, never since you and your mother were the first to treat me like a human being. You will be able to do anything with me, sweetest lady; the very sense that you are under the same roof makes another man of me. I loathe what I used to enjoy. Why, the very sight of you, sitting at supper like the lady in Comus, in your sweet grave dignity, made me feel what I am, and what those men are. I heard their jests with your innocent ears. With you by my side the Devil's power is quelled. You shall have a peaceful beneficent life among the poor folk, who will bless you; our good and gracious Queen will welcome you with joy and gratitude; and when the good time comes, as it must in a few years, you will have honours and dignities lavished on you. Can you not see what you will do for me?"

"Do you think a broken-hearted victim would be able to do you any good?" said she, looking up with tears in her eyes. "I _do_ believe, sir, that you mean well by me, in your own way, and I could, yes, I can, be sorry for you, for my mother did feel for you, and yours has been a sad life; but how could I be of any use or comfort to you if you dragged me away as these cruel men propose, knowing that he who has all my heart is dying guiltless, and thinking I have failed him!" and here she broke down in an agony of weeping, as she felt the old power in his eyes that enforced submission.

He marched up and down in a sort of passion. "Don't let me see you weep for him! It makes me ready to strangle him with my own hands!"

A shout of 'Pilpignon!' at the door here carried him off, leaving Anne to give free course to the tears that she had hitherto been able to restrain, feeling the need of self-possession. She had very

little hope, since her affection for Charles Archfield seemed only to give the additional sting of jealousy, 'cruel as the grave,' to the vindictive temper Peregrine already nourished, and which certainly came from his evil spirit. She shed many tears, and sobbed unrestrainedly till the Bretonne came and patted her shoulder, and said, "Pauvre, pauvre!" And even Hans looked in, saying, "Misse Nana no cry, Massa Perry great herr--very goot."

She tried to compose herself, and think over alternatives to lay before Peregrine. He might let her go, and carry to Sir Edmund Nutley letters to which his father would willingly swear, while he was out of danger in Normandy. Or if this was far beyond what could be hoped for, surely he could despatch a letter to his father, and for such a price she must sacrifice herself, though it cost her anguish unspeakable to call up the thought of Charles, of little Philip, of her uncle, and the old people, who loved her so well, all forsaken, and with what a life in store for her! For she had not the slightest confidence in the power of her influence, whatever Peregrine might say and sincerely believe at present. If there were, more palpably than with all other human beings, angels of good and evil contending for him, swaying him now this way and now that; it was plain from his whole history that nothing had yet availed to keep him under the better influence for long together; and she believed that if he gained herself by these unjust and cruel means the worse spirit would thereby gain the most absolute advantage. If her heart had been free, and she could have loved him, she might have hoped, though it would have been a wild and forlorn hope; but as it was, she had never entirely surmounted a repulsion from him, as something strange and unnatural, a feeling involving fear, though here he was her only hope and protector, and an utter uncertainty as to what he might do. She could only hope that she might pine away and die quickly, and perhaps Charles Archfield might know at last that it had been for his sake. And would it be in her power to make even such terms as these?

How long she wept and prayed and tried to 'commit her way unto the Lord' she did not know, but light seemed to be making its way far more than previously through the shutters closed against the storm when Peregrine returned.

"You will not be greatly troubled with those fellows to-day," he said; "there's a vessel come on the rocks at Chale, and every man and mother's son is gone after it." So saying he unfastened the shutters and let in a flood of sunshine. "You would like a little air," he said; "'tis all quiet now, and the tide is going down."

After two days' dark captivity, Anne could not but be relieved by coming out, and she was anxious to understand where she was. It was, though only in March, glowing with warmth, as the sun beat against the cliffs behind, of a dark red brown, in many places absolutely black, in especial where a cascade, swelled by the rains into imposing size, came roaring, leaping, and sparkling down a sheer precipice. On either side the cove or chine was closely shut in by treeless, iron-coloured masses of rock, behind one of which the few inhabited hovels were clustered, and the boat which had brought her was drawn up. In front was the sea, still lashed by a fierce wind, which was driving the fantastically shaped remains of the great storm cloud rapidly across an intensely blue sky. The waves, although it was the ebb, were still tremendous, and their

roar re-echoed as they reared to fearful heights and broke with the reverberations that she had heard all along. Peregrine kept quite high up, not venturing below the washed line of shingle, saying that the back draught of the waves was most perilous, and in a high wind could not be reckoned upon.

"No escape!" he said, as he perceived Anne's gaze on the inaccessible cliff and the whole scene, the wild beauty of which was lost to her in its terrors.

"Where's your ship?" she asked.

"Safe in Whale Chine. No putting to sea yet, though it may be fair to-morrow."

Then she put before him the first scheme she had thought out, of letting her escape to Sir Edmund Nutley's house, whence she could make her way back, taking with her a letter that would prove his existence without involving him or his friends in danger. And eagerly she argued, "You do not know me really! It is only an imagination that you can be the better for my presence." Then, unheeding his fervid exclamation, "It was my dear mother who did you good. What would she think of the way in which you are trying to gain me?"

"That I cannot do without you."

"And what would you have in me? I could be only wretched, and feel all my life--such a life as it would be--that you had wrecked my happiness. Oh yes! I do believe that you would try to make me happy, but don't you see that it would be quite impossible with such a grief as that in my heart, and knowing that you had caused it? I know you hate him, and he did you the wrong; but he has grieved for it, and banished himself. But above all, of this I am quite sure, that to persist in this horrible evil of leaving him to die, because of your revenge, and stealing me away, is truly giving Satan such a frightful advantage over you that it is mere folly to think that winning me in such a way could do you any good. It is just a mere delusion of his, to ruin us both, body and soul. Peregrine, will you not recollect my mother, and what she would think? Have pity on me, and help me away, and I would pledge myself never to utter a word of this place nor that could bring you and yours into danger. We would bless and pray for you always."

"No use," he gloomily said. "I believe you, but the others will never believe a woman. No doubt we are watched even now by desperate men, who would rather shoot you than let you escape from our hands."

It seemed almost in connection with these words that at that moment, from some unknown quarter, where probably there was an entrance to the Chine, Sir George Barclay appeared with a leathern case under his arm. It had been captured on the wreck, and contained papers which he wanted assistance in deciphering, since they were in Dutch, and he believed them to be either despatches or bonds, either of which might be turned to profit. These were carried indoors, and spread on the table, and as Anne sat by the window, dejected and almost hopeless as she was, she could not help perceiving that, though Peregrine was so much smaller and less robust than his

companions, he exercised over them the dominion of intellect, energy, and will, as if they too felt the force of his strange eyes; and it seemed to her as if, supposing he truly desired it, whatever he might say, he must be able to deliver her and Charles; but that a being such as she had always known him should sacrifice both his love and his hate seemed beyond all hope, and "Change his heart! Turn our captivity, O Lord," could only be her cry.

Only very late did Burford come back, full of the account of the wreck and of the spoils, and the struggles between the wreckers for the flotsam and jetsam. There was much of savage brutality mated with a cool indifference truly horrible to Anne, and making her realise into what a den of robbers she had fallen, especially as these narratives were diversified by consultations over the Dutch letters and bills of exchange in the wrecked East Indiaman, and how to turn them to the best advantage. Barclay and Burford were so full of these subjects that they took comparatively little notice of the young lady, only when she rose to retire, Burford made a sort of apology that this little business had hindered his going after the parson. He heard that the Salamander was at the castle, and redcoats all about, he said, and if the Annick could be got out tomorrow they must sail any way; and if Pil was still so squeamish, a Popish priest could couple them in a leash as tight as a Fleet parson could. And then Peregrine demanded whether Burford thought a Fleet parson the English for a naval chaplain, and there was some boisterous laughter, during which Anne shut herself up in her room in something very like despair, with that one ray of hope that He who had brought her back from exile before would again save her from that terrible fate.

She heard card-playing and the jingle of glasses far into the night, as she believed, but it seemed to her as if she had scarcely fallen asleep before, to her extreme terror, she heard a knock and a low call at her door of 'Guennik.' Then as the Bretonne went to the door, through which a light was seen, a lantern was handed in, and a scrap of paper on which the words were written: "On second thoughts, my kindred elves at Portchester shall not be scared by a worricow. Dress quickly, and I will bring you out of this."

For a moment Anne did not perceive the meaning of the missive, the ghastly idea never having occurred to her that if Charles had suffered, the gibbet would have been at Portchester. Then, with an electric flash of joy, she saw that it meant relenting on Peregrine's part, deliverance for them both. She put on her clothes with hasty, trembling hands, thankful to Guennik for helping her, pressed a coin into the strong toil-worn hand, and with an earnest thrill of thankful prayer opened the door. The driftwood fire was bright, and she saw Peregrine, looking deadly white, and equipped with slouched hat, short wrapping cloak, pistols and sword at his belt, dark lantern lighted on the table, and Hans also cloaked by his side. He bent his head in salutation, and put his finger to his lips, giving one hand to Anne, and showing by example instead of words that she must tread as softly as possible, as she perceived that he was in his slippers, Hans carrying his boots as well as the lantern she had used. Yet to her ears the roar of the advancing tide seemed to stifle all other sounds. Past the other huts they went in silence, then came a precipitous path up the cliff, steps cut in the hard sandy grit, but very crumbling, and in places supplemented by a rude ladder of sticks and rope. Peregrine went

before Anne, Hans behind. Each had hung the lantern from his neck, so as to have hands free to draw her, support her, or lift her, as might be needful. How it was done she never could tell in after years. She might jestingly say that her lightened heart bore her up, but in her soul and in her deeper moments she thought that truly angels must have had charge over her. Up, up, up! At last they had reached standing ground, a tolerably level space, with another high cliff seeming to rise behind it. Here it was lighter--a pale streak of dawn was spreading over the horizon, both on sky and sea, and the waves still leaping glanced in the light of a golden waning moon, while Venus shone in the brightening sky, a daystar of hope.

Peregrine drew a long breath, and gave an order in a very low voice in Dutch to Hans, who placed his boots before him, and went off towards a shed. "He will bring you a pony," said his master.

"Excuse me;" and he was withdrawing his hand, when Anne clasped it with both hers, and said in a voice of intense feeling--

"Oh, how can I thank you and bless you! This is putting the Evil Angel to flight."

"'Tis you that have done it! You see, I cannot do the wicked act where you are," he answered gloomily, as he turned aside to draw on his boots.

"Ah! but you have won the victory over him!"

"Do not be too sure. We are not out of reach of those rascals yet."

He was evidently anxious for silence, and Anne said no more. Hans presently brought from some unknown quarter, a little stout pony bridled and saddled; of course not with a side saddle, but cloaks were arranged so as to make a fairly comfortable seat for Anne, and Peregrine led the animal on the ascent to St. Catherine's Down. It was light enough to dispense with the lanterns, and as they mounted higher the glorious sight of daybreak over the sea showed itself--almost due east, the sharp points of the Needles showing up in a flood of pale golden light above and below, with gulls flashing white as they floated into sunlight, all seeming to Anne's thankful heart to be a new radiance of joy and hope after the dark roaring terrors of the Chine.

As they came out into the open freedom of the down, with crisp silvery grass under their feet, the breadth of sea on one side, before them fertile fields and hills, and farther away, dimly seen in gray mist, the familiar Portsdown outlines, not a sound to be heard but the exulting ecstasies of larks, far, far above in the depths of blue, Peregrine dared to speak above his breath, with a question whether Anne were at ease in her extemporary side saddle, producing at the same time a slice of bread and meat, and a flask of wine.

"Oh, how kind! What care you take of me!" she said. "But where are we going?"

"Wherever you command," he said. "I had thought of Carisbrooke. Cutts is there, and it would be the speediest way."

"Would it not be the most dangerous for you?"

"I care very little for my life after this."

"Oh no, no, you must not say so. After what you are doing for me you will be able to make it better than ever it has been. This is what I thought. If you would bring me in some place whence I could reach Sir Edmund Nutley's house at Parkhurst, his servants would help me to do the rest, even if he be not there himself. I would never betray you! You know I would not! And you would have full time to get away to your place in Normandy with your friends."

"You care?" asked he.

"Of course I do!" exclaimed she. "Do I not feel grateful to you, and like and honour you better than ever I could have thought?"

"You do?" in a strange choked tone.

"Of course I do. You are doing a noble, thankworthy thing. It is not only that I thank you for his sake, but it is a grand and beautiful deed in itself; and if my dear mother know, she is blessing you for it."

"I shall remember those words," he said, "if--" and he passed his hand over his eyes. "See here," he presently said; "I have written out a confession of my identity, and explanation that it was I who drew first on Archfield. It is enough to save him, and in case my handwriting has altered, as I think it has, and there should be further doubt, I shall be found at Pilpignon, if I get away. You had better keep it in case of accidents, or if you carry out your generous plan. Say whatever you please about me, but there is no need to mention Barclay or Burford; and it would not be fair to the honest free-traders here to explain where their Chine lies. I should have brought you up blindfold, if I could have done so with safety, not that I do not trust you, but I should be better able to satisfy those fellows if I ever see them again, by telling them I have sworn you to secrecy."

Then he laughed. "The gowks! I won all those Indian bonds of them last night, but left them in a parcel addressed to them as a legacy."

Anne took the required pledge, and ventured to ask, "Shall I say anything for you to your father?"

"My poor old father! Let him know that I neither would nor could disturb Robert in his inheritance, attainted traitor as the laws esteem me. For the rest, mayhap I shall write to him if the good angel you talk of will help me."

"Oh do! I am sure he would rejoice to forgive. He is much softened."

"Now, we must hush, and go warily. I see sheep, and if there is a shepherd, I want him not to see us, or point our way. It is well these Isle of Wight folk are not early risers."

CHAPTER XXXIV: LIFE FOR LIFE

"Follow Light, and do the Right--for man can half-control his doom--
Till you find the deathless Angel seated in the vacant tomb.

Forward, let the stormy moment fly and mingle with the Past.
I that loathed, have come to love him. Love will conquer at the last."

TENNYSON.

On they had gone in silence for the most part, avoiding villages, but as the morning advanced and they came into more inhabited places, they were not able entirely to avoid meeting labourers going out to work, who stared at Hans's black face with curiosity. The sun was already high when they reached a cross-road whence the massive towers of Carisbrooke were seen above the hedges, and another turn led to Parkhurst. They paused a moment, and Anne was beginning to entreat her escort to leave her to proceed alone, when the sound of horses' feet galloping was heard behind them. Peregrine looked back.

"Ah!" he said. "Ride on as fast as you can towards the castle. You will be all right. I will keep them back. Go, I say."

And as some figures were seen at the end of the road, he pricked the pony with the point of his sword so effectually that it bolted forward, quite beyond Anne's power of checking it, and in a second or two its speed was quickened by shouts and shots behind. Anne felt, but scarcely understood at the moment, a sharp pang and thrill in her left arm, as the steed whirled her round the corner of the lane and full into the midst of a party of gentlemen on horseback coming down from the castle.

"Help! help!" she cried. "Down there."

Attacks by highwaymen were not uncommon experiences, though scarcely at eight o'clock in the morning, or so near a garrison, but the horsemen, having already heard the shots, galloped forward. Perhaps Anne could hardly have turned her pony, but it chose to follow the lead of its fellows, and in a few seconds they were in the midst of a scene of utter confusion. Peregrine was grappling with Burford trying to drag him from his horse. Both fell together, and as the auxiliaries came in sight there was another shot and two more men rode off headlong.

"Follow them!" said a commanding voice. "What have we here?"

The two struggling figures both lay still for a moment or two, but as some of the riders drew them apart Peregrine sat up, though blood was streaming down his breast and arm. "Sir," he said, "I am Peregrine Oakshott, on whose account young Archfield lies under sentence of death. If a magistrate will take my affidavit while I can make it, he will be safe."

Then Anne heard a voice exclaiming: "Oakshott! Nay--why, this is Mistress Woodford! How came she here?" and she knew Sir Edmund Nutley. Still it was Peregrine who answered--

"I captured her, in the hope of marrying her, but that cannot be--I have brought her back in all safety and honour."

"Sir! Sir, indeed he has been very good to me. Pray let him be looked to."

"Let him be carried to the castle," said the commander of the party, a tall man sunburnt to a fiery red. "Is the other alive?"

"Only stunned, my lord, I think and not much hurt," was the answer of an attendant officer; "but here is a poor blackamoor dead."

"Poor Hans! Best so perhaps," murmured Peregrine, as he was lifted. Then in a voice of alarm, "Look to the lady, she is hurt."

"It is nothing," cried she. "O Mr. Oakshott! that this should have happened!"

"My lord, this is the young gentlewoman I told you of, betrothed to poor young Archfield," said Sir Edmund Nutley.

Lord Cutts, for it was indeed William's favoured 'Salamander,' took off his plumed hat in salutation, and both gentlemen perceiving that she too was bleeding, she was solicitously invited to the castle, to be placed under the charge of the lieutenant-governor's wife. She found by this time that she was in a good deal of pain, and thankfully accepted the support Sir Edmund offered her, when he dismounted and walked beside her pony, while explanations passed between them. The weather had prevented any communication with the mainland, so that he was totally ignorant of her capture, and did not know what had become of Mr. Fellowes. He himself had been just starting with Lord Cutts, who was going to join the King for his next campaign, and they were to represent the case to the King. Anne told him in return what she dared to say, but she was becoming so faint and dazed that she was in great fear of not saying what she ought; and indeed she could hardly speak, when after passing under the great gateway, she was lifted off her horse, at the door of the dwelling-house, and helped upstairs to a bedroom, where the wife of the lieutenant-governor, Mrs. Dudley, was very tender over her with essences and strong waters, and a surgeon of the suite almost immediately came to her.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "you should be with Mr. Oakshott."

The surgeon explained that Mr. Oakshott would have nothing done for him till he had fully made and signed his deposition, in case the power should afterwards be wanting.

So Anne submitted to the dressing of her hurt, which was only a flesh wound, the bone being happily untouched. Both the surgeon and Mrs. Dudley urged her going to bed immediately, but she was unwilling to put herself out of reach; and indeed the dressing was scarcely finished before Sir Edmund Nutley knocked at the door to ask whether she could admit him.

"Lord Cutts is very desirous of speaking with you, if you are able," he said. "Here has this other fellow come round, declaring that Oakshott is the Pilpignon who was in the Barclay Plot, and besides,

the prime leader of the Black Gang, of whom we have heard so much."

"The traitor!" cried Anne. "Poor Mr. Oakshott was resolved not to betray him! How is he--Mr. Oakshott, I mean?"

"The surgeon has him in his hands. We will send another from Portsmouth, but it looks like a bad case. He made his confession bravely, though evidently in terrible suffering, seeming to keep up by force of will till he had totally exonerated Archfield and signed the deposition, and then he fainted, so that I thought him dead, but I fear he has more to go through. Can you come to the hall, or shall I bring Lord Cutts to you? We must hasten in starting that we may bring the news to Winchester to-night."

Anne much preferred going to the hall, though she felt weak enough to be very glad to lean on Sir Edmund's arm.

Lord Cutts, William's high-spirited and daring officer, received her with the utmost courtesy and kindness, inquired after her hurt, and lamented having to trouble her, but said that though he would not detain her long, her testimony was important, and he begged to hear what had happened to her.

She gave the account of her capture and journey as shortly as she could.

"Whither was she taken?"

She paused. "I promised Mr. Oakshott for the sake of others--" she said.

"You need have no scruples on that score," said Lord Cutts. "Burford hopes to get off for the murder by turning King's evidence, and has told all."

"Yes," added Sir Edmund; "and poor Oakshott managed to say, 'Tell her she need keep nothing back. It is all up.'"

So Anne answered all the questions put to her, and they were the fewer both out of consideration for her condition, and because the governor wanted to take advantage of the tide to embark on the Medina.

In a very few hours the Archfields would have no more fears. Anne longed to go with Sir Edmund, but she was in no state for a ride, and could not be a drag. Sir Edmund said that either his wife would come to her at once and take her to Parkhurst, or else her uncle would be sure to come for her. She would be the guest of Major and Mrs. Dudley, who lived in the castle, the actual Lord Warden only visiting it from time to time; and though Major Dudley was a stern man, both were very kind to her.

As a Whig, Major Dudley knew the Oakshott family, and was willing to extend his hospitality even to the long-lost Peregrine. The Lord Warden, who was evidently very favourably impressed, saying that there was no need at present to treat him as a prisoner, but that every attention should be paid to him, as indeed he was evidently a dying man. Burford and another of his associates were to be carried off, handcuffed, with the escort to Winchester jail, but before the

departure, the soldiers who had been sent to the Chine returned baffled; the place was entirely deserted, and Barclay had escaped.

Anne allowed herself to be put to bed, being indeed completely exhausted, and scarcely able to think of anything but the one blessed certainty that Charles was safe, and freed from all stigma. When, after the pain in her arm lulled enough to allow her to sleep, she had had a few hours' rest, she inquired for Peregrine, she heard that for many hours the surgeon had been trying to extract the balls, and that they considered that the second shot had made his case hopeless, as it was in the body. He was so much exhausted as to be almost unconscious; but the next morning, when Anne, against the persuasions of her hostess, had risen and been dressed, though still feeling weak and shaken, she received a message, begging her to do him the great kindness of visiting him.

Deadly pale, almost gray, as he looked, lying so propped with pillows as to relieve his shattered shoulder, his face had a strange look of peace, almost of relief, and he smiled at her as she entered. He held out the hand he could use, and his first word was of inquiry after her hurt.

"That is nothing--it will soon be well; I wish it were the same with you."

"Nay, I had rather cheat the hangman. I told those doctors yesterday that they were giving themselves and me a great deal of useless trouble. The villains, as I told you, could not believe we should not betray them, and meant to make an end of us all. It's best as it is. My poor faithful Hans would never have had another happy moment."

"But you must be better, Peregrine," for his voice, though low, was steady.

"There's no living with what I have here," he said, laying his hand on his side; "and--I dreamt of your mother last night." With the words there was a look of gladness exceeding.

"Ah! the Evil Angel is gone!"

"I want your prayers that he may not come back at the last." Then, as she clasped her hands, and her lips moved, he added, "There were some things I could only say to you. If they don't treat my body as that of an attainted traitor, let me lie at your mother's feet. Don't disturb the big Scot for me, but let me rest at last near her. Then tell Robin 'tis not out of want of regard for him that I have not bequeathed Pilpignon to him, but he could do no good with a French estate full of Papists; and there's a poor loyal fellow, living ruined at Paris--a Catholic too--with a wife and children half starved, to whom it will do more good."

"I meant to ask--Shall a priest be sent for? Surely Major Dudley would consent."

"I don't know. I have not loved such priests lately. I had rather die as near your mother as may be."

"Miss Woodford," said a voice at the door, and going to it, Anne

found herself clasped in her uncle's arms. With very few words she led him to the bedside, and the first thing he said was "God bless you, Peregrine, for what you have done."

Again Peregrine's face lighted up, but fell again when he was told of the Portsmouth surgeon's arrival at the same time, saying with one of his strange looks that it was odd sort of mercy to try to cure a man for Jack Ketch, but that he should baffle them yet.

"Do not set your mind on that," said Dr. Woodford, "for Lord Cutts was so much pleased with you that he would do his utmost on your behalf."

"Much good that would do me," said poor Peregrine, setting his teeth as his tormentor came in.

Meantime, in Mrs. Dudley's parlour, while that good lady was assisting the surgeon at the dressing, Anne and her uncle exchanged information. Mr. Fellowes had arrived on foot at about noon, with his servant, having only been released after two hours by a traveller, and having been deprived both of money and horses, so that he could not proceed on his journey; besides that he had given the alarm about the abduction, and raised the hue and cry at the villages on his way. There had been great distress, riding and searching, and the knowledge had been kept from poor Charles Archfield in his prison. Mr. Fellowes had gone on to London as soon as possible, and Dr. Woodford had just returned from a fruitless attempt to trace his niece, when Sir Edmund Nutley and Lord Cutts appeared, with the joyful tidings, which, however, could be hardly understood.

Nothing, Dr. Woodford said, could be more thorough than the vindication of Charles Archfield. Peregrine had fully stated that the young man had merely interposed to prevent the pursuit of Anne Woodford, that it was he himself who had made the first attack, and that his opponent had been forced to fight in self-defence. Lord Cutts had not only shown his affidavit to Sir Philip, but had paid a visit to the Colonel himself in his prison, had complimented him highly on his services in the Imperial army, only regretting that they had not been on behalf of his own country, and had assured him of equal, if not superior rank, in the British army if he would join it on the liberation that he might reckon upon in the course of a very few days.

"How did you work on the unhappy young man to bring about this blessed change?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh, sir, I do not think it was myself. It was first the mercy of the Almighty, and then my blessed mother's holy memory working on him, revived by the sight of myself. I cannot describe to you how gentle, and courteous, and respectful he was to me all along, though I am sure those dreadful men mocked at him for it. Do you know whether his father has heard?"

"Robert Oakshott is gone in search of him. He had set off to beat up the country, good old man, to obtain signatures to the petition in favour of our prisoner, and Robert expected to find him with Mr. Chute at the Vine. It is much to that young man's credit, niece, he was so eager to see his brother that he longed to come with me

himself; but he thought that the shock to his father would be so great that he ought to bear the tidings himself. And what do you think his good wife is about? Perhaps you did not know that Sedley Archfield brought away jail fever with him, and Mrs. Oakshott, feeling that she was the cause by her hasty action, has taken lodgings for him in Winchester, and is nursing him like a sister. No. You need not fear for your colonel, my dear maid. Sedley caught the infection because he neither was, nor wished to be, secluded from the rest of the prisoners, some of whom were, I fear, only too congenial society to him. But now tell me the story of your own deliverance, which seems to me nothing short of miraculous."

The visit of the Portsmouth surgeon only confirmed Peregrine's own impression that it was impossible that he should live, and he was only surviving by the strong vitality in his little, spare, wiry frame. Dr. Woodford, after hearing Anne's story, thought it well to ask him whether he would prefer the ministrations of a Roman Catholic priest; but whether justly or unjustly, Peregrine seemed to impute to that Church the failure to exorcise the malignant spirit which had led him to far worse aberrations than he had confessed to Anne. Though by no means deficient in knowledge or controversial theology, as Dr. Woodford soon found in conversation with him, his real convictions were all as to what personally affected him, and his strong Protestant ingrain education, however he might have disavowed it, no doubt had affected his point of view. He had admired and been strongly influenced by the sight of real devotion and holiness, though as his temptations and hatred of monotony recurred, he had more than once swung back again. Then, however, he had been revolted by the perception of the concessions to popular superstition and the morality of a wicked state of society. His real sense of any religion had been infused by Mrs. Woodford, and to her belongings, and the faith they involved, he was clinging in these last days.

Dr. Woodford could not but be glad that thus it was, not only on the penitent's own account, but on that of the father, who might have lost the comfort of finding him truly repentant in the shock of finding a Popish priest at his bedside. And indeed the contrition seemed to have gathered force in many a past fit of remorse, and now was deep but not unhopeful.

In the evening the father and brother arrived. The Major was now an old man, hale indeed, and with the beauty that a pure, self-restrained life often sheds on an aged man. He was much shaken, and when he came in, with his own white hair on his shoulders, and actually tears in his eyes, the look that passed between them was like nothing but the spirit of the parable so often, but never too often, repeated.

Peregrine, who never perhaps had spent a happy or fearless hour with him, and had dreaded his coming, felt probably for the first time the mysterious sense of home and peace given by the presence of those between whom there is the tie of blood. Not many words passed; he was hardly in a state for them, but from that time, he was never so happy as when his father and brother were beside him; and they seldom left him, the Major sitting day and night by his pillow attending to his wants, or saying words of prayer.

The old man had become much softened, by nothing more perhaps than watching the way in which his daughter-in-law dealt with the manifestations of the Oakshott imp nature in her eldest child.

"If I had understood," he said to Dr. Woodford. "If I had so treated that poor boy, never would he have been as he is now."

"You acted according to your conscience."

"Ah, sir! a man does not grow old without learning that the conscience may be blinded, above all by the spirit of opposition and party."

"I will not say there were no mistakes," said the Doctor; "and yet, sir, the high standard, sound principle, and strong faith he learnt from you and your example have prevailed to bear him through."

The Major answered with a groan, but added, "And yet, even now, stained as he tells me he is, and cut off in the flower of his age, I thank my God and his Saviour, and after Him, you and yours, that I am happier about him than I have been these eight and twenty years."

With no scruple, Major Oakshott threw his heart into the ministrations of Dr. Woodford, which Peregrine declared kept at bay the Evil Angel who more than once seemed to his consciousness to be striving to make him despair, while friend and father brought him back to the one hope.

From time to time Anne visited him for a short interval, always to his joy and gratitude. There was one visit at last which all knew would be the final one, when she shared in his first and last English Communion. As she was about to leave him, he held her hand, and signed to her to bend down to hear him better. "If you can, let good Father Seyton at Douai know that peace is come--the Evil One beaten, thanks to Him who giveth us the victory--and I thank them all there--and ask their prayers."

"I will, I will."

Some one at the door said, "May I come in?"

There was a sunburnt face, a head with long brown hair, a white coat.

"Archfield?" asked Peregrine. "Come, send me away with pardon."

"'Tis yours I need;" and as Charles knelt by the bed the two faces, one all health, the other gray and deathly, were close together. "You have given your life for mine, and given _her_. How shall I thank you?"

"Make her happy. She deserves it."

Charles clasped her hand with a look that was enough. Then with a strange smile, half sweetness, half the contortion of a mortal pang, the dying man said, "May she kiss me once?"

And when her lips had touched the cold damp brow--

"There--My fourth seven. At last! The change is come. Old--impish--evil--self left behind. At last! Thanks to Him who treads down Satan under our feet. Thanks! Take her away now."

Charles took her away, scarce knowing where they went,--out into the spring sunshine, on the slopes above the turf bowling-green, where the captive King had beguiled his weary hours. Only then would awe and emotion let them speak, though his arm was round her, her hand in his, and his first words were, as he looked at the scarf that still bore up her arm, "And this is what you have borne for me?"

"It is all but healed. Don't think of it."

"I shall all my life! Poor fellow, he might well bid me deserve you. I never can. 'Tis to you I owe all. I believe, indeed, the ambassador might have claimed me, but he is so tardy that probably I should have been hanged long before the proper form was ready; and it would have been to exile, and with a tainted name. You have won for me the clearing of name and honour--home, parents and child and all, besides your sweet self."

"And it was not me, but he whom we so despised and dreaded. Had I not been seized, I could only have implored for you."

"I know this, that if you had not been what you are, my boy would have borne a dishonoured name, and we should never have been together as now."

It was in truth their first meeting in freedom and security as lovers; but it could only be in a grave, quiet fashion, under the knowledge that he, to whom their re-union was chiefly owing, was breathing out the life he had sacrificed for them. Thus they only gently and in a low voice went over their past doings and feelings as they walked up and down together, till Dr. Woodford came in the sunset to tell them that the change so longed for had come in peace, and with a smile that told of release from the Evil Angel.

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Peregrine's wish was fulfilled, and he was buried in Portchester Churchyard at Mrs. Woodford's feet. This time it was Mr. Horncastle, old as he was, who preached the funeral sermon, the In Memoriam of our forefathers; and by special desire of Major Oakshott took for his text, 'At evening time there shall be light.' He spoke, sometimes in a voice broken, as much by feeling as by age, of the childhood blighted by a cruel superstition, and perverted, as he freely made confession, by discipline without comprehension, because no confidence had been sought. Then ensued a tribute of earnest, generous justice to her who had done her best to undo the warp in the boy's nature, and whose blessed influence the young man had owned to the last, through all the temptations, errors, and frenzies of his life. Nor did the good man fail to make this a means of testifying to the entire neighbourhood, who had flocked to hear him, all that might be desirable to be known respecting the conflict at Portchester, actually reading Peregrine's affidavit, as indeed was due to Colonel Archfield, so as to prove that this was no mere pardon, though technically it had so to stand, but actual acquittal. Nor was the struggle with evil at the end forgotten, nor the surrender alike of love and of hatred, as well as of his own life,

which had been the final conquest, the decisive passing from darkness to light.

It was a strange sermon according to present ideas, but not to those who had grown up to the semi-political preaching of the century then in its last decade; and it filled many eyes with tears, many hearts with a deeper spirit of that charity which hopeth all things.

* * * * *

A month later Charles Archfield and Anne Jacobina Woodford were married at the little parish church of Fareham. Sir Philip insisted on making it a gay and brilliant wedding, in order to demonstrate to the neighbourhood that though the maiden had been his grandson's governess, she was a welcomed and honoured acquisition to the family. Perhaps too he perceived the error of his middle age, when he contrasted that former wedding, the work of worldly conventionality, with the present. In the first, an unformed, undeveloped lad, unable to understand his own true feelings and affections had been passively linked to a shallow, frivolous, ill-trained creature, utterly incapable of growing into a helpmeet for him; whereas the love and trust of the stately-looking pair, in the fresh bloom of manhood and womanhood, had been proved in the furnace of trial, so that the troth they plighted had deep foundation for the past, and bright hope for the future.

Nor was anybody more joyous than little Philip, winning his Nana for a better mother to him than his own could ever have been

It was in a blue velvet coat that Colonel Archfield was married. He had resigned his Austrian commission; and though the 'Salamander,' was empowered to offer him an excellent staff appointment in the English army, he decided to refuse. Sir Philip showed signs of having been aged and shaken by the troubles of the winter, and required his son's assistance in the care of his property, and little Philip was growing up to need a father's hand, so that Charles came to the conclusion that there was no need to cross the old Cavalier's dislike to the new regime, nor to make his mother and wife again suffer the anxieties of knowing him on active service, while his duties lay at home.

Sedley Archfield, after a long illness, owed recovery both in body and mind to Mrs. Oakshott, and by her arrangement finally obtained a fresh commission in a regiment raised for the defence of the possessions of the East India Company. And that the poor changeling was still tenderly remembered might be proved by the fact that when the bells rung for Queen Anne's coronation there was one baby Peregrine at Fareham and another at Oakwood.

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