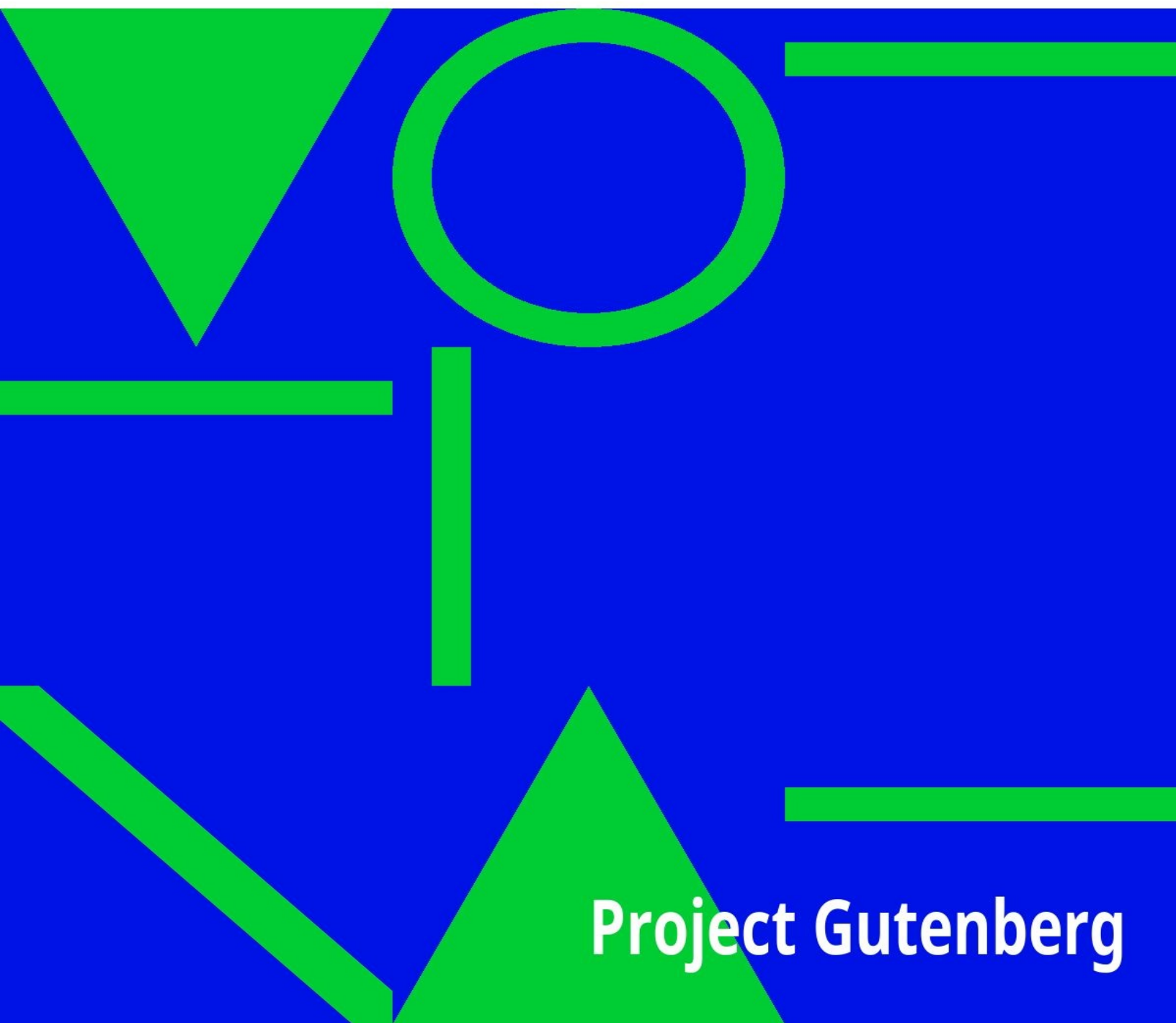


Sweet Mace

A Sussex Legend of the Iron Times

George Manville Fenn



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Title: Sweet Mace
A Sussex Legend of the Iron Times

Author: George Manville Fenn

Release Date: November 29, 2010 [EBook #34490]

Language: English

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Produced by Nick Hodson of London, England

George Manville Fenn

"Sweet Mace"

How Gil Carr Heard a Concert in Spring.

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

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

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

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

Here is the site of Gil Carr's musings, for untouched Nature shows little change. Overhead there is a fabric of tenderest green leaves, laced with pearly cobweb and flashing threads of sunshine, which run in and out like sheaves of glorified asbestos, and weave the whole into a wondrous shelter beneath whose delicious dream-shadow one wanders in a haze of green. For Nature's own colour is lavishly used to decorate this glorious amphitheatre for the first concert in spring, and there it is in every shade, from the sweet pale ash-green of the opening willow to the rich hue of the dogs' mercury and hemlock. Green everywhere, for the

delicate curtains of the trees are green, the carpet is verdant, and the banks that rise tier upon tier are of the richest velvet moss. There is no uniformity here, there are no rows of seats, but a grand confusion, upon which the eye lingers restfully and which it refuses to quit.

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

Talk of violets too, there they are, not the scented sweets of earliest spring, but the larger, bluer, more plentiful *Viola canina*, growing in patches with the purple orchids. Colour? There is ample to relieve the greenest green, untiring though it be, and were brighter tints wanted they are here, such as put to shame the brightest gems of our greatest jewellers' shops. There they are, whenever the silvery arrows of the sun flash through the delicate leafage like a wondrous rain—there they are, bright, dazzling, flashing, and sparkling, the vivid transparent grouped rays of Iris herself on every pearly drop of dew, lying waiting for the sun to gather it to his bosom, and feel the daily fire of his life-giving ray. Nature has surpassed herself, and all is bright, while, bright though the decorations be, the most aesthetic critic could not find one that offends. There could be no want of finish where Nature has worked, and here, where all harmonises to the eye, she has prepared, for the grand burst of harmony for the ear, that wondrous concert that surely begins on one particular undated morning in spring, when, as if moved by a single impulse, all bird-dom breaks forth into song—a song of praise so sweet and glorious that the heart seems to leap, ay, and does leap, back over the gulf of years, to feel as in childhood's days, before rust, canker, and the world's own wear had hardened it to what it is.

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

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

Tuning up still. There is the strange harsh, reedy, repeated, hautboy-

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

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

Again a solo, morning though it be, and you say "the thrush." But no, those notes were somewhat like those of the great contralto *merulus*; but listen, they are sweeter far, and they are soprano, for it is Philomel herself. Hark! After those long-complaining notes there is a familiar "Weep, weep, weep, chug-chug-chug-chug-chug!" The very orchestra seems hardly to breathe and not a chorister to move as this wondrous strain of richest melody goes rising, falling, thrilling the breast, till one breathes the sweet fresh balmy air in sobs, and drinks in the sweet draught of music—a drink for the gods till it is ended, and there are no dregs. Here come the harsh notes, though, from the orchestra—a short sharp jerky recitative from the magpie, followed by the angry declamation of the jay, leading up to those little fiddlers the chaffinches, with their seconds, the finches of green, and the linnets on the outer edge. There is a short running chorus here, followed by a short chorale that is even slow and solemn, and then there is a pause—twelve bars rest—Nature's *baton* is suspended, and one seems to see the grand dame with her attendant train of nymphs, with Flora and Iris looking on. Then come once more the soft long thrilling notes of the nightingale, reciting the song with which at

night the grove will ring. It is recitative of inexpressible sweetness, and it leads up to the grand chorus, the great song of praise from thousands of birds' throats, beneath which seems to sigh like the murmur of the deepest pedal-pipes of an organ the low buzz of insect life, blending, supporting, and adding grandeur to that which is already great.

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

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

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

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

"Sir Thomas, and if I did not feel bound to carry out my royal master's commands, I'd go no further, but sit down here on this shady

bank, and bask in the sunshine of your daughter's eyes. Once more I say, is there any ending to this winding lane?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For answer Mistress Anne uttered a shriek, rose quickly, and half

threw herself in the young man's arms.

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

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

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

It was from the corner of the bank which formed this side-track that the hoarse laughter came, and, turning sharply, Sir Mark gazed fiercely upon a rugged-looking mahogany-faced man, who seemed to have faced

storm and sunshine where these slaves of Nature work their worst. His scanty hair was grizzled, his beard rusty, half-grey, and unkempt; his hands were knotted and gnarled, and, saving his eyes, everything about him betokened wear and tear. They alone flashed, and brightly, from beneath his shaggy brows, as, leaning against the corner, he stood with crossed legs, one hand holding a little thick-stemmed, very small-bowled clay pipe, which he leisurely smoked, resting his elbow the while in his right hand.

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

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

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

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

“Where, where, Mas’ Wat?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes, my gay spark,” said the old fellow, with his eyes lighting up and flashing; “or one of the great poisonous adders out in the West, with

rattles in their tails, from whose bite a man dies in an hour.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Then he really has extensive works here?”

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

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

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

“What captain? What men?”

“That tall, stout fellow we talked with—Wat Kilby—he is the captain’s

head man—Captain Carr—Culverin Carr they call him here.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“A noble Christian-like feeling,” cried Sir Mark. “But, tut, tut, Sir Thomas, this must not be. Rouse up, man. These knaves must be

brought to book if they don't behave. Have no fear, sir; a word from me to the King, and his Majesty's wisdom would be brought to bear on the need of sweeping this place clear of such dregs."

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

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

"Captain Culverin?"

"Hush—hush, pray, Sir Mark," whispered the baronet, and then to himself, "Thank heaven we are here."

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

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

wreaths of pale blue smoke ascended into the soft summer air.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thomas?"

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

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

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

"What! Jeremiah Cobbe?"

"No; Captain Carr."

How Jeremiah Cobbe damned his Majesty King James the First.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The skiff came nearer and nearer, for the great pike now darted right towards the shore, running onward towards where the group were standing, and then, finding the water shallow, leaping bodily out, to fall back with a tremendous splash, for it was a monster of its kind. Then with another rush it made straight for the middle, where there were cool and shady depths beneath the water-lilies, amidst whose stout stems the

strong line might be tangled and freedom found. But the effort was vain: with a quick turn of the oars the rower spun the skiff round, and urged it along, lessening the stress upon the young girl's wrists, and, evidently well accustomed to the management of a boat, hastening or slackening its speed by the guidance of the fishing-pole—whether it was heavily or lightly bent.

The chase led the occupants of the boat far away, but Sir Mark did not stir. With one hand resting on the hilt of his sword, the other twisting the points of his moustache, he stood gazing after the boat with a red spot burning in either cheek. He seemed to have forgotten the existence of Mistress Anne, and started when she spoke.

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

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

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

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

As they went on along the edge of the great Pool, where the forget-me-nots and brooklime made blue the shallows, while the roar of a furnace and the heavy throb of hammers began to make themselves heard, Anne Beckley stole a glance at the boat, saw that they had been seen by the rower, and turned at once eagerly to Sir Mark, upon whose arm she leaned as they talked, till they reached a little swing-bridge

which spanned the narrow stream of water that rushed from the great Pool down a channel formed between two walls of rough sandstone blocks. Here the confined waters sparkled and foamed as they swept on towards a great water-wheel, which they slowly turned, the drops falling glittering like diamonds from the paddles and slimy spokes. Just across the bridge was the large garden, lush with flowers, and surrounding the gabled house, from whose door now appeared a squarely-built, grey-haired man of fifty, to walk slowly towards the bridge, as if to meet the new-comers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Masculine all this; but as Sir Mark’s eye glanced quickly round he saw several traces of feminine occupation, for on a stand in one corner was a great china bowl full of rose-leaves, and in a vase a well-arranged nosegay of simple, old-fashioned flowers, the table it occupied being close beside a large tambour-frame with some design in progress. There was the odour of burnt tobacco in the room, doing battle with the fragrance from the garden, which floated in at the open window, where

roses nodded and scattered their petals upon the broad oaken sill. There was a chair there too, and a basket of freshly-gathered currants shining like smooth rubies in their nest of leaves, and in an instant the visitor concluded that the deep bay by the casement opening upon the rich, old-fashioned garden, was the favourite seat of the girl he had seen engaged in fishing as they came along.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“I do smoke, and I don’t agree with his Majesty,” said Cobbe, gruffly,

as he proceeded to fill his pipe by means of a little silver stopper, for a child's finger would hardly have passed into the bowl.

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

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

"Go on then, sir," he cried. "I shall be glad to hear what business you have to settle with me. If it is for half-a-dozen culverins for his Majesty's army, or by the good Peter, I have it, he has got to know about my new howitzers, and he has sent to see. Now, how the holy 'postle did he get to know about them?"

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

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

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

"Right," said the other nodding.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“To his Majesty’s enemies?”

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

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

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

servants and hangers-on.”

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

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

“Silence, sir!” cried Sir Mark; “do you dare to set at naught the King’s.”

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

“Insolent dog,” cried Sir Mark.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The face of an angel: is this Heaven?”

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

“Thank you, I can rise,” said Sir Mark, reddening, as he made an effort and rose without assistance; but the room seemed to swim round, and he staggered and would have fallen, had not his surgeon caught him by the uninjured arm, and helped him to a seat, letting him gently down into a half-reclining position.

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

two would be enemies for a woman's sake.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the room?"

He glanced at Mace.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It depends so upon the man."

"Eh? How?"

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

"Well?" said the founder.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“About Mace?” said Gil, quietly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Why?” said Gil, gravely.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“No harm?” said Gil.

“No: so we’ll stop at once. Think you I’m going to let a man like you fool the girl with fine words? You journey here, and you journey there, and you see saucy Frenchwomen, bright-eyed Spaniards, and dark-haired Portingallo dames, and those of Italy, and no one knows where beside. Court them, my lad, and marry as many of them as you like. May be you have now a wife in every port, but you must e’en leave my little white moth alone. Let her flitter and flutter about and be satisfied with the soft light of the moon and stars; I don’t want her pretty wings singed in the fierce light of a thoughtless man’s love.”

“Amen!” said Gil, softly.

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

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

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

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

“Well, if you will know, Master Gil, I looked out across the Pool some little time back, and I saw a certain young man out there in my boat fishing. All at once he thrust his hand into a bucket of water, and seized a feckless gudgeon, which he deftly hooked, and then threw overboard for the pike to seize. And, as I looked, I saw a little hand taken and kissed, and I knew then that one Captain Culverin had hooked a second gudgeon as well, and that he might play with her for a time, as he

watched her helpless struggles in his hot hands, and then he might throw her overboard too. Then the scales fell from my eyes, and I saw that I had been a fool—one who had been so wrapped-up in his cannon-making that he had forgotten to watch what went on in his own house. Gilbert Carr, you have ceased to be a brother to my child, and have made hot love to her. Come, confess.”

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

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

“But Master Cobbe—”

“I’ll hear no more, I say.”

“Nay, Master Cobbe, this is unreasonable.”

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

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

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

As he said these words Jeremiah Cobbe, the founder of Roehurst,

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

How the Founder set a Trap to catch a Lover.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The day wore on as Gil sat there thinking! the wood-pigeons set up their mournful coo-coo, coo-coo, heedless of his presence; the blackbirds that swarmed in the low coppices, where the trees had been cut down, uttered their alarm-notes, and then came and hunted out the wild cherries close at hand; and at last, as here and there the bright lamps of the glow-worms were lit, the rabbits came out to frisk and feed, so still and thoughtful was the occupant of the glade.

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

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

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

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

“I should slay him if he did.”

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

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

It must have been ten o'clock when Gil came in sight of the gables standing up against the soft, clear summer sky. The occupants of the

neighbouring cottages were asleep, and with the exception of the beetle's drone, and the baying of some bugle-mouthed beagle, all was so silent that the ripple and rush of the water in the stone channel seemed to rise and fall with almost painful force.

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, dear, I am here," he replied, eagerly.

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

window now.”

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

“Are you turning poet, Gil?”

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

“You foolish boy.”

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

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

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

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

Gil sighed content.

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

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

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

“I am.”

“What?”

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

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

Meanwhile as Gil’s dark figure was seen approaching the house, the

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

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

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

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

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

"He won't drown," muttered the founder; "and it will be a lesson to him—teach him that I don't mean play."

Walking softly back to the mill-wheel he crossed again, made his

way into the house, and then to the window, where he once more took up his position, and began to watch the dimly-seen crossing, waiting to see the disturber, as he termed him, of his daughter's peace, fall headlong into the channel.

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

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

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

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

"My poor lad!" he groaned. "What have I done? Of all the passionate fools!—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Heaven knows," cried Gil; "don't stop to talk."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How Wat Kilby went wooing.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Which I am not, then,” thought Gil.

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

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

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

“Hollo, Wat!” cried Gil.

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

a sitting position with his back against an old beech, gazed up in the speaker's face and replied—

“Hollo, skipper!”

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

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

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

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

“Yes, yes; and what did you see?”

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

“Yes, yes; go on.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“You were not watching me?”

“I arn’t going to tell no lies. No.”

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

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

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

“Hah!” And then a puff of smoke.

“And I would not willingly hurt your feelings.”

“Hah!”

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

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

“Silence, sir,” cried Gil.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You never ordered me not to go," growled Wat.

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

"Hah!" with a smokeless exhalation.

"And the flat-nosed Malayan in the Eastern Seas."

"Hah!"

"And that Chinese, yellow, moon-faced woman."

"Hah!"

“And the black girl on the Guinea Coast.”

“Hah!”

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

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

“Soft? Yes.”

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

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

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

“Then it’s a disgrace to you!”

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

“Why you’re an old man, sir!”

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

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

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

“No, I oughtn’t, skipper,” he cried, excitedly. “And, look here, don’t you say that there terrifying word to me again—I hate it. When it’s all over, if you don’t have me dropped overboard, just as I am, at sea, or even here at home in the little river, I’ll come back and haunt you. Coffin,

indeed! Talk about such trade as that! Just as if I hadn't sailed round the world like a man."

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

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

"Who did?" cried Wat sharply. "Nay, captain, never."

"Have I been mistaken, then?" cried Gil, eagerly. "Stop, though—you don't mean to say that you have been casting your ancient eyes on Janet?"

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

"Why, man, she's eighteen, and you are sixty-four."

"All the better," cried Wat. "Janet it is, and I'm going to wed her."

"Does she know it?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Ay, ay, skipper."

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

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

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

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

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

How Mistress Anne sought a Spell.

The days passed swiftly on in the lonely little valley where Jeremiah Cobbe had cast his lot. The trees flourished, and the wondrous variety of

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

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

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

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

Dame Beckley's preparations did not seem to do the good she anticipated; still they did some, for, being composed of so much water and vegetable juices, they must have had beneficial effects upon the

roses and other plants around his bedroom window—plants which the young courtier duly moistened from the vessel sent to him. Otherwise fared the wine, for of that he partook liberally, as well as of Jeremiah Cobbe's strong drinks.

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

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

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

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

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

and struck at her she cut it again and again till she had disabled it, and ended by crushing its head in the earth.

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

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

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

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

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

This long worm the robin seized and bore, writhing and twining, in its bill to the path, where it set down its prize, but only to seize it again and give it a series of fierce nips from end to end, accompanying each nip

with a sharp shake to stop the twining, which, however, was not entirely done, for when the little redbreast seized its victim by the head there was a slight undulating motion going on—a movement continued as the bird began rapidly to gulp it down.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Quite in the chimney-corner, and seated upon a stool so low that her chin was brought in close proximity to her knees, was a hard-featured gaunt woman of sixty, dressed in widow’s weeds of a very homely kind, but scrupulously clean. The muslin kerchief and cap she wore were white

as snow, and her grey hair was tidily smoothed back. But, in spite of her neat look, there was something repulsive about the woman's face—a look of low cunning that played about her thin lips, which were drawn in at the corners, while she had a habit of bringing her thick grey eyebrows down over her eyes so as almost to conceal them, though, as you looked at her, you felt that she was scrutinising you severely from behind the shaggy grey fringe, and judging you from a hidden point of view.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Nine.”

“And nine drops each time?”

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

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

“Yes,” said Anne Beckley.

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

“Yes, but that could not matter.”

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

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

“And why are you sure, lovey?”

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

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

“But I can’t, Mother Goodhugh,” cried the girl, petulantly.

“Ah, but you do,” said the woman, who began to walk up and down

the brick floor, muttering and talking as if to herself. "She must, she must, for she is very beautiful and good. She has but to wish it over the nine drops to win the hearts of as many lovers as her heart desires."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes, yes,” cried the girl.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Shall I hear it?" faltered Anne.

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

may happen.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Touches?”

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

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

whispering of many voices, which passed, came back, and died away in the distance, leaving her in the midst of a silence that was profound.

How the Spell began to work.

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

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

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

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

"Coo—coo—oo—oo. Coo—coo—coo—coo—coo—oo," came from somewhere far below.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Got her, lads?” said another voice.

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

“What are you going to do with her?”

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

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

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

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

“Oh, up yonder,” was the reply.

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

“The skipper!”

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

“Yes, yes; it must be,” she thought directly after; and these were some of the rough, adventurous men of whom she heard whispers at the

Moat—the crew of bold, daring fellows, who sailed round the world and braved all dangers, even laughing at the laws; for one of Captain Gil's men had been taken before her father for some offence, and when the worthy baronet was about to condemn him to fine and imprisonment, amercing him in coin as well as time, he had leaned forward and whispered that in the justice's ears which had made him reconsider the case and dismiss the prisoner in the end.

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

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

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

"Now, be careful how you come or you'll break your pretty neck, and then—Curse it, here be the skipper."

"What's this?" cried a well-known voice. "Whom have you here? Mistress Anne Beckley?"

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

"You dogs, how dare you?" roared Gil, while, with a sense of indescribable joy, Mistress Anne held her head against his broad breast, heard the resonant utterances which seemed to echo in his chest, and listened to the firm, strong beating of his heart. She never for a moment thought of tearing away the bandage; but, when she did raise her fingers, Gil's stout hand prisoned both of hers and held them tightly, where they

stayed without resistance, nothing loth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

was at liberty to her face.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It did not occur to Gil that the position he occupied was a strange one, if seen by a looker-on, for he was too much concerned by the apparent suffering of his charge, and, as her fright had been caused by his followers, he felt in duty bound to try and make up for their insolence by his consideration for her weakness. He stood, then, supporting her as she held her hands pressed to her aching eyes, and smiled encouragement as she at last looked timidly up at him with a very pitiful expression of countenance, and ended by catching his hand in hers in the excess of her gratitude for her deliverance, and kissing it passionately, as she burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

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

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

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

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

How Mother Goodhugh played the Part of Shimei of Old.

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

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

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

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

"But I impose upon you, Master Cobbe."

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

will like to see.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Nay, but I’ll curse thee now,” said the old woman excitedly, as her eyes glistened, her wrinkled cheeks flushed, and her grey hair seemed to stand right away from her temples. “Let him hear me curse thee for an

ungodly man with all his trade, a maker of devilish engines, and hellish thunder and lightning in barrels, in which he shall some day pass away in a storm of fire and smoke and brimstone fumes.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Shame on you, Mother Goodhugh, shame!” cried a voice; and pale,

and with eyes red with recent weeping, Mace Cobbe ran forward to throw one arm across her father's breast, and stand between him and the old woman, as if to shield him from her anger, as, advancing with upraised stick and her eyes flashing with excitement, she seemed no inapt representative of a modern sibyl.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Shame on you, Mother Goodhugh," cried Mace, with her pale

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Yes,” cried the old woman, breaking in again, “gives me bread to smother my curses,” and she shook her stick menacingly, “and I curse again. Give me back my boy—give me back my dear. When he does

that, I will take back my curses and ill-wishings to myself, and bury them beneath the earth. Till then they will cling to him; and mark me, all, ill will come to this roof. It is builded on the sandrock," she cried, pointing to how the house stood in a niche of the scarpd rock, which ran right behind the building, towering up with the broom and gorse and purple heather, dotting the open spaces where the pine and hornbeam ceased to grow, a pleasant-timbered gabled house, where it seemed, with its climbing roses and blushing flowers, that sorrow could never come—"it is builded on the sandrock, but it shall be rent asunder, and dissolve in flame, and smoke, and ruin, and destruction, and then—then"—she cried hoarsely.

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

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

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

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

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

"Poor souls!" cried the founder, cheerily; "they believe her to the

bottom of their hearts. Why, hey, here's Master Peasegood, to bear me out. I say, Master Peasegood, that if an old and ugly woman chooses to set up for a witch, and only curses hard enough, she'll find plenty to believe in her."

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

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

"I was coming to pay my respects to you—Sir Mark Leslie, I believe."

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

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

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

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

"Not I," said the new-comer: "I'll go and sit in the shady room, and hold discourse with fair little Mace, and the ale. I shall stay to the next

meal, so you need not hurry," he added, to Sir Mark's disgust.

"You're welcome," said the founder. "How is the holy father? Why didn't you bring him?"

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

"Ay, with all her might."

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

"But you don't like cursing," said the founder.

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

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

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

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

it be the love of the woman for the man.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mace nodded and smiled.

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

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

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

“I hardly know,” sighed Mace.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How Tom Croftly took his Chastisement.

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

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

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

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

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

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

over something in the middle of the building.

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

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

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

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

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

A shout from the founder roused him from his musings, and he shaded his eyes with his hands, and watched the furnace, whose light now grew more silvery every moment, and whose fluttering flames seemed to be more full of wondrous dyes. The light was sharper and

more defined, and in the darkness below, where there were tiny points of light, shewing that there were crevices in the firebricks, Sir Mark could make out the figure of the founder standing with a great iron bar in his hands.

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

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

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

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

"My father—where is my father?" cried Mace, running up wild-eyed

and pale.

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

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

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

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

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

"We be all here, Master."

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

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

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

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

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

meditatively at the blood.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The great fellow began to rise slowly, with the obedience of a dog, but the parson interposed:—

"Nay, nay, Master Cobbe; thou hast done enough beating."

"The master's quite right," said the foundryman; "I ought to have looked after the trade."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

begins to play Shimei and throw her stones.”

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

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

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

How Gil signalled in vain.

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

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

“She may have him and welcome,” cried Anne, with her old passion for Gil reviving moment by moment, as she felt now sure of gaining the dearest object of her heart. It was to her, then, nothing that Gil seemed

cold and distant when he parted from her near her father's house, that must needs be she felt as she warmly pressed his hand; and then with cheeks flushed with hope, and joy in her heart, she hurried home full of faith in Mother Goodhugh, and ready again to seek her aid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gil's eyes flashed as he turned sharply round and faced his companion, who was about to lay one of his fat hands upon his arm; but

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

After an hour's walking he came to a spot where the stream widened out a little, and he gave a nod of satisfaction as, fifty yards in front, he saw the tall gaunt form of Wat Kilby wading in the pools, and stooping down from time to time beneath the overhanging stony banks to thrust in his hand, and more than once retire it with a glistening speckled trout, which he thrust into a satchel hanging beneath his arm.

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

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

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

"Not they," growled the old fellow. "How could they?"

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

"Yes, I know," said Wat.

"You know?"

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

“You saw her?”

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

“And you didn’t interfere?”

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

“Did she go up higher?”

“Not a step.”

“Nor Mother Goodhugh?”

“Not half a step.”

“Why did she bring her there?”

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

“Do you think that’s the case?”

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

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

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

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

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

“Hang your trout!” cried Gil, impatiently.

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

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

“The flour and all?”

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

“What time shall we begin?”

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

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

As he rose and left the stone where he had been sitting thinking so long, there was a slight rustle close at hand, such as might have been made by a snake or a lizard; but it was caused by no reptile, for a human head rose slowly from out a clump of bracken, and, after waiting patiently and listening with all the caution of some wild animal, the head was lowered again. A low rustling noise followed, the grass and ferns quivering as something passed beneath them, and the track by which the owner of the head was slowly creeping away could be traced along the side of the ravine in the dim light, as if some hare or fox were cautiously working its way.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

wrong, that those she loved should treat this trade so lightly, and readily distribute all that could be made.

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

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



How Master Peasegood entertained his Friend.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Not this hot weather, poor things, I hope," said Master Peasegood.

“It’s warm enough here; I don’t know what it would be there.”

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

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

“They’ve seen the lights again, Master Peasegood.”

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

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

“Marshy exhalations, luminous vapours, terrestrial lamps, Mistress Hilberry.”

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

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

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

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

noise.

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

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

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

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

For answer, Father Francis held out his hand.

“Nor the Captain?”

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

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

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

“Forbidden subject,” said Master Peasegood.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Would it not be a sin?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Ay, it is,” said Master Peasegood. “It reminds me of my sensations when I was once prevailed upon by Dame—nay, she was Mistress Beckley then, for Sir Thomas had not paid a thousand pounds for his title—by Mistress Beckley to drink of a wonderful decoction of hers, made of sundry simples—agrimony, rue, marshmallow, and dandelion. It has always been my custom to drink heartily, Father Brisdone, so I drank

lustily from the silver mug in which it was placed. Poor mug, it was an insult to the silver to put such villainous stuff therein. The very swine would have turned up their noses and screwed their tails; and I forsooth, for good manners' sake, gulped it down. Here, father, drink some of this honest ale, and let us take the taste of the Indian weed from our lips."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Father Brisdone sighed.

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

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

They were standing in a narrow path, running at right angles from a

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

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

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

How the Forest Spirits paid their Debts.

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

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

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

She held up her hands and opened her eyes wide.

“It be witchcraft, Jarge,” she exclaimed.

“Nay—nay, girl,” he cried; “it be somebody else’s craft, and what’s that on the bin?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

the lead and the captain walking with the rear.

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

Trees switched and rustled their branches as the heavy horseloads brushed against them; the wild animals of the wood scampered off at the sight of the dim lanterns; but they had been journeying on for quite an hour before a faint whistle placed Wat Kilby on the *qui vive*, when, seeing what was wrong, he and a couple more men stole off amongst the trees to get to the rear of those who were watching the strange file, and directly after the two clerks were struggling on the ground in utter darkness, while the horses passed on, and Gil came abreast.

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

"We've made a mistake, skipper," growled Wat Kilby. "It's the parson and the holy father."

"What were they doing here?"

"Watching," growled Wat.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“But you had us seized.”

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

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

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

“Bah! away with thy trash.”

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

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

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

He was not long in reaching the last horse, and walked steadily by its

side; he came to a halt in the dark ravine just below where Mistress Anne had been seated for so long upon the stone, and here a busy scene took place, the horses being rapidly unladen, and pack, chest, and barrel being carried or rolled along a shelf of rock beneath an overhanging ledge of sandstone, where the little gorge seemed to come to a sudden stop before branching out in a fresh direction.

Sentries had been placed at some distance along the only approach to the place; and while they kept guard one of the lanterns was carried in through a rift in the rock, and placed upon the block of stone, where it shed its rays upon the scene, lighting up a chamber that had evidently at some very remote time been cut from the rock, another communicating with it at the back; and here on shelf and ledge were piled up in picturesque confusion what seemed to be ships' stores, and a heterogeneous collection of barrels, bales and kegs. Some evidently contained gunpowder, while others as certainly were filled with that more humble meal—flour. Then there were rolls of sailcloth, coils of rope, racks of swords and pikes, and a couple of small pieces of artillery.

There was no confusion: bale, keg, barrel, and box were carried in by the men in perfect silence, till the last load of the horses had been deposited, when Wat Kilby growled out an order, and four men put their shoulders to a huge mass of stone, which they rolled over twice, when it blocked up the low entrance to the cave; a few branches were carefully dragged back to lie athwart it, and the party once more set off as silently as they had come, but this time with the captain in front and Wat Kilby at his side.

"You will have plenty of time on your hands for the next month," said the former; "you had better keep an eye on that fellow, Abel Churr. I have been thinking which would be best: to catch and threaten him—"

"That's one way," said Wat.

"To bribe—"

"Two ways."

“Or to take no notice.”

“Three ways.”

“If he gets in, which he could not do without help, he would only take a few odds and ends that we should never miss. The awkwardness would be another party knowing anything about the store when we are away. One might come back from a voyage to find the whole place wrecked.”

“What do you say to shutting him up for a month to bring him to his senses?”

“Would not do,” said Gil, as they trudged on through the forest.

“Take him off with us to sea?”

“No, I would not do that.”

“Hang him, then, out of the way,” growled Wat. “I’ll bury him after, for he don’t deserve such a Christian burial as dropping over the side with a shot at his heels, to be standing up at the bottom of the sea ready to rise again.”

No more was said, and the strange, weird-looking train passed silently on through the forest till the cultivated land was neared, when, without a word, the strength of the party seemed to gradually diminish, a team of horses dropping behind here, a pair there, a single horse further on, till at last horses and men had all disappeared, and Wat and the captain stood together in a moist-smelling glade, with the early morning air coming in gentle puffs, sometimes salt from the sea, with the faint, peculiar odour of decaying seaweed, sometimes sweetly-scented with the hay which farmers here and there were making for their winter store.

“Let Abel Churr rest,” said the captain quietly. “I may find means of quieting his tongue.”

“I’d like to do it myself,” growled Wat, as they separated, but only for the latter to be called back.

“Have you been hanging about the Pool-house lately, Wat?”

The great fellow shuffled about, and rubbed one ear.

“You need not answer,” said Gil, quietly, and he walked away.

How Mother Goodhugh cursed Abel Churr.

The rocky ravine which looked in the darkness like the entrance to some mystic region had hardly been vacated by Captain Gil’s crew, and the storehouse that he had formed in this stronghold of nature left to its solitude, before there was a curious rustling noise on high; a piece of bark fell to the ground; then a dry, dead twig; then the rustling was continued, and ceased for quite a quarter of an hour before it began again.

This time it was commenced more loudly, and a branch of a tree overhead in the darkness quivered and jerked.

“Too—hoo—hoo—hoo—hoo—hoo—o—hoo—o—o—o—o!” cried an owl somewhere close at hand, when the noise suddenly ceased, and all was silent once more for a good half-hour. Then the rustling was resumed, and in the dim starlight a figure was seen to descend a tree, rustling and scraping the bark till it reached the patch of soil in which the gnarled oak was rooted, and, thrusting aside the bushes, the figure made its way down to the trickling stream, which, after running apparently from the rock, coursed amongst the stones and ferns, half-hidden from the light of day, down the ravine bottom, to join some larger rivulet miles away.

The dimly-seen figure crept cautiously along for some distance without venturing to stand erect, but at last, feeling apparently free from danger, it began to walk with less circumspection, though always in a flinching, animal-like fashion.

Day was breaking as it reached Mother Goodhugh’s cottage, and after glancing up at the window, to be sure that the inmate was not

stirring, the visitor crept up the bank opposite, and beneath a spreading fir-tree, where, curling itself up in an animal way, it went off to sleep.

Some three hours later Mother Goodhugh was partaking of her breakfast—no simple meal, but one of substance, graced as it was with eggs and goodly bacon-rashers, gifts of foolish peasants' wives who came to consult her concerning sick pigs, failing poultry, and milk-dry cows—the door was wide open, and the sparrows, after chirping about amongst the thatch, dropped down one by one, hopped right in, and kept picking up the crumbs the old woman threw from time to time upon the red brick floor.

Sometimes she made a sound with her lips which brought others down to partake of her bounty, much to the annoyance of an old one-eyed magpie, which hopped to and fro in a wicker-cage, and cried, “*chark*,” and “*ha, ha, ha!*” the former being the nearest approach it ever got to charcoal, a word which, with brimstone and powder, Mother Goodhugh intended to form her pet's *repertoire*.

The sparrows hopped in over the lintel, seized crumbs, and flew off over and over again. Then there was a loud fluttering of wings, the birds departed, and Abel Churr entered, brushing off the fir-needles which clung to his hair and gaberdine.

“Just in time, mother,” he chuckled. “Here, I've brought you the toad weed picked at midnight, and here are stink-horns and toadstools, fit to brew the strongest charms you will. Give me some breakfast.”

“Shame upon thee, idler, for wanting to live on a lone widow's substance!” cried Mother Goodhugh.

“Don't I help thee to all kinds of trade to make the substance rich?” chuckled Abel Churr; “but wait a bit, mother, I've found a treasure-house; a store of riches; and I'm a made man. I know where to find all that I want from time to time. Would'st like to share it?”

“Yes, yes,” cried the old woman, eagerly; “what have you found, Abel?”

“Help me to something to eat,” he said, with a cunning smile, “and then I’ll talk to thee.”

She hastened to put before him bread and milk, and eggs, and bacon, of which he freely partook, gazing at the hostess from time to time in a peculiar way, as if he had some further plan at heart.

“You don’t tell me what you’ve found,” said Mother Goodhugh. “Come, tell me, lad. You’ll be happier for having some one to share it all.”

“Found!” he cried, laughing; “I’ve learned that about Captain Culverin that he would kill me for knowing, did he find me out. Ha, ha, ha! I shall be rich now, and can help thee back more than thou hast helped me to, Mother Goodhugh. Where are the strong waters?”

“I have none,” said the woman sulkily. “It is a lie,” he cried, sharply; and, rising, he stepped to the little chimney-piece, raised an old shell, and took out a key, which he held up, laughing.

“Nay, nay, give me the key,” cried the old woman, making a dash to seize it; but with a savage thrust, more like a blow, he sent her staggering across the brick floor, to fall heavily, and lie for a few moments half stunned, while, chuckling with glee, Churr opened a corner-cupboard and took out a quaint-looking black bottle, which he carried to the table.

“Coward—thief!” cried the old woman, as she struggled up; “thou shalt not have it;” and she ran to the table, when, with a malignant look, Churr struck her heavily with the back of his hand, sending her against the wall, where she stood panting.

“Keep away, or I’ll pook thee again,” he cried, sourly.

“Drink it, if you dare,” she cried, with flashing eyes. “It is poison of my own brewing. Drink, and die then: coward, to strike me thus.”

Abel Churr’s whole aspect changed; his yellow countenance looked haggard, and his hand shook, as he stared from the old woman’s face to the bottle, and back again.

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Mother Goodhugh, seeing her power; “drink away, lad, drink. I’ll see thee buried beneath some tree, and come and gather toadstools from off thy grave.”

Churr set down the bottle upon the table, and, as he did so, his hands trembling visibly, Mother Goodhugh slowly sidled up, and was about to make a pounce upon the flask, when, with a cunning flash of the eye, Churr forestalled her and snatched it up, laughing heartily as he took out the cork, and smelt the contents.

“Old mother of lies,” he cried, chuckling. “I’ll drink this poison all day long. Hah!” he ejaculated, shaking the flask so that the spirit within gurgled. “Hah!”

He placed the vessel to his lips and drank savagely, while Mother Goodhugh stood glaring at him, with head stretched forward and fingers crooked like the claws of an animal about to spring.

“Here,” he cried, pouring out a little of the spirit in a cup, and holding it to the old woman; “here, I will not take it all. Drink, mother, drink.”

The old woman eagerly snatched up the cup and drained it.

“That settles it. I thought so,” he said, laughing, as he took another draught. “Poor old Mother Goodhugh will be poisoned, too. Old fool! to think thou could’st deceive me with such shallow tricks. There,” he continued, after another draught, as he thrust in the cork, and placed the flask in his breast. “Now I be going away.”

“Help me that bottle,” cried the old woman. “Don’t take away that flask. It is mine.”

“No more thine than mine,” cried Churr, turning round at her with a snarl. “Haven’t I for years helped you in getting together what you have; helped you to cheat and trick the silly, gaping fools about here with thy mummeries? Speak to me again as you did, and I’ll go and tell them all of thy tricks, and jugglery, and putting water in the founder’s moulds to blow them up, and let them see thee as a woman like themselves—old idiot

that you be.”

“Tell them,” cried Mother Goodhugh, furiously, as she made an effort to tear the flask from him, but only to be driven back by another furious blow; “tell them, coward, and they will not believe thee. You mock at me—do you? You call my spells foolery. We shall see how you will fare, now that I curse thee, and tell thee that thou shalt not die upon a bed.”

“Curse away, mother,” he cried. “I have the strong waters.”

“They’ll not believe thee; while, if I say the word, there are a dozen who would slay thee for injuring me, and leave thee to rot in the forest or die on a mixen.”

“Say it then,” he cried, with a malignant grin. “Let them try if they dare.”

“We shall see,” cried the old woman, stretching out one hand, and gazing fiercely at her confederate. “I do curse thee sleeping and waking. You have braved me, Abel Churr, and laughed at all my trade. Now we shall see.”

“Yes,” he said, “now we shall see;” and, putting the bottle in his breast, he turned to the door. “I fear thy threats as much as I do thy poison. Ha, ha, ha! Poison—brave poison—good poison—poison for princes. Mother, wouldn’t you like to know what I have found out about Captain Gil?”

“Nay, keep thy knowledge,” cried the old woman, fiercely. “I know it, too. You will not live to enjoy it. Now, get thee gone.”

“What!” he said, jeeringly. “Shall I not share my riches with thee, my dear old partner? Shall we not join now in cheating and tricking some one better than the wretched village fools? I tell thee that Captain Gil is rich, and I have his secret: I have found his store.”

“And I tell thee, Abel Churr,” cried the old woman, “that thou hast always been a villain, a brute, and a coward to me. If thou knowest aught of Captain Gil’s secret, you will keep it, and share it with none. From this

day I have neither truck nor trade with thee, so go thy way, and my curse go with thee. But take this to heart as thou goest: Captain Gil is a stern man, and if thou hast learned aught of his, and he knows it, look to thyself, or maybe thou'lt be sattled."

Abel Churr uttered an impatient "Pish!" and left the place full of his discovery. Avoiding the cottages of the workpeople, he went round by the back of the Pool, to where, like a lawn in the wood, lay a few acres of grass cut down for hay, a part of which had been stacked, the remainder lying out to dry, for a heavy rain had checked the carrying for a day or two.

Churr looked round, listened, made sure that the field was empty, and then started and looked timidly upwards as a jay uttered a loud harsh cry and flew towards the wood. Then, crawling to the half-made stack, he climbed upon it, separated the soft, sweet-scented hay, took a draught of the spirit, corked the bottle and thrust it in the heap, and then, nestling down and drawing the hay over him, he was in a few moments fast asleep.

How Abel Churr bought a Secret.

That was a bitter as well as a momentous day for Gil Carr. In the course of the morning he made his way to the Pool-house, determined to have a few words with Jeremiah Cobbe, and to talk calmly to him concerning Mace and the future. He felt, too, that a little sympathy was due to the founder after the late accident at his works.

He went straight to the house, for he had taken Mace's words to heart, that he should go boldly to the place; but, on entering, he was only met by Janet, who came after he had walked in according to old familiar custom, and rapped loudly at an inner door.

Janet came down, looking red-faced and guilty, from one of the upper chambers.

"Why, Janet," he said, "the house is as quiet as if all were dead.

Where have you been, lass? Why, that's thy mistress's kerchief on thy head!"

The girl snatched it off, looking redder and more guilty than before, and hid it behind her.

"I'd wager, Janet, that thou hast been upstairs trying on thy mistress's finery. I'll tell her so."

"Nay, pray, Captain Gilbert," she cried, excitedly, "you would not make mischief between us. I did but—"

"That's confession enough," said Gil, laughing. "Now, tell me where is thy master?"

"Down at the furnace-house, seeing to its being new-roofed, sir," replied the girl.

"And thy—" Gil stopped with beating heart, for he dared not for the moment ask the question—one that he felt he could himself answer. "One word though," he cried, "Mistress Janet. I have something to say about that pretty face of thine."

"Oh, Captain Carr," said the girl, blushing. "You must not talk to me like that. What would my mistress say?"

"That I was doing right, child. Harkye, you must not be showing that pretty face and those bright eyes to men who cannot become thy sweethearts."

The girl's heart beat fast, and she looked up and looked down, began to plait her apron, dropped Mace's kerchief, snatched it up, hid it behind her; then turning her head, with the pleasant flush of surprise deepening upon her neck.

"Why, Janet," said Gil, laughing, "you look as modest as if you were being courted."

"Oh, Captain Carr," she simpered, "you must not talk to me like that;"

and the weak girl fell a-trembling, telling herself that now her mistress had taken to go a-walking with the handsome young knight staying at the house, Captain Culverin, the bold, handsome fellow, of whom every maiden far and near had spoken as a hero, had fallen in love with her.

“Not talk to thee, child,” said Gil, laughing. “Look here, Janet, I must be plain with thee.”

He looked at her in an amused way for a moment, and then, catching one of her hands, he took her chin between his finger and thumb, and raised her face so that he could gaze straight into her humid eyes.

The tears stood beneath the lids, and in another moment she would have cast herself upon the captain’s breast had not a word or two more dispelled her illusion.

“I’ve known thee, Janet, since thou wert a little toddler, to whom I gave sugar from the Western Isles; and for thy mistress’s sake, Janet, would not have harm befall thee. Look you here, child, Master Wat Kilby hangs about here to gratify his old eyes by casting them upon thy pretty shape and face. Now, Janet, have you ever given him encouragement?”

“As if it was likely!” cried the girl, snatching herself away, and her whole aspect undergoing a transformation. “A girt, old, ugly man like that; I’d pook him if he dared touch me. Such trade as that!” and she was flinging herself out of the hall when Gil checked her by saying, sternly—

“Stop, girl! I am glad of it, for Wat Kilby is no mate for thee. Where is thy mistress?”

“Where should she be?” cried the girl, spitefully, and with flashing eyes she went on: “Out in the forest reading love-songs to Sir Mark, same as she now does every day.”

She ran off to hide her tears, but not before she had seen how cruel a stab she had given her mistress’s lover; and then, seeking her own chamber, she cried for long enough over her disappointment, and as

much for sympathy for the brave young fellow whom she had, as she well knew, cut to the quick.

Gil stood biting his lips, as he thought over the girl's words.

"No," he cried, "I won't believe it; Mace is too good and true."

He went out of the house to where the founder was directing his workpeople, who were busily laying massive oaken beams across the damaged building; and as Gil came up the old man nodded, talked of ordinary things, and then excused himself on the plea of business in so marked a manner that Gil could not but see that his presence was irksome, and soon afterwards left.

He had hoped to have seen Mace, but he felt that he could not wait there now, and in a purposeless way he turned off the beaten track, meaning to throw himself down in some dry, shady spot, and try and arrange his thoughts. As it happened, fate led him straight to an opening in the forest, where two paths met—a place where the founder's men had cut down the great oaks, leaving a clump of firs standing here and there, and beneath them was a mass of dry odorous pine-needles, the collection of many years. The old stumps left by the woodman's axe were pretty well overgrown with moss, grass, and the various wild-flowers of the wood; and altogether a better spot than this opening in the thick forest could hardly have been found for noonday dreamings.

So thought Sir Mark, as he lay at Mace's feet, while she, with the bright rays of sunshine darting through the thin needled foliage, to lose themselves in her glossy hair, sat on one of the old stumps, and read to him in a soft, sweet voice—one which to Gil, as he came suddenly upon them, seemed softened and attuned to fall tenderly upon the invalid's ear.

"He is well enough by now, I'll wager," muttered Gil, as he walked straight up, to find that Mace rose as soon as she saw him, coloured deeply, and greeted him in a cold and injured way.

Gil Carr's hot blood danced through his veins, and, in his haste, he forgot to recall the last time they had met, when he was seen side by side

with Anne Beckley; and, attributing Mace's constrained manner to her vexation at being surprised with Sir Mark, he turned upon that gentleman fiercely, to find his glances returned with interest. For there was a look of triumph in the visitor's eye, and a contemptuous smile on his lip, both of which seemed to say to him, "There, you see you have no chance; I am all conquering, and the day is mine."

Very few words passed before Mace, who feared a quarrel, said—

"Will you return with me now, Sir Mark? The sun is growing hot, and my father will be waiting."

He bowed in his most courtly manner, and, taking her hand, helped her over a fallen tree, and again across a rift in the earth, while Gil, trembling with rage, disappointment, and mortification, stood gnawing his lip.

"And this is woman's faith!" he cried, as he strode away. "Oh, that my ship were fit for sea, or that I had something I could do."

He stopped, thinking for a few minutes, and then walked away straight for the ravine, partly to pass the time, partly because he felt uneasy about his store; while, sad at heart, poor Mace walked beside her companion, who sighed and never ceased to try and show her how hopelessly he was in love.

It was very unfavourable for the progress of vegetation where Gil Carr strode over the ground, trampling down the tender forest herbage, tearing aside the young growth, and leaving a harsh track through the forest, till, getting nearer to his destination, he seemed to grow more careful, and ended by waking to the fact that any one might easily trace him by his trail.

Altering his mind then, he struck down beside one of the rivulets, and followed its course pretty closely to the river—a small enough stream, but one which at times carried a considerable depth of water.

A mile along here brought him to a busy nook, where, around a

goodly-sized vessel, a score of men were hard at work with hatchet and adze repairing and restoring plank and timber that had been torn and riven by the rocks and waves of a long cruise. It was only the hull, every bit of rigging having been removed to lighten her for the men at work; and seated upon a barrel, smoking, giving orders or directions, was Wat Kilby, who rose to make his report on seeing his skipper approach.

Gil did not stay long. He saw that his men were working hard, and that they were well provided for in the sheltered nook by the little river side, which he had made his vessel's port; and at last, as the evening was coming, entered the boarded hut which formed Wat's home for the time, partook of a rough meal with him, gave him certain orders, and turned once more towards Roehurst, meaning to go up the ravine on the way.

He was weary with much walking, and low-spirited. What had been a pleasant sojourn ashore had become wearisome and full of pain, due, he felt, rightly or wrongly, to the coming of Sir Mark, the recollection of whom made his brows knit and his hands involuntarily clench.

These thoughts stayed him in his course, and more than once he sat down thinking whether it would not be better to get away to one of the ports, and charter a small vessel for a trip, so as to occupy his mind.

"And leave the field open to the enemy?" he cried, springing up. "Nay, that's not like Gil Carr."

With sundry plans in his head, then, he now went straight on, climbing up the rugged sides of the ravine, heedless of the growing darkness, and at last reaching the entrance to his store.

His intention had been to glance at it, and make sure that it was all right, and then to go on to Roehurst for the night, hoping to gain an interview with Mace, and take her to task for her change, when he had spoken of himself.

But as he reached the entrance his heart stood still, for his worst fears were confirmed. The retreat that he had taken such pains to keep a

secret, and had shrouded with enough mystery to make the goings and comings of his men an object, not of curiosity amongst the simple superstitious people, but alarm, had been discovered, and by some one full enough of enterprise and daring to make his way inside.

The first thing that struck his attention was a tall, stout fir-pole, which had evidently been used as a lever to dislodge the stone that stopped the entrance, and on going close up and peering in he could see a dim light burning upon one of the barrels, while a figure was down upon its knees hard at work opening a case.

"The pitiful thief!" said Gil, as a movement on the intruder's part let the light fall upon his face. "As I thought—Abel Churr. Well, Master Churr," he muttered, as a hard look came over his face, "you have discovered a secret that should be paid for—with death—the due meed awarded to a thief."

He drew his long, thin sword, and, holding it before him, stepped cautiously forward; but altering his mind, he thrust it back into the sheath with an impatient ejaculation, and once more peered over the stones between them at where the marauder was busily prising open the case.

"The fool!" muttered Gil; "if that candle burned down he would be blown to pieces. What cursed luck that he should have found us out."

He took another step forward cautiously, to avoid being heard, lest Churr should dash by and escape; but, once inside, the captain's person blocked the way, and stepping boldly forward, Churr started up with a shrill cry, like some beast when tracked to its lair.

"You dog!" cried Gil, as he dashed at him, receiving, as he did so, a heavy blow from the iron bar with which the adder-hunter had been wrenching open the case.

He staggered back, and Churr was springing over him, but he was too late, for, recovering himself, Gil seized him tightly, and a fierce struggle began.

Churr had sprung forward so sharply that Gil Carr was driven to the narrow platform beyond the stone, and the struggle took place outside the cave. But it was not of long duration, for Churr was no match for the well-built, muscular young man, who, after wrestling with him here and there, ended by wrenching from him the iron bar, and they fell heavily on the narrow shelf of rock, from which, if either slipped, he would go down some forty feet perpendicular, and then crash through the bushes into the dark bed of the rivulet far below.

“What—what are you going to do?” panted Churr at last, as he was held half over the side.

“To kill you, as I would any other thieving rat or vermin who came to steal. But tell me first who knows of this place beside you?”

“No one, not a soul,” howled Churr. Then, feeling that he had made a mistake, he added hastily, “Only a few trusty friends.”

“The first words were the truth,” said Gil, sharply, as his hand sought his belt; “the last were added to make me afraid to kill you, lest others should come and be aware of the deed. Abel Churr, you have learned a secret, and you must have known the risk.”

“But I’ll never tell, and I’ll never come again. I’ll never help it to a soul, or say a word about the trade.”

“Never,” said Gil in a low stern voice.

It was quite dark now, and the gloom of the ravine seemed heavier than ever as Abel Churr, who felt that his end was near, wrenched himself slightly round to gaze shudderingly into the depths below; and then as he fancied that he saw the flash of a knife in Gil’s disengaged hand, while the other held him tightly by the belt, he uttered a loud shriek, that was repeated from the rock in front, to die off in whispers as if the man condemned to death were already on his way to the unknown shore, and his voice could be heard farther and farther as he onward sped.

How Tom Croftly had a Holiday.

The founder yielded one day to Tom Croftly's importunities and gave him a holiday, which also meant taking one for himself, and to thoroughly enjoy it they both got up early.

Tom Croftly was first, reaching the Pool-house before it was light, and just as the blackbirds had begun to hunt in the damp corners for slugs and snails.

It was quite an hour later before the founder joined him, to find Tom working away with the heavy old wheelbarrow and the manure-fork.

"Hallo, Tom, you here?" said the founder, looking eastward, where the golden orange flecks told of the coming sun.

"Here? Ay, been here this hour; most emptied the mixen, and got a brave girt bed made; but who's to work wi' such a tool as this?" and he held up the fork.

"You, if you've any sense in your head," growled the founder, who was sleepy yet.

"I've got some sense in my head," said Tom Croftly; "but no man can't work with a noo-fangled tool like that. I never see such a thing. It breaks a man's back. A fork ought to have three tines in it."

"And I say it ought to have four," said the founder, tartly. "Why, as soon as you started to fork dry stuff with the other it all began to tumble through. That new four-tined fork holds it."

"Ay, and 'most breaks a man's back," grumbled Tom Croftly. "Falls through? Why, of course it does. That's nat'ral, and as it should. It's the small as falls through, and you takes up all the crumbs after wi' a shovel. 'Taint like having a holiday to work wi' a tool like that."

"There, get on," said the founder, "and don't grumble. Lend me the fork."

He seized the implement, and loaded up the barrow easily and well, turning afterwards to his man, "There, you can't do better than that."

"And where's your crumbs to finish off with at the top?" grumbled Tom Croftly. "We shan't get much of a cucumber-bed, you'll see."

"Look here, Tom Croftly, if you're going to grumble like this, we'll go back to the foundry-work."

"Nay, nay, master."

"Thou askedst for a holiday, and I said 'yes,' and here it is."

"And my garden wanted it badly, master."

"Yes; but I'm not going to holiday keep with a grumbler."

"I'll never say another word, master, only that tool felt as if Mother Goodhugh had put a spell upon it. Hoop! wup!"

The two latter ejaculations were uttered by the founder's man, as he lifted the barrow-handles, and then pushed the barrow along over the dewy grass-paths to where the cucumber-bed was to be made.

"Mother Goodhugh never put a spell on anything in her life," said the founder, stoutly, as he began to unload the barrow in a little square marked out by four strong pegs.

"I dunno about that, master," said Tom, rubbing his great bullet-head.

"Why, Tom, Tom, thou'rt never such a fool as to believe in ghosts, and sprites, and witches?" said the founder, arranging the stable manure carefully with the fork.

"Nay, nay, master. Oh, no. I don't *believe* in 'em, but it was curus that the mould should blow up in that terrifying way after Mother Goodhugh had been."

"Curious if it hadn't," cried the founder, patting down his work. "If Tom

Croftly had given a look to the mould first, or if I had—as I ought to have done—there would have been no explosion.”

“Nay, master, I think she ill-lucked the mould.”

“And I think she poured a pail of water in, my lad. Why, Tom, you’re six feet one high.”

“Six foot two and a half, master,” said Tom, in a self-satisfied manner.

“And as strong as a horse.”

“Ay, master, I am. I lifted our pony off his legs the other day.”

“And yet you’re afraid of that poor half-daft old woman.”

“Nay, nay, master; not *afeard*,” said Tom, stoutly. “I never felt afeard o’ Mother Goodhugh yet; but you see, if she do happen like to be a witch, it be just as well to be civil to her like, and not do anything to make her curse one.”

“Curses don’t do any harm, Tom, my lad,” said the founder.

“I hope they don’t, master, for Mother Goodhugh do curse you a deal.”

“Let her,” said the founder.

“Shall I fetch they crumbs in a trug, master?” said Tom, watching intently the formation of the cucumber-bed.

“We will have the bed a deal higher yet, Tom, and put the crumbs on the top, and a couple o’ hills of nice warm earth a’top o’ that. We must have some finer cucumbers this year than Dame Beckley grows up at the Moat.”

The manufacture of the cucumber-bed went on, and Tom Croftly had the satisfaction of fetching the “crumbs” in a trug or truck-basket; after which, the founder and he had a long turn at the patch of hops, which

had been growing rather wild and away from their poles. The wild ones were carefully twisted round the supports, and tied at intervals with rushes to keep them in place, after which, it being seven o'clock, the founder proposed breakfast, and led the way to the house.

Sir Mark had accepted an invitation the previous day, after much protesting that he was still too weak and could hardly get about, and had gone to dine with Sir Thomas at the Moat, and stay the next day over, so that Mace felt herself free and forgetful of her troubles. She set aside the haunting thoughts of the fate of the weapons her father made, and devoted herself to domestic duties that had of late fallen to Janet's lot.

"Morning, mistress!" cried Tom, coming smiling in at the kitchen door, through which he could see Mace with her sleeves rolled above her white elbows busily trying the new cakes that had been baked for breakfast.

"Good morning, Tom," cried Mace. "Quick, Janet, get out the cold bacon and draw a mug of ale."

Tom smiled broadly, as he took his place at the white, well-scrubbed table, for it was an understood thing that whenever Tom Croftly had a whole holiday, that is to say, had a cessation from foundry-work to go in the garden, he had his meals at the house.

The founder's breakfast was ready, but he was called away, so Mace remained busy about the kitchen, going in and out of the dairy where the golden butter lay in rolls, and the yellow cream was so thick in the broad pans that it went into wrinkles and crinkles, like an old woman's face when it was skimmed.

The glorious sunshine came in at the open door, with the scent of the flowers, and the bees buzzed about the blossoms as they journeyed to and from their round-topped hives, while Tom Croftly took a long draught of ale, sighed, and then began work upon the new loaf and bacon.

"This be a fine cut o' bacon, mistress," said he, as Mace came near.

"I am glad you like it, Tom."

“Ay, I like the bacon, mistress, but this here knife’s a wonder.”

“What, isn’t it sharp, Tom?”

“Sharp, mistress, bean’t nothing to it. It be terrifying sharp, and it be as keen at the back as it be at the front, and that’s what I don’t like, for it’s risky like at the corners o’ your mouth, and when a man’s mouth is already two sizes too large, it’s a pity to cut it bigger.”

“Take another, Tom,” said Mace, placing one for him.

“Thanky, mistress, that’s kindy of you,” said Tom. “Eh, but you be grown into a flower. Here, only t’other day, and I see thee balancing thyself on thy two pretty little pink legs, and couldn’t get on wi’ my work for watching thee—lest thou should fall.”

“You always were very kind to me, Tom,” said Mace, smiling.

“And always will be,” said Tom Croftly; “for, mistress, it did my heart good to see thee stick up for the master again that old Mother Goodhugh.”

“Poor weak woman!” said Mace, sadly.

“Ay, poor weak old woman; but she’s got a sore heart, mistress, like as—as—some one else have as I knows on.”

“Who’s that, Tom?” said Mace.

“Captain Culverin Carr,” said Tom, striking the table with the haft of the knife. “Ah, I don’t like dressed-up jay-birds from London.”

Mace was silent, but she looked at their old workman with eyes that were half alarmed, half angry, and hearing her father’s voice hurriedly left the kitchen.

“Ay, so his heart is sore,” muttered Tom Croftly, after a glance round to see that he had not been heard. “If I thought that ill-wishing that London spark would keep him away from here, I’d give Mother Goodhugh

my biggest couple o' ducks—that girt young 'un and his brother.”

Tom Croftly stopped and sighed for a long time over his bread and bacon before returning to the enjoyment of his holiday the founder did not join him, however, for a good half-hour longer, when Mace was by his side.

That was a golden day to both—a holiday indeed. No allusion was made to the departure of their visitor, neither was Gil's name mentioned; but, as if some burden had been removed from both their hearts, they seemed to have made up their minds to have one day such as they had been accustomed to in what seemed like the olden times.

With a straw hat to shade her bright face, Mace was now looking on, while the raspberry canes that had broken loose were retied to their stakes, and then she held the knife as she had a score of times in childhood while the founder went down upon his knees to take the bindings off from some freshly-grafted trees, commenting upon his work, and boasting of its superiority over the grafting done at Dame Beckley's.

Then there were the cuttings of those curious plants to see to that Gil had brought back from his last voyage, and they seemed to be progressing well, all but one that was being eaten by a grub.

Mace listened eagerly, thinking that her father would mention Gil's name now, but he went on weeding out a few interlopers before he seemed to recall whence the cuttings came, and then he frowned and turned off to another part of the garden.

The cloud passed away directly, and they were chatting merrily again or listening to Tom Croftly, who possessed a very long tongue, and had plenty to say.

“Lor', Miss Mace, look at my apple-trees, how they be a-hinging down a'ready!” cried Tom Croftly. “Look at the girt big uns lumpeting all down the boughs. I'll have to put a strod under yon branch, or a wilt be breaking down.”

"They look lovely, Tom. No scarcity this year."

"Not there, mistress. It all comes o' well wassailing the trees. If there's anything I like, its a good apple-howling in due season."

"But you don't think it makes any difference, Tom?"

"Not make any differ, mistress? Why look at my trees this year."

"Oh, they are loaded enough, Tom," said Mace, smiling; "but would they not have borne as well without that noise the lads made on New Year's Eve?"

"Not they, mistress. I like the boys to come round to the orchards, and shout and go round the apple-trees in a ring," he said, stopping to hold his reaping-hook horizontally, and making a movement with his left hand, as if to complete the circle, while he closed his eyes and repeated the following doggerel, as if it were some sacred verse:—

'Stand fast, root; bear well, top;
Pray the God send us a good howling crop.
Every twig apples big;
Every bough apples enow;
Hats full, caps full,
Full quarters sacks full.'

"That's it, mistress; that brings the apples. There's a fine cluster o' little wild strawbries here," he cried, as he "brushed," as he called it, the thistles and nettles that were springing up under the orchard trees.

"I'll bring a basket and pick them, Tom," cried Mace; and she ran quickly back to the house.

"A swap soon gets dull, master," said Tom, stopping to sharpen the broad-bladed reaping-hook he held, and gazing the while after Mace. "Eh, but it ought to be a girt and good man, master, who has young mistress for a wife. A king wouldn't be good enough for she."

"Right, Tom," said the founder. "Hallo, what's the matter?" he cried,

as Mace came running back in a state of great excitement.

“The bees, father—a swarm.”

Down went Tom Croftly’s hook and whet-stone, and away he and the founder ran to where the bees were in full flight, a late colony, after hanging in a pocket-shaped cluster outside their straw dome for days, having at last persuaded their queen to start.

It was a headlong flight, but not off and away, for as the founder and his man came up it was to find that the busy little insects were darting to and fro, as if bound to describe as many elongated diamonds as they could in the hot sunshine. There was a sharp angry buzzing hum in the air, and, after running into the kitchen, Tom came back with a broken poker and the brass preserving-pan, which he belaboured wildly like a gong, evidently under the belief that the bees would be charmed or stunned into repose.

“Nothing like dinging ’em well, master,” he cried, as the bees darted here and there. “They won’t sting thee, mistress. There, look at the pretties!” he cried. “Well done! What a cast, and as big as a May-day swarm.”

This was as he saw that the queen had settled upon a pendent branch of a young plum-tree, the workers clustering round and over and under, and clinging one to the other, till there was a great insect mass, which made the bough drop lower and lower till it nearly touched the ground.

“That be the very place to have ’em, master,” he cried. “Now, mistress, thou’lt take them, won’t thee? It’s a fine girt swarm. Ye marn’t be afraid, and they won’t hurt thee. I’ll fetch a hive.”

He trotted off, leaving father and daughter watching the great mass of bees hanging some two feet from the ground; and soon after Tom Croftly returned with a clean hive, which he busily rubbed with sugar dissolved in beer, while he held a bee-board under his arm.

“Now, mistress, art ready?” he cried.

“Nay, Tom, I’ll take them myself,” said the founder. “We mustn’t have her stung.”

He took the hive from his man, placed it beneath the great ball of insects, and gave the branch a quick sharp shake, with the result that nearly all fell into the hive. Another shake sent in the rest, so that it seemed as if they must be crushed or infuriated into stinging him to death; but, though some rose and buzzed around his head, he quietly placed the bee-board, handed to him by Tom, over the open hive, deftly reversed it, placed it under the shade of the tree, and left it there for the insects to settle in their new home.

The bees had been left but a few minutes, when, with his face lit up with smiles, the founder exclaimed, “Why, Mace, that’s been a warm job. Tom Croftly would like a mug of ale to drink success to the swarm.”

“And you will have one, too, under the apple-tree, father; and—just one pipe.”

“Get out!” cried the founder, “putting temptation in a weak man’s way.” But he went to the large seat under the old apple-tree, that spread its longest branches over the Pool, and had just settled himself down as Mace returned with his big silver tankard, pipe, and tobacco.

“Hah! that’s prime!” he said, as he seated himself in an easier position, gazing through his half-closed eyes at his luxuriant garden and the glistening surface of the Pool. “Why, here comes the parson. Hey there, Master Peasegood: just in time!”

The stout clerk had seen the founder in his garden, and came panting up, his face seeming to grow broader as he neared the apple-tree.

“Hah!” he sighed, shaking hands as he sat down, “what weak creatures mortals are. Here have I been murmuring against the heat, and the great burden of flesh I have to bear, and all the time there is rest and

refreshment waiting to be offered to me. Mace, my darling, if I were not a parson, I'd say by the hand of an angel. Thanks, child, thanks! Cobbe, here's thy good health, man. May'st thou never be as fat as I."

He drank heartily and passed the flagon to the founder, who tapped the lid up and down as he said with a look of pride: "My own barley, parson—malted myself; my own hops—grew yonder; and the ale—brewed in my own tub. Good as Dame Beckley's home-made wine, eh?"

"Don't talk about it, goodman," cried the parson, with a look of disgust. "Come, thou hast raised a desire to take the taste out of my mouth that seemed to come in. Give me the flagon once again."

The founder passed the ale, and the visitor took another draught of so vigorous a kind that, after the operation, Mace started off to refill the vessel.

"Ah!" sighed Master Peasegood, "the dreadful draughts that good, weak woman has presented me to drink are something terrible to think of:—agrimony tea, balm wine, camomile tea, and a score more; but the worst of all is that dreadful juice of her sour well-squeezed grapes, that she calleth wine. Master Cobbe, will you kindly pass the ale, and methinks I'll take a pipe."

The parson dined with them, and stayed on as if to supper; Tom Croftly enjoying the rest of his holiday his own way, which was in "terrifying weeds," as he called it, chopping away with a hoe at the luxuriance that sprang up in the moist, fertile garden. In the evening the seat beneath the apple-tree was occupied, and they sat and talked as the soft running murmur of the water came pleasantly to their ears, while Mace, in the enjoyment of the pleasant hours, and forgetful of her love-troubles for the time, worked as long as she could see. Sir Mark was forgotten, and, in spite of one painful remembrance, Gil's bronzed, handsome face filled her fancy as she listened to the whirr of the nightjar from the oak plantation, and from the bosky clumps away towards the ironstone hills the thrush's evening hymn; and then away and away for miles till the sweet songs sounded faint and died away.

Sweet halt in the journey of her life. Sweet music of water and song-bird. Sweet scent of rose and clematis climbing round the windows of the house. The very air laden with sweetness, so that Mace asked herself why she had ever felt unhappy when she was surrounded by such joys.

Not one word or thought had for hours been given to Sir Mark, and he had, as it were, dropped out of her memory for the time, till, just as supper was ready, Mace saw Tom Croftly making signs to her with the handle of his hoe.

She rose, and left her father talking earnestly with the parson, to go to where the foundryman was standing waiting for her to come.

"I've about terrified all them weeds, mistress," he said, "and I'm going home. The bees be all right, and I've had a rare fine day; but there be some'at as I want to say to thee, child, and I don't quite like to speak."

"What is it, Tom?" said Mace. "Is it any thing I can do for you?"

"Yes, mistress, it be; though I beant quite sattled in my mind whether I ought to tell'ee. Did that there trug as I made you do, mistress?"

"Oh, capitally, Tom. It just holds enough fruit for one day's picking."

"That be right, mistress, and I be glad. I got the best 'ood I could. All alder 'ood, and well seasoned; and—"

"You want me to do something for you, Tom?"

"Well, yes, mistress. My pretty little mistress as I've knowed ever since thou couldst toddle. Thou won't be hurt like and rate me if I speak?"

"No, Tom, I will not," said Mace, wondering what his request would be.

"Then don't you be guiled into listening unto that fine London spark, mistress, for he's a bad 'un, fond o' wenching, and not good enough for thee."

Tom Croftly did not wait for an answer to his prayer, but hurried away in a shamefaced fashion, leaving Mace with her breast heaving and the colour burning in her cheeks. The tears rose to her eyes, and she seemed to awaken once more to the realities of the present, and, as if to complete the disillusioning of her heart, she heard the tramp of a horse, and as she rejoined her father she heard the stout parson say—

“Hey, Master Cobbe, here comes thy gay visitor. I think I’ll not stay supper. I’ll say good-night. Ah, Mace, my child, you there? Farewell, my darling. Good-night.”

He rolled off, meeting Sir Mark by the bridge, as the latter caught sight of Mace’s dress through the trees, and effectually blocking the knight’s way as he tried to be polite, till such time as Mace had reached her room to sit for hours thinking of Sir Mark’s return. Then she found herself wondering what Gil was doing, and whether she ought ever to give him a thought now as she recalled the scene which she had witnessed with Mistress Anne.



How Gil and Sir Mark measured Swords.

"A courtier," said Sir Mark, smiling, "Well perhaps I am; but see how I have taken to this rustic, delicious life. I have felt like another man since I have been here."

"Indeed, Sir Mark," said Mace gravely, as they stood a couple of evenings later in the founder's hayfield, where the stack now stood waiting for its crowning of straw.

"Yes, indeed," he cried. "Look here; I have been with your men to-day and yesterday when they piled up this sweet-scented hay, and I am growing quite a farmer. I know that Master Cobbe was rather too hurried in getting it up, and that it reeks too much, and that if it were covered in now it would go bad."

"Indeed?" said Mace, and speaking as if her thoughts were far away.

"Yes, indeed," he cried; "and I am growing wise in gun-casting and powder-making. I am learning day by day; but above all, sweet Mace, I am learning how vain and hollow is the world to which I have belonged, and how happiness is not to be found there."

"You are talking in riddles, Sir Mark," replied Mace, dragging herself back as it were to listen to his words.

"Read my riddles, then," he cried, in a low tone, as he laid his hand upon her arm, and arrested her by the meadow-path. "Mace, dearest, listen to me—but for a few moments. No, no; do not hasten—the evening is early yet, and where could be fitter place for what I would say than this sweetly-scented mead, where the soft evening breeze seems to whisper of that which fills my heart? Mace, dearest, I love you with all my heart."

"Sir Mark," she said, turning to look half wonderingly, half in anger, in his flushed face, "do you forget that you are my father's guest; that this is no place of gallantry, but that I, his simple, country-born child, am a mere rustic, and unfit for such as you?"

“Unfit!” he cried. “Shame, when you are beautiful as the fairest woman of King James’s court.”

“The evening is growing damp, Sir Mark,” said Mace coldly.

“Why are you so distant?” he whispered, trying to take her hand. “Nay, nay, this is too bad, you must have seen, you must know, that I love you.”

“I have seen, sir, that it has pleased you to pass compliments, as seems to be a favourite habit of yours, and you, sir, must have seen that they caused me pain.”

“Pain? When I’d give my right hand, my very life, to save you from a single pang! Mace, you know why I have lingered here, even to getting in disgrace with my Royal master, that I might be near you; and now for reward you grow cold as if we had never met before.”

“Sir Mark, I must return home.”

“Yes, directly, sweet; but, Mace, listen to me. You cannot, you will not, be so cold as this?”

“Sir Mark,” replied the girl, “does my father know that you meant to speak to me thus?”

“Pest on her particular ways,” he muttered. Then aloud, “No; but he shall know, if you wish it, sweet.”

“If I wish it, Sir Mark! I do wish it; and tell him at the same time what I tell you now, that I say I cannot listen to your words.”

He was so taken aback by her firmness that she swung open the gate and passed hastily along the road leading to the house, looking excited, tearful, and greatly agitated—a state of agitation increased as she encountered Gil half-way, and knew that he must see her excited manner.

“Mace,” he said, sternly, “I want a few words with you.”

“Not now; not now,” she said.

“Yes, now,” he cried, angrily. “I cannot bear this coldness longer. You must, you shall, listen to me.”

“No, no,” she cried; “another time.”

“Why another time?” he said. “Ah, I see,” he cried, with jealous fury, for, glancing beyond her, he suddenly became aware of the figure of Sir Mark approaching them; and, turning a curious, inquiring look upon the girl, he glanced back at Sir Mark. “There is the reason, then. And it is for this gay court-bird that rough Gilbert Carr is thrown aside.”

Had it been lighter he would not, in his then excited mood, have read aright the look of reproach in the poor girl’s face as she hurried onward to hide the burning tears that flooded her eyes, and reached home to find Father Brisdone waiting by the garden-gate.

“Ah, my child,” he said, saluting her; “a goodly evening. How sweet the wild-flowers smell! Why, what is wrong? You seem in trouble.”

“Yes, yes, father,” she whispered, excitedly. “A sudden fear has assailed me. Go down towards the meadow, follow them into the wood, if they have gone there; my heart tells of mischief.”

“They? Who, child?” said the father, quickly.

“Sir Mark—Gilbert Carr. I fear they will quarrel.”

“Have they cause?” said the father, inquiringly. “Here is Master Peasegood. He was to meet me. Well met, Brother Joseph,” he said, as the stout clerk waddled up. “Leave it to us, dear child, and we will bring these mad boy’s to their senses.”

“Mad boys—senses!” cried Master Peasegood, mopping his face. “What is wrong? You don’t mean that this Sir Mark and the Captain—? Oh fie, Mace, my child, fie!”

“Master Peasegood, if you have any feeling for me,” cried Mace, in

hot indignation, "go and interpose before there is mischief done."

"Phew!" whistled the clerk. "Brother Brisdone, come along."

It was time they started, especially as Master Peasegood's bravest pace was a very slow one, for no sooner had Mace hurried away than, with his anger and jealousy completely mastering him, Gil strode towards Sir Mark, who, on seeing him approach, far from attempting to avoid the meeting, leaned back against the gate, and stared at his rival with a cool exasperating mien.

Gilbert Carr had been a fighting-man from the time he had first learned to handle a sword; he had also been in command of a ship in many a perilous time, and the result of his training had been to teach him the necessity of coolness in danger. This was a perilous time, and from old custom he began at once to master his excitement, and prepare himself for the encounter that he felt must take place. He was as hot and determined as ever, but he felt that he must gain the mastery over this court gallant, or he would never feel happy more. It would result in his increasing Mace's displeasure perhaps, but in his cooler moments he might feel the deepest sorrow for having caused her pain.

All the same, though, the thought came upon him that Mace's name must be left out of the quarrel. It would be cruel in the extreme to have it known far and wide that he and this knight had fought about Mace Cobbe. It would be like a blow at her reputation, and, besides, whatever he might know in his heart of hearts, Sir Mark should not have the satisfaction of jeering at him as the successful lover.

No, there should be some other cause for the fight that would ensue, and it was easy to find one.

Easier than Gilbert Carr expected, for Sir Mark, stung by disappointment and the cold manner in which Mace had received his declaration, after he had, as he thought, carefully laid siege to and won her, was just in the humour to quarrel with a fly. From where he stood he had seen Gil stop and speak to the maiden, and it seemed to him that she had sent Gil on to chastise him for his insolence.

“A confounded little rustic coquette!” he muttered; “and now she sends her bully to me. Curse him, he thinks I am weak with illness and easily managed. Let him mind, or I may deal differently with him to what I did with the old founder.”

As Gil came nearer, asking himself how he should commence the quarrel, Sir Mark’s rage was ready to master him, for he began to feel that all his courtly adulation had been thrown away; that the founder’s daughter had listened in her calm, self-contained way, while he had fooled himself into the belief that he was moulding her, like soft wax, to his will; and all the time this Carr held the key of her heart, and was preferred.

“Curse him, let him mind,” he muttered. “I know one or two stoccatos that he can never have learned; and if I had him at my feet, run through the body, why it would be a service to King James, for the fellow is no better than a buccaneer.”

Gil came steadily up, towards the gate, still at a loss what to say, when Sir Mark insolently faced him, drew himself up, and, staring from his crown to his feet and back again, said sharply,—

“Were you sent to talk to me?”

“No,” said Gil, sharply, “I was not.”

“Oh!” replied Sir Mark, caressing his pointed beard; “I thought, perhaps, the young lady of—”

“Hold that prating tongue,” cried Gil, angrily, “or I may slit it, to teach it manners. I was not sent to talk to you, but I came to seek and know more of the man who has thought proper to settle himself down here. Hark ye! my good knight and follower of King James, the Solomon, the wise hater of tobacco, I want to know your business?”

“Let us see,” replied Sir Mark, insolently. “Are you authorised to inquire? Recollect, fellow, that you are addressing one of his Majesty’s officers.”

"I authorise myself," said Gil, quietly, as he fought hard to keep down his rage and be cool. "As for his Majesty and his officers, tell him that down here in the south are some staunch men, who care no more for him, his laws, and his thick-tongued utterances, than they do for his messengers, however gaily they may be clad."

"You know, I suppose, that I could have you seized, good fellow, and laid by the heels in prison till such time as it pleased his Majesty to have you tried for sedition, and then hung or shot for the peace of his land."

"A way that would seem most meet to you, I presume," said Gil, quietly.

"He is beside himself with rage, and yet trying to madden me, but I'll keep cool and urge him on," thought Sir Mark.

"I shall strike him directly, if he talks to me like that," thought Gil.

"Let me see," said Sir Mark, gazing at his rival with half-closed eyes; "I have pretty well mastered your life, my good fellow; and the country would be purified if you were away. You are one of Raleigh's crew of buccanneering rufflers."

"Sir," cried Gil, proudly, "I am the son of one of the band of brave men who went out with that injured knight, and who look with the most utter contempt upon the north-country faithless puppet who sent him to the block. Pah; he and his followers stink in the nostrils of all good men and true. Let me see," cried Gil, seizing his opportunity, "by your broad speech, sir, you are one of the paltry, ragged Scots who came south with Solomon to seek a home."

"You lie, you scurrilous knave," said Sir Mark, stung to the quick by this last; "I am the son of a gentleman, who knows how to avenge an insult."

As he spoke he sprang forward and struck Gil in the chest with the back of his hand.

The blow was sharply given, and with all the young man's force; but

Gil did not budge an inch. This was what he sought, and, drawing back from the gate, he made way for the knight to pass.

Sir Mark, evidently fearing treachery, drew his sword, but Gil had no thought of foul play.

"I make way for you, Sir Mark," he said, grimly. "Walk on first, sir, while you can."

Sir Mark started at the grim significance of his companion's words; and then, full of doubt in the other's honesty, he strode along a path pointed out by his rival, fighting hard to keep from looking back to see if he were in danger of a treacherous blow.

"Turn to the left, Sir Mark," said Gil, suddenly; "I presume you do not wish our meeting to be interrupted, and it may be if we stay within the wood."

"Where would you go, then?" cried Sir Mark, sharply, for he felt his courage fail somewhat in the presence of a man who grew cooler each moment.

"The lower furnace-house seems the likeliest spot to me," said Gil, quickly. "It will be deserted at this hour; there will be a good light from the roasting ore, and the clash of our swords will be unheard. Moreover, there will be a shorter distance to carry the body of the man who falls."

Sir Mark shuddered, but he made no sign; and, following the direction pointed out by Gil, the two young men came out of the wood below the wheel, crossed the stream by a plank bridge, and then, passing through two or three thick plantations, surrounding as many powder-sheds, they entered a wide stone building, whose floor was of furnace-cinder and charcoal; and, as they stood face to face, the place was far more light than the wood.

Without another word, Gil divested himself of cap and doublet, drawing his sword, and throwing down belt and sheath, in all of which he was imitated by Sir Mark, who, now that he was face to face with the

peril, seemed to lose a good deal of his nervousness, though the coolness of his enemy staggered him.

“Your sword, sir,” said Gil, holding out his hand; but Sir Mark shrank back, and stood upon his defence.

“I merely wished to measure them,” said Gil, contemptuously, as he threw his own upon the charcoal floor. “Measure them yourself.”

Shamed by his rival’s greater show of confidence, Sir Mark made an effort over his suspicious nature, picked up Gil’s sword, and, holding both by the blades as they flashed in the warm red glow of the furnace, he handed them to Gil.

“Nay,” he said; “measure them yourself.”

Gil smiled as he took the weapons, laid the blades together, and finding his own to be fully three inches the longer, he handed it by the blade to Sir Mark.

“That is not my weapon,” said the latter, suspiciously. “Give me my own sword, fellow.”

“Not I,” said Gil; “mine is three inches longer in the blade, and I am not going to have it said that I killed thee by taking a foul advantage. We have no seconds, sir.”

Sir Mark hesitated for a few moments, and then, with the longer weapon, placed himself on guard with a good deal of the ceremony taught in the fencing-schools, while Gil quietly crossed swords with him, and the fight began.

It was a curious sight in that black-floored building, lit by the ruddy glow of the charcoal-furnace, whose illuminating powers sufficed to produce a ruddy twilight—nothing more—through which the figures of the contending men could be seen in rapid motion, as their flashing blades gritted edge against edge, and passes were rapidly exchanged.

Both fenced well, and at the end of a couple of minutes they fell back

by mutual consent. No advantage had been obtained on either side. Each of them had, however, fully awakened to the fact that he had no contemptible enemy to deal with; and as with recovered breath they crossed swords once more it was with increased caution, and pass and parry followed with each exerting all his skill.

Gil fought, in spite of his apparent calmness, with terrible fury, for he was face to face with the man whom he believed to have blasted his happiness, and three times over the keenly-pointed blade he held passed through his adversary's linen shirt, literally grazing the skin.

On his own side in the dim light he had had enough to do to hold his own, for it was only by the most skilful fencing that he was able to throw aside Sir Mark's fierce thrusts, one of which inflicted a skin wound in his shoulder, and another grazed his hip.

They pressed each other in turn to and fro near the furnace-mouth, where the man who faced it gained no advantage, for he was thrown up so distinctly to his adversary's view, and then back right into the gloomiest corner of the great building, where it was so dark that the danger was the same.

The swords gritted and flashed once or twice, emitting faint sparks; the contending men's breath came thicker and faster as they strove on, the sweat in the heated place trickling down their faces in glittering beads; and the fight had grown furious as each, yielding to the fierce excitement of standing face to face with an enemy, strove with all his might to rob that foeman of his life.

At last, being the stronger and more skilful with his weapon, Gil drove his adversary back, step by step, delivering thrusts with lightning-like rapidity, every one as it succeeded the other being more feebly parried; and at last, with a strange sense of gratified passion in his breast, Gil pressed him more sorely, as he felt that he was in his power, when, just as he felt that victory was his, the tables were turned, for Sir Mark's sword which he held snapped short off at the hilt, and it was only by stepping sharply back that Gil saved his life.

For, beside himself with fury, Sir Mark seized the opportunity, and aimed so deadly a thrust that it must have passed through his opponent's body. Gil's rapid retrograde movement saved him, however, for the moment, though he tripped over the remains of a mould, and fell headlong at his adversary's feet.

"Slain in fair fight," cried Sir Mark, exultantly, as, leaping forward, he placed his foot upon his adversary's chest, and thrust at his throat.

"Not yet," cried Gil, hoarsely. "I am a sailor."

As he spoke he caught the descending blade in his hand, turned it aside, and it passed into the charcoal floor, while, before Sir Mark could repeat his thrust, he was sent staggering back as Gil sprang to his feet. Then, sharply striking aside a fresh thrust, Gil closed with his adversary; there was a brief struggle; with one hand holding Sir Mark's sword-wrist, the other raised on high, he was about to strike with his short keen dagger, when a loud cry arrested him, and Mace, followed by her father and his foreman Croftly, ran in.

"Shame on thee, Gilbert Carr," cried Mace, as she rushed between the adversaries. "Is this thy conduct towards my father's guest?"

"Thy father's guest would have run me through, mistress," he said, curtly. "I did but fight for life."

"I'll have no more of this," cried the founder, fiercely. "Gilbert Carr, there have been too much of thy swashbuckling ways."

"Nay, Master Cobbe, you are too hard upon me," said Gil. "It was a fair fight, fairly provoked."

"I'll not have my child made the prize for any fighting," cried the founder, hotly. "Mace, this is your doing."

"If Gilbert Carr made me the object for which his sword was bared," cried Mace, coldly, "he might have left it in its sheath."

"I have not deserved this at your hands, Mace," whispered Gil. "It is

cruel, indeed.”

Mace spoke not, but as she saw her lover’s emotion she felt that she would rather bite out her tongue than say such words again.

“I forbade you my place, Gil Carr,” cried the founder. “You are no friend to me. Sir Mark is my guest, and an officer of the King, whom you have assailed, so get you gone ere the officers of justice lay you by the heels.”

“I fear no officers of justice,” cried Gil, angrily; “and I presume Sir Mark is too much of a gentleman to shelter himself behind their staves.”

“But you need fear them,” cried the founder angrily. “What is this I hear of Abel Churr?”

“What has he dared to tell?” cried Gil, forgetting himself for the moment.

“Men with mute lips tell nought,” said the founder. “Where is Abel Churr?”

“I know not,” replied Gil.

“Nay, but you should know,” continued the founder, as Master Peasegood and Father Brisdone came panting in from an unsuccessful search. “Tom Croftly, tell what you heard. Abel Churr was an idle raff, but he was a man, and one of us here.”

As he spoke Mace’s countenance changed, and she drew nearer to Gil.

“I don’t know much, master,” said the foundryman slowly, “only that seven days ago I saw Abel Churr half drunken, and he was boasting that he knew a secret of the captain’s there which would hang him if it was known.”

“He must have told you, too, Father Brisdone,” said Master Peasegood, quickly.

“Abel Churr did confess to me when I encountered him in the woods, Brother Peasegood, but the words uttered in confession are sacred. I cannot tell.”

“Not if a man’s character is at stake,” cried Master Peasegood.

“I’ll soon end this,” said the founder, as Gil quietly replaced his doublet and took his sword from Sir Mark’s hand. “Gil Carr, speak out like a man. Where is Abel Churr?”

“I do not know,” replied Gil, firmly.

“Had he some secret of yours?”

Gil paused for a moment, and his eyes encountered those of Mace gazing at him in a beseeching way, when a change seemed to come over him, and he replied frankly—

“Yes.”

“What was it?”

“A secret that I wished to keep.”

“How did he find it out?” said the founder.

“How do I know, sir? By creeping through the wood, and dogging my steps, I suppose.”

“When did you see him last?” said the founder.

“A week ago.”

“Where?”

“In the woods,” replied Gil, who submitted to the examination as it were in obedience to Mace’s eyes.

“And what passed there?” said the founder.

"I'll tell you," replied Gil. "I found him prying into my affairs, and I seized him."

"And threatened him?"

"Yes; I swore I would hang him to the yard-arm of my ship if I caught him again."

"Yes—and then?"

"Then I let him go."

"And since then?"

"I have not seen him since."

Mace's eyes brightened with satisfaction, and Gil, as he stood there alone, felt recompensed for much of the past, as it seemed to him that now he was in trouble she was turning to him.

"Sir Thomas Beckley must know this," cried the founder. "The suspicion is that Abel Churr has been foully dealt with, and that you, Gilbert Carr, are to blame."

"And I say that whoever charges me with hurt to Abel Churr lies," cried Gil, hotly. "The scoundrel had a secret of mine in his keeping, and I did threaten him, but I let him go when I had caught him robbing me, with such a warning that I felt he would never come again."

There was truth in his bearing, but somehow there was only one present who believed him, as he stood there alone, while the founder said coldly, "Gilbert Carr, there's a dark suspicion hanging over thee. It may be that the deed was not done by thee, but by orders to thy men; but, anyway, it behoves thee to clear thyself by finding Abel Churr. Till you can do that, come upon my premises no more. Sir Mark, we are a rough people here, and set at naught some of the laws, but we hold a man's life in good esteem. I shall see Sir Thomas, our justice, in the morning, and no stone will be left unturned to find this wretched man."

“Gilbert Carr,” said Master Peasegood, advancing; “speak out once more—Do you know aught of this wretched man?”

“I have said all I know, Master Peasegood,” replied Gil, quietly. “I can say no more.”

“We must wait, Master Cobbe,” said the parson. “Seven days are but a short time. He will come back perhaps ere long.”

“I hope he will,” said the founder, firmly. “Gilbert Carr, this is my land, and no place for thee.”

Gil looked at him angrily, and then at Mace, whose glance disarmed him once again.

“As you will, Master Cobbe,” he said. “Some day perhaps you may regret this harshness to so old a friend. Mace, as I am to be dismissed, good-bye till we meet again—in better times.”

He advanced and held out his hand, but Sir Mark, who was near her, interposed.

“Stand back, sir,” he said; “no man with such a suspicion resting upon him shall touch Mistress Cobbe’s hand.”

Gil seized him by the shoulder, and with one swing hurled him aside.

“Your hand, Mace Cobbe,” he said, holding out his own, in which she laid hers for a few moments, before hurrying to her father’s side.

A dead silence had fallen on the group, and as Gil turned to go he felt that appearances were sadly against him, though it would be vain to say more then. Striding across the foundry he made for the open door, angry even unto passion, but helpless under the pressure of opinion. He was not prepared for the fresh reverse that he encountered, as, after turning to exchange a fierce glance with Sir Mark, which said plainly enough, “We shall meet again,” he was half startled by finding his way barred by Mother Goodhugh, who was standing in the doorway, full in the red light cast by the furnace.

He drew back as the old woman moved her stick and stepped into the building.

“Is he to be screened?” she cried aloud. “I say, is he to be screened? Your friend, Master Cobbe—the friend of your child—the man you mean to make your son. I say, is he to be screened?”

“Hold thy prate,” cried the founder, angrily. “Mother Goodhugh, I am in no humour to listen to thee now.”

“Nay, but thou shalt listen. I say is he to be screened? Gil Carr,” she cried, turning upon him sharply, “where is Abel Churr?”

“Stand aside, woman,” cried Gil. “I know not.”

“But you do know,” cried Mother Goodhugh. “He was my only friend, and I will have all brought to light. He went to follow you in the forest. You met him—speak, did you not meet him?”

“I did,” said Gil sharply. “And you murdered him,” cried the old woman. “Ha, ha, ha! As I said—as I said; more care for the house of Cobbe. The curses fall thick and fast. As I said, as I said. Yes, get you gone, murderer, and you, good people, have the forest searched for the remains of his victim. He must be found—he must be found.”

Gil turned upon her angrily, but he did not speak. He strode from the building, out into the summer night, hot and angry; and as he went along the lane he could hear the old woman’s shrillest tone as she shouted after him; and even the hurrying water in the race towards the wheel seemed to repeat the word “Murderer,” in his ears.

How a Casement was opened.

In the days which followed there was a diligent search for Abel Churr, in which Gilbert Carr’s men joined hands with those of the founder, for reasons best known to Gil; and every likely place in the forest was searched save the ravine leading to the cave entry, and that was gone

over by Gil's men alone. At times there might be one or two who felt disposed to give Gil the credit of having made away with a man who had been a spy upon his actions, but very little was said on the matter, the common people, as a body, liking the captain and his men, whose return from a voyage was heartily welcomed, even though at times they were rather more than free.

Those who spoke out and sided with Mother Goodhugh received hints to keep their tongues more quiet, the hints being traceable to Wat Kilby; but there was but little need to speak. Gil was too great a favourite; and when there was some talk (on the part of Sir Thomas Beckley) of the captain being arrested and inquisitions made, Sir Thomas received so broad a hint from his daughter not to interfere with Gil, and also from the captain's followers, to let matters rest, that he hastily obeyed.

"I'm not going to blame thee, skipper," said Wat Kilby, one day when the heat of the search was over; "but wouldn't it have been better to have shut him up for a bit till we started, and then have taken him away?"

The captain turned sharply round upon him.

"Look here, Wat," he said; "do you believe that I have murdered Abel Churr?"

"Lord, no, lad, not murdered; that be too terrifying a word. Pooked him—executed him for a spy—pooked him; and quite right too."

"Once for all," cried the captain, "let it be fully understood by you, and you can tell the men, that I caught Abel Churr in the store, and, after frightening him, I let him go, making him swear that he would never approach the place or divulge its position to a soul."

"Do you want me to tell the lads that?" said Wat.

"Yes, of course."

"Nay, then I'm a mutineer. I'm not going to help 'em to such words as that."

“Why not?”

“Why not, skipper? Because it would lower you in the eyes of every man of the crew. What! after the oath we swore, and after the way the boys have kept it, for you, our captain, to go and let loose a varmin who had broken in and was robbing you, perhaps hunting out the savings and trade every man has got stored up here? Nay, captain, it would be degrading you in the eyes of all.”

“What would you have done, then?”

“What would I have done?” said Wat. “Why, same as you did—killed him like the varmin he was, and buried him in the mixen or under the stones.”

“You really believe, then, that I killed this man in cold blood?”

“Why, of course, skipper; you couldn’t do otherwise. As to a man and cold blood! bah! he was a rat, and he was caught. Do you know how the lads searched the little valley?”

“No.”

“Crept through the wood, pooked the grass aside, and sat down and smoked,” said Wat with a chuckle.

“Then they did not properly search it?”

“Of course not,” cried Wat, gruffly. “You don’t suppose they wanted to find that girt fox, do you?”

“Wat,” cried the captain angrily, “you disobeyed my orders. That place shall be searched, and that at once.”

“What—and try to warm up the scent again, captain? Nay, he’s saddled, let sleeping dogs lie. The world’s all the better for there being no Abel Churr; and the adders and things can have a chance of marrying and having families without being pulled out of their holes by the tail.”

As he spoke, the old sailor turned away, and Gil walked to the cottage where he had his temporary home.

That night on the dark bank in front of the Pool-house four glow-worms shone out for the first time for weeks, and Gil Carr walked across the little swing-bridge towards the founder's garden.

The sight of a few glow-worms on that bank might have been expected after the many that had been placed there at various times by Gil, but they never stayed long, for the blackbird or thrush generally made a meal of them; and when, on that night, Mace went up to her room, glancing out as was her custom before drawing the blind, she knew that before long there would be some one waiting beneath the casement, and her heart began to beat.

She had not seen Gil since the evening of his encounter with Sir Mark, and, truth to tell, she had watched night after night to see if he would try to see her, and sad of heart had gone to her sleepless couch without a sign.

Sir Mark was still there, but was to leave in a day or two, having sent on his report of the works, and pleading ill-health as a reason for staying longer. But his conduct to her had changed. There was less of the sighing gallant in his manner, though he appeared pained by her coldness, and treated her with studied respect.

The founder and he seemed to be growing firm friends, though Mace with pain saw that the visitor was gaining an ascendancy over her father's actions that augured no future good.

Janet was with her in her room that night, and meaningly drew her attention to the tiny lights, but received so sharp a look for her pains that she ventured to say no more, and soon after left, the room to go and stand irresolutely in the passage, thinking.

"He's there," she said, with malicious glee lighting up her eyes; "and he's forbidden to come. He played with me and tricked me, professing so much and then laughing at me, and telling me I was not to listen to old

Wat Kilby. Suppose I trick him.”

She paused, thinking for a few moments, and then slipping into a small room—half dressing-room, half bureau—she took a cloak and hood from a peg and slipped them on.

Meanwhile Gil had passed softly into the garden, and stood waiting in the darkness of the summer night, to see if Mace’s looks towards him had any meaning, and he had not waited long before a faint click told him that the casement had been opened.

“Mace.”

“Gil.”

“Why have you come?”

“Because you were in trouble, Gil, and I wished to say a word or two of comfort, and to ask you of Abel Churr.”

“I know what you would say,” he said, softly. “Am I guilty? Is’t not so?”

“Yes.”

He laughed gently as he strained his eyes to try and make out the outlines of her sweet face.

“Mace,” he said, “it is like old times to be here again, and there is more light and hope in my heart than there has been for weeks. Let me answer you with another question. If I were guilty, Mace, should I be here?”

“No,” she said softly, as her hand stole down, white and soft, amongst the roses, to be seized and held to his breast. “But tell me, Gil, with your own lips, that you are innocent; that this charge is not true, and I will believe you.”

“Mace, child, so help me—”

“Stop,” she whispered, hastily; “the man who loves me needs no oaths. Tell me on your word, Gil, as a gentleman, that you are guiltless, and I will believe.”

“There is my hand,” he whispered; “place yours within it. There; does it burn?”

“No,” she whispered; “it is cool and soft.”

“Yes,” he said, quietly; “but if it were stained with Abel Churr’s blood it would burn and flush at the touch of your innocent palm. If I said there had never been blood upon it, child, I should lie; but it has been the blood of an enemy, shed in fair fight; and as often,” he added, with a laugh, “it has been my own. Mace, you have never misjudged me, darling? Tell me that you never believed me to be the assassin they would make me out.”

“Never, Gil.”

“Thank God, then, that I was suspected.”

“What?” she cried, starting.

“I say thank God that I was suspected.”

“Why?”

“Because it has swept away the clouds between us, and turned your gentle heart to me because I was in pain and trouble: that is all.”

“Is that all, Gil? Did I ever turn from thee?” she faltered.

“Yes,” he said with a half-laugh, “you believed me false and trifling with Mistress Anne Beckley, whom I had saved from the annoyance offered by my men; and I, poor silly-pated fool, believed you to care for that coxcomb Sir Mark, whom, thank heaven, you saved from an unkindly blow. Yes, sweet, I have been a fool, a jealous, weak, but always loving fool. Forgive me, for I must go.”

“Forgive you, Gil? Will you forgive me my want of trust?”

“With all my heart, sweet; and now I must leave you. Mace, child, thou art my wife, or the wife of no man, come what may. If I stay from you it is because I would not anger thy father by these pitiful nightly visits. I love you too well, child, to come like this. Perhaps in a week or two I shall be away across the seas, where night and day your face will be my hope; Mace, your dear eyes will be the stars by which I steer. Good-bye, sweet, good-bye.”

He held her hand tightly in his, and it clung to his in return. Then placing his left hand on the heavy trellis, and a foot on the sill below her casement, he raised himself to a level with her face, and as he drew her to him lips touched lips for a brief moment, and then he lightly dropped back again, as a quick rustling noise, and a hasty exclamation, followed by steps, fell upon his ear.

“I must go,” he whispered, “for both our sakes. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

Plain, homely words; but they meant much as spoken then.

Turning once more to gaze up at the window, Gil was walking rapidly the next moment towards the path, when a dark figure started up in his way.

End of Volume I.

How Janet was clasped in the Wrong Arms.

A signal made with four glow-worms can be seen by many who happen to be gazing out into the darkness of the night. Janet had seen them plainly, and, as it happened, so had the founder, who took down—and buckled on his sword, and then crept cautiously to Sir Mark’s chamber.

“Are you awake?” he whispered.

“Yes, yes,” cried Sir Mark, starting up with a cry; “is aught the matter?”

“Hush, man,” whispered the founder, “or you’ll alarm the house. One would think I had told thee that one was setting spark to the powder-barrels in the cellar.”

“Powder-barrels in the cellar?” said Sir Mark, in a hoarse whisper.

“Of course. Where would’st have them for safety? Tut, man, it is not Guido Fawkes who has come. He is here.”

“What, Fawkes?”

“Nay, how dense thou art. Up and dress quickly. He is in the garden, I’ll wager, trying to keep tryst with my child. Dress quickly, and bring thy sword. If he be not pricked to-night as a warning my name is not Cobbe. I’ll wait thee in the passage below.”

He slipped out on to the broad landing, and waited, when, to his surprise and rage, he saw a figure hooded and cloaked, glide down the stairs and out of the front door, which creaked lightly as the girl passed through.

“Curse her!” he muttered. “I could slay her at once, but I’ll take her with him. Pest on this fellow, how long he is!”

He was completely out of patience when he heard the stairs creak, and Sir Mark crept softly down.

“Quick!” the founder cried, “or we shall be too late. Now,” he whispered, “go you and watch, sword in hand, by the bridge. You can manage without going in this time, while I search the garden. We’ll trap him to-night. How dare he come?”

The couple separated, and, each taking his apportioned part, Gil Carr’s chance of escape seemed small indeed. He was beneath Mace’s window, and in another minute the founder, sword in hand, would have been upon him, had not a faint cry from another part of the garden drawn

him aside to where, dimly enough, he could see Mace's cloak and hood beside a tall dark figure.

The founder stood watching for a few minutes, and, sooth to say, hesitating; for now it had come to a point, he was loth to injure Gil, partly from a latent liking for him, partly because of his power amongst the people of the place. But the recollection of Abel Churr's disappearance made his heart grow stern, and, with the full determination to chastise Gil for his insolence in coming to the house after being so sternly forbidden, he cautiously advanced to where the figures were standing.

The catching of a rose-thorn in his doublet and the sharp rustle the twig gave in being released sufficed to alarm the wearer of the cloak, and she glided quickly down the garden-walk with her companion, disappearing from the founder's gaze; and, though he followed them cautiously, they must have gone down some side-path, for he could not see them again.

"Pest on them!" he muttered. "They knew I was on the watch."

Under this impression he crept cautiously back towards the house, expecting to see them there; but, though he waited some time, there was no sign, and he went down the garden again, which, fortunately for Gil, was sufficiently extensive to allow of the meeting in progress going on unheard.

The founder was not aware of the fact, but more than once in the darkness he was literally hunting the two figures, which kept gliding on before him, avoiding him almost by a miracle, till in sheer weariness and disgust he returned to where Sir Mark was impatiently watching near the bridge.

"Well! Hast seen them?" he said.

"Nay," said the founder, "only once. We'll wait here and see if they come."

The words had scarcely left his lips before he uttered an

exclamation, and ran towards the house, just in time to catch a dark figure stealing towards the door.

“Quick!” he whispered to Sir Mark, who had followed him; and, half-carrying the captive within doors, the founder tore aside the hood, exclaiming against his daughter for her wanton ways.

“What will Sir Mark think of you?” he cried angrily. “He will—Why, curse the girl; it’s Janet!”

Janet it was, who on the spur of the moment had masqueraded as her mistress, gone down the garden, and with throbbing heart thrown herself as she believed in Gil’s way. For he suddenly seized her in his arms, and, though she uttered a faint cry and escaped, she took care not to go beyond his vision, but led him a Will-o’-the-Wisp kind of dance from walk to walk, till, thinking she had been sufficiently coy, she stopped short, quite out of breath, and allowed herself to be caught.

He who captured her was sharper of eyesight, and, in spite of the cloak and hood, not for a moment deceived. He had made too much use of his eyes by night for them to play him false; and, as once more he caught the girl in his arms, he held her tightly, exclaiming—

“Why, Janet, you pretty little witch, have I caught thee at last?”

The girl no sooner felt the rough face of her captor against hers than she struggled vigorously, though in vain.

“Why, it be Mas’ Wat Kilby,” she panted.

“Wat Kilby it is, my darling,” he replied in an amorous growl. “Who did you think it was?”

“Never mind,” cried the girl; “loose me, you wicked old bear, or I’ll shriek for help. There—quick—there’s some one coming.”

It was so true that Wat Kilby relaxed his grip, all but that upon one of the girl’s wrists, and this he held as together they hurried through the garden on tiptoe, Janet, becoming more amiable, whispering her

companion to go cautiously “for heaven’s sake!”

He obeyed her, and together they glided from path to path of the great bosky, tree-shadowed garden, literally hunted from place to place by the founder, until, finding that he had given up the quest, Janet freed herself from the grasp of Wat Kilby and made for the door, quite satisfied with her escapade, and only thinking now of getting safely back.

“A horrible old bear!” she muttered; and then her heart sank, for a figure she knew to be that of her master made at her, and she was caught by the wrist.

Meanwhile, Wat Kilby, who had followed at a short distance, muttering to himself, and calling Janet “a coy little craft,” “a tricksey little caravel,” and half-a-dozen more suitable nautical terms expressive of her distant ways and tempting prettiness, suddenly became aware of the danger to his leader. For the founder at the end of a few minutes came out of the house with Sir Mark, and posted himself where he would be certain to encounter Gil as he came away.

“And then there might be mischief,” growled the old sailor. “If the skipper went down, it would break little beauty’s heart; so it would if he pricked her father. This is the second time I’ve saved him through being here. Wonder whether he’ll be ungrateful enough to turn upon me now for doing a bit o’ gentle courting on my own account.

“Ho, ho, ho,” he chuckled; “just as if a man could ever be too old to love a pretty girl. Old women are old women, and not much account; but a staunch, sturdy, seasoned man, why he’s like old oak, and makes the best o’ building wood. Now, then, where’s the skipper? It’s high time for us to be sheering off.”

He pretty well knew from former observations where to encounter Gil; and, creeping cautiously amongst the bushes, he waited his time, and rose up before him as he was making for the bridge.

“All right, skipper,” he whispered. “Breakers ahead! Hard down, and let’s get back the other way.”

Gil knew Wat too well to think that he would deceive him or be mistaken, and, placing himself under his guidance, he followed him to the back of the garden, where they leaped the fence, and at last reached the edge of the pool.

“There’s no other way to get back without being seen, skipper,” whispered Wat. “We must wade across here; and, if it gets too deep, try a swim. They’re watching to pook us by the bridge.”

“Who is watching?” whispered Gil.

“Mas’ Cobbe and that dandy Jack.”

“Let them watch!” muttered Gil, as he thought of his parting from Mace that night; and with light heart, and a feeling of readiness to encounter anything for his young love’s sake, the young man followed his companion into the cold, dark waters of the Pool.

How Sir Mark Showed His Heart.

“Have I drunk some love potion?” muttered Sir Mark to himself very early the next morning, “or am I going back to my calf-love days? Here have I enjoyed more conquests than any man at the court. I came down to the Moat, and pretty Mistress Anne Beckley throws herself into my arms; then I come on here to find myself regularly taken—trapped as it were. She does what she likes with me, even as she does with that bully, Carr. I fight against it, and make myself worse. I declare I will think of her no more, but go back and swear allegiance to pretty red-haired Mistress Anne, when Mace’s eyes rise up before me, and turn me from my way. She is so calm and sweet, and seems so pure, that I am beaten.”

He walked up and down the old parlour, where Janet was bringing in the various preparations for the breakfast, coquetting about till she caught his eye and smiled and looked down, throwing out invitation after invitation, when, as she passed close to him, he caught her in his arms and kissed her, easily overcoming the girl’s faint opposition, and repeating the salute till she broke away and made off, leaving him smiling

at his success.

“Why, there isn’t a woman living that I could not win,” he said to himself. “Bah! What an idiot I am. What are the kisses of such a creature as that worth compared to the slightest smile of such a girl as Mace? I am sick at heart!”

He walked up and down again, and just then Janet came back, mincing and blushing, and making a great pretence of being terribly alarmed, when, to her disgust, she found that Sir Mark was so abstracted that he paid not the slightest heed to her presence, but walked straight to the window, and stood gazing out into the garden.

Poor Janet’s face was a study as she rattled the breakfast-plates and knives, thumped dishes down upon the table, and coughed to take the visitor’s attention, but all in vain. She had rapidly recovered from the snubbing administered by her master, and was congratulating herself upon her conquest, when now, all at once, when the visitor’s last kiss was still wet upon her lips, he had turned away.

Janet tried in vain to take his attention, and ended by flouncing out of the old parlour, hot with indignant wrath.

“No,” mused Sir Mark, whose eyes were resting upon Mace, where, sweet and fresh as the flowers she was picking, she wandered down one of the garden-walks; “the old man is wrong. She is not the girl to trifle. She is not the woman a man might make his mistress. It is all folly about their meetings. Carr may play the Spanish gallant beneath her window, but if any meeting has been held it has been with that gamesome, wanton jade—Janet.”

“How beautiful she is!” he muttered, as, forgetful of Janet’s presence and the kisses he had taken, he gazed with kindling eyes at the gentle, pallid face, lit up with the consciousness of love for Gil and of his truth. For there was a happy smile on Mace’s lip that morning, and her face, that had of late been pale, was now tinged with a tender peachy bloom. There was grace in her every movement, and Mark Leslie’s heart beat fast.

“No,” he said, “she is too pure and innocent to become the mistress of any man. Curse it all, no one could be such a villain as to wrong her,” he cried, with a sudden access of morality that had not existed in his composition a few weeks back. “She is lovely enough to be the wife of any man. Suppose that simple stuff gown and white linen kerchief, cap, and cuffs were exchanged for a rich brocade, with jewels in her hair, and round that soft, sweet neck, which would tempt a man to risk his salvation that he might clasp it. Curse me, I wish I were one of the flowers she is plucking with those delicious fingers. What does it mean—has she bewitched me, or, as I say, has some love-philtre been at work?”

“Curse me, if I care what it is!” he cried at last, excitedly, as he still gazed through the casement at the unconscious girl. “She’d be a wife for a prince. Her knowledge is wonderful; her mien purity and sweetness combined; her voice low and silvery, as if music had assisted at her birth. Why not win her and wed her, and at once?”

“Humph!” he muttered. “Why not? Old Cobbe must be as rich as any Jew, whilst I am as poor as a beggar. He’d be glad enough to see her Dame Leslie—Dame Mace Leslie. How provoking that I must go so soon, when I might have been making sure my position. Never mind, it may not be too late. And, curse me, I’ll do it, for she is lovely.”

“Ah, Sir Mark, stolen glances at that jade?” said the founder, who had just entered the room unperceived, and who was watching curiously the interest taken by the young man in his daughter.

“Master Cobbe!” exclaimed Sir Mark, loudly and angrily. “Shame upon you, sir, to speak of your child like that.”

“She should behave more seemly, then,” said the founder, gruffly.

“More seemly!” cried Sir Mark. “Look at her. Did’st ever see one more sweet and pure of mien? See the candour and gentleness upon her brow and lip. You are wrong, Master Cobbe, you are wrong; my life upon it you wrong her by your suspicions of her interviews with Carr.”

“Do I?” said the founder, hotly. “Let’s have her in, then, and ask her. I

grant that she is too truthful to lie.”

“Nay, nay!” cried Sir Mark, excitedly; “I would not have her insulted by such suspicions. Your daughter is a lady. It would be cruel.”

“Odds life, man,” cried the founder, half-amused by the other’s earnestness. “Whom have we here—the King’s champion?”

“The Queen’s, you should say, Master Cobbe,” replied the other. “Master Cobbe, you do not understand your daughter’s ways.”

“I understand my own,” said the founder, gruffly, “and I made her. She’s my own flesh and blood, Sir Mark. Bah! I understand her whims and follies better than you.”

“Nay!” cried Sir Mark. “You roused me up last night to come and be a witness of the truth of thy suspicions that sweet Mistress Mace held clandestine meetings with Captain Carr, though I would have wagered my life upon the suspicions being false.”

“Thou did’st not say such a word last night,” said the founder drily.

“Nay, how could I force my opinion upon you?” said Sir Mark. “I could only follow, and pray that you were wrong; and what did you show me for result, when you had, as you thought, forced me to be an unwilling witness of sweet Mistress Mace’s shame?”

“I saw no unwillingness,” said the founder, drily; “I thought thou obeyed’st it with eager joy.”

“Nay, but I was unwilling: and my alacrity was to have revenge upon the man who was searing my poor heart. And then what did you show me when you had made your capture? That wretched drab of a serving-girl.”

“Am I?” muttered Janet, who had half entered the room, and had heard his words.

“Well, I am wrong,” growled the founder; “and I am glad of it. I’d give something to know that Gil Carr’s visits had all been to see yon wench.”

“Rely upon it they were, Master Cobbe. My life upon it they were,” said Sir Mark, eagerly.

“Hah!” ejaculated the founder; “rely upon it, eh? And why, pray, Sir Mark, dost thou take so sudden an interest in my child?”

“Sudden, sir? Nay, it is not sudden. From the first moment I saw Mistress Mace—”

“Thou loved’st her. Of course; the old story that has been poured into silly maidens’ ears from the beginning of the world. Stop, sir, listen to me,” he continued, as Sir Mark was about to speak. “I am not a learned theology man, like Master Peasegood or Father Brisdone, but, as you say, I’d wager my life that, when the serpent urged pretty little, innocent Mistress Eve to take the forbidden fruit, he gave her a lesson or two in the art of love, and upset her for the rest of her life.”

“Maybe he did,” said Sir Mark, smiling; “but the serpent was insincere, and I am no serpent.”

“How do I know that, young man?” said the founder, laying his hand upon the other’s breast. “I’ve been thinking a good deal about your visit lately, and I will tell you flat that I have kept you here as a scarecrow.”

“A scarecrow?”

“Yes, to frighten off that marauding kite, Gil Carr, who was getting far too sweet upon my simple child.”

“Scarecrow! Serpent! Nay, Master Cobbe, I am neither,” cried Sir Mark, whose eyes had rested upon Mace as her father spoke, and gained such an access of passion as they had lit bee-like on the honey-scented blossom that he was ready to speak out plainly now.

“As I said before, how do I know that?”

“Because I tell you now, as a gentleman of his Majesty King James’s household, that I love Mistress Mace with all my heart.”

“And I tell thee flat again, Sir Mark, that, gentleman of his Majesty King James’s household though you be, I would sooner believe the words as coming from some simple gentleman of our parts.”

“What am I to say to you, then?” said Sir Mark, excitedly.

“Nothing at all,” replied the founder, bluntly. “Of course you love the girl—everyone does who sees her; but what of that?”

“What of that? Why, Master Cobbe, I would fain make her my dear wife.”

“Thy wife? My little Mace—my simple-hearted child, wife of a gay spark of a courtier—a knight of King James. Nonsense, man; nonsense! Trash!”

“It does take thee by surprise, no doubt,” said Sir Mark, with a little hauteur; “but it would not be the first time that a knight of my position had stooped to many a worthy yeoman’s daughter.”

“Thou’rt a modest youth,” said the founder, with a dry chuckle; “and I suppose it would be a great stoop for the hawk to come down from on high to pick up my little dove. And to keep up this style of language, good Sir Mark, I suppose thy hawk’s nest is very well feathered—thou art rich?”

“Well—no,” said Sir Mark, hesitating; “not rich; but my position warrants my assuming to take a wife from the highest in the land.”

“So you come and pick my little tit,” said the founder. “Well, and a very good taste, Sir Mark. She is, as you say, a beautiful girl, and she will have fifteen thousand pounds down on her wedding-day for portion.”

“Fifteen thousand pounds!” exclaimed Sir Mark.

“And twice as much more—perhaps three times—when I die,” said the founder, with a smile of self-satisfaction, which increased as he saw Sir Mark move his hand as he recovered from his surprise.

“Money is no object to me,” he said; “I love Mistress Mace for her worth alone.”

“And you’d marry her without a penny.”

“Ye-es, of course,” cried Sir Mark; “give me your consent.”

“Nay—nay, my lad, not I,” said the founder. “My Mace is no meet match for thee; and, as my guest, I ask you to say no foolish nonsense to the child. She has had silly notions enough put into her head by Gil Carr.”

“But that is all over now, Master Cobbe,” cried Sir Mark. “I pray you give me your consent. I may be recalled to-day.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said the founder. “You have been here too long, and I don’t know, even now, that it is all over with Gil Carr. I’m not going to break my child’s heart, and—hey-day, tit, child, what’s wrong?” he cried, as, with a face white as ashes, and her eyes dilate with horror, Mace ran quickly into the room followed by Janet.

“Gil! father,” she cried, hoarsely; and then, with a shudder, her eyes closed and her head sank upon his breast.

“Why, child, what now? Has he dared? Speak, wench,” he cried, stamping his foot, as he turned upon the trembling serving-maid, “what is it?”

“Captain Culverin, master,” she whispered, trembling—“Mas’ Wat Kilby.”

“What of them, fool?” cried the founder, excitedly.

“Drowned, master—in the Pool, and they’re bringing their bodies now ashore!”

How Wat Kilby led the Way.

In his excitement the founder hastily laid Mace on the couch and rushed out, when Sir Mark was about to run to the poor girl's side, to seize his opportunity, and press his lips to hers, but he was forestalled by Janet, who, with flashing eyes, leaped between them to cry spitefully, "Nay; and if thou must kiss aught, kiss me. Thou can'st not want to kiss two maidens in one day."

With an angry ejaculation Sir Mark turned aside and followed the founder, who was running along the side of the Pool to where a group of his people were busy round a boat just drawn up close to the edge, with Father Brisdone and Master Peasegood in the midst, giving directions to the men who were lifting a couple of bodies towards a shed half-filled with soft dogwood charcoal.

For it had been an awkward night with Gil Carr and his companion.

They had plunged boldly into the Pool, finding it at the side come up to mid-thigh, and the bottom sandy; but before they had cautiously proceeded far, taking care that the water did not splash, it became shallower, and Gil asked old Wat in a whisper whether they were not too near the shore.

"No," was the reply; "I know the Pool well; this shallow runs right across. I've seen the shoals of little fish sunning themselves here by the thousand till some evil-minded pirate of a luce has darted amongst them and scattered them like a silver fleet in the Spanish main. You follow me, skipper, and let me lead thee for once in thy life."

"You were disobeying my orders, Wat," said Gil, in a low whisper, as he followed his lieutenant. "What were you doing in Master Cobbe's garden?"

"Courting. Thank God for the ability to court!" growled Wat.

"You dare to own it to my face!"

“Nay, thou’rt behind my back,” growled Wat; “but I own it all the same. Where would’st have been if I had not said to myself, ‘there’s that pretty little soul Janet longing to see me once again, and as it’s loving—night, and the skipper’s courting the mistress, faith I’ll go and court the maid?’”

“After I had forbidden it, Wat!”

“I am a man, all a man, good Captain Gilbert Carr, and I say thank God for the ability to love, and liking to taste sweet lips.”

“Thou arrant old coxcomb,” cried Gil, angrily. “Why thou art woman mad!”

“I am, thank God!” said Wat. “Hah, skipper, what would the world be without women? Bless their bright eyes, and red lips, and pretty prattling tongues—mind that hole, it’s a bit deeper—I don’t know whether I love best to be kissed or poked by them.”

“You old fool!”

“Ay, to be sure, skipper, it’s a man’s nature to be a fool over a woman. It’s nature’s remedy to keep us from being too wise. As I was saying, I don’t know which I like best. If she kisses and fondles you without a kick, why it’s all sweet sugar and milk and honey, and I smack my lips. If she cries ‘kiss me not, old bear,’ and struggles and pooks me, and pretends to tear out my eyes with the ends of her pretty fingers, and tugs my beard, and pulls out the hairs, why it is pickles and sharp sorrel-sauce, and hot peppers, and I smack my lips and like it all the same. Ah, skipper, take all the women out of the world, and you may heave me overboard whenever you like!”

“Women will be thy ruin,” said Gil.

“That’s what Mas’ Peasegood says, and then he went on at me for an hour as good as to say if ever I’m damned it will be for a woman’s sake, bless her for it. Mind, here’s another hole here. Zooks, I touched a big eel with my boot.”

“But once for all,” said Gil, “I will not have thee hanging like a chicken-thief about Master Cobbe’s garden.”

“An’ where would’st have been if I had not been here to-night, skipper? Suppose the founder had come running at thee with his naked sword? The sight of a naked sword always was too much for thee, my lad. Remember how I taught thee to fence, and you pook me your point the second time into my thigh. Why, it would have been out sword and at him, and thou mightest have hurt the old boy.”

“Old boy! He’s fifteen years younger than you if a day, Wat.”

“Bah! Years! What are years? He was born after I was, but look at us. I’m a younger man than he. A man’s not old till he feels old, skipper; and when he feels old heave him overboard if he be a sailor. If he be a land-goer, dig a hole in his mother-earth and pack him up warm to sprout out and grow little boys for the future times. Well, as I said, suppose you had pricked the old man or he had pricked thee?”

“The better for me it seems,” said Gil, grimly. “It would be the high road to his favour. But are you sure you are right here? How dark it is!”

“Right? to be sure I am,” growled Wat; “right as I was to-night in having a bit of a talk with pretty Janet, lad.”

“And that I forbid for the future,” said Gil, stopping with the water nearly up to his waist.

“Forbid away,” grumbled Wat, “but as long as my skipper goes amongst rocks Wat Kilby goes as well to watch over him the while.”

“Then that settles it, Wat,” said Gil; “I am going no more.”

“Ho, ho, ho!—ho, ho, ho!” chuckled the old sailor. “Sattles! What? have you and young mistress fallen out?”

“Hold your peace!” said Gil, sharply; “and learn to obey my orders.”

“Saints on earth, I’m like so much wax or Stockholm pitch in his

hands, and he does with me as he likes. It's a brave deal deeper here than I thought, skipper; wait till I have out my blade and feel my way a bit."

He pulled out his sword, and began to sound with it in the darkness; but, save in the direction of the house and garden, the water seemed to grow deeper and deeper; and, after taking a step or two in different directions, the old fellow drew back and paused grumbling.

"It's deeper than I thought," he said; "the water goes down above my head everywhere. Let's wait a bit."

"What for?" said Gil, angrily. "Do you think the Pool will grow shallower? This comes of trusting another."

"Well, I thought I knowed the bearings," said Wat.

"What fools we'd look if it were daylight," said Gil; "standing up to our middles."

"Chesties," said Wat, correctively.

"Well, to our chests or chins, if you like," cried Gil. "Heaven be praised that it is so dark."

"So don't say I," cried Wat, softly; "for if it was not so dark I could see which way to steer."

"Do you mean to tell me, Wat," whispered Gil, in a low angry voice, "that you have persuaded me into trusting to your guidance, and that now you know nothing of the depth of the Pool?"

"I could have sworn as that little sandy reef ran right across to the other side."

"And now there is deep water all round."

"Unless we go back."

“Confusion!” ejaculated Gil. “Am I to understand that you don’t know the way at all?”

“Well, skipper,” growled Wat, “I won’t say I don’t know the bearings of the channels; but if you like to take the rudder I’ll give up to you.”

This being tantamount to a declaration of his own want of knowledge, Gil began cautiously to feel his way about, with the result that the first two steps he took placed him up to his chin in water, that would, he felt, be over his head at the next.

Dressed as he was, swimming was a most difficult task, the high, heavy boots he wore filling with water, and being sufficient to drag him down; and yet sooner or later he felt that he should be obliged to trust to his powers as a swimmer, and gave the hint to his companion.

“Be ready to swim, Wat,” he whispered.

“No, no; there be no need to swim,” was the response. “Only hit the right place, and it won’t reach above your boots.”

Gil did not respond, but tried in various directions, always to find the water deepen; and at last he stood with it bubbling at his lips, and he knew that the next moment he must strike out.

Even now he could have made an effort to go back ashore in the direction of the house, but it might mean an encounter with the founder, and this was to be avoided at all hazards, for Mace’s sake; and after all, he thought, what was before them was nothing more than a good swim, for he never once realised the fact that there was danger in his position: it seemed more ludicrous than full of peril.

He gave a glance round, and, having decided in his own mind where lay the shore they sought to reach, he uttered a low warning to Wat, and tried to wade towards it.

The second step rendered it necessary for him to swim, and striking out boldly he had gone a few yards before he turned his head to speak to Wat.

“This way,” he whispered; but there was no response for a few moments, and then, with a hoarse blowing noise, the old sailor spluttered out, “Why, I went right over my head.”

This added to the ridiculous side of the question, and, contenting himself with bidding Wat keep close, Gil swam on in the direction of the shore, making very slow progress, and now becoming aware for the first time of the difficulty of the task he had undertaken.

Wat was swimming close at hand, making a good deal of noise, but Gil never thought for a moment that he would have any difficulty, and it was not until they had progressed slowly for about five minutes that the first intimation of danger came like a chill of dread.

“Can you touch bottom, skipper?” said the old fellow.

“No,” said Gil, after a pause. “We are in deep water. Why?”

“Because, if we can’t directly, I shall drown!”

“Nonsense, man,” whispered back Gil. “Swim slowly and steadily, and we shall soon reach the shore.”

There was no more said for a few moments, and then from old Wat, in a low panting voice—

“Skipper, I shan’t never reach no shore; and this ain’t even brackish water, let alone salt.”

“Don’t talk,” said Gil, sharply; “but swim, man, with a long steady stroke.”

“Not even salt water,” said Wat hoarsely, as if he had not heard his leader’s words. “Drowned in a miserable pond.”

“Will you hold your peace,” whispered Gil, “and swim on, man? Who ever thinks of drowning at such a time as this?”

“I’m nearly spent,” said Wat, hoarsely. “I didn’t think it would be so deep.”

It was very hard work to keep himself afloat; and the knowledge that his old faithful companion and follower was losing heart robbed him of a good deal of the energy which he had left. But Gil Carr had been reared amongst dangers, and instead of beginning to lament that they were in such a condition, and praying or calling for help, he tried to rouse up more energy both in himself and his follower, though, as regarded the latter, with but little result, for he awoke more and more to the fact that Wat’s straggles were growing fainter each moment, and that unless he could aid him he was a drowning man.

He stopped swimming away from him then, and taking a few strokes back, with his boots seeming to be made of lead, he tried to make out where Wat was swimming, and only found him by the bubbling water which was just closing over his head.

It required almost superhuman energy as, with a vigorous snatch, Gil caught his follower by the beard and drew his face above water, holding him so while he drew breath.

“No use—save yourself!” panted Wat. “I’m spent, skipper—spent.”

“Do as I bid you,” cried Gil, angrily. “Turn over—your back—float—that’s well. Now mind: leave me free. If you clutch my arms we shall both go down.”

As he spoke he tried hard to kick off his heavy boots, but they clung to his legs, and to have continued striving meant to sink. Throwing himself upon his back then, and with one hand grasping Wat Kilby’s hair, he once more struck out, gazing of necessity upwards at the starless sky, and feeling more and more that unless some miracle interposed in their favour they must both lose their lives. It was impossible to tell in what direction he was going when his every energy was directed to trying to keep them both afloat; and, strive to contain himself how he would, there was always the knowledge upon him that, moment by moment, he was growing weaker.

For the water came more and more over his lips, thundered more heavily in his ears, and kept, as it were, forcing itself up his nostrils, burning, and strangling him, and causing such an intense desire to struggle with all his might for life, that, but for the disciplining of years and the power it had given him of mastering his own emotions, there would have been a minute's desperate struggling, a few agonised cries for help, and then the water would have closed over his head.

The water that had risen at each stroke to his chin was now always above his lips, then above his nostrils, and it was only by frantic efforts that he recovered himself for a few moments; but directly after his heavy boots dragged him lower and lower, and with a gasping cry he gave one more tremendous stroke, when he felt his head forced in amongst a clump of reeds, and for the moment he could breathe.

He lay with the back of his head in amongst the reeds for some minutes, not daring to move lest he should glide back into deep water, but even now the waves were rippling and playing in his ears. He could not stay long, however, like that, for he had Wat Kilby to think of; and throwing one arm back over the reeds he dragged himself more amongst them, and at the same time pulled Wat close to his side.

How it was done he never afterwards knew, only that he contrived somehow to rouse the old sailor sufficiently to once more take a little interest in life, and draw himself over and amongst the reeds.

So far from being in safety, all they had gained was the power to breathe, for at the least movement the thin, whispering, water-grasses gave way, and their position was worse.

"Can you hear me speak, Wat?" said Gil at last, in a hoarse voice, as he felt that he was once more gaining breath.

"Ay, skipper," said the old fellow, faintly; "I be not dead yet."

"Can you draw yourself more amongst the reeds?"

There was a few minutes' pause, and then Wat said with a groan,

“No, skipper. If I move, it means going below; there’s nothing to hold on by.”

Gil foresaw that this would be the reply, for on feeling cautiously round he could only come to the conclusion that they were half floating, half lying, among some nearly-submerged reeds, and that the slightest effort to better their condition meant the destruction of the frail support.

“Wait till you get your breath, Wat, and then shout for help,” said Gil.

“Nay, I’ll not call,” was the hoarse reply. “Do thou shout, skipper.”

“I order you to call, Wat,” was the half-angry reply; and, in obedience, Wat uttered a hoarse hail from time to time, for his voice to go floating over the water, borne by the breeze away from the Pool-house, and here the two men lay some three hundred yards from the garden, cold, benumbed, and gradually growing more helpless, while those who were nearest slept on hearing no cries, and in utter ignorance of the peril in which the two well-known adventurers lay.

The hails uttered from time to time reached one or two of the cottages, but those who heard the sounds float from off the lake merely turned once in their beds, and thought of marsh spirits, or the night-walkers that had been seen from time to time, passing along the tracks; while the less superstitious said to one another, “Captain Culverin and his men be out to-night. What be in the wind now?”

Again and again did Gil make an effort to find where they lay, and see if he could not reach the boat, and come back to his companion’s help; but the darkness was made more intense by the thick mist which was heavier than ever. He was rested though, and had the nerve to make a bold effort, but those boots that clung to his legs far above his knees were like lead, and he dare hardly stir.

Try how he would, he was fain to conic to the conclusion that he must lie passive amongst those reeds, saying a few words to Wat Kilby from time to time, to encourage him; for the old man, sturdy as he was, seemed to have taken quite a fatalist view of their case.

“Wait for daylight, skipper?” he said, sadly. “No; I think it be morning that will have to wait for me, and I shan’t answer to my number. The cold water be getting into my joints, and I be too stiff to move.”

To remain for long in their cramped and helpless situation seemed to Gil at first impossible; but hour after hour glided away, and save the rippling of the water hardly a sound greeted the sufferers’ ears. Too numbed and helpless even to cry out for help, they lay waiting for morning, hardly hoping to see the dawn, for at any moment a slip would have sent them into deep water, to go down at once.

Sometimes a soft wind stirred the thick steamy mist upon the water and rustled the reeds above their heads; while, at intervals through the night, the cry of some coot or duck floated weirdly across the great Pool, but, at last, all those things seemed to Gil to be part of a confused dream, as he grew, more and more numbed and helpless. The water washed higher over his face, but he could not raise his head to avoid it, nor disturb the current of his thoughts, which were flowing placidly enough now, and quite unmingled with despair, along his life-course; and it seemed ridiculous to him that he, who had braved so many perils of the mighty sea, should perish on this pitiful pond. Then he began to think of Mace and her feelings when she heard of his death; and, with a sigh, he thought it seemed hard indeed that he should die now when he was so sure of her love. But he whispered a blessing upon her to the soft summer breeze, and thanked Heaven that they had parted so happily that night.

Wat Kilby had not spoken for hours, but lay there in a state of torpor, till suddenly he exclaimed:—

“You there, skipper?”

“Yes, Wat.”

“I wouldn’t care so much only—”

There was a pause here.

“Only that I have got my bag of tobacco here in my pocket, and it be quite wet through.”

After that, there was utter silence.

How two went a-fishing, and what they caught.

“You may argue, Brother Brisdone, till all is blue,” said Master Peasegood, “but I maintain that what I say is right. Now, look here; go back to the early days, and take your own apostle.”

“My own apostle?” said Father Brisdone, smiling, as they walked down the lane, soon after sunrise, one bearing a basket the other a bag. The heavy dew lay upon leaf and strand, and sparkled in the brilliant sunshine; birds sang and flitted from bough to bough, scattering the heavy drops from off each spray; and, as the two clerics had come out of the cottage after an early breakfast, they had stood breathing the soft pure air, and smiled back at smiling Nature.

“My own apostle?” said Father Brisdone.

“Yes, Saint Peter; the rock upon which your church is built. Well, what was he—a fisherman?”

“Yes,” said Father Brisdone, “before he took up his holy calling.”

“Fisherman still, good brother. Did he not become a fisher of men? Depend upon it, brother, Peter, if he had been down by the lake again, would have enjoyed a good pull at the net.”

“Maybe, maybe,” said the father, smiling.

“Well, let’s grant it. Now, I was a fisherman before I took to the cloth, and I have been a fisherman ever since, right or wrong; and I hold that there is very little wrong in providing a dinner.”

“I’ll not argue with you,” said Father Brisdone. “If all men were like you, Brother Peasegood, this would be a happier world.”

“Wrong again!” cried Master Peasegood. “You see you force on an argument. If all men were like me, brother, it would be an unhappier world; for, look you, I’m too fat. I’m as big as three small men; and, if all were like me, we should be so crowding and elbowing each other that we should be quarrelling for want of room. Ha, ha, ha!” and “ha, ha, ha,” he laughed again, making the rocks and woodlands echo to his jovial mirth; the stray rabbits betrayed their whereabouts by showing their little white tails as they hopped into their holes; and snake and lizard upon sunny bank hurrying away to safety long before the footsteps could be heard.

“There’s something in fishing that seems to expand the heart,” continued Master Peasegood to his willing hearer. “I never knew a man who was a good fisherman who was very wicked or brutal.”

“In other matters,” said Father Brisdone, with a smile.

“Well, well, well, but the fish we catch are vile, cruel things, which persecute their smaller fellows. Why, I’ve known a luce of twenty pounds seize and half swallow one of ten, and kill himself in the act. Oh, no, brother, I have no pity for a great luce or pike; and, besides, see what they are when nicely treated, well cleaned, and stuffed, and buttered, and baked. Ha, ha, ha! we have the advantage of you there, Brother Brisdone; we can be carnal-minded, and eat, and drink, and wive if we like. But come along and let’s begin. I can sniff the water now, with its soft wreaths of mist floating around. We’ll have the boat and set our lures, and fish for a couple of hours, and then take a brace of the finest to Master Cobbe, and beg some more breakfast for our pains.”

“But suppose we catch no fish?”

“But we shall catch fish—more, perhaps, than you expect.”

The two friends trudged on, and, upon turning a corner of the narrow lane, came upon Mother Goodhugh, standing at the turning where Sir Mark had made his first acquaintance with Wat Kilby.

“Good morrow, Mother Goodhugh,” said the stout parson.

“Save thee, my daughter,” said Father Brisdone.

“Are you both going to curse the murderer of Abel Churr?” said Mother Goodhugh, sourly.

“Nay,” said Master Peasegood; “and it would behove thee better, good woman, if thou did’st not sprinkle these curses of thine about with so liberal a hand. Come along, father.”

“Yes, go along,” cried the old woman, maliciously; “time-servers and makers of friendship with the ungodly as you are. But you’ll see, you’ll live to see.”

“She’s a terrible old woman,” said Master Peasegood, with a curious smile upon his lip; “and she seems to make my fat go cold, like unto that of venison on an unwarmed dish. I’ve given her up, father, as a bad nut to crack. The worst of it is, that if I turn prophet my sayings are never fulfilled; while, when she raises her voice, her prophesyings come to pass, and the simple folks here believe in her more than in me. But thank goodness, here we are.”

Three hundred paces brought them to the edge of the lake, over which the soft white mists were disappearing before the sun. The boat lay on the sandy beach, with a chain holding it fast to the trunk of an old willow; and, as soon as the basket and wallet had been laid in, Master Peasegood helped his friend to take his place.

“I don’t think I shall swamp the boat, Brother Brisdone,” he said, laughing, as he sent the skiff well down in the water. “If I do, just you hold on tightly to my gown, for I’m too fat to sink.”

A hearty “Ha, ha, ha!” floated across the lake as he finished his speech; and then, taking the little oars, he proceeded to paddle across for some distance before pausing and opening the large basket he had brought.

The first thing taken out was a large can of water with a lid pierced with holes; and then from the bag were shaken out a dozen bladders,

each tied round the centre with a string and a loop. From his basket Master Peasegood then brought out a dozen goodly hooks, whose points were stuck in a piece of cork, and whose strings were neatly tied in a bunch; and, as he took them off, one by one, each was baited with a fresh young gudgeon from the can, the string attached to one of the bladders, and this dropped overboard to float away.

In a short time the whole of the hooks were baited, and the lake dotted with the bladders that floated here and there, borne by the breeze or tugged by the lively gudgeons. Then, and then only, did Master Peasegood nearly upset the boat by leaning over the side to wash his hands, and smile at his companion.

His smile was not perceived though, for Father Brisdone was sitting with one elbow upon his knee, his cheek upon his hand, gazing out and away at the soft landscape, with the Pool-house and its works glorified by the morning sun.

“Now we’ll sit and talk for awhile,” said Master Peasegood, smiling jollily. “What do you say to a pleasant subject for discussion—say purgatory?”

“Because thou hast been putting these poor gudgeons into a state of misery, brother?” said Father Brisdone.

“Let the gudgeons rest,” said Master Peasegood. “They have all gone overboard like so many finny Jonahs, for the benefit of those on board this ship; and, if they are lucky, they will soon be safe in so many whales’ insides. Ha, ha, ha! Master Brisdone, I’m afraid I’m a very irreverent disciple. By all the saints, there goes one of the Jonahs. See!”

He pointed to where, just by a reed-bed towards which the bladder had drifted, there was a tremendous swirl in the water, and away it went skimming along at a rapid rate.

“Ha, yes, I suppose that will be a great fish,” said Father Brisdone, sadly; “but I was thinking of the maiden at yon house—sweet little Mace.”

“Bless her!” said Master Peasegood.

“Amen,” said his companion. “Brother Joseph, she is at a perilous age, and I do not think her father’s to be trusted.”

“You mean with her future?” said Master Peasegood. “I fear so too. Poor child, she needs a mother’s counsel!”

“Think you she has a lover?” said Father Brisdone, quietly.

“Two fierce lucas playing round the little gudgeon,” cried Master Peasegood, excitedly. “One of them will snatch it up directly. Nay, nay,” he continued, reddening; “I meant no inference. I was thinking of yon bait. There it goes.”

He pointed to where a gudgeon had leaped several times out of the water to escape a couple of fierce pike, one of which seized it and bore it off.

“Lovers?” he continued. “Yes, that courtly fellow from town is trying to win her, and so is Gilbert Carr.”

“And she?”

“She loves Culverin Carr with all her pretty little soul, but he shall not have her unless—”

“Unless what?”

“He mends his ways. She shall marry no scapegrace who plays fast and loose with women’s hearts. He trifles with Mistress Anne Beckley, and the silly girl is mad for him.”

“Nay, I think you wrong him, brother. I believe in Gil Carr as a true gentleman at heart. I love the brave, bold youth.”

“I hope I do wrong him,” said Master Peasegood. “He’s a fine, handsome fellow, but I will not have my little white moth played with, and the tender down upon her winglets crushed by unholy hands.”

“Why do you call her white moth?” said the father, dreamily.

“It is a fancy of the people here, because she dresses in white; and they meet her, looking soft, and white, and ethereal, in the woody lanes at eventide where moths abound. Ah, Father Brisdone, happy men are we who early marry ourselves to the Church, and know nought of these fleshly troubles. Yes, they call her the white moth; and between ourselves it’s a glowworm that often comes wooing to her, and I fear his light will burn.”

Father Brisdone sighed. “Ha, ha, ha! that’s because another Jonah has gone down,” said Master Peasegood, pointing to a flying bladder.

“Nay,” said the other sadly; “I sighed at your words about our being happier without these fleshly cares. I don’t know—I don’t know.”

“More do I,” said Master Peasegood; “only that I’m very fatherly fond of little Mace, and if I can stand between her and Carr I will. Now, brother, we’ll chase that first great fish. Suppose you take the oars.”

Father Brisdone obeyed, and Master Peasegood fitted a large hook to the end of a stout walking-staff, directing his friend the while as he urged the boat over the limpid water, making fish dart away here and there amongst the water-lilies and flags.

They approached pretty near the bladder, and then away it went, showing that the great pike was well hooked, and now commenced a chase for some ten minutes, the captive always evading the great hook just as Master Peasegood was on the point of securing the string.

The chase led them right away over the deepest part of the Pool, and amidst various little islands of reeds growing on soft masses of decayed vegetation; the boat, when urged forward, passing easily amongst and over them, so lightly were they rooted in the soft vegetable fibre below.

“Now then, a good pull, brother, and we shall have him,” whispered Master Peasegood. “He’s a monster, but he is tired now. Four good

strokes and then hold up your oars, and let the skiff glide and I'll—Good God! what's that?—the other oar, man, pull!"

The skiff spun round and was urged towards a clump of reeds, among which, and half covered by the water, were two ghastly faces, which settled down, gliding from their precarious hold, as the wave made by the skiff reached them.

Another moment and they would have been beyond reach, but Master Peasegood thrust his arm to the shoulder into the water, as he leaned over the side, and grasped the doublet of one man, thrusting in his hook and seizing the other, and then drawing both up to the sides of the boat, as it rustled amongst the reeds, but bringing the edge down so low that the water began to pour in over the side.

"Quick, brother, quick!" shouted Master Peasegood. "Hang over the other side, or we are lost!"

With a promptitude that might not have been expected from him, Father Brisdone threw himself to the other side of the skiff, and raised the endangered edge so that the water ceased to pour over the gunwale, while Master Peasegood deftly leaned sideways and dragged the first body he had secured round the stern of the boat.

Father Brisdone saw what he intended, and, changing his position a little, just managed to catch the doublet, and the next minute the boat was well balanced, for one of the bodies was being held up on either side.

"Are—are they dead?" whispered Father Brisdone, in an awe-stricken voice. "Poor lad—poor lad."

"Heaven only knows," cried Master Peasegood, as he changed his position and said, "Give me hold of the poor boy—his collar—that's well. I've got this one the same. There, their heads are well above the water now, and I can hold them thus. Now take the oars and row for life."

"But can you hold them?" cried Father Brisdone, as he obeyed his

companion, and gazed at him the while, seated with hands grasping the two men's collars, one on either side.

"I hope so. Oh, yes! They can't drag me out of the boat, but it would be madness to try and drag them in. Row hard: never mind me."

Father Brisdone bent to his task with a will, and in a fashion that showed how he had more than once handled an oar, while Master Peasegood braced himself up, and held on to his burdens as they dragged behind.

"You see who they are?" he said, as the skiff gathered way, and the water rattled under her bows.

"Yes; one is the man of whom we talked."

"And the other is old Wat Kilby. I'll never believe he is drowned," cried Master Peasegood. "He's born for quite another fate. Pull steady and hard, man. If my arms are jerked out of the sockets I'll forgive thee. Ohe—ahoy—hoi—oy," he shouted to a couple of men on the shore, and as they stopped to gaze others began to collect, so that by the time the side was reached there was plenty of willing aid, and hands ready to bear the two men into the charcoal-shed, where, by Father Brisdone's orders, blankets were fetched and stimulants, while, under his instructions, strong hands rubbed the icy limbs.

This was continued for a time, and then the founder made a proposal, which was put into effect.

"Four of you, one to the corner of each blanket," he cried; "and run them down to the little furnace. We can lay them on the hot bricks there."

"Yes, quickly," cried Father Brisdone. "The very thing."

It was done, and the genial heat and the friction liberally applied. At first no change took place, and the founder shook his head; while Sir Mark, as he gazed at the stern, handsome countenance of Culverin Carr, felt that a dangerous rival had been removed from his path.

“We were too late, brother, were we not?” said Master Peasegood, sadly.

“I’ll tell thee, anon,” was the reply, as, with cassock off and sleeves up, Father Brisdone was toiling away, with the perspiration streaming down his forehead.

One hour—two hours passed, and still there was no sign of life. Those who aided would have given up long before but for the father’s example, led by which they worked manfully, till, to the great joy of the operator, there was a faint quivering about his patients’ eyelids.

Encouraged by this, all worked the harder, to be rewarded by a sigh from Gil, and a low growl from Wat Kilby, who now rapidly recovered consciousness, and startled all present by exclaiming:—

“Who has taken my tobacco?” Gil recovered more slowly, but he was soon able to speak; and the first person upon whom his eyes fell was Sir Mark, who seemed half fascinated by his gaze.

A couple of hours later the two men were sufficiently revived to bear removal; and in a gruff way, as if the show of hospitality were forced upon him, Master Cobbe offered them the use of his house.

Gil’s heart gave a leap of joy at the invitation, while Sir Mark’s countenance grew black as night. It resumed, its former aspect, though, as he heard Gil refuse, and merely request permission to stay where they were for a time, after which he said they would go their way.

“I’d give something to know how those two came so near being drowned,” said the founder, as he walked over the little bridge with Sir Mark.

“I’d give something,” said Sir Mark to himself, “if that meddling priest had left the scoundrel to die in peace. How I hate him, to be sure.”

Meanwhile, Mace, who had been upon her knees in her little chamber, praying with all her soul for her lover’s life, had now changed her prayer to thanksgiving, and at last stood by the window, and

exchanged a look with him, as she saw him walk slowly away, with Wat Kilby, whose pipe was lit, and who was smoking as if nothing whatever had been amiss.

As to how the accident had occurred, that was the secret of the two sufferers, the guests that evening of Master Peasegood, whose laces were not sought for till the next morning, by which time three-parts had managed to get away, or rid themselves of their steel, leaving the floating bladders alone for the parson's crook.

How Sir Mark visited Dame Beckley's Garden of Simples.

In the course of the morning a mounted messenger came on to the Pool-house with a despatch for Sir Mark, whose brow clouded as he read that it was a peremptory recall to town.

He handed the despatch to the founder, who read it quietly, and returned it.

"Hah," he said, "then I am to lose my guest. I hope Sir Mark does not quarrel with my hospitality."

"Nay, but I do," said Sir Mark, petulantly. "You deny me the very one thing I ask."

"And what is that?" said the founder.

"Your daughter's hand, Master Cobbe."

"Nay, nay, she's no mate for thee, my lad, so let that rest."

"But I cannot,—I will not," cried Sir Mark.

"But thou must, and thou shalt," said the founder. "Now, what can I do to speed thee on thy journey?"

"Nothing," was the reply, "for Sir Thomas has sent a spare horse for my service. Good Master Cobbe, hearken to me. Come: you will accept

me as your son-in-law of the future?”

“Go back to the fine madams of the court, my lad, and you’ll forget my little lass in a week.”

“Nay, by Heaven, I never shall.”

“And we shall never see thee more.”

“You consent?”

“No,” said the founder, sternly. “Good-bye, my lad, and I hope thou forgivest me the prick in the shoulder I gave thee.”

“Forgive? I bless you for it,” cried Sir Mark, enthusiastically; “and as to our never meeting again, why, man, I shall be back here ere a month has gone by.”

“Harkye,” cried the founder, laying his hand on the other’s arm, “this can only be by some trick or other of thine in thy report. Sir Mark Leslie, if thou play’st me false, look well to thyself.”

“Play thee false, Master Cobbe! Nay, I’ll only play to win sweet Mace—and your money,” he added to himself. “I shall be back, I tell you, and before long. Now to make my adieux to your daughter.”

But Mace returned for answer through Janet that she was too ill to see Sir Mark; and the message was conveyed to him when he was alone.

“And now, pretty Janet, what’s it to be,” he said—“a kiss or this gold piece?”

“Both,” said Janet, promptly, as she held out hand and cheek.

“There they are, then, and mind this, Janet: help me in my suit to win thy mistress, and thou shalt have the handsomest gown thou canst choose, with a gilded stomacher like they wear at court.”

“Shall I?” cried the girl, with sparkling eyes.

“Ay, and aught else you like to ask for. Now, farewell.”

He printed another kiss on Janet’s rosy cheek and a few on her lips, and stayed some little time before he once more sought the founder, who had, however, gone to one of his sheds.

Here a farewell of anything but a friendly nature took place; and, forgetting to bestow any present on the workmen, Sir Mark mounted the horse awaiting him and rode away, to see what sort of a reception he should have from the pompous baronet and his child.

Sir Mark had had his mind so set upon Mace Cobbe that, when at Roehurst, he could think of nothing else, and his every thought on leaving the place was about how to get back from London with a good excuse for staying.

“I must get the old fellow a big order for powder and cannon,” he said, “and play my cards so that I have the commission to see the order executed, test the guns and the grains, and then I shall have the old man in my fingers. Only let him accept the Royal order, and I can work him. Ha, ha, ha!” he laughed, “powder not of required strength; flaw in this gun; want of carrying power in that; failure in accuracy in another. Why my dear father-in-law, thou wilt be at my mercy; and if I cannot work you to my ends, in spite of all independence and defiance, my name is not Mark Leslie.”

“Why,” he added, laughing, “if I failed in managing thee in any other way, Master Cobbe, I have only to hint to His Majesty that here is a clever artificer who maketh strong powder, which he supplies to the Papist, and I could have a score or two of men down to lay you by the heels. Surely I could manage it all if driven to urge him very hard. But, there, I can get on better by driving him with a light hand. Let me see, why war materials will be wanted for Holland! Tut, lad, it will be easy enough to do.”

He rode gently on, having a care to prevent his horse from setting his feet in the deeper holes; and now began a fresh set of thoughts, to

wit, concerning Mistress Anne.

“By Bacchus and Venus, and all the gods and goddesses who had to do with the making of love,” he cried, “and am I to face that bright-eyed, ruddy-haired piece of tyranny? She was ready to fall in love with me at the first meeting, and here have I treated her and Sir Thomas most scurvily. How am I to behave? Apologise, or take the high hand?”

“The latter!” he cried, touching the fat horse he rode with the spur. “If I am humble, I shall be slighted. Hang it, I will be courted, for I am from the court.”

He rode on through the pleasant woodlands, enjoying the sweet-scented breeze, but only for the agreeable sensations it afforded him; and, almost leaving the horse to follow its own bent, he at last came in sight of the stone pillars which supported the gates leading up to the Moat.

It was a spot that would have delighted poet or artist, that long, embowering avenue of trees, at the end of which stood the mossy pillars, each supporting an impossible monster, which seemed to be putting out its tongue derisively at the visitors to the old house.

Riding along the avenue and through the gates, Sir Mark passed a park-like stretch of grass, and then a belt of trees which almost hid the house, till he was close up to the old moat, from which it took its name; a broad, deep dyke of water that surrounded the building, bordered with a wide-spreading lawn of soft green turf, which was kept closely-shaven, and was dotted with spreading trees, and gnarled, rugged old hawthorns. This wide lawn ran from the edge of the moat to the ivy-grown walls of the quaint mansion, evidently the work, with its florid red brick, of some clever architect of Henry VII's days. To a lover of the picturesque, the place was perfect, with its ivy-softened walls and buttresses, quaintly-shaped windows, shady corners, seats beneath hawthorns, and clipped yews that dotted the old pleasaunce; and nothing could have been more attractive than the wild garden formed by the great lawn, broken by mossy boles, which ran down to the great lily-dappled moat.

Sir Mark drew rein upon the old stone bridge, and gazed around him for a while at the broad leaves floating on the dark, clear water, where some great carp every now and then thrust up its broad snout and with a loud smack sucked down a hapless fly. There was something very attractive about the place; the quaint red building seen amongst the oaks and firs; the dashes of colour here and there of Dame Beckley's flower-beds, many of which were rich with strange plants that Gil Carr had brought from foreign lands and given to Mace for the garden at the Pool-house, and of which Dame Beckley had begged or taken cuttings.

There was an air of sleepy calmness about the old moat that had its effect upon Sir Mark, whose musings upon the bridge took something of this form.

"I am in debt; I get more deeply so; and I can never recover myself, as my expenses increase, without wedding a rich wife. Sir Thomas Beckley, Baronet, cannot live for ever; and this would be a charming place for me to settle down to when I get middle-aged and stout, and have grown to care little for the court.

"But then the lady!

"Hah!" he sighed, "It is the way of the world. If rustic Mace, with her sweet beauty, had thrown herself at me, and dropped like a luscious fruit into my hands, I should have wearied of her in a week; but she is hard to reach so I strive the more; while Mistress Anne, here—

"Hah! I will not be too rash. Suppose I temporise, and am gentle and respectful by turns. Even if I marry Mace, there is no reason why I should scorn one who is nearly as fair. Besides which, if Master Culverin is in favour, then a little revenge upon him by tasting the sweet lips of his other love would not come amiss. Only I must be cautious, or I may go wrong. By Bacchus! here is the lady herself!"

He touched the flank of his horse, for just then he caught sight of the gay colours of Mistress Anne's brocaded gown, where she sat upon a rustic seat, reading beneath a shady tree, of course sublimely ignorant of Sir Mark's approach, as she had been watching for him ever since the

messenger had left; and, though her eyes were fixed upon her book, she had read no words since she had seen him pause upon the bridge, and her heart went fluttering beneath its hard belaced cage.

Sir Mark did not know it, but the lady who sat before him in the old pleasaunce, not far from the moat, had come to precisely the same determination as himself. Could she win Gil she would, for his dashing life of adventure always made him seem quite a hero of romance; but, failing Gil, Sir Mark would do. So once more she determined to play a cautious waiting game of the two-strings-to-the-bow fashion; and, therefore, when Sir Mark leaped from the fat cob, sent by Sir Thomas by her special command, and approached her hat in hand, no stranger could possibly have imagined that there was such a place in the world as the Pool-house, where dwelt sweet Mace Cobbe, to whose greater attractions Sir Mark had yielded, and stayed away. The handsome courtier from town might have just returned from a visit to the foundry after but a few hours' absence so smiling and pleasant was his reception beneath the trees.

"By Bacchus, she's a sensible girl after all," thought Sir Mark.

"I may bring him to my knees yet," thought Mistress Anne; "and, if I do, I'll hold him till Gil Carr asks me to be his wife, and then—"

A flash sped from her eye full of malicious glee, as, taking her hand once more *à la minuet*, Sir Mark led her up towards the house, where, well-schooled by his daughter, Sir Thomas squeezed his fat face into a smile, and declared he was glad to see his guest again.

"Your inspection has taken you a long time, Sir Mark," he said.

"It has been a tedious task," was the reply; "and even now I have not done."

"Indeed?" said Mistress Anne.

"Nay," he replied; "it is quite possible that I may have to return within the month to continue my report."

As he spoke he glanced furtively at Mistress Anne, to see what effect it would have upon her. To his satisfaction, she clapped her hands joyously.

"I *am* so glad," she cried, with childlike glee. Then, as if ashamed of her outburst, she looked down and blushed, ending by glancing timidly at Sir Mark.

"She's very charming, after all," he thought, as he smiled upon her. "Poor girl, she can't help it, I suppose;" and he felt a pleasant glow of self-satisfaction and conceit run through his veins.

"We see so little company," simpered Anne.

"Really, you've seen very little of me," said Sir Mark. "But duty—duty, Sir Thomas. I felt bound to stay there and keep matters well under my own eyes."

"It must have been very tedious and tiresome," said Anne, innocently; "but then, Mace Cobbe is very nice and pleasant, is she not?"

Sir Mark looked sharply to the speaker to see if this was a venomous shaft, but Mistress Anne's eyes were as wide open as her face was vacant and smooth.

"Yes," he said, quickly; "a very pleasant, sensible girl. Well educated, too."

"Yes," said Anne, dreamily. "I like Mace Cobbe, only dear father and my mother don't quite approve of my making her an intimate."

The faint "Oh!" that escaped from Sir Thomas Beckley's lips must have been caused by a twinge of gout, for he did not venture to speak when he caught his daughter's eye.

"Will you not come and see my mother, Sir Mark?" continued Anne, sweetly. "She is down in her simple-garden, by the southern wall."

"I shall be delighted," was the reply; and rising, he escorted the lady

out through an open bay window, and along the closely-shaven lawn.

“Anne means to marry him,” said Sir Thomas, gazing after his daughter, and rubbing his nose in a vexed manner. “What a smooth, soft puss it is! Who’d think she had such claws?”

“She’s innocence itself,” said Sir Mark to himself, as he twisted his moustache-points, and smiled down tenderly at his companion, who blushed and trembled and faltered when he spoke to her, as naturally as a simple-hearted girl who had been longing for his return. “By all the gods it would be much easier work to make up matters here!”

“Let me run on, and tell my mother you have come, Sir Mark,” said Anne, ingenuously.

“Nay, nay,” said the guest, pressing the trembling little white hand he took; “I have not many hours to stay.”

“Oh!” cried Anne, gazing with piteous wide open eyes. “You are not going away to-day?”

“In two hours’ time, sweet, I must be on the road to London. Must—I must.”

To give Anne credit for her efforts, she tried very hard to squeeze two little tears out of the corners of her eyes; but they were obstinate, and refused to come. She heaved a deep sigh, though, and gazed sadly down at her little silk shoes, as they toddled over the short grass, her heels being packed up on the bases of a couple of inverted pyramids, which just allowed her toes to reach the ground.

“Poor child!” thought Sir Mark; and the desire was very strong upon him to just bend down and kiss her. But he resisted the temptation bravely, his strength of mind being fortified by the knowledge that they were well in sight of the latticed windows.

A minute later, and they had to go through a narrow path, winding through and overarched by broad-leaved nut-stubbs, which formed quite a bower belaced with golden sunbeams, that seemed to fall in drops

upon the enchanter's night-shade, the briony, and patches of long thick grass.

"Is this the way to the simple-garden, Mistress Anne?" he said, playing with the hand that lay upon his arm.

"Yes, Sir Mark," she faltered; "it is close at hand."

It might have been a mile away as far as seeing what went on in the nutwalk was concerned; and feeling this, and a very tender sensation of pitying sorrow for the weak girl at his side, Sir Mark thought that to yield to the temptation would be only kindness, and an act that would solace the poor child, so he said with a sigh:

"Yes, Mistress Anne, I must away in a couple of hours."

"So soon?" she whispered.

"Yes; so soon."

And then somehow, sweet Mistress Anne, in her girlish innocence, thought not of resistance, as her companion drew her softly nearer and nearer to him, one of his arms passing round her slight waist, so that she hung upon it, with her head thrown slightly back. Her veined lids drooped over her eyes, her lips were half parted to show her white teeth, and the lips themselves were red and moist as her soft perfumed breath. For she was very young, and did not know what it was to be taken in the arms of a man, saving upon such an occasion as that when Gil had held her and half borne her along. It was quite natural, then, that when Sir Mark's lips drew nearer and pressed hers, at first so softly that a gnat would have hardly felt the touch, then harder, more closely, and ended by joining them tightly, that she should not shrink from the contact, but, though motionless, seem to passively return kiss for kiss—a score of kisses joined in one.

This one might have lasted an hour or a moment—Sir Mark did not know. All he knew was that for the time being Mace Cobbe was forgotten, and that the kiss was very nice. In fact, it seemed to him that he was just

in the middle of it when an excited voice broke it right in half by exclaiming—

“Oh, my gracious!”

Looking up, he found himself face to face with dumpy, chubby Dame Beckley, staring vacantly astounded, in her spectacles and garden-gloves, her basket having dropped from her hand.

“I—beg—I—”

“Oh, Sir Mark!” exclaimed the lady, angrily; and then, catching her daughter’s eye, she went on in a trembling, fluttering way; “I never thought—I couldn’t see—I really—Oh, dear me; how do you do, Sir Mark? I—I—I am glad to see you back.”

He held out his hand, smiling in her face the while, and in her confusion Dame Beckley placed therein a little trowel, making him start. Then, starting herself, she grew more confused, and snatched the trowel away, dropped it, and nearly struck her head against the visitor, as he stooped quickly to pick up the fallen tool.

“I beg your pardon, Sir Mark,” she stammered, as she finally succeeded in getting trowel and garden-gloves comfortably settled in the basket, a frown from her daughter hastening her pace.

“Sir Mark was coming with me to see you in the simple-garden, mother,” said Mistress Anne, calmly enough. “Will you show him some of your choicest plants?”

“Oh, yes, child, if I—that is—bless me, I hardly know what I am saying. This way, Sir Mark, this way,” and turning abruptly she led the little party down the garden.

Sir Mark pressed Mistress Anne’s hand, and gave her a meaning look and smile, but he was disconcerted to find his companion’s face as innocent and guileless-looking as her limpid eyes.

“Confound it all,” he muttered; “I must not trifle with her, or I shall

break the poor girl's heart."

"These are my simples, Sir Mark," said the dame, pointing to the various old-fashioned herbs growing beneath the shelter of a sunny wall; lavender, rosemary, rue, and balm; peppermint, spearmint, and lemon-thyme; pennyroyal, basil, and marigold; wall-hyssop; and sweet marjoram, borage, and dill, with a score more,—which she hastened to point out to hide her confusion.

"That is agrimony, Sir Mark, for fevers, and that is the new long snake-rooted glycorice from Spain, a fine thing for colds and burning throats. These are the echeverias for making up when there are scalds and burns, and applying cool to the place."

"And what is that great long-leaved plant, madame?" said Sir Mark, showing an interest in what he saw.

"The Indian weed—tobacco, sir, and this is a strange new gourd from the same land; and this is a root that grows into curious floury lumps or balls, when underground. But maybe you have heard of them before we simple people in the country. It is the batata."

"Yes; I have heard of that, and tasted it too," said Sir Mark.

"Would you like to see my vines, Sir Mark?" said the lady, eagerly. "They are in the shelter of the old walls here, and I ripen my grapes, and make my wine, that you shall taste when we go in."

"I thank you, madam, and shall be right glad."

"Here, too, is my woodsage, or germander," cried Dame Beckley, eagerly. "It is a fine bitter, with which we make our ale. I have tried to get Cobbe at the Pool to use it when he brews, but he is obstinate and headstrong, and will take the strange-smelling hop-nettle, which twines and runs up the stakes. Maybe Sir Mark has seen the plantation there."

"Ay, that I have," said Sir Mark, smiling at Anne, while her mother prattled on.

“The founder has a goodly garden, but not like mine,” said the little lady, proudly. “He never grows such apples as these, nor yet such berries or such plums. I have told him much and given him many seeds, but he is a headstrong and a hard man to teach.”

Sir Mark bowed.

“I gave him the graft to place in his stock for the choice Christmas pippins,—the Noel beauty, Sir Mark,—or he would not have had a worthy apple in his garden. Now, I prithee, come and see my bees.”

“Perhaps Sir Mark would not care to see the bees, mother,” said Mistress Anne, demurely; “he might get stung.”

“I should be too pleased to see them,” said Sir Mark, eagerly; and he was led up this long walk, down that, between the closely-cropped yew-trees and the edges of box, all kept in wondrously-regular order, and the beds lush with many-coloured, sweet-scented plants, which grew in clusters luxuriant and strong.

Sir Mark assumed a look of pleasure, and Mistress Anne was innocence itself; her eyes downcast and a trembling, hesitating expression in her countenance, though she plainly saw that Sir Mark was wearied out and longed to go in and rest.

“There is the orchard, that Sir Mark has not yet seen,” cried Dame Beckley, to her daughter’s great delight, as she hung upon the visitor’s arm.

“But, ladies, I must be thinking of my journey back to town.”

“Not without tasting our hospitality, Sir Mark,” exclaimed Dame Beckley, apparently in answer to a signal from her child, and leading the way. So he was amply feasted and petted for the time, until, mounting horse once more, he rode over the bridge, and stopped to wave his hand before the trees hid Mistress Anne and her mother from view, with Sir Thomas in his feather-stuffed breeches and cock-tail hat.



How Sweet Mace asked for a Cup of Water.

“Quick, Polly, my hat and cloak!” cried Mistress Anne, running up to her room, where her little handmaiden was seated at work. “Then there is some truth in the old woman’s philtres after all?”

“Yes, mistress, if you mean Mother Goodhugh’s,” cried the girl, who had caught the last words.

“Why? How? What do you know?” cried Mistress Anne.

“Why, mistress, everybody in love goes to her to get her help.”

“And who told thee I was in love, thou saucy slut?” cried Anne angrily.

“My handsome mistress’s beautiful cheeks, that turned red when she knew Sir Mark Leslie was coming, and her red, ripe lips, that spake his name. La, mistress, don’t be angry with little me, for wishing to see thee with a handsome, gallant husband. But I shouldn’t like though for him to be so fond of Sweet Mace down at the forge.”

“And who dare say he is?” cried Mistress Anne, angrily.

“They say he be, mistress, and that he pooked Captain Culverin about her, and the captain was nearly drowned as well.”

“Who told thee all this?” cried Anne.

“Janet, who lives there, helped the news to me,” replied the girl; “but Sir Mark would never bemean himself to marry such a creature as that Mistress Mace.”

“Hold thy prating tongue,” cried Mistress Anne; “and if I find thee talking about my affairs, girl, or what thou seest, Sir Thomas shall know.”

Hastily tying on hat and cloak, she started for Mother Goodhugh’s, Polly, her apple-faced little maid, making a grimace as she left the room.

“I shall talk as much as I like,” said the girl, giving her head a toss; “mighty madam, as you be. Tell Sir Thomas, and I’ll tell what I see going on from this window, down in the nut-stubbs. Ha, ha, ha! how my lady did stare.”

Mistress Anne lost no time in making her way across the fields and through the woods, to Mother Goodhugh’s; finding the old woman seated at her door, watching her bees as they flew in and out from the straw-hives in her garden-patch.

“Ah, my dearie,” she exclaimed; “you be come again?”

“Yes, mother,” cried Anne, trying, now to keep calm and cool. “What is this I hear about Captain Carr?”

“Captain Carr be not for thee,” cried the old woman, firing up; “he be a murderer—he has slain my best old friend, and if Sir Thomas, thy father, does not have him hung, he be no true man.”

“Softly,” said Mistress Anne; “softly, mother.”

“Nay, I will go softly no more. But of thine own affairs, dearie, Captain Gil Carr is cursed, with all he does. My words have brought him evil already, and thee good. Sir Mark, the handsome stranger, is to wed my handsome mistress. I sent him thee to-day.”

“You sent him?”

“Ah, child, mock away. I sent him on his way to London. Tell me, if thou darest, that he did not say sweet things to thee? Ay, thy face tells it. Child, he be thine.”

“Nay, mother,” cried Anne, who was thrown off her guard by the old woman’s apparent knowledge; “he is coming back soon, and he will go to the foundry-house, and—and—”

“Mace Cobbe? Nay, child, nay; the game be thine own now. He and Mace have nothing between them. He be thine if thou wilt have him.”

“How can you tell me that, mother?”

“What!” cried the old woman, “have not I worked upon him night and day, till he and that girl are at odds? I say, child; the game be thine own.”

“Mother,” whispered Anne, after a glance at the door, “I hardly believe in thy spells; but look, here is a golden piece for you. Ten more shall be yours if you can make Mace Cobbe displeasing in Sir Mark’s eyes when he comes back. He is not half gained yet, but with your help he can be won.”

“Make her displeasing—her face?” said Mother Goodhugh, with a peculiar look. “Hush! I want to know nothing—I will not know anything, Mother Goodhugh. Only I say make her so that he shall care for her no more.”

“But how, child, how?” said the old woman, with a malicious grin.

“Do you want me to teach you your trade?” cried Anne, sharply. “There, give me back my gold piece, and I’ll go to one who can do my bidding.”

“Nay,” cried the old woman, sharply; “I’ll do it; but if I get into trouble thou must stand by me with Sir Thomas.”

“What if they want to burn thee for a witch!” said Mistress Anne.

“Hush!” cried the old woman, “hush!” and she glanced hastily round, to see that they were not overheard. “Don’t speak like that; the people might hear thee. Hist! some one is coming.”

Mistress Anne started up in alarm, as approaching footsteps were heard; and, obeying the old woman’s pointing finger, she hid behind the blue-checked curtain, which shut off her bed, just as there was a tap on the door, and the innocent object of their machinations entered, basket in hand.

“Why, it be thou, child,” cried the old woman, in an ill-used tone.

“Yes, mother; I’ve brought a few little things for thee.”

“Nay, I want them not, nor none of thy trade,” cried the old woman; “I want them not;” but her glistening eyes told another tale. “There, set them down there,” she continued, pointing to a side-table.

“Suppose you open the basket and take them out yourself, mother,” said Mace, smiling with an ingenuous look that might have disarmed the crone’s resentment; but it seemed to have a reverse action, as she rose muttering and scowling, half-snatched the basket, and carried it beyond the curtain, to empty it of its contents.

As she did so, the old woman’s eyes encountered those of Mistress Anne, and a peculiar meaning look passed from one to the other, as Mace said aloud—

“I am thirsty with my walk, mother; can you give me a cup of water?”

“Yes, child, yes,” cried the old woman, hastily; and one of her hands stole towards a shelf over Mistress Anne’s head, as she made believe to go on emptying the basket by making its lid creak loudly.

Mistress Anne’s eyes followed the old woman’s hand, and she saw the skinny fingers close upon a phial, which she hastily hid in her breast, and then once more the eyes of the pair behind the curtain met in a meaning way, and the face of the hiding girl grew ghastly pale.

“Wait a moment, child,” grumbled Mother Goodhugh, “and I’ll get thee a cup of water from the spring. There be thy basket, but bring no more such things to me; I hate them.”

“We’ll see, mother,” said Mace, smiling, as taking a cup from a shelf the old woman hurried out of the cottage to where, out in the road by the side of the lane, a dipping-place for the clear, cool iron-impregnated water had been made.

Stooping down, after glancing right and left, she dipped the cup full of the clear water; and then, removing the cork from the little phial, she poured half its contents beneath the hand that covered the cup, recorked

and hid the bottle, and then with an ugly smile about her lips returned to her visitor.

“Here, child,” she said; “it be cool, and sweet, and pure. There be no curse in that;” and as she spoke she glanced involuntarily at the curtain, behind which Anne Beckley was listening, and, though no breeze penetrated the cottage, the hangings visibly shook as Mace took the cup.

Poison, a decoction of some imaginary power, or merely the juice of a plant full of tannin, the effect was the same. Mother Goodhugh was too deeply intent on watching her last visitor and the curtain to pay any heed to the contents of the cup. She had dipped it full of the iron-impregnated water, and seen that it was clear as crystal before holding it in her left hand, with the fingers extended round the rim and her palm acting as a cover. The pouring in of the liquid of the phial, too, had been done in a hasty way, without more than a glance at what she was doing.

To her surprise, then, as she handed the cup to her visitor, Mace passed it back.

“I asked you for a cup of cold water, mother,” she said quietly, “and you gave me this!”

Mother Goodhugh looked down at the cup to see that the limpid crystal water she had dipped had turned of a livid black; and, startled and convicted by the change, she gazed at it, then at the girl, and then back at the cup.

“What did you put in it, mother?” said Mace, quietly.

“I—I—put anything in?” said the old woman, humbly; “what should I put in?”

“Some one or another of your silly mixtures,” said Mace, sternly. “Why do you attempt to try them upon me?”

“Silly mixtures!” Such a term applied to her philtres in the presence of one whom she wished for her own reasons to impress fully with her potency! A moment before the old woman was shivering and cowed; now

her visitor's words roused up the spirit of opposition within her, and, with her eyes flaming defiance, she called upon her powers of well-matured dissimulation as she half shrieked:—

“I put in mixtures! Go to, white witch that thou art. Did I not see thee cast an evil eye on the drinking water, and turn it black? Look here,” she cried, seizing the cup, throwing out its contents, running to the spring, and returning with it full of clear fluid, “the water be bright and sweet. Nay, nay; thou shalt not touch it,” she cried, as Mace stretched out her hand to take the cup—“I will have no more of thy juggling tricks here. Out upon thee, witch—witch, who triest to win decent maidens' lovers to thy side. When the time comes that justice overtakes thee for thy wicked enchantments, my voice shall be raised to tell of all I know. Go!—Away with thee!—Witch, witch!”

She stood waving her hands and stick at her who had brought her help, and a malignant look of spite and suppressed glee overspread her face, as she laughingly hugged herself upon the clever way in which she had turned the tables upon her accuser. The girl's lips parted to speak; but finding her adversary become more voluble and ready, Mace shrank away, staggered by the words of the old woman, who followed her to the door, and stood menacing her and shrieking threats as she hurried away with the words “witch, witch,” ringing in her ears.

There was no lack of common-sense in the founder's daughter, but for the moment she was startled by Mother Goodhugh's words. No more superstitious than the educated people of her days, a faint belief in the sin of witchcraft lingered in her mind; and she knew by rumour of the terrible fate that had been reserved for women accused of such dealings. For, from time to time, account of fiery executions had reached the remote hamlet, and she shuddered as these memories came back.

To be accused of witchcraft by some malignant enemy meant placing the accused in a position wherein nothing she said would be believed; and, as she hurried homewards, Mace's face was pale with anxiety and dread.

This soon passed off, though, and she laughed at her childish

terrors.

“Poor old thing, she is half mad,” thought Mace; and even then she began to think about the cup; coming rapidly to the right conclusion that Mother Goodhugh had placed some one or another of her decoctions in the water.

“I’ll go there no more,” she said; “the old woman is dangerous, and to try to ward off her wishes by kindly acts seems to make things worse.”

She was, in spite of the encounter, light-hearted and glad; for though the accusation against Gil troubled her, still she knew that he was innocent, and had hoped by propitiating Mother Goodhugh to get her in time to withdraw her words. That adventure had failed; but there was a change at home that made her heart leap. Sir Mark had gone, and an incubus seemed to have been removed from her heart as she felt that the old happy days would come again; and, laughing off the scene with Mother Goodhugh, she hastened on through the pleasant, sunlit glade, where the birds hardly fled at her approach.

“There will be no spells here,” she said, laughingly, as she turned aside; and, parting the bushes, climbed down amongst the ferny stones to where the water dropped into a natural basin, from which, with a cup improvised with a broad burdock leaf, she sipped the pure sparkling fluid and quenched her thirst, seating herself afterwards to rest upon one of the mossy stones, and gazing dreamily down the ravine, through which the water flowed beneath a canopy of luxuriant ferns. As she gazed, a kingfisher, till then motionless upon a twig, suddenly darted down into a pool, rose with something silvery in its beak, and fled along the narrow valley like a streak of azure drawn across the verdure by a spirit-hand, while soon after the white coverts of a blue bar-winged jay were seen as the shy bird peered at her with corvine curiosity and then uttered an excited “Tchah—tchah!” and fled.

Mace thought not of kingfisher, jay, or the velvet-coated blackbird that came and perched so near to watch her intently, for she was considering whether Sir Mark would come back, and, if so, whether he would renew his suit. She was troubled, too, about her father, and his

want of faith in Gil. It had seemed as if in his heart he did not dislike the attentions paid to her by Sir Mark; and at last, with a sigh, she rose and continued her little journey.

"Time smooths away a good many difficulties," she said, half-laughing; "and, if it does not, I must fain follow the example of the Virgin Queen."

To her surprise, before she was out of the wood she met her father, who rarely left the precincts of his own grounds, unless it was to visit ironstone pit, quarry, or the colliers busy charcoal-burning. He seemed to be examining her curiously as she came up to him, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Where have you been, Tit?" he asked.

"To take Mother Goodhugh a chicken and a few little niceties, poor soul!"

"For cursing thy father so bitterly?"

"Nay, father; to try and make the poor half-crazed soul more sensible."

"And to pay her for muttering nonsense to please a silly girl. Tit, I thought better of thee," he said.

Mace looked at him half-wounded, half-amused.

"When did you know me guilty of such follies, father?" she asked.

"Never till now, when thy head was filled with love-nonsense by that scoundrel, Gil."

"Father, you hurt me when you speak thus of Gil," she cried sadly; "and when you doubt my truth."

"Thou hast been to Mother Goodhugh, like some silly wench, to ask her for love-charms; worse still, thou hast, the moment Sir Mark has

gone, run off to keep tryst with a man I forbid thee to see.”

The pained look grew deeper in Mace’s eyes as she laid both her hands upon the broad chest of the founder, and gazed full in his eyes.

“Father, dear,” she said, simply, “why should I go to bid a foolish old woman mutter silly spells, when I know that Gil loves me with all his heart.”

“Out upon his love. As he loves Anno Beckley, and every woman he meets. Shame on thee, girl—for shame!”

She smiled sadly as she still gazed up in his face.

“You don’t mean this, father, dear,” she said. “You don’t think I should be so silly as to go to Mother Goodhugh for what you say?”

“I do,” he cried, harshly.

“And you don’t in your heart think that I have been to see Gil.”

“I tell thee, I do,” he cried.

“And what is more, you don’t think your little girl would play you false.”

“What?” he cried, “has not Gil been at thy window?”

“Yes, father,” she said; “as he has scores of times when we were boy and girl together; but I have bidden him come no more. I never thought harm of it—only that it was pleasant folly,” she added, dreamily.

“Out upon such folly!” he cried.

“Gil will not come again, and I shall try to see him no more, dear, till you bid us meet; and you do not believe that I should ever deceive you.”

“You turn me round your finger, child,” he cried, catching her to his breast, and kissing her passionately. “No, no, no; I don’t believe you went

to that old woman for such trash, nor to meet Gil Carr. I know you couldn't deceive me, my darling; and if I am harsh to thee it is for thy good. Ah! Tit, Tit, what a little witch thou art!"

"Don't, father!" she cried, starting from him with a cry of pain.

"What is it, my bird? What have I done?"

"You called me a witch," she said, with a slight shudder, but trying to laugh it off.

"Well! an' if I did?" he said, laughing.

"It was foolish to mind," she said; "but Mother Goodhugh just now was angry with me, and called me witch, and uttered threats."

"Against thee?" cried the founder, angrily. "I say, then, let her curses return upon her own head, witch that she is herself. She shall go from Roehurst before this time to-morrow."

"Nay, nay, father," cried Mace, hastily; "don't visit her mad ravings upon her. Let her rest. Poor thing! she's crazed with grief. Let her be—for my sake, let her be."

"What, and let her some day bring evil upon us by her witcheries?"

"What, and is my stout, brave father going to have faith in what yon silly woman says!" cried Mace, laughing. "Come, father, promise me you will not have her touched."

"I'll promise thee anything, child," he said, smoothing her soft hair, and bending down to kiss her cheek.

"Anything, father?" she cried.

"Not quite, Mace," he said with a sigh; "but anything that is for thy good;" and they walked on through the wood together, the old man smiling and loitering as his companion kept stooping to pick some bright flower, for it put him in mind of her childhood, when sweet Mace and the

wild flowers seemed each to belong to each. Now it was the bright yellow meadow vetchling, now the brilliant orange-tinted lotus, and then long sprays of the purple-blossomed tufted vetch.

Further on they came to a sunny opening where the trees had been felled, and here was quite a forest garden, where Mace paused, with the care that had shaded her face for days gone to leave it bright and childlike once more; while the founder smiled as he stood and watched her run from patch to patch, picking hastily and talking the while.

"I won't be long, dear. Oh, how beautiful the heath is; what lovely sprays!"

Then she ran to where the orange ragwort threw up its tufts of sun-like florets, picked golden-rod and Saint John's wort; ran a few steps to where the wood betony raised a clump of purple-waving heads. These, with delicate grasses, pink robins, lavender scabious, and soft-foliaged golden-disked flea-bane, and hawkweed, made up a goodly nosegay. But still, there was more and more to add, for as she walked on it was by a clump of golden genista, each plant a bouquet in itself; bright pink starred centaury; and then farther along by a hollow, where the water lay in a dark pool, the quaint stars of the branch bur-reed, with abundance of forget-me-not, seemed to ask the picking.

"Oh, father!" she cried merrily, as she stopped at last, with a bunch of flowers as large as her fingers could grasp, "what a shame that I should keep thee thus!"

"Nay, nay, my child," he said, smiling, as he stroked one of her soft flushed cheeks; "it seems to do me good to see thee young again. It is like a rest on life's journey, and a pleasant halt where one can forget one's hurry and toil. Mace, my pet," he said, seating himself among the heath upon a sandy bank, "I think I could give up everything, except my garden and my pipe and ale, if you and I could go on together always like this."

"Then let us go on like this, father," she cried, seating herself at his feet and resting her head against his knee. "Why should we let trouble

come between?"

"Because we can't help it, girl," he replied, laughing. "He's let in by that little mischief imp who comes unasked and holds open the door for t'other, and then the sorrows come. You know the boy I mean, Tit; his name is Love, and I s'pose it has always been the same."

There came a curiously pained look in Mace's eyes as she turned them quickly up to her father, then the woodland nosegay she had picked fell at her feet, and her head drooped down upon his knee.

How the Big Howitzer was Fired.

Time glided on, and Gil's ship was fast getting ready for sea. It was to be a good trip this season; and, as she approached completion, her freight was gradually accumulated, for, as in a quiet matter-of-fact way, the captain let the relations between him and Mace stand in abeyance, the founder made some slight advances, and business arrangements were resumed.

It would have been a serious matter for both if they had stood out, for Gil formed almost the only channel through which Jeremiah Cobbe's productions were sold, and upon him depended the supply of two of the principal ingredients with which one of the founder's branches of industry was carried on.

So gunpowder was made and ground. Gil—though never asked to the house, nor making any attempt to see Mace, and at their casual encounters meeting her quite as a friend—spent much of his time at the founder's works, superintending a casting, watching the purification of some batch of nitre that he had brought home, and, above all, helping at the trial of a newly-finished howitzer or culverin.

The founder was pleased, for he told himself that the young people were growing sensible, and he became more friendly to Gil, who at last, after sundry night journeys had been noted by the people about, found himself ready for another voyage.

“When do you sail, then?” said the founder to him one morning.

“I have thought of going to-morrow,” was the reply; “but the tide hardly suits.”

“Then put it off till the next day, my lad, and we’ll have out the new piece to-morrow, and try her across the Pool.”

“With all my heart,” said Gil, and the next morning he was busy and light-hearted at the foundry, with old Wat Kilby and half-a-dozen more, helping and superintending the mounting and dragging out of the great newly-finished piece of artillery, on which the founder for some time had been engaged.

“She’ll startle some of them,” he said, as he patted the great piece on the breech, just as Mace came up slowly, and saluted Gil. “You shall have the first shot with her, Tit,” he said, as the idea occurred to him.

“Will it be safe to let her?” said Gil, rather anxiously, as he saw Mace shudder and shrink back.

“Safe? Just as if one of my pieces could burst!” cried the founder, disdainfully.

“The girt barrel be ready, Mas’ Cobbe,” said Tom Croftly, as he came up to announce that he had set up a great tub on a platform of planks on the other side of the Pool.

“We’ll soon batter that down,” cried the founder, as with a loud cheer the huge piece of artillery was dragged up to the end of the lake, facing the founder’s house, the whole of the men turning out to see the first discharge.

“You’ll help me to load and train her?” said the founder, who was as excited over the trial as a boy.

“Ay, I’ll help,” cried Gil, rolling up the sleeves of his doublet, and taking the lead at charging the monster; Mace smiling as she looked on, and saw the strength he brought to bear, ramming the powder, lifting the

great shot as if it were a child's ball, and then driving it home.

"Don't aim at the target till we get the charged shell," said the founder. "This is only a christening shot."

"Then we'll call the piece 'Mace the First,'" said Gil, laughing.

"That's her name, then," said the founder; "and she shall be the first of many Maces. Why are you aiming so low?"

"I want to show you a shot of mine that I should use against a Spaniard if I wished to sink her," said Gil, smiling, as by means of wedges he depressed the muzzle of the piece.

"But stop, man, the ball will go to the bottom of the Pool, and I want you to hit yon ragged oak."

"So I shall," cried Gil, taking aim. "Give me leave, and you shall see."

"There," he said, when he had adjusted the piece to his satisfaction, "that will about do. Now, Wat, ready with that linstock. What are you looking at, man?"

Wat Kilby, whose eyes had been fixed on Janet staring out of the window, uttered a low growl, and lit the linstock.

"Now, Master Cobbe," cried Gil, "do you feel satisfied that the piece is safe?"

"My life upon it," cried the founder.

"Nay," said Gil, gently; "it is thy child's life."

The founder frowned, and was about to speak hastily, but he refrained.

"Thou art right, friend Gil," he said; "but have no fear, the piece is made of my toughest stuff. Come, my child, be ready with the linstock."

Gil's countenance betrayed his uneasiness; and, to give him confidence, Mace let her eyes meet his, with a calm, loving look, as she mastered her dread and horror, took the burning linstock, and stood ready near the breach.

There was a general rush to right and left as the lighted linstock was brought forward; only the founder, Gil, and Wat Kilby, who handed the light, remaining, the latter coolly squatting down near the mouth of the piece to watch the course of the shot.

The founder smiled grimly as he said to his child:

"A little more to the right, my lass. I warrant she don't burst; but she'll kick like a Castilian mule. Now, captain, if you like to stand aside, there's no need for you to run a risk."

Gil smiled and nodded his head as he took a final glance along the piece to satisfy himself as to the direction in which it was laid.

"There," he said. "I am quite ready; raise your arm a little, Mace, and let the burning linstock fall softly on the touch-hole. Now, Master Cobbe, give the word, please; when you will."

"As I cry three," cried the founder—"Ready—One, two, *three*."

Gil stood by the side of the piece, opposite to Mace, watching her face as she stood firm and unflinching; and as she lowered the linstock he inwardly cried, "Brave girl! she would face a peril that would kill any of less sterling mould."

For, at the word "three," she let the linstock-end, with its burning slow match, touch lightly, exactly on the point where the priming lay. Then there was a flash, a ball of white smoke, vomited from the howitzer's mouth, a deafening roar, and the great iron ball struck the water fifty yards away, rose, dipped again, and went on skipping along the surface of the water till it crossed the lake, and split the decaying oak to fragments, where it stood blasted on the further shore.

A loud hurrah from the lookers-on told of their satisfaction; and the

founder turned in admiration to the captain.

"A wonderful shot," he said; "but how learned you that trick, friend Gil? I thought we should never see the ball again."

"From throwing stones," said Gil, smiling. "If a stone should bound along the surface, why not a shot? That is the deadliest shot to my mind, Master Cobbe, that one could send at an enemy's ship, and it was bravely fired."

"Of course," said the founder, proudly. "If my child knew that I had made the powder, and my hands had designed and fashioned the piece, she felt she would have naught to fear. And now for a shell."

"Yes," said Gil, thoughtfully; "now for a shell. You think your piece will fire one straight, Master Cobbe, as well as a mortar throws one in a half-circle through the air?"

"I do," said the founder. "I lay my life on it."

"Then," said Gil, "I'd like to try my plan at the same time."

"What may that be, my lad?"

"Well, sir, it is this," said Gil. "You load your piece, then you prepare your well-charged shell, with a piece of slow match in its eye."

"Yes."

"And according to whether that is long or short, so is the time before it bursts the shell."

"Exactly, my lad."

"And you light the fuse or match before you place it in the howitzer."

"How else could you do it, my lad?"

"That we will try," said Gil. "I propose that you load the piece as you

would a common gun, and then put in the shell with its fuse unlit.”

“Why, that’s no better than a shot,” cried Wat Kilby.

“Nay, old lad, the powder would fire the match when the piece went off, and thus all the awkward preparation would be saved.”

“My faith, Gil,” said the founder, smiling, “it’s a grand idea, and you shall try it; for if it succeeds there ought to be a big reward for the man who invents such a plan.”

“Let’s try, then,” said Gil, quietly; and, with Wat Kilby’s help, the piece was recharged, a shell filled with powder, and, with its fuse towards the charge, rammed home. Then the great piece was laid so that it commanded the broad tub set up as a mark.

“I reckon,” said Gil, “that this shell should burst just about when it strikes that mark, which should be shattered to pieces; and, if an enemy’s ship, or a fortress, terribly crippled by the effect.”

“Good, my lad, it should,” said the founder, smiling.

Without another word, Gil carefully adjusted the piece; the linstock was again handed to Mace, and, hiding a shudder, for her father’s sake she once more fired the great gun, and after a few moments, as the roar rolled like thunder over the Pool, the founder exclaimed—

“A failure, Gil, a—”

Crash!

From a mile away came the roar of the bursting shell, like an echo of the first shot.

“A success, sir, a success; but we wanted a quarter the fuse,” said Gil, smiling.

“It’s glorious—it’s grand!” cried the founder, excitedly. “Gil, your hand—nay, we don’t shake hands now. Captain Carr, you could make a name

as the greatest gunner in our land. Mace, my child, bravely fired. Why, that shell must have struck the high rocks, where the new ironstone lies.”

“Ay, it has,” said Wat Kilby, who stood shading his eyes with his hand, as he gazed at the high precipitous rocks away behind the gabled house.

“Quick, there, another shot!” cried the founder. “Mace, my child, art ready for another?”

“Nay, father,” she said quietly, and with a pained look in her eyes; “you should try this time.”

“Ay, lass, and I will,” he cried, as he watched the sponging-out and reloading of the piece; while Mace, who little recked in that shot of what she had done for her future, stood now a spectator, instead of an actor in the scene.

The piece was soon ready, and this time the shell was prepared by Gil himself, with a shorter fuse.

“Lay her so that the shell may burst over the great charcoal-heap by the corner of the wood,” said the founder; and, after exercising a great deal of care, Gil laid the piece quite to his satisfaction.

“Now try,” he said. “Ready!”

“Ready,” cried the founder.

“Fire.”

The linstock was again applied; there was the same tremendous roar; the great piece leaped back several feet, and a few seconds later, *crash!* came the bursting of the shell once more, so near to the charcoal hill that the air was filled with the fragments that were scattered far.

“A great success, Gil; you have won a prize,” cried the founder, “one of those that the world will talk of a century hence; but hey-day! what’s this?”

There was the quick trampling of horses' feet, and at the end of a few seconds two horsemen came tearing along the track at full speed, their riders having apparently lost all control over their steeds. The first kept his seat, and tugged hard at the bridle; but the second was well on his horse's neck, to which he clung with all his might, his red face and his thickly-padded feather breeches showing that it was Sir Thomas Beckley, whose appearance was greeted by the founder with a roar of laughter.

Gil hardly glanced at him, for the happy sunshine of the past hours seemed to have been clouded, as the frightened horses stopped of their own accord, and he saw that the first arrival was Sir Mark, whose horse, like that of the baronet, had been startled by the bursting shell.

How Sir Mark's Men came to Grief.

"Confound you, fool," cried Sir Mark, leaping from his restive steed; and as he spoke his eyes rested upon Gil. "Have a care how you fire. Your blundering nearly cost worshipful Sir Thomas Beckley his life."

Gil met his eye with a cold stare of defiance that made the hot blood dance in the other's veins.

"It was I who fired the shell, Sir Mark," said the founder, curtly; "and it were well when I am trying my pieces if visitors gave notice of their coming."

"I came, sir, on the King's business," said Sir Mark, sharply; "and so ride where and when I will! I trust thou art not hurt, Sir Thomas."

The worthy baronet felt for his hat, which was gone, and with it his Sunday plume, as, evidently congratulating himself that he was safe on earth again and free of his frightened steed, he raised his fat eyelids a little wider, and gaped like a fish, opening his lips and shutting them without a sound.

"See," he continued, "the worthy justice is hurt. I ask your pardon, Mistress Mace, but I was concerned for Sir Thomas. Will you help me to

lead him into the house—with your permission, Master Cobbe.”

“Permission?” cried the founder. “There, sir, leave your ceremony in town when you come to see me. Sir Thomas, I am sorry our firing startled your good nag: come in and drink a cup of wine, and you’ll be all right in a twinkling.”

Sir Thomas wanted to be dignified, and refuse, but at the same time he felt ready to give his ears for a glass of wine. He was shaken, bruised, and his nerve had gone; in fact he had given himself over for a dead man, when his horse stopped beside the group of workmen; so, sinking his dignity, he followed the founder across the little bridge and into the house, Sir Mark following, with Mace, who knew that she must be at hand to play the hostess.

Just then a couple of Sir Mark’s followers,—half soldiers, half servants,—cantered up, and, seeing at a glance that no harm was done, threw themselves from their horses, and, pitching the reins to the nearest workmen, strutted and stared about in a condescending way, as if the rusticity of the place and people was highly amusing to their London minds.

Gil leaned with his back against the gun, gazing after those who entered the house; and a feeling of bitterness came over him as he recalled the fact that the next day he sailed on a voyage that might take him three, four, or five months, and he would have to go and leave the woman he loved exposed to the persecutions of this man.

He smiled as he glanced down at himself, at his loose shirt smeared and blackened with gunpowder, his bare arms and hands smirched with the same; and he compared himself with the gaily-attired officer who had alighted and entered the house, and not to his own advantage.

“Even his grooms cut a better figure,” muttered Gil.

His musings were cut short by a growl from Wat Kilby.

“How now, old bear!” he said, bitterly. “Is thy head sore?”

"It'll be somebody else's head sore directly," growled the old fellow, who had just been a witness of the fact that one of Sir Mark's followers had seen Janet's bright face at the window, as she gazed admiringly at the showily-dressed new arrivals, and had kissed his hand to her—a compliment the pretty handmaiden was not slow to acknowledge.

"Now, Wat, you must not heed such things," said Gil. "What is the girl to thee?"

"This much, skipper, that if he don't mind—there: if he affronts me I'll stuff him head first into the gun, as I be a sinful man."

"Silence, old fool!" cried Gil, angrily. "The girl is nothing, and never will be, to thee. Get me my doublet and cap, for the new babe is baptised and the visitors may all go home."

"Old fool, eh?" growled Wat. "Well, perhaps I be. Never mind; it's pleasant to be an old fool if it be on account of a pretty woman."

As he spoke he fetched his skipper's doublet and cap from the place where they had hung, and was turning with them to Gil, who had stooped down by the edge of the Pool, to wash off some of the tightly-clinging powder, when one of Sir Mark's followers walked up, and, rudely slapping Gil on the shoulder, cried, "Stop there, fellow; you have not done yet."

"No," said the other, swaggering up; "you've fired for your pleasure; now, perhaps, you'll have to fire for ours."

"My lads," said Gil, quietly, "I am not in a quarrelling humour to-day. Go to thy master, or maybe his livery may get sullied in the Pool."

"Insolent!" cried one.

"What does he mean?" cried the other. "Stop, I say; keep your doublet off till Sir Mark gives you leave to put it on."

He made a snatch at the garment Wat was handing to his leader, wondering the while how Gil could be so calm, but as the fellow snatched at the sleeve Gil's open hand dealt him so tremendous a blow in the

chest that he staggered backwards; and, as his companion leaped at Gil to help his comrade, Wat thrust out a foot and sent him sprawling on the ground.

The two men leaped up, whipped out their swords, and made at Gil, who half drew his own weapon, but thrust it back with a contemptuous "Pish!" and, as the first man made a pass at him, he struck it aside with his open hand, closed with his assailant, disarmed him, and snapped his sword in two.

The other was more cautious, but Gil watched his opportunity, tore his sword from his hand, and served it the same.

Blind with rage, the two men drew their daggers, and made at him again; but by this time Gil's men had closed round, and Sir Mark's followers were seized and disarmed.

"What shall we do with them, captain?" said one of the sailors; but Gil had walked away in disgust at the treatment he received from the founder, and the order came from Wat Kilby—

"Pitch 'em overboard, my lads, into the Pool."

Meanwhile, Sir Mark had entered the old parlour, and gladly, like Sir Thomas, availed himself of the founder's hospitality after a long, hot, and dusty ride. The exciting finish, too, had begotten thirst. He had a dozen gallant sayings to bestow upon Mace, whose mind was full of the insult he had thrown at Gil; and her heart beat with pleasure as she recalled her lover's calm sense of contempt for the gaily-dressed fly who had stung him in the breast.

"This is not a bad glass of wine, Master Cobbe," said Sir Thomas, who was drinking his third.

"I'm glad you like it," said the founder, who kept glancing at Sir Mark and his child in an uneasy way; "it's part of a cask brought me from the south of Spain itself."

"Ah, yes," said the worthy justice; "it is not bad."

"The days have seemed weeks since I have been away, Mistress Cobbe," whispered Sir Mark; "and I have tried so earnestly to come."

"Is it on business to my father?" said Mace, who felt that she must say something, "That depends, sweet," he said in a low voice. "I come as a friend or as an enemy, as he will, and as the fair Mistress Mace may will. His Majesty has charged me with a mission to Master Cobbe, that means—shall I speak plainly?"

"If you please, Sir Mark," she replied. "I do not understand you else."

"Then I will speak out, even at the risk of offending—nay, I would say hurting, one who, I hope, is very glad to welcome me back."

"You said you would speak plainly, Sir Mark," replied Mace.

"Ay, and so I will," he said; "but surely I may prolong our discourse. Think how many weary weeks it is since I heard thy voice."

"You said you came as a friend, or as an enemy to my father, Sir Mark," replied Mace, ignoring the compliment. "You must come as a friend when you enter his house and partake of his hospitality."

"Tush! how sharp the little rustic mind can be. Nay, child; how did you know I meant to stay?" he added aloud.

"From thy manner, Sir Mark."

"Then I trust it will be as a friend that I have come," he said, eagerly; "and that my stay here may be long, and bring great riches to your father's purse. It rests with him, or with thee, I hardly can tell which."

"Your words are strange, Sir Mark," said Mace, who kept on talking, but with her thoughts far away, for the sounds of angry voices had fallen upon her ear, and she was trembling lest anything wrong should have arisen on account of Gil.

"Nay, then, how can I speak otherwise?" whispered Sir Mark, as Sir

Thomas prosed on with the founder, praising his wine, and condescending to drink deeply, for it was greatly to his taste—"how can I speak otherwise when I am so confused and stricken by thee? Let me speak plainly, then."

"See to thy men, Sir Mark," cried Mace, hurrying to the open window; for just then came an angry buzz of voices, shouts mingled with laughter, and cries for help, in which Sir Mark's name was mingled.

In two strides he was at the window. The next moment he had leaped out, just as there were a couple of splashes, and he saw, just where the race commenced, his two followers plunged into the Pool.

How Wat Kilby was not Ducked.

Men, when half-angry, are in their horseplay rather disposed to be brutal, and it was so here. Sir Mark's followers had made themselves exceedingly obnoxious to those of Gil, and they had seen him defend himself against a furious attack before, treating his enemies with contempt, he had brushed them aside and walked away. There was a fine opportunity then to avenge the insult to their leader, and to teach the gaily-dressed strangers to be a little less important and condescending to the people amongst whom they had come.

Ever since the world began there has been the desire to dress up the frail tenement of clay in which our souls do dwell, and to make it bright and gaudy. In early days it was perhaps only a daub of red earth, the blue or purple stain of a berry or leaf, or a brightly-tinted feather from some wild bird's wing; and no sooner was the decoration donned than envy came upon the scene, mingled with dislike. Possession could not be had of the gay adornment, but there was the satisfaction of seeing the bright colours fade, the daub of gaily-hued earth washed away by the same heavy rain that bedraggled the feather, and made its plumes stick to the shaft. This same feeling exists in a.d. 1883 as it did in the year 3500+b.c., and no greater pleasure can be given to a rough mob than that of seeing some well-dressed individual come down into the mud.

The followers of Gilbert Carr then felt a real annoyance at seeing these showily-dressed men vapouring about, and hence it was with sincere pleasure that they heard Wat's order, one which they were not slow in putting into effect.

Four of the sturdy sailor-looking men seized the strangers on the instant; while the workpeople freely helped; and the result was that, in spite of struggles, cries, and piteous appeals, first one and then the other was plunged into the rushing water of the mill-race, and borne towards the turning wheel.

As for Wat Kilby, he would have felt a grim satisfaction in seeing both swept through, over the fall into the deep hole beyond, where he would have helped to fish them out half-drowned; but there were plenty of workpeople present who would not allow matters to go to such an extremity, but were already about to lend aid as Sir Mark leaped out of the window, to be followed more deliberately by the founder through the door, Sir Thomas staying behind to have another glass of the very satisfactory wine.

Sir Mark then was in time to see his two men carefully fished out, to stand staggering and dripping on the edge of the Pool.

"How was this?" he cried. "Whose doing was it?" he repeated, stamping his foot angrily, and gazing round as his men sputtered, panted, and pressed the water out of their eyes.

For answer there was a tremendous roar of laughter, which exasperated him the more, as he looked eagerly around for Gil, or some one worthy of his steel.

The founder was more successful, for on coming up and asking a similar question, gazing angrily the while at Wat Kilby, that individual uttered a low laugh.

"This was thy doing!" the founder cried fiercely, as he scowled at the old sailor.

“Ay, and suppose it was, Master Cobbe. What then?” growled Wat.

“You dog! How dare you insult my guests?” he cried. “I’ll have no more of thy ill-conditioned drunken ways. Here, Croftly, Jenking, a dozen of you, serve this old brawler, here, the same. I will have him punished, Sir Mark, or my name is not Cobbe.”

He turned to his guest, and then his sun-browned, rugged face became purple with fury, for, of all the group of his busy workmen about, not one stirred to do his bidding.

“Do you hear?” he roared, furiously. “In with that fellow there.”

Wat Kilby laughed, and seated himself on a block of stone, took out his pipe and flint and steel with exasperating calmness, and prepared to strike a light.

Still no one moved, and Sir Mark, who was irritated beyond endurance, called to his followers to throw Wat in themselves.

But the two men shivered and glanced towards their horses, so thoroughly had they been cowed by their wetting; and, seeing this, Sir Mark made at the old fellow himself.

“Up with you, boor,” he cried, presenting his sword as if to prick the old fellow towards the water.

Wat ceased nicking the steel against the flint, blew at the tinder, lit his pipe, and puffed a cloud in the face of Sir Mark, as, rising suddenly, he towered over him, and looked down with a cool laugh.

“Put up thy sword, my fine fellow,” he cried. “Thou art not going to pook me, and there isn’t a man here who would raise a finger to help thee. I gave my lads here orders to duck your men for insulting our captain, and they did it well. Come away, boys, we are not wanted here.”

The great fellow’s coolness seemed somehow to stagger Sir Mark, while the founder made no further attempt to interfere, as Wat thrust his tobacco in one pocket, his flint and steel in the other; and, puffing away at

his pipe, went slowly off, staring hard at the house for a glance at Janet. Then passing the great howitzer he gave it an affectionate slap upon the breech, and marched towards the forest.

“In with you,” cried Sir Mark to his followers; “in and get your garments dry. Master Cobbe, these men will have to be brought to book.”

He glanced round haughtily at the group of workpeople, who did not, however, seem much impressed either by him or his ways, for they merely nodded and whispered together, ending by broadly grinning at the figure cut by the two half-drowned men, who followed the founder into one of the stone furnace-sheds, where they were furnished with blankets to use as wrappers while their clothes were rapidly dried.

Sir Thomas shortly after left on foot, alleging that he was too much hurt by the saddle to attempt to mount again; and his horse was ridden back for him by one of the founder’s boys.

The worthy baronet and justice reached home looking very hot and weary, to be met on the step by his daughter.

“Where is Sir Mark?” she cried. “My dear, I left him at the Pool,” replied Sir Thomas, feebly, for the attack made by his daughter was sharp.

“Left him there? Did I not say thou wert to stay and bring him back?”

“But, my dear—”

“Oh, out upon you!” cried Mistress Anne, stamping her foot in anger. “Fie, father, fie; I try so hard to do justice to thy house, and welcome our guest back as becomes his rank. I try to let him see that he is the visitor of a baronet, and what do you do, my father, but slight him—leave him to the care of these people at the foundry, for him to stay as he stayed before. It is a shame.”

Poor Sir Thomas tried to put on his magisterial air, but failed dismally, as he always did when he tried to do battle with his child. He could frighten his different domestics till they trembled in awe of his

presence; but his daughter seemed to have so great an influence over him that he was fain to open and shut his lips in fish-like muteness, and obey her to the very letter.

It was a great relief to him then when Mistress Anne flounced out of the room, and he heard a door upstairs bang very loudly, being a signal that she had shut herself, angrily, in her own bower, as it was called by the maids.

“Poor child,” he muttered; “I fear her heart is set on this young knight.”

“What’s that you say?” exclaimed Dame Beckley, who had entered, and heard a part of his speech.

“I say, I fear me that her heart is set upon this young knight, my dear.”

“Tut—tut—tut. Yes, I suppose so,” replied the dame. “But the other day it was that Captain Gil.”

“Ay, she’s a headstrong girl,” said the baronet; “and we shall have much trouble with her yet. How much she takes after my family, to be sure!”

Dame Beckley glanced sidewise at her lord, but she did not speak; and then, hearing that Sir Mark had not returned, and that Sir Thomas did not know whether he would return, she fully divined how it was that the eruption of temper had taken place; and sighing, and wishing her daughter well wed, she retired to cull simples in the garden, and feel thankful that she had outgrown all such troubles of her own.



How Sir Mark played his Cards.

There was news at the Pool-house next day that Culverin Carr's ship had sailed; Jeremiah Cobbe hearing thereof from his man, Tom Croftly.

"Heaven send them a good voyage, master," said the workman. "I hear the girt ship went down the river at daybreak, and there's a brave deal of our work on board."

"Yes," said the founder, thoughtfully; and then he began thinking about Gil.

"He's gone off, poor boy, and without a word of good-bye. I was rough enough to him yesterday, and yet he showed me a plan that is a little fortune in itself. Poor lad, I like him; but tut—tut; there, it can never be; Mace is no mate for him, and I'm glad that he has gone."

He was busying himself soon after in seeing the big howitzer dragged back to the shelter of a shed, so as to be free to talk to Sir Mark, who had intimated or rather ordered him to be ready for a conference at ten of the clock; and, in spite of his bluff independence, there was that in his guest's manner that made him rather uneasy, as much on his child's account as upon his own.

"There's something behind," he said; "something I don't understand; and, though I could fight him well enough in a fair and open quarrel, when they get to their diplomacy and policy, and underhanded-behind-your-back ways, I'm done."

The thoughts of the previous day's shell-firing, however, put Sir Mark out of his head; and he was thinking whether it would not be wise to have the howitzer out once more to try the same experiments, when Sir Mark, who had been waiting since breakfast to gain an interview with Mace, and quite in vain, now joined him by the edge-stone of the race.

For Mace had had hard work to maintain her composure at the morning meal; having heard, as she had from Janet only just before, that

Gil's ship had sailed.

She was not satisfied with their parting, for she felt in her heart that he would be troubled at the presence of Sir Mark, whose inopportune return had, as it were, cast a shadow on Gil's last day.

"But he'll trust me," she said, with a satisfied smile; "and he may. There, I'll fret no more, for time will make all smooth, no doubt."

As to Sir Mark, she felt that she must be very plain with him, and trust to his being enough of a gentleman to cease what would degenerate into persecution if continued in face of her declaration that she could not listen to his suit.

So Mace brightened up, and told herself that there was no need to be at all uneasy about their guest, setting him down as a vain coxcomb, without giving him the credit for being, to gain his own ends, unscrupulous to a degree.

"Ah, Sir Mark," exclaimed the founder, heartily; "I've seen thy two fellows, and a hearty breakfast has set them right. They are none the worse for their last night's dip."

"Bodily, perhaps not, Master Cobbe; but mentally I'll vow that they are very ill. My followers are soldiers and gentlemen, and cannot suffer so great an affront without some heed. Those people with their leader will have to be hunted out of the place."

"Thou'lt want ships to limit them now," said the founder, drily; "for they are off to sea."

"What! at sea? Why, they were here but now."

"But now?"

"Well, last even," said Sir Mark. "They cannot be gone."

"Tut, man. Culverin Carr and his men work by night, when such as we are asleep. They were at the mouth of the river, where the sea beats

on the sand-bar, before you woke this morning, I'll be bound."

"You seem to be well acquainted with their movements, Master Cobbe," said Sir Mark.

"Not I," was the reply. "When I've sold cargo to Captain Gil I ask no more except to have a written promise from him to pay me my money, which generally comes in sulphur and in Chinese salt. I never inquire into his sailings or comings-in. It is as well not, and they're pretty secret over them, taking on board, sailing, and the like."

"This is curious work, Master Cobbe, in his Majesty's dominions. Law and order seem to be held cheaply here. It was time something was done."

"And yet, sir, we have gone on for years, offending none, and have found life very bearable," said the founder, warmly. "We owe no man aught, and we ask no favours from any. But you had business to do with me, Sir Mark. Shall we go in?"

"No," said Sir Mark, "I'll say what I have to say out here."

The founder softly rubbed his hands and wished that the great howitzer had not been replaced in the shed, for it might have been fired again, and its wonderful strength and carrying powers exhibited to the King's messenger. If he saw its value, and made good representations at court, that would be a large fortune for his child.

He rubbed his hands again, smiling to himself the while, till he awoke suddenly to the fact that Sir Mark was watching, when he seemed suddenly to tighten himself up, and gazed back shrewdly at his companion, who smiled and said—

"I came back to you, Master Cobbe, armed with great powers by His Majesty, to whom I have talked long and learnedly upon your works and knowledge of the arts and mysteries of making guns."

"That is well, Sir Mark," said the founder, smiling. "And what said his Majesty?"

“He left in my hands the power and discretion to order of you—largely—sundry munitions of war.”

“That is good,” said the founder, rubbing his hands, as if the palms began to itch to feel the money.

“Hi was satisfied with the quality and workmanship.”

“I tell thee, Sir Mark, that the equals of my pieces are not to be found in this country, search where you will. I take such pains to have naught but the toughest iron, and as to finish—”

“Exactly, Master Cobbe,” said the knight, smiling in a half-cynical manner; “but that is your view of the matter.”

“No man ever knew me to lie or to cheat in trading, Sir Mark,” said the founder, hotly. “I will compare my pieces with those of any foundry in —”

“Yes, yes, exactly, Master Cobbe, exactly. But, hark ye, I have, as I tell thee, full authority to deal with thee, but everything depends upon my report.”

“Try the report of the pieces themselves,” said the founder, chuckling. “There, speak out, my lad. If it be a case of commission, say what you require, and I’ll tell thee at once whether I’ll pay or no.”

“Do you wish to insult me, Master Cobbe?” said the knight, haughtily.

“Insult thee? No, my lad, not I. Would it be any insult to offer thee a hundred or two for thine introduction?”

“Silence, man!” cried Sir Mark, angrily. “I am no dealer seeking a bribe, but one who would do you a good turn, if possible, at a very difficult time. You have enemies.”

“If successful, didst ever know a man without?”

“And they have somehow given the King to understand that it was really you who supplied the conspirators with the powder for their deadly plot.”

“But I swear—” began the founder.

“What good will that do, sir? An enemy swears against thee, and humours the king, who, so great is his hatred of such matters, lends willing ear to the charge, and would rather believe the treason of thee than not.”

“That’s a pretty state of affairs!” cried the founder. “Do you mean to tell me, Sir Mark, that the king would willingly believe an honest man guilty?”

“His Majesty gives much of his time to two subjects—that of witchcraft and that of schemes against his person. You know how deadly a plot was laid against him by his Papist enemies?”

“Ay, I know all that; but—”

“Hear me out, Master Cobbe, then you shall speak to your heart’s content. Here is the case. It has been reported to his Majesty that you are a great factor of deadly gunpowder; that you sell it largely to his Majesty’s enemies; and that at the present time you are receiving into your house a Papist spy—one Father Brisdone, who is making arrangement for a fresh supply of powder for some new plan.”

“It’s a lie!” roared the founder, striking his doubled fist in his opened hand. “Now, look here, Master Ambassador, or whatever you call yourself, how comes his Majesty to know aught about my powder and Father Brisdone? It strikes me, sir, that yours have been the lips that made the mischief.”

Sir Mark was taken aback by this outburst, but he recovered himself pretty quickly.

“I will not take offence, neither will I argue with you upon such a point, Master Cobbe,” he said, coldly. “Let me ask you this—Was mine

the speech that gave evil report of thee to the King, which said evil report first brought me down?"

"True!" exclaimed the founder. "I beg thy pardon, my lad. There is some busy meddling rascal, then, who tells tales of me and mine. Well, all I say is, let him look to it. I would not be he for a something if we two stood together some night by the mill-pool."

"You would not throw him in?" said Sir Mark.

"No; but I might push him in, and leave him to get out how he could. But there, you can send word to his Majesty that he has been deceived. Certainly I sell powder to go abroad along with my guns—powder made of the softest dogwood charcoal we can burn."

"Yes," said Sir Mark; "I could, as you say, send word to his Majesty that it is not so, but it would require backing up with stronger asseveration."

"To be sure," said the founder; "and that you will make. You tell his Majesty that I am the last man in the kingdom to do him harm."

"Why should I tell him this, Master Cobbe?"

"Why? Why tell him?" said the blunt founder. "Why? Because it is the truth."

Sir Mark smiled, and stood apparently thinking for a while before he spoke again.

"Master Cobbe, I have the power to place in thy hands," he said at last, "the supplying of as many pieces of ordnance, and as much good, strong powder, as thou could'st make, for the use of his Majesty's forces, in an expedition to be sent to Holland. What say you; will you supply the guns?"

"Price, my lad, price? Will his Highness pay me well?"

"I will undertake to say that he will, Master Cobbe; and, what is more,

I can see that it is done. Make your own fair, honest charge for the pieces and their food, and there will be no demur."

"Look here, Sir Mark," replied the founder, looking the speaker full in the face; "you turned angry when I talked of giving you a recompense for this order, and called it bribery. What does it all mean? Thou would'st not do all this for naught."

"Is there no such thing as gratitude in the world, Master Cobbe?"

"Plenty, sir; but court gallants don't come spreading it out like beaten gold over a rough country work-master, unless they want to get something back."

"You are witty at the expense of court gallants, as you call them, Master Cobbe," said Sir Mark, laughing. "Tut, man, be not so dense. Is it a surprise to you that I should have spent my time in London working hard on thy behalf? Here was an order for ordnance going a-begging. What more natural for me to say than—Here is honest Jeremiah Cobbe, who can make better pieces than his Majesty will get elsewhere, and it will force him back into the King's esteem, instead of his lying under the stigma of being a traitor? What more likely for me to do than to get him the order?"

"Then, thou hast gotten me the order, eh, Sir Mark?"

"Nay, I have obtained for myself the power to give thee that order, Master Cobbe."

"And at what price?"

"Tush, man, speak not of price," cried the other, eagerly. "What are prices to us? Can you not see that our interests are one, and that I am working for myself as well as thee?"

"Nay," said the founder, bluntly; "I see it not."

"You will not see it, Master Cobbe," said Sir Mark, smiling. "Why, man, I have but one thought—for thy welfare."

“Indeed,” said the founder, bluntly; “and why?”

“Why?” cried Sir Mark. “You ask me why, when you know so well that I would do aught for the father of the woman I love.”

“Ah,” said the founder, drily; “now we have got to it at last. So that mad wish of thine is not dead yet.”

“Mad wish! Why, Master Cobbe, for what do you take me?”

“A very good hand at a bargain, Sir Mark. Nay, nay, stop you, and let me speak, for you have had a goodly say. You come to me then, now, scorning all kinds of commission for the great order you have to bestow, but you say to me all the same—Here is the order, give me thy daughter in return.”

“Master Cobbe!”

“Sir Mark Leslie! Now, sir, what manner of man do you take me to be, that you offer me goodly orders in exchange for my own poor flesh and blood?”

“No, no, Master Cobbe; you do not speak me fair.”

“I think I do, sir,” replied the founder. “Go, take thy great order elsewhere, I’ll have none of it. My child weds some day a man of her own station, who is a suitable mate. I shall not take a bribe to give her to the first who tries to tempt me.”

“Come, come, Master Cobbe, you are too hard. You know I love her.”

“Yes; you say so, sir.”

“Be not so hard, then. Give me access to her.”

“Access to her, man? You speak as if I locked her in her room. My child is free enough, and she will tell thee readily that she is no mate for Sir Mark Leslie.”

“Nay, nay, Master Cobbe!”

“Nay, nay, Sir Mark. There, sir, you are welcome to what my house affords while it pleases thee to stay, for I will not quarrel with thee; but let us have no more converse about such matters as these.”

“And the order, Master Cobbe, one that would bring thee thousands?”

“Take it elsewhere, sir; take it elsewhere. You are a very good, generous kind of devil, no doubt, but thy temptations will not succeed at so great a price.”

“Bah!” ejaculated Sir Mark. “Devil, forsooth! One would think, man, I asked for thy soul.”

“And what else dost ask for?” cried the founder, angrily, “but for the pure, sweet girl who is to me my very life and soul. There, I’ll speak no more on it. I get angered, and I’ve had repentance enough for quarrelling with you once before, good guest. There, sir, as I said before, the house is open to you and to your men. Take its hospitality; as to that order, make of it what you can.”

Evidently growing hot and angry, the founder turned away to go and cool himself—so it seemed—in his hottest furnace, while Sir Mark stood watching him till he disappeared, with a smile upon his lips.

“The old fellow is tougher than I thought,” he said. “I expected the prospect of the money would have won his consent. Well, it makes me feel a kind of respect for him after all, rough as he is. But stop a bit, Master Cobbe, you’ll execute the King’s order and make money by it. You’ll give me sweet Mace’s hand, and sooner or later I’ll have thy savings to the last penny to clear off my little debts, and enable my beautiful rustic wife to keep up such style as shall make the sneering dames at court think twice before they slight one who has beauty, power, and position.”

As he spoke, he glanced at an open window, where Mace, trembling

and excited, had been an unseen spectator of the meeting, standing far back in the room, and giving a sigh of relief as she saw her father stride angrily away.

How Gil interrupted a Discussion.

There must be something very fascinating in the herb called tobacco, or else the reverend gentlemen, who had commenced taking it with distaste, would never have grown to be steady smokers; and, in spite of Mistress Hilberry's sour looks, met evening by evening to enjoy their pipes with the regularity of a clock.

But so it was, and it grew to be quite a custom for Master Peasegood to welcome Father Brisdone daily, and lay his pipe ready to his hand when he seated himself at the table.

"Yes," said Master Peasegood, as they sat together; "our gay spark has come back, and he has had a long talk with Jeremiah Cobbe. He wants to have our little maiden's hand."

"But he must not," cried Father Brisdone, excitedly. "Better that she should enter some holy walls as the bride of Christ."

"Humph!" ejaculated Master Peasegood; "I don't quite agree with you there, brother; but we will not argue. I am with you that he should not marry our little maiden. By the way, he let drop to friend Cobbe something about you."

"How know you this?" said the father. "Why Cobbe told me, to be sure."

"Under the seal of confession?"

"Seal of stuff!" cried Master Peasegood, testily. "I don't confess. He told me, and asked my advice, and I tell my most intimate friend. Look here, brother. It seems they won't let thee alone."

“Indeed! And why?”

“There’s a rumour out that thou art down here to purchase powder for some new plot, and Master Cobbe is in a fine way about it.”

“And you? What did you say to him?”

“Told him he was a fool.”

“Hah!” said Father Brisdone.

“I was just in the humour,” said Master Peasegood. “I am just in the humour now. Why I’d rather marry the poor girl myself than see her handed over to that court pie.”

“And Master Cobbe—what says he?”

“That he’d sooner see her in her grave.”

“Poor girl, poor, sweet girl!” said Father Brisdone. “It must not be, brother. We must fight on the other side.”

“There’ll be no need.”

“Nay, but there will. Yon spark is cunning and crafty, and he will work upon the old man till he consents. If they have designs against me, I may at any time be removed or have to flee. If this be so, I leave you to on that poor girl’s side to the very last.”

“Have you seen her lately?”

“I was there four days since for a good and pleasant hour,” said Father Brisdone, with a sigh. “Nay,” he said, smiling, “look not so suspiciously; I said no word on religion to her. What need was there when her breast is so pure and free from guile?”

Master Peasegood stretched out his broad fat hand, and pressed that of his friend.

“Thank you, brother,” he said, smiling. “It’s strange how we have drifted together. I’ll confess it; I’ve tried hard indirectly, and hoped to get thee over to our Church.”

“Not harder than I have tried indirectly with thee,” said Father Brisdone, smiling. “Ah, brother, why should we trouble ourselves about it when we are both journeying on the highway. You like to walk in boots, and I prefer sandals.”

“Hah, yes,” said Master Peasegood; “but then I do save my feet from the grit, and dust, and thorns of the way.”

“Yes, but then I travel with shaven crown and cooler head than you in your thick flap hat.”

“Yes, perhaps so. But there, there, why should we discourse about such matters?”

“True, brother, when we are both hopeful that, in spite of contending dogma, we may reach the heavenly gate in company; and it strikes me,” he added with a smile, “that if we do the good saint may give us both a welcoming smile.”

“Brother,” said Master Peasegood, leaning across the table, “if he had not one for you, I’d, I’d—bless me that I would—I’d take him to task about the fact.”

“Take him to task!”

“Ay! Remind him of a bit of weakness of his when a certain cock did crow.”

Father Brisdone looked up with a half-amused, half-sorrowful expression. Then, with a sigh:

“If the good saint had no welcome for my companion, and held the door open for me alone, I should feel that I had been mistaken all my life, join hands with my friend, and accompany him back.”

There was another hearty shake of the hand at this, and then the two friends sat and smoked in silence for a time.

“Look here, brother,” said Master Peasegood, suddenly; “we both love and like to direct sweet Mace, and leave another roaming about like a poor lost lamb. Now, why don’t you take up Mistress Anne Beckley? She is young, and easily moulded.”

“Nay,” was the reply; “I’d rather you tried your hand. I shall not seek to make her a proselyte to our cause.”

Master Peasegood sat gazing at his friend for a while, and then exclaimed—

“The news I gave you does not seem to have much effect.”

“What news?”

“That thou art a papist emissary, and come to purchase powder for a new plot.”

“Heaven grant that such a bloody and atrocious crime be not again upon the way. It makes me shudder to think that men could have such ideas, and say that they are in the cause of the Church.”

Father Brisdone spoke excitedly, and his pale face flushed as he rose and paced the room. “Oh, brother, we live in bitter times when men can think a good and gracious God could smile down upon such crimes.”

“Ah,” said Master Peasegood, re-lighting his little pipe, “you are a bad Catholic, and I no longer wonder that thou art left here by thy party.”

Father Brisdone looked back on him, and smiled.

“The captain has sailed,” said Master Peasegood.

“Yes; he asked me to keep a protecting eye over our child.”

“He did, did he? Then I have a counter turn with him. Why did he not

ask me to play that part?"

"Because he knew thee of old, and that our child would be certain of thy protection."

"Ah!" said Master Peasegood, with a sigh; "that girl is a great strain upon my mind—bless her!"

"Ay, bless her!" said Father Brisdone, fervently. Then, after a pause, "I may have to flee one of these days, for persecutions are sometimes very bitter against such as I. If I do go suddenly, you will remember all my words."

"Remember them! Yes. But where should you go?"

"Throw myself upon the hands of Captain Carr, and trust to his generosity."

"Yes, if at home; but he has sailed."

"There are the woods and rocky hills."

"Yes," said Master Peasegood! "and plenty of blackberries, and hips and haws, and cold night-dews, and damp ferns. Bah, man, we can't live like hermits here in this Christian land. This is not a place where a man can be happy in a hair-shirt and a scooped-out hole in the rock, with a handful of dates and a cup of water. My word, it would puzzle some of those early fathers to exist on such terms down here. But there, have no fear, there is not a man for miles round who would not give either of us a hiding-place and a regular meal if we were in need."

"Brother Peasegood, you are a true friend," said Father Brisdone; "and I shall resign myself to thy advice, for I am weak, and I own that I shrink from the thought of martyrdom; for life is, after all, so very sweet."

"Of course it is, or it wouldn't be given to us. Bah! When you meet with a man who talks much about the weariness and wretchedness of the world, depend upon it there is something wrong."

Father Brisdone bowed his head. "I'm afraid I have a good deal of the evil one in me, brother," said Master Peasegood, helping himself to more tobacco. "See here, I try this herb to see what it is like, so that I may be able to follow out his Majesty's wishes, and duly preach it down; and how do I find myself? Why, tied neck and heels, and given over to the hands of the tempter."

"Ah, yes," said Father Brisdone, re-lighting his own pipe, "it is a soothing and seductive weed."

"Then again, about you? Sir Thomas at the Moat twitted me again with our intimacy, as not becoming the parson of Roehurst, and I told him I was converting you fast."

"An untruth, brother Peasegood."

"Yes; but it slipped out unawares. Ah, Brother Francis, I'm afraid that I resemble the unjust steward, and am making friends with such as thou against the days when thy party has the ascendancy once more, and we Protestants are of small account."

Father Brisdone shook his head sadly.

"Nay," he said, "the day is gone; and, if it were not, thou art not the man to stand on the order of taking care of self. But was not that a step?"

They ceased speaking, for it was plainly enough a step, and directly after the door was unceremoniously opened and a figure stood on the threshold.

"Gilbert Carr!" cried Master Peasegood; "why I thought thee miles away."

"And so I should be," was the reply; "but I could not go without first saying a few words."

Master Peasegood rose from his chair, and made way for his fresh visitor to take a seat; but Gil laid his hands upon the stout clerk's shoulders, and gently pressed him back.

"Sit still," he said; "I have not a minute to stay. I have come across from Curtport, and must be back at daybreak, or my vessel will have to wait another tide."

"Have you a horse?"

"No; I walked," said Gil, smiling.

"Why, it is nearly thirty miles," said Father Brisdone.

"Quite," was the reply. "Look here, Master Peasegood, I can speak before Father Brisdone, for he is a friend."

"But first have bite and sup," cried Master Peasegood, essaying to rise.

"I have both in my wallet here," said Gil. "Now, listen to me: I am uneasy about matters at the house by the Pool."

"And thou would'st have me watch over some one there?" said Master Peasegood.

"Yes," was the reply.

"Be easy in thy mind, then, lad, for it is done. Not that I favour thee, or think well of thy suit, mind; but rely on my taking care of the little treasure there."

"I am content, Master Peasegood," said Gil, holding out his hand.

"But you did not walk across country from Curtpool to tell me this?" said Master Peasegood.

"I did; and why not, Master Peasegood? There, my mission is ended, so good night to both."

Before either could reply he had passed out into the darkness, and they heard his steps die away in the distance.

“A true-hearted, brave man!” said Father Brisdone, fervently. “Heaven’s blessing be upon him!”

“Heaven’s blessing be upon him, by all means,” said Master Peasegood drily; “and I hope it will do him good.”

“Why do you speak so cynically of the young man?”

“Because I don’t like him after all for our child, and he shall never have her with my consent.”

“Poor girl! And yet she loves him.”

“He’s not good enough man for her,” growled Master Peasegood.

“No man that I know is,” replied Father Brisdone. “But, there, we cannot dislike him for his love for one so sweet and true. Good night, brother; I must be for home. It grows late.”

“I’ll see thee half-way back,” cried Master Peasegood; and after a short walk with his friend he returned to his cottage, and was soon making the bed vibrate with his heavy breathing, which often degenerated into a snore. But he had not been sleeping many minutes before there was a loud pattering at the casement, one that was repeated again and again.

“He gave them hailstones for rain,” muttered Master Peasegood, in his sleep.

Patter, patter, patter again at the casement, when Master Peasegood started up, and the bed gave forth a dismal groan.

Patter, patter, patter at the window once more.

“There’s some one ill,” said the stout clerk, and, rising hastily, while the bedstead emitted a sound like a sigh of relief, he threw on his old gown, went to the window and threw it open.

“Hallo!” he cried.

“Hallo, parson,” came up out of the darkness in a deep growl.

“What is it thou, old son of Belial,” said Master Peasegood, sourly, for he had been awakened from a pleasant sleep.

“Ay, Wat Kilby it is.”

“I thought thee with thy master, far at sea—safe enough, for thou’lt be hanged some day, Wat Kilby, and never drowned.”

“Thou’rt a false prophet,” growled Wat Kilby.

“Thou’rt a villainous old unbeliever, worse than a Jew!” cried Master Peasegood, angrily.

“I wish all thy country flock were as good as Jews, parson.”

“I wish they were,” said Master Peasegood, angrily. “And now why art thou here?”

“We’re at anchor. Skipper’s ashore.”

“He was here an hour ago, man.”

“Eh? Was he then? I must get me back. Here, hold down thy hand; I’ve brought thee some tobacco. I know thou’rt converted, parson, and can smoke.”

“I’ll come down, if I can convert thee, Wat Kilby.”

“Convert me, Master Peasegood; why, what’s amiss with me?”

“Amiss, thou wicked old reprobate? Why thou’rt an open sinner, and never com’st to church.”

“Eh, but I would if thou’dst let me smoke my pipe by the open door.”

“Then you are repenting of your evil ways.”

“Nay, I’ve nothing to repent of, but a love or two.”

“And spiriting away poor Abel Churr.”

“Nay, parson, I never did; I wish I had,” growled Wat.

“Then that’s as bad.”

“Nay, parson, don’t preach; I arn’t a bad ’un after all. I always tries, and gets along pretty well for a time, but, just as I’ve got as perfect as can be, down comes the devil with a pretty girl, and then I’m done.”

“Out upon thee, Wat Kilby, my cheeks burn with shame.”

“Ay, it do make the cheeks burn, parson. But it always was so, parson, and that’s the devil’s way. He always did serve me so, and you may preach at me and preach, and preach, and preach, but unless you can preach all the pretty women off the earth, if you’re right in what you say, I’m sartain to be burnt.”

“But you must resist the devil and he’ll flee, Wat Kilby.”

“Nay: not he, parson. He knows his man too well. There, it’s all no good. Reach down thy hand—got it. That’s well.”

“Thanks, Wat Kilby. Man, it is a goodly offering of the precious weed.”

“Thou and the king said it was devilish poison.”

“Ah, um, yes; but my ideas are being modified, my man. And now what does this mean?”

“Well, you see, parson, it’s all about a woman I have come.”

“Is this a time man to speak about a wedding?”

“Yes, parson; when you have to go by orders.”

“Well speak out quick, for the night is chill.”

“I will, parson. It’s like this: I love pretty Mistress Janet at the Pool.”

“For a grandchild, Wat Kilby?”

“Nay, master; for a wife. I wanted to get speech of her, but could not get me near. Tell her, and keep thy eye on her as well, that Wat Kilby han’t forgot, and will come back and wed her.”

“Well man, well?”

“And I ask thee, parson, not to wed her to any other man.”

“But man, how can I help—”

“Why, forbid it all, and I’ll saddle down to be a better man and come to church when I be not at sea. Sometimes I’ll come and sit in the porch o’ Sunday afternoons. And now I must hasten to catch the skipper. Tell her from me, parson, Wat Kilby will come and make her an honest woman, and be true; and now good night.”

“Here, stop, you vile old sinner!” cried Master Peasegood, but he only heard old Wat Kilby striding rapidly away, and after listening for a few moments he closed the lattice with a slam.

“The place gets worse the more I preach,” he cried, angrily. “Master and man. A nice charge, verily—but Wat and that Janet! My preaching must be stronger, yet. That wicked wench!”

Five minutes later Master Peasegood was fast asleep, and the casement-frames vibrated to his snore.

How the Game went against Master Cobbe.

A very different scene was enacting at the Pool-house on that very evening. Sir Mark had spent the day mostly out of doors, and had sought out the founder, who, finding that he made no further allusions to his child, but turned the conversation to the works, readily showed him the busy tasks in progress, where, about a mile from the house, men were digging ironstone from out of a pit. Then on the way back he pointed with

pride to the deep hole in the face of a precipitous mass of stone, where the shell had torn for itself a place in which to explode, and then rent out the rock in splintered fragments, which lay about side by side with the pieces of iron of which the shell was composed.

“Does that hole go in far?” said Sir Mark, eyeing it curiously.

“Goodness knows,” was the reply. “Deep enough. That shot would destroy part of an enemy’s stronghold, or drive in the side of a ship. But come, and you shall see them get ready a furnace for my next gun.”

Sir Mark followed, and watched the process as layers of ironstone were alternated with charcoal from a mighty heap that lay hard by.

A visit to one of the powder-sheds came next, after Sir Mark had left outside his sword, dagger, and spurs.

“Are you not too particular?” he said, rather disdainfully.

“Not a bit,” was the bluff reply. “Would’st have his Majesty’s Ambassador blown into fragments, like one of my shells? I am none too particular,” he said, as he saw his companion shudder. “I have had so many accidents here that you must allow me to know what is best.”

After this Sir Mark seemed disposed to shirk the visit, but he made an effort, and walked through the place more manfully, looking with curious eyes at the dull black grains, or masses of composition in an unfinished state.

“How would his Majesty like a run through here?” said the founder, with a chuckle. “Powder will always have an ill savour in his nostrils.”

It was with no little sense of relief that Sir Mark found himself outside, close by the shed where the great howitzer had been placed, and at his solicitation the founder readily consented to have the gun out once more, and with boyish eagerness devoted himself to test the powers of the piece and its bursting shells, when loaded after Gil’s own fashion.

At last the founder and his guest had returned, partaken of the evening meal, which Mace dispensed with the calmness of one whose heart was quite at rest; and finally she had retired to find occasion to take Janet to task for being giggling and whispering in the shrubbery with one of Sir Mark's gaily-dressed men, for by dint of careful drying and smoothing, the traces of the plunge into the mill-race had been made to disappear.

"Now, Master Cobbe," said Sir Mark, "let us calmly and in friendly spirit talk over our affairs again. Suppose you fill your glass."

"That I will," said the founder; "and you do the same."

"I'll drink with you and welcome," said Sir Mark, filling his glass, nodding, and then wetting his lips, while the founder took a hearty draught.

"That's better," he said. "And now, sir, what is it to be—a good order for his Majesty's troops?"

"Yes, and fortune for you Master Cobbe. This order will be but the introduction to many. Why should you not be ordnance-master to his Majesty?"

"Why, indeed, my lad," said the founder, composedly. "I should gain, of course, but the King would be no loser."

"Then why not have it so, Master Cobbe. Come, I appeal to you—I plead to you. Are you blind to your daughter's advantages? I am not a moneyed man, but I offer position and a title."

"If I sell her to thee," said the founder, looking through the wine in his glass.

"Tush! Why call things by such hard names? 'tis no sale—I love her dearly, and to help my cause I own that I do try to press upon thee by means of the interest I have at court."

"What should I make by your order, Sir Mark?" said the founder,

musingly.

“How can I tell?” cried Sir Mark, eagerly. “What do I know of the profits? All I know is that I can give you an order for guns and ammunition, to the value of three thousand pounds, to be paid in hard coin. You shall supply as many of those great howitzers and shells as you can, and then take on more men and make others, for from what I have seen of the performance of those guns you have made both name and fortune.”

The founder sat gazing through his wine again, as if musing, and the visitor watched the play of his features with anxiety.

“Harkye, Master Cobbe,” he whispered, “I offer marriage and a place at court for your child. Of course I know that there has been some love-talk between her and this Carr, as they call him, but he has sailed away, and what could be a better opportunity for my suit?”

“But, suppose she loves this Gilbert Carr, Sir Mark?”

“Tush, man; a girl’s fancy! She will forget him in a week. The sight of a wedding-dress would drive him out of her head. You but give me access to her and your aid, and, trust me, she will be a willing bride. There, it is settled, is it not?”

“Sir Mark Leslie,” said the founder, sitting back in his chair; “if you could offer me ten times three thousand pounds in orders I would say the same. Sir, I am a bluff south-country yeoman, and I would sooner become the meanest beggar that crawls than sell my poor child as I would chaffer away a gun. There, I’ll listen to no more. Stay, if you please; you are just as welcome. But I’ll hear no more from you or any man upon this point.”

He gazed frankly into his guest’s eye as Sir Mark’s brow knit, and the young man strove hard to keep down the annoyance he felt at the rejection of his suit by this, in his eyes, common man.

For some minutes neither spoke, and then Sir Mark began in a low

husky voice.

“Master Cobbe, I have come to you offering you friendship, and you reject it. I cannot be your enemy for your child’s sake; but you compel me to bring force to bear.”

“Force, sir, what force?” cried the founder angrily. “Do you mean you’ll carry her away? ’fore Heaven I warn you that the lives of you and your servants would not be worth a snap of the fingers did you try such a thing. There are more men here in this neighbourhood than you think for, ready and willing to fight for her at word of mine.”

“No, Master Cobbe; the force I bring to bear is of another sort. Mind, you bring me to this by your obstinate rejection of my suit. I now tell you that Mace must and shall be my wife, and that you will give her to me.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes,” said Sir Mark, “and soon. Listen: I hold the power here to seize upon this place in his Majesty’s name; to arrest you for high treason as the man who supplied his Majesty’s enemies, and as one who is now in league with papist emissaries. Stop, sir, hear me out. You are leagued with one Father Brisdone, a notorious follower of Spain; with a rough adventurer named Carr, who is more pirate than trader. In fact, you and yours are attainted, and at a word from me ruin falls upon you all.”

“And you will do all this with two men whom the very boys who work for me would throw into the Pool?”

“I came in peace, with two men only, Master Cobbe; but a messenger would fetch twenty, fifty, or a hundred good swordsmen and harquebusiers to my side to seize your person, raze the works to the ground, and then—yes, then, Master Cobbe, your daughter would become an easy prize.”

“What you say is all false!” cried the founder, who sat aghast as he felt what a web the man before him had contrived to spread around.

“False or true, I am no judge, Master Cobbe. I am here to execute

the King's commands. The case is left in my hands to act as I see fit. If you prove a good subject of his Majesty, and supply him with the ordnance, well. If you refuse, you stamp yourself a rebel, and as one guilty of high treason."

"But I do not refuse, Sir Mark; I offer to supply his Majesty."

"You refuse the proposal of his servant."

"Did his Majesty bid thee truck and bargain with me, making my child the price at which I should obtain this order?" said the founder, curtly.

"His Majesty bade me do what seemed the best," said Sir Mark; "so what is it to be, Master Cobbe—Peace or war?"

"War," cried the founder, angrily; and he brought his fist down heavily on the table.

"As you will, Master Cobbe; but I warn you of your folly. You lose heavily in wealth and liberty, and you deprive your child of her natural protector, leaving her almost entirely at my mercy."

"No," cried the founder, "not so. If by your lies and trickery I am snatched from her, there are two men who would take upon themselves the part of guardian. Father Brisdone would—"

"Be in prison or a fugitive," said Sir Mark, quietly.

"Then Master Peasegood would—"

"Be suspended from his office for evil dealing, and allowing himself to be won over to the Papist cause."

"Then I'd trust Gil Carr, and bid him wed my child."

"Gilbert, otherwise Culverin, Carr's ship, when it returned, would by my orders be watched and seized, as a suspected vessel, and its captain and crew imprisoned to await their trial."

“Then Sir Thomas Beckley, justice and just man, with all his faults, would protect my daughter.”

“Sir Thomas Beckley might be called upon to seize the person of Mistress Mace Cobbe, for divers malpractices, held in common with a woman here known as Mother Goodhugh, a notorious witch. His Majesty has determined to put down and root out of his kingdom all those vile traffickers with the works of darkness, and has placed great power in the hands of the magistrates of this realm.”

“What!” cried the founder, half in anger, half-laughing. “My child a witch!”

“I say not so, Master Cobbe; I only speak of the common report. Both thy daughter and her maid have been regular visitors to this notorious woman, and by this they have exposed themselves to great risk; for to be attainted now of witchcraft, even of holding communion with the powers of darkness, may mean the stake.”

“Curse thy quibbling, glib, plot-weaving ways?” cried the founder. “Failing those I have named there is not a man, woman, or boy in Roehurst who would not raise a hand for the white moth.”

“Yes,” said Sir Mark, quickly; “that is it. Even that tells against her. She is known commonly as the White Moth of Roehurst; and there are those who whisper that she is a witch.”

“Sir Mark Leslie!” cried the founder, who was white with anger, “I will not quarrel with thee again. I forgot myself once towards my guest; I hope to control myself now, but you try me sore.”

“It grieves me, Master Cobbe, and, though I speak this, it is not as an enemy but as a friend. I merely place my position before you, and say is it not better to avoid all this trouble, when instead the way is open to wealth and honour, and a peaceful old age?”

“Who and what are you?” cried the founder, passionately; “and why do you come to disturb my peaceful home?”

“I am his Majesty’s servant, Master Cobbe. I came here at his command to investigate certain malpractices alleged against thee. I found them to be true, but I found here also a greater king than his Majesty James the First. I found here that all-powerful monarch—Love, and, vanquished by him, I suffered thy sword; I made reports that softened thy case; I returned from my mission with so goodly an account that the King gave me leave to offer thee honour and wealth if, in place of being of doubtful allegiance, thou becomest his faithful liege subject, and work for him as you have been accused of working for others. There, Master Cobbe, it is late, and thou art angry. Think over it all; sleep on it; take time to consider. I am one who can wait; for, believe me, I would rather see thee honoured than know that a lingering imprisonment was sapping thy vital forces and bringing thee low. Good night, Master Cobbe, good night.”

Sir Mark held out his hand, but it was not noticed; the founder sitting back in his stiff old-fashioned chair, and going over the words of his guest, who, with a peculiar smile, glanced at him mockingly, and slowly ascended to his chamber, leaving his host to sit thinking hour after hour, and at last to stumble off heavily to bed with the feeling upon him that he had been playing at some game with heavy stakes, and that the luck had been all upon the other side.

How Mistress Anne was Unquiet, and how the Founder came to Terms.

The coming back of Sir Mark had the effect of driving Mace to her room, where she stayed as much as possible. Gil need have had no jealous fears, could he have read her heart, for her every thought was of him. Seated at her window, looking over the Pool, her eyes might be gazing at some azure kingfisher darting across the shallows, or seated on some twig, ready to plunge down and emerge from the water with the drops falling like glistening pearls from its sides, as it bore away a tiny silvery fish; or her pensive look be fixed upon the heron, so grey and lank of mien, standing motionless, deep in the water, amidst the varied aquatic growth, where it seemed at times to launch its long beak, like some

javelin, at a luckless fish, to stab or seize it for its prey; or at even, when the soft wreaths of mist came floating over the Pool, she watched the flight of the owl as it uttered its peculiar cry, and swept by so softly that it passed as noiselessly as a ghost, while the white moths flitted and danced amidst the roses round her casement by night, as the golden flies and gauzy-winged dragons darted and played about in the sun. By soft balmy day, or cool delicious dreamy night, Mace sat at her window, watching and thinking, but it was always of the white sails of a ship, ever gliding farther and farther away.

These thoughts formed her bright dreams, to which she turned when fancies about Sir Mark became obtrusive; for the days glided on, and he stayed, growing each hour more courtly and respectful to her. While he was bright and full of compliments she could fence with him, and turn away the points of his speeches, but now that he had become grave and earnest she was full of fears.

A greater cause for fear though was the conduct of her father, who seemed to be giving way to their guest, though at times he broke out with his old independent ways, and appeared to be setting him at defiance.

Mace was puzzled, for she could not comprehend her father's manner. He had never been more tender and affectionate, but there was something behind which troubled her.

Sir Mark left at last, to her great relief, and for the next fortnight she was as joyous as a bird, singing about the house, and in the highest of spirits, when, to her horror, the guest returned, accompanied by a dozen well-armed followers, who proved to be artisans, and began work the very next morning, assisting the founder's staff.

Then by degrees it leaked out that Sir Mark had brought a great order from the King for guns and their ammunition—an order that must lead to wealth for the founder, who was busy almost night and day.

At the end of another week half-a-score more men arrived, to be distributed through the village, lodging with different workmen, whom they assisted during the day.

They were nominally in the founder's service, and he paid them their weekly wage, but they looked to Sir Mark for guidance in all else saving the work at the foundry, and to Master Cobbe came plenty of complaints.

For Roehurst was no longer what it had been. Sir Mark's followers brought with them London ways, and an amount of freedom which the founder's men had on more than one occasion to resent; though certain maidens, notably Janet, at the Pool-house, and Polly, the handmaid of Mistress Anne, thought that the place had never been so gay and bright before.

And all the time the furnaces roared and made liquid the iron from the hills which had grown the wood-coal that supplied the heat, while careful moulds were made by the founder himself, who watched the casting of every piece.

Then powder was made in large quantities, and carefully stowed away in Master Cobbe's magazine, a cool, deep, stone cavern, half natural, half cut in the soft sand-rock.

From being generally calm and peaceful, the place now grew to be like a busy hive. Nearly every day Mace shuddered as the casements rattled with the explosion of some great piece which was being tested, and in this part of the business Sir Mark took great interest himself. Butts were made, and targets set up for practice, and one by one great black howitzers were turned out, considered perfect, and then placed aside ready for sending to London, or to one of the shipping-ports upon the coast.

Every now and then came a messenger from some one high in authority in the great city, and the despatch he bore was duly perused and replied to by Sir Mark; who passed the greater part of his time at the foundry, but paid occasional visits to the Moat, where he was always most courteously received. There were cold grave looks for the young knight at the Pool-house, but always smiles and side-long glances at the Moat; but somehow the cold, grave looks only inflamed his passion, while the sight of Mistress Anne begat dislike.

But she knew well enough how to play her part, and though after Sir Mark's departure Polly had her ears well boxed for the first remark she made—Dame Beckley fled to her garden of simples to seek for peace, as if it were some cunning plant—and Sir Thomas blew out his cheeks, opened his eyes, and then went into his sanctum to study the King's work on witchcraft—the tremendous storms that arose never spread outside the precincts of the Moat, and Sir Mark believed the lady to be simplicity and gentleness itself.

These visits of Sir Mark brought wealth to one inhabitant of Roehurst, to wit, Mother Goodhugh, who always received a visit from Anne Beckley directly after the visitor had left; when the old woman, who had been cunning enough to learn all the news of the place, was ready enough in pointing out how matters were working for her good.

"Don't be afraid, dearie," she said one day, after going through a good deal of mummary. "That spell seemed to point to the fact that Captain Gil was to be thy lord, but his terrible crime has changed all that, and Sir Mark will marry thee."

"But he is always there!" cried Anne.

"Well, child, is it not to be near to thee? Don't you fear. Ask thy maiden Polly to question Janet Burger, and she will learn that Mace and Sir Mark hardly meet, and when they do she be as cold as so much ice."

"Yes," said Anne; "that is true enough."

"And how did you know, dearie?"

"I bade Polly question Janet."

"Then you see how right I am, my child. Oh, yes; it will all work right. Trust me, the gallant youth be only down here that he may be near to thee."

A few days later Anne Beckley arrived at the cottage with flaming eyes.

“Mother Goodhugh,” she cried, “you failed before, but now you must try, and try well, to work some spell on that creature at the Pool.”

“And why, child?”

“Because I hear it said that Sir Mark is going to marry her.”

“Tchch! nonsense! What put that silly notion in thine head?”

“It is true. It came from Janet.”

“Oh, pay no heed to her, my dearie. Only trust to me and all will come right in the end.”

“But, mother,” began Anne, impatiently.

“Nay, nay, child, all you have to do is to wait and see. I promise thee again that thy gallant shall never wed Jeremiah Cobbe’s child; and it will be well for her if she does not perish at the stake.”

Anne Beckley looked curiously at the old woman, who met her eyes with a malicious leer.

“Ay, ay,” she said, laughing; “you’re thinking some one else might perish there, but we keep our own secrets, child, and we shall not denounce one another. Besides, our little spells are only innocent love affairs, and we keep our own counsel, dearie, only too well. Ah, I shall be glad to see thee happily wedded to the man of thy choice, and then the present you make me will keep me to the end of my days.”

It was with a strange sense of uneasiness that the two women parted; Anne biting one of her fingers as she told herself that she was an idiot to listen to the drivellings of that old woman, and yet feeling a curious superstitious dread of her, and belief that she could exercise some influence on her destiny.

“Let her mind, though,” she muttered: “let her be careful how she behaves to me. I could denounce her as a witch, only she is very dangerous; but what did she mean by saying *we* and *one another*? She

dare not say I join with her.”

On the other side Mother Goodhugh watched her out of sight, and then entered her cottage, shaking her fist threateningly in the direction Anne had taken, and a laugh of no very pleasant kind escaped her lips.

“There are other philtres besides love-philtres, my dear,” she said; “and if she thinks that she will crush me she will make a great mistake.”

Mother Goodhugh might laugh the words of Janet to scorn, but that astute maiden had eyes and ears always on the *qui vive* for fresh news. She gave a great deal of her attention to one or another of Sir Mark’s followers, but all the same there was a willing smile for Sir Mark himself when he condescended to notice her, which was not seldom; and in spite of the freedom of her own temperament, and the liberality with which she would bestow a favour upon first one and then another, she was jealous enough in disposition to angrily resent Sir Mark’s attentions to her mistress. Hence it was that she was often on the watch, and always on the listen, with the result that by degrees she saw the founder after a hard fight gradually give way to the pressure brought to bear.

For a long time Mace could not believe it, but by degrees her eyes became opened to the fact that Sir Mark was daily getting more influence over her father.

Naturally avaricious, the founder could not withstand the temptations thrown in his way by his guest, who was diplomatic enough to be content with a little advance at a time.

The founder held out for a while, and told himself that he would not submit to this upstart from court; but, as he went over again and again the position in which he stood, he could not help seeing how troublous might be the condition into which he could be brought by an enemy.

At first he did not scruple to call his visitor an enemy, and a bitter enemy, but by degrees the thoughts of gaining thousands, of occupying the position of first ordnance-founder to the King, softened him, and the effect of Sir Mark’s words was shown in his saying to himself that it was

after all but a fair thing for a man in love to try all he could to win the object of his choice.

It was the entry of the enemy into the outer works of the founder's fortress, and as Sir Mark quietly went on sapping and mining so did Jeremiah Cobbe give way.

"I want to do the best I can for my child," he said to himself, one evening, as he stood watching the great wheel go round. "She must not listen to Gil Carr, for that would be destroying her young life, even if he should prove to be innocent. No, that would never do, and she is getting weaned from him. He's a fine fellow, but not good enough to be my darling's mate."

Then over his pipe at night he sat and considered, after Sir Mark had left him, their converse for the evening having probably been of the merits of iron or brass pieces, for the guest was cunning enough to see that with patience the besieged would fall. How would it be if he did give way? This Sir Mark was haughty, and over-bearing, and proud, but he was a gentleman, high in favour at court. He was poor certainly, but he could give his wife a great position.

"And he was honest over it," said the founder, refilling his pipe; "I like him for that. He said he had no money. Humph, perhaps he'd like to get hold of mine! Well, and if he did he'd put me in the way of making more. First ordnance-founder to his Majesty King James!

"No—no—no!" he cried, rising to go to bed, "I'll not give way. It would be like selling her, and I love her too well for that."

It was clever, the way in which Sir Mark flattered the founder's vanity. There might have been no Mace in the world, only that he was courteous and reverent to her in the extreme when they met at meals, for he never mentioned her name, but followed the founder like a shadow, inquiring into the toughness of this iron and that, and delighting his dupe by laying aside his showy doublet to take part in the trial of some piece, to come away as besmirched with powder as Gil himself.

“There’s stuff in the fellow,” said the founder; “and I blame him for what is, after all, only his education.”

The fortress was beginning to give way.

“Courts have their peculiarities, and he, fresh from ordering and commanding, thought he could do as he liked with me. It was fine, too, the way he whipped out his sword when I damned the King.”

The founder laughed heartily, and wiped the tears out of his eyes, for he was again sitting alone before retiring for the night.

“Well, it was brave and true of him. A man who would risk his life like that for the honour of his master must be a noble gentleman at heart, and would make a good husband.”

He shook his head at that, and once more went to bed.

The next night he was sitting alone again, indulging in his evening pipe.

“Poor little darling, it would bring some tears in her eyes if I did consent, and give her to him as his wife. *Give*; yes, give! I would not sell her; but, after all, what a position for her! I think I should like it; and, after all, I am but mortal. Why should I not wear velvet and a gold chain, and strut about as Sir Jeremiah Cobbe, Master of the King’s Ordnance?”

He refilled his glass and pipe and smiled to himself, for the stones were getting very loose, and the walls of the outworks were tottering to their fall.

“My darling, too, my lady—Dame Mace Leslie. Hang the honours for myself! I’d give something, though, to see my little maiden in her gay stomacher and fardingale, with jewel-studded coif, and lace ruff, go rustling into court, all abloom with her youth and beauty, the envy of everybody in the place.”

He sat and smoked as he pictured the scene.

“God bless her!” he cried; “there wouldn’t be one there who was her equal. My word, how they’d all gird as they feasted their eyes on the daughter of Jeremiah Cobbe!

“Pah! What idiots my old people were! Jeremiah! What a name for a stout-hearted Englishman! I think we did better in calling our darling Mace. I don’t know, though,” he muttered; “it don’t seem to go well with *Dame*.

“Humph! I wonder what her poor mother would say, whether she would hold out as I have done.”

He sat on thinking till long past midnight, with the sapping and mining of Sir. Mark insidiously doing its work, though the founder heeded it not.

“Curse the money,” he said; “I care not a jot for that, but am I doing right in standing like this in my darling’s light? Suppose I said yea to Sir Mark’s proposal, and let him become her suitor? What then?”

He sat and smoked out his pipe to the very ash, and then thought on as he sucked at the empty bowl:—

“Ay, what then?”

Jeremiah Cobbe sat there the long night through, and at early dawn only went up to his chamber, where, after a refreshing wash, he sat and thought again before going down, as the workers came from the various cottages to their daily toil.

As he stood by one of the windows gazing out he saw his child in the garden culling flowers, and Sir Mark watching her, but he did not follow her, only went away with bent head, and stood leaning over the breech of a gun.

The founder stayed thinking again for a little while, and then, drawing a long breath, he crossed the intervening space, clapped the young man on the shoulder, and held out his hand.

“Give me your word as a gentleman, Sir Mark, that your suit shall be in all kindness and love,—that you will use no undue pressure, but wait patiently for my consent,—and—you understand?”

“I promise,” said Sir Mark, earnestly, as he laid his hand in that of the founder, fighting hard the while to keep down a triumphant look.

Hand clasped hand, and, as if moved by the same influence, the two parties to the unholy bargain glanced towards the house, at whose door stood Mace, gazing at them with labouring, unquiet breast, for a greater trouble than that of her father’s warlike weapons now assailed her heart.

How Sir Mark put on the First Chain.

The founder was full of repentance, and felt that evening that he dared not meet his child's clear, searching gaze.

"He's too much for me," he muttered. "He's managed to get over me when I've had more ale than's good for me, and when I've brought out the sherry sack. It's prime stuff, that dry, strong sherry, but it makes a man too easy, and he gives away more than he would when it's not in him. I'll be more careful. I won't take so much; and yet I don't know—it's very pleasant."

He had gradually worked himself round to the belief that he was acting for the best, and then came the reaction, and he felt that he had sold his child for the sake of gain.

Nothing was said about his promises to Sir Mark, for, though he had gone into the house soon after with the express determination of speaking out frankly and imperatively his intentions, he shrank from the untoward task.

"I'll take her down the garden, and have a quiet talk in the morning," he said; and when the morning came he put it off till eve, plunging heart and soul into the busy toil amongst his people, who, like some little colony, looked up to him as their patriarch and the supplier of their daily food.

"The lads are pleased enough with this girt job, master," said Tom Croftly, wiping the grime and sweat from his forehead, as they stood by one of the roaring furnaces; and the founder came away smiling, but only for his smile to be chased away as he saw Mother Goodhugh going along the track, to stop and shake her stick in his direction as she seemed to be cursing him.

"I never minded her and her curses before," he muttered; "but now they seem to worry me like. I haven't done right—I haven't done right; but I've given my word—I've given my word."

He hurriedly made for another work-shed, glancing unquietly at the old woman as she trudged along, turning from time to time to look in his direction.

“Curse that old harridan!” he muttered; and then he stood thinking, perhaps for the first time in his life, that now he had, as it were, been unfaithful to his trust, Mother Goodhugh’s evil wishes against his house might have some effect.

“I don’t care,” he said; “it’s for the best;” but as he said the words the remembrance of Gil Carr rose up before him, as if with reproach.

“He should never have had her,” he muttered. “It was impossible. The death of that poor fellow, Churr, clings to him, say what one may. He may not have done the deed, but it was by his orders, and he is responsible for the sin.”

He bit his lips angrily even as these thoughts came to his mind, for they gave him no relief, and it seemed cowardly to harbour them in Gil’s absence, just by way of excuse for his present acts.

Then, too, go where he would, work hard as he might, his child’s calm, reproachful gaze seemed to be ever before him.

“She knows it already; I’m sure she knows it,” he said to himself; and at last, harassed by his upbraiding thoughts, he became furious and irritable to a degree.

The eve had passed, and the next morning, and the night, but still the founder did not speak. He told himself that he had but to say—“My child, Sir Mark is your future husband;” but he could not say those words, and at times he grew fiercely angry at his cowardice, for as the days glided by the task grew harder and harder, and he literally dared not speak.

He had one satisfaction, though, and that made somewhat smoother the thorny way through which he was travelling, Sir Mark was gentleness itself towards Mace. He never spoke one word that was not full of tender

consideration towards her. His very looks, though full of admiration, were softened by respect; but she could read in them an air of proprietorship; and to her mind they seemed to say that he knew he was safe to win her if he only waited his time.

Those were not happy days at the Pool-house, and Mace, with many a bitter tear, wished herself back in the pleasant peaceful times of the past. The coming of Sir Mark's men had wrought a complete change in the place; there were quarrels of frequent occurrence on the score of gallantries, real or suspected, with husbands and brothers, rumours of which came to the young girl's ears; and, whenever she encountered Mother Goodhugh, the old woman had a malignant laugh for her, and a shaking finger that seemed to portend evil. Then, in her despondent state of mind, Janet became a constant source of trouble to her. She scolded, threatened to send her away, and even tried to keep her shut up in the house; but she might as well have tried to wrap up so much quicksilver in muslin as to keep back the wilful girl, for in return for bits of news and gossip carried to Mother Goodhugh, the old woman furnished Janet with philtres that were to win her the hearts of any of the gay strangers she wished to enthrall.

"Oh, Janet, Janet, where is your modesty?" cried her mistress. "Who was that man you talked with? Is it not the same I warned you about last night?"

"No-o, mistress," said Janet.

"How can you be so shameless! Night after night I have to blame you for your wilful ways."

"Yes, mistress," sobbed Janet; "I'm a wicked, wicked girl, but men are so nice."

"For shame! Why not heed me when I speak to you for your good?"

"I do, mistress," sobbed Janet; "but these men they plague me so. I try, oh, so very hard, to be good, and I will be a better girl. I want to be good, and something always keeps trying to make me bad; but I will be

better now.”

But Janet grew worse, in spite of her promises of amendment. She wept and sobbed, and avowed that she was the wickedest girl under the sun, kissed her upbraiding mistress’s hands with the full intent of leading a more modest life, and the next hour her vows were all forgotten, and she was listening to the soft whispers of some one or other of the soldierly men who hung about the place.

So Mace’s days were not peaceful now, and matters at last became so unbearable as the time glided on that she determined to speak to her father, and ask him to let her leave home until his great work that troubled her so was done, and the unwelcome visitors were gone.

For weeks she went about with the words on her lips, longing to say them, but she dared not on account of the shock she knew it would give her father, while he, restless and unquiet in her presence, kept back what he had to say.

It was Sir Mark who brought father and daughter to an explanation.

There had been a week of something like relief, for the visitor had been to London on business connected with the order, and on his return he had startled Mace by a change in his mien in speaking to her as he had not spoken since his avowal of his love that evening by the meadow-gate.

It was evening, and Mace was seated alone in the big window, working, and glancing out from time to time at the pleasant garden, thinking that it did not look so bright and cheery as of old; when Sir Mark entered, and crossing the room stood close by her, gazing gently down with his hands clasped behind.

She looked up at him in a timid way, and then shrank back in her chair. Her first impulse was to run from the room, but she scouted the idea as one only fit for some weak girl; and, fighting hard to recover herself, she said the first words that came to her lips, angry with herself the next moment with what she had spoken.

“Mistress Anne Beckley was here with my lady this afternoon.”

“Indeed!” he said, huskily, as he still gazed down.

“Mistress Anne asked after your health, and bade me say that they missed you very much.”

“And you, what did you say?” he asked, softly.

“I said you were busy with my father, watching over the trial of great pieces of ordnance and the making of powder,” replied Mace, who was fast recovering her calmness.

“Why did you not tell her I could not tear myself from the home where my every thought was centred; that I could not live away from her who was to be my wife? See, Mace, dearest, I brought you this from town. It is to grace your sweet, white throat. There, I thought the pearls were beautiful, but they look poor and mean, after all.”

Mace’s hands nervously clasped Sir Mark’s wrists as, with a quick movement, he brought them from behind him, and throwing a handsome string of pearls round her neck he clasped it there.

If her suitor’s wrists had burned her, she could not have snatched her hands away more quickly as she shrank back once more into her seat, gazing at him with so strange a look that the words he was about to utter failed on his lips, and he stood for a while gazing down at her in silence.

“You are surprised,” he said at last, smiling. “Well, they were given clumsily, but you teach me to be humble and reverent before you, Mace. I grow speechless in your presence, as with a kind of humble adoration, as I look forward to the day when you will be my wife.”

“Your—wife!” she faltered.

“Yes,” he cried, catching her by the hands to cover them with kisses, “my wife, whom I shall worship, and take away from this wild, secluded spot to shine like some jewel in King James’s court.”

He dropped her hand, for he heard the founder's voice without, and left her sitting back—crouched, as it were, in her chair, cold and nerveless.

She had expected this; she had looked hourly for its coming; but now that it had come it was like some fearful shock.

"Gil," she whispered, at last. "Gil," as she felt like a bird in a fowler's net, "why are you not here?"

His name seemed to give her back her strength, and, starting up, she caught sight of her white face in the glass. Then her eyes fell upon the glistening ornament around her neck, and, feeling that it was like a chain that Sir Mark had placed there to secure her to him, she tore at it hastily, the string snapped, and the great lustrous pearls flew with a pattering noise about the floor as she hurried from the room, ran up to her chamber, and threw herself sobbing upon her knees.

How Mace objected to her Bargain.

"Am I a weak child?" cried Mace at last, as she sprang up and wiped away her tears. "I will not sit still, and be sold like this. I cannot be forced to wed a man I hate, and I will not listen to his words.

"When will Gil come back?" she cried; and sitting down she tried to reckon up the number of weeks since he sailed, but her head was in a whirl; and even as she tried to think her hands burned, and she held them from her as if they had been polluted by the kisses they had received.

Then, with a feeling of horror, she thought of the possibility of Gil having witnessed that scene—the clasping on of the necklace, the touch of the donor's hands, and the tears once more rushed to her eyes as she writhed at her helpless position.

"I will go away to Cousin Ellice," she said; "I will go at once. Father cannot know of Sir Mark's behaviour. I cannot, I will not, believe it," she

cried, passionately. "I would not marry Gil without his consent, but I cannot listen to this man.

"Why, one would think I was some weak girl such as we read of in the old ballad stories!" she cried, with a laugh that was more like a hysterical cry, and, hastily washing away the traces of her tears, she determined to make a bold effort to show Sir Mark that his case was hopeless, and descended to the parlour to gather up and restore the pearls.

All thought of the jewels, though, was chased away by the sight of her father just seating himself for a rest and a smoke; and, smoothing her face, she went up to him, and stood by his side with her hands resting upon his shoulder.

"Are you tired, dear?" she said, passing her cool hand across his brow.

"Very, child," he replied, drawing her to him, so that she was seated upon his knee, with her head leaning against his cheek.

"You work so hard now," she continued. "This great order makes you so busy."

"Yes," he said, laughing; "but it is for honour and wealth, child. It is a great thing, and Sir Mark as good as promises that I shall be Master of Ordnance to the King."

"Are Sir Mark's promises all to be believed?" said Mace, quietly.

"To be sure! Yes, of course, child. He is a noble gentleman, of goodly birth, and when thou art his wife—"

He stopped short, for the words he had been trying to say had suddenly slipped from his lips, and he was startled by the manner in which his child leaped from his side, to stand staring down at him with flashing eyes.

"What is it?" he cried, in a clumsy, faltering manner.

“What was that you said, father?”

“I said when thou art Sir Mark’s wife, and he takes thee to court.”

“I can never be Sir Mark Leslie’s wife.”

“Tut! nonsense,” cried the founder, working himself up into a passion; “why do you talk such rubbish as this? What do you know of wedlock? Sir Mark has asked for thy hand in honourable marriage. It is a great honour; and thou wilt be wed and praised at court, and become a great body. What could I wish better for my child?”

“Oh, father, what do you mean?” she cried, with his own angry spirit rising up within her.

“Mean?” he cried, rousing himself now, to finish the task that he had fought in vain for so long to begin. “I mean that Sir Mark is to be thy husband. He brings thee honour and me wealth. It is a great thing, child. Living here as thou hast, such a position as that thou wilt occupy is a thing almost undreamed of. Why, my darling,” he said, trying to smile, “thou wilt ride in thy grand carriage, and have lackeys to follow thee, and be admired of all the court. Zounds! but I shall be proud indeed!”

“Father,” cried Mace, piteously, “you do not mean all this!”

“But I do!” he cried. “There, go to, silly child; it seems a trouble, but it will be all a joy. There, there: we need talk of it no more, for perhaps it will not be for months. I have given Sir Mark my promise, and thou wilt be his wife.”

Mace stood gazing at him piteously. Then throwing her arms round his neck she burst into a fit of sobbing.

“No, no, dear father!” she cried, “I cannot, I cannot wed him. It would break my heart.”

“Stuff!” he cried, caressing her; “what dost thou know of breaking hearts and such silly, girlish fancies? He brings thee jewels, and thou wilt have gay brocades. Why, my sweet pet, thou wilt drive Anne Beckley

mad with envy. Mark me, she meant to wed Sir Mark herself.”

“Father, dear,” said Mace, kissing him, and speaking in a low, appealing voice, “it is not like you to speak to your little girl like this. Do I care to flaunt in gay clothes—to try and best Anne Beckley? Have I any such ideas as these?”

“No, no, child; may be not,” he said, stroking her hair; “but—but—I’d like to see thee a grand dame.”

“Would it make you happier, dear?” she replied, kissing him fondly as she nestled to his breast.

“Well, well, yes, of course,” he said hastily.

“Nay, nay, father, dear, you would never, never be happy again if you sold me to that man.”

“Sold!” he cried furiously, for that truthful word stung him to his heart. “How dare you say that, ungrateful girl that thou art? How dare you?”

“Because it is true,” cried Mace, drawing back from him to stand, white and angry, at bay. “Father, you are trying to sell me to this man!”

“It is a lie—a damned lie!” he cried furiously. “Mace, thou hast been listening to that villain—that scoundrel—that murderer—Gil Carr, again.”

“It is no lie, father,” she retorted, “and Gil is no murderer—no villain—no scoundrel, but an honourable gentleman, as you know.”

“I know thou hast been carrying on with him again,” cried the founder. “Curse him!” he roared, bringing his hand down heavily upon the table, so that the glasses and pipes leaped again.

“I have not,” cried Mace, angrily. “You said I should not, and I obeyed you, as I always have; but,” she added proudly, “I told Gil I would never be the wife of another man, and I never will.”

“Have a care, madam, have a care!” cried the founder, who was

beside himself with passion. "I am a true man, but an obstinate one. I said thou should'st not wed that wild buccaneering adventurer, and I'll keep my word."

"Father!" cried Mace, as hotly, "I am thy daughter, and I can be obstinate too. I can keep my word. I will not wed Gil, if you forbid it; but I will wed no other man."

"Curse the day he ever entered my house, and curse the day he ever enters it again! I have given Sir Mark Leslie my word that thou shalt be his wife, and that word I'll keep. Now, I have said it, and thou knowest what to expect. I've indulged and spoiled thee, till, like an ingrate, thou fliest in my face, and forgettest all thy duty. Now go and learn what duty to a husband is."

"No, no, no!" cried Mace, casting off her angry fit, and flinging her arms round her father's neck. "Forgive me, dear, I said words to you I repent of now."

"Then thou wilt meet him as thou shouldest, child?"

"No, no, father, I cannot!" she cried, with a shudder; "I detest—I despise him. I do not wish to marry. Let us go back to our old happy days, dear—as we were before this man came to trouble us. Why do you wish to send your little girl away?"

The founder was moved, and his arm involuntarily embraced the slight form, and drew it to his breast, while his brow grew rugged with emotion. At that moment he felt as if he would gladly have gone back to the calm old days of peace, and in his heart of hearts he wished that there was no such thing as love, or marrying and giving in marriage, on the earth.

"There, there," he said softly, as he caressed and petted her as he would have done when she was a child. "There, little one, I want to do what is best for thee, to make thee happy."

"Let us stay as we are, then, father dear," she said, as she

responded to his caresses.

“No, no, child, it cannot be,” he said. “I have given my word to Sir Mark, and he is to be thy husband, and that right soon.”

“No, no, father!” she cried; “you do not—you cannot mean it.”

“I do mean it, and it must be,” he said firmly, as he rose, and she stepped back now, and stood gazing at him as, hastily pouring out and swallowing a glass of strong waters, he walked out of the room, leaving Mace standing with hands clasped before her, gazing at vacancy, as she realised her terrible position, and asked herself what she should do.

That night she crept up to her room in a dazed, stunned fashion, and sat gazing out of her window, watching the stars rise slowly from over the sea, as she wondered whether Gil would come back and save her from the fate that threatened, where he was now, and whether she should ever look again with beating heart at their innocent little signal in the grassy bank—the four glow-worms’ lights.

Where was he now? she asked herself. Was he thinking of her as his ship sailed over the blue Mediterranean? Perhaps so; but would the time come when it would be a sin for her to think of him other than as a friend?

With a shudder she told herself that such a time could never be, for she would sooner take the boat some night and let it drift far out over the deepest part of the Pool, and there step over into the cold, black waters in search of the rest that she could not hope for here.

And as she thought all this in a weary, despairing way, the founder sat in his own room, angry, troubled, and full of pity for his child; but all the same relieved of a heavy load, as he told himself that she knew now what was to be, and that she would soon grow happy and content.

How Sir Mark knocked away two Props.

A week, a fortnight, a month glided by, as time will gallop on, when some unwished-for season is ahead. Matters at the Moat were as of old. Sir Thomas dispensed justice, Dame Beckley prepared simples, and Mistress Anne purchased love-philtres, vowing each time that this was the last, but still, in spite of her better judgment, keeping on, for Gil was away, and might never come back, while Sir Mark was present and might be won.

He came sometimes to the Moat, and was very pleasant and courtly. He condescended to flirt with her a little, and filled her with hope that her vanity fed, as it grew dim on his departure. She was gentleness and innocence itself when he was present, but her eyes flashed when he left; and there was that in her looks which seemed to say that she would as readily poison him as give him cunning decoctions to win his love.

These were no pleasant times for the people at the Moat, for no sooner had the visitor departed, after regaling all present with accounts of how the gun-making went on, than Anne's temper blazed forth—Polly said like a blow-up at the Pool—and for hours and hours Sir Thomas would not venture to leave his study, nor Dame Beckley her garden of herbs.

For Anne Beckley had painted and patched, and worn her different brocades; she had tried tenderness, laughing looks, patience, and threatenings of Mother Goodhugh, all to no purpose; and her heart grew hot within her as she vowed vengeance against her rival.

At the Pool the busy works were in full swing, and the founder had good excuse for keeping away from his daughter; while Sir Mark, now that the ice was broken, left no opportunity unseized to hasten on his suit. Progress he made none, but he did not complain. "The love will come after marriage," he said, laughingly, and as patiently kept on working for the future.

To Mace's horror he assumed a quiet tone of proprietorship over her, and on paying fresh visits to the metropolis he seemed to spare no expense in buying presents and necessities for the wedding, which he assumed to be a matter of course, laughing at the girl's cold and distant

behaviour, while he never failed to treat her with the most tender consideration.

She made appeal after appeal to her father, but with the sole effect of angering him. For he had been long in making up his mind to give his consent, but when it was given the obstinacy of his nature made him deaf to all appeals; while, even had he been yielding, there was one at hand always ready to back up the weak part, as he by degrees gained so great an influence over the founder that, though the latter was ignorant of it, his will had been pretty well mastered by his guest, who dealt with him almost as he pleased.

They were busy times, and the calls made upon his attention prevented the founder from paying much heed to his child's pale looks and restless mien. Guns were finished, and dragged by heavy teams of horses through the sandy lanes to the little port, and there shipped along with casks of black-grained powder to go round to London or some other depot. There were heavy sums of money, too, paid into the founder's hands by Sir Mark, making the old man's eyes sparkle as, with a few well-turned words, the royal messenger told him of the satisfaction felt by Ministers and King at the way in which the orders were being carried out.

"You will be a great man, *father-in-law*," said Sir Mark, laying his hand on his shoulder. "Work away, for I have placed matters in train for another order when this one is done. I don't see why my relative should not be rich."

"Thanks, my lad," said the founder, whose face softened. "Go on, and remember this, that in turning a stream of gold into my pockets it is providing a great dam like yon Pool to work thine own mill-wheel by-and-by."

"I have thought that many times," said Sir Mark to himself. Then aloud, "This order, you see, was all in good faith, and the money has been paid. I look now for my reward—payment in advance, before I bring in the next. When is our wedding to take place?"

The founder looked grave for a few minutes, and then gazed full in

Sir Mark's face.

"There are no half measures with me, my lad," he said, laying his hand in Sir Mark's. "Whenever you like. Shall we say when the last gun is finished and—"

"And payments made," said Sir Mark, smiling. "Good! it shall be so. I start to-morrow for town, and from there I'll bring the moneys, and I hope the new order, along with presents and wedding ornaments for my darling. Is it to be so?"

"Yes," replied the founder; and he turned sharply, for a low sigh had reached his ear, and he was just in time to see Mace disappear from the door, which she was about to enter when she caught his words—words which sounded to her like a death-warrant, and which rang in her ears as she hurried to her chamber and locked herself within.

There was a peculiar look upon Mace Cobbe's countenance as she sat gazing straight before her, thinking of her position. Gil had been gone four months now, and might not return for a couple more; though, if he did, what could she do?

She shuddered at the thought, and for a time was overcome.

The next day, though, she was all feverish energy, and, setting off as if for a walk, she made for Master Peasegood's cottage, where, after a little hesitation, she plunged desperately into the matter in hand.

"I have not been idle, my little one," said the stout clerk, "but have on more than one occasion roundly taken thy father to task about this matter."

"Yes, yes," said Mace, excitedly, "and what did he say?"

"Bade me look after people's souls and let them look after their bodies themselves."

"Ay," said Mace, with a sigh, "it is what he would say."

“Sir Mark has been here to me about—about—”

“The wedding?” said Mace. “Speak out, Master Peasegood, I am ready to hear aught of thee.”

“Yes, my child. He came in his big commanding way to say that he should require me to be ready at a certain time.”

“Yes, and you—what did you say?”

“That I would sooner—”

“Speak! Pray tell me,” cried Mace, passionately; “you torture me, you are so slow.”

“I said an unkindly thing, my child,” replied Master Peasegood, sadly. “I said that I would rather read the burial service over thee than wed thee to such as he.”

“Thank you, Master Peasegood!” she cried, eagerly. “And you will keep to that, for I cannot wed this man.”

“My child,” said the stout parson, “I promised friend Gil—for thy sake, not his—that I would be like a second father to thee, and I will; so come to me when thou art in trouble, and I will give thee counsel and aid.”

“But I am in trouble, Master Peasegood, and want thy counsel and aid.”

“Here they are then, little one,” he said. “Go home and wait patiently. It is not thy wedding-day yet. Who knows how this gay spark stands at court? At any hour he may be recalled, and all his matrimonial plans be knocked upon the head. Fair Mistress Anne would give her ears to wed with him: and if she has set her mind upon it, mark me, she will likely enough take steps to stay his wedding you. There is many a slip ’twixt cup and lip, child, and maybe this trouble of thine will settle itself without action on our part. It will be time to take stringent steps on the eve of the wedding if nothing happens before, and something may. At all events he shall not wed thee in Roehurst church while I am parson there. Hah! who

may these be?"

There were steps at the door, and a sharp rapping, which the parson responded to himself, to find confronting him a stern, semi-military looking man in dark doublet, with two followers cut exactly upon his pattern.

"Master Joseph Peasegood, Clerk of Roehurst?" said the stern-looking man.

"Yes," said the parson; "I am that person, sir."

"Here is a paper of attachment for thy person, Master Peasegood. Thou wilt with me at once to London."

"I—go—to London—attachment—what for?"

"I cannot answer thy question, sir," was the reply. "I am only executioner of this warrant. I believe it is something to do with Popish practices. Come, sir, I have a carriage waiting. The roads are bad, and we want to be going."

"Popish practices! I, of all men in the world! But my people—who will take charge of them?"

"A reverend gentleman is on his way, sir," was the reply.

Master Peasegood read the document, bowed his head, and hastened his few preparations, standing at last finally with Mace's hand clasped in his.

"Tell Father Brisdone I commend thee to his charge, my child, and bid him from me take thee away from thy father's care sooner than let thee become the wife of this man. Tell him, too, that I am puzzled about this seizure of my person. I know not what it means, unless it be for consorting with him."

"I know, Master Peasegood," said Mace, pressing his great hand. "You have an enemy who has done this thing."

“Ay, child, and who may that be?”

“The man who asked a service of thee, which thou did'st refuse.”

“Sir Mark? Yes, thou art right. Good-bye, my child, good-bye.”

Mace's heart sank as she saw the stout figure of her old friend go towards where a great lumbering, open vehicle was standing, and as it disappeared she felt that she had one friend the less. It was, then, with a mute feeling of despair that she turned down the narrow, winding lane to meet a little further on three men, who, at a short distance, seemed to be the same she had so lately seen depart.

On a nearer approach, however, she found that it was their uniform, or livery, only that was the same.

They looked at her curiously as they passed, and then a shiver ran through her as the thought struck home,—what was their object there?

“Father Brisdone!” she ejaculated. “They have been after him.”

A cold feeling of despair crept over her as she read in all this the power of the man who sought to make her his wife. He was evidently at work insidiously removing her friends, to replace them with people of his own, and more than ever she felt how helpless her position had become.

With her heart beating a slow, heavy, despairing throb, she passed on a rising piece of ground to gaze through the trees at a portion of the Pool which lay gleaming in the sunshine; when her brow contracted strangely, and her eyes half closed, as sinister thoughts, like those of some temptation, came upon her.

She was to be alone and friendless if Father Brisdone was taken away: her father had literally sold her to this man, and sooner than he should take her in his arms and call her wife she felt that she would seek for rest in the great Pool.

“Pst! pst!”

Mace turned sharply, and, gazing in the direction from which the sound had come, she saw high up amidst the bushes on the bank the rusty cassock of him who had so lately been in her thoughts.

“Dear father!” she cried. “You there?”

“Hist, child, hist! Don’t look in my direction, but stoop, pick flowers, and talk to me as you bend down.”

“Why are you there, father?” she said softly, as she obeyed his words.

“It is the old story, child. I am one of a proscribed set of men now, and I have had warning from Tom Croftly that there are those here who seek to make me a prisoner.”

“Yes, father, I have seen them.”

“Then I must take to hiding, child. When Gilbert Carr’s ship returns he will give me safe passage to France. Till then I shall make my home in the iron-pits—the disused ones in the old beechwood.”

“Where I’ll bring thee food and covers, father,” cried Mace, who found relief from her own troubles in helping others.

“Nay, child, thou wilt be watched by one at the Pool. Tom Croftly will bring me all I want, if thou givest it to him. He is trusty, and will bring any message or letter with faith and care. I shall be watching over thee still, though I am in the old hole of the rock. It is not the first time that I have had to hide for life and liberty. But hark here, my child, I have said come not. If matters occur that make it necessary for thee to flee thine home sooner than wed a man thou dost despise, come to me in the forest, and maybe together we may escape to where I can find thee a home with a holy sister, and rest and peace.”

“Thanks, father, oh, thanks!” cried Mace. “But listen: Master Peasegood has been taken away.”

“So soon? But I am not surprised. It is because he refused the same

offer as I.”

“Were you asked, father?”

“Nay, child, I was ordered; and that is the real reason why I am hunted down. Hist! steps! Go on.”

Mace involuntarily walked on through the wood, bitterly lamenting that she should bring indirectly such misery upon those she esteemed, when a slight rustle in the bushes made her turn her head and utter a faint cry, as she was tightly clasped in Sir Mark Leslie’s arms.

How Mace made a Promise.

“I do not often exact my lover’s fees,” cried Sir Mark, kissing her passionately in spite of her struggles, while a feeling of horror half froze her, as she thought that this man must have heard the conversation with the father.

In a few moments, though, she had freed herself, and stood panting before him, longing to look back, and straining to listen to every rustle of the leaves behind her, and yet not daring so to do, lest it should draw attention to the fugitive.

“How silent you are,” he said, laughing. “A stranger would think you feared me, and not that we were so soon to be man and wife. My darling, is it not time we grew less distant?”

“Let me pass, Sir Mark!” cried Mace, hardly knowing what she did or said.

“Pass! No, little meadow-sweet. I will walk home with thee, proud and delighted to be thy champion and protector—the happiest man on earth.”

He talked on as he walked by her side, turning from time to time to gaze on her white face, as they neared the cluster of houses near the

Pool, and seeming pleased that first one head, and then another, should be turned to gaze after them as they went across the little bridge and into the porch.

As soon as she could escape, Mace hurried up to her own room, where she recovered a little from the agitation, as she thought of the father, and that there was one place to which she could flee in the event of matters coming to the worst. She had to plan, too, that certain necessities should be sent to Father Brisdone, all of which relieved her of her terrible brooding thoughts, and the feeling that she was forsaken. Helping another, and that so old a friend, was her solace, though she wept bitterly as she thought of how it was through her that he suffered.

One thought, too, now dominated over the others, and that was, had Sir Mark heard her words? If he had, the father would be seized, and she sat thinking, longing to send him warning, but afraid, for she knew that, with all his smiling openness of countenance, Sir Mark's words that he spoke to her on their way back were true, for he had told her that he was jealous of her; that he trembled lest some one should rob him of his great joy, and that his men were compelled to be watchful; and often when she had seen a dark figure near her window at night she was sure it was not from objects of gallantry—that Janet had not been waited for, but that the house was being guarded as if under military rule.

It was with a sense of relief then that she saw Sir Mark's departure for London the next day, even though he told her, as he held her hand, that on his return he should claim it as his own.

There would probably be a fortnight, in which time a change might come, as Master Peasegood had said, for Sir Mark might never be permitted to return.

The freedom from his presence, though, brought little more liberty, for that very afternoon a quiet, smooth-faced, smiling man in clerical garb called at the Pool-house, introducing himself as the minister who was temporarily to hold the cure of souls.

Mace shrank from him with fear and distrust, for in him she knew she

was looking upon Sir Mark's creature, a spy upon her actions, and one who was to bind her fast to him with chains that could never be undone.

She contrived to carry various articles down to Croftly's cottage, but in doing that she found that she was watched, some or other of Sir Mark's men loitering about, apparently enjoying their idleness and freedom from their master's eye; while she soon awoke to the fact that even her visits to the gardens were noted, and that Janet, her maid, had been bought over to the other side.

She tried one more passionate appeal to her father, but he would not hear her; and after this she felt that she was thrown upon herself to make some desperate resolve, either to flee to Father Brisdone, or take a more terrible step, one which during the past few days she had learned to look upon almost without a shudder.

The time seemed winged by magic as it glided by, and, trembling and excited, she knew that the hour had nearly come for Sir Mark's return. Twice over messengers had arrived from him, in each case laden with presents, and bearing a letter full of words meant to be tender, but which excited her disgust. She had had to listen, also, to the fulsome adulation of Master Peasegood's successor, who, to her horror, contrived to get himself asked by the founder to stay at the house, where he became a spy and an incubus of which the poor girl seemed to be never rid.

At length a last messenger arrived, bearing a fresh order to the founder, and requesting him to proceed with it at once, at the same time announcing Sir Mark's arrival on the morrow.

That night Mace sat at her window debating within herself as to what she should do. A last appeal to her father had been so met that she felt desperate, and a hair's pull one way or the other would have been sufficient to draw her aside.

The question she asked herself was, whether she should flee to Father Brisdone now, or wait until the eve of the wedding, and she decided for the latter course, as, sobbing bitterly, she told herself there

was escape for her still if the father had not been seized.

The night was dark with the darkness of autumn, and as she sat at the open window, with her cheek upon her hand, she gazed out at the dark Pool and listened to the murmur of the falling waters as they plashed musically amidst the stones and piles.

Suddenly, in the midst of her despairing thoughts, her hand dropped on the window-sill, and her eyes dilated as she gazed before her at the broad green bank across the race, where four points of light shone out diamond-wise as in the happy days of her young love.

“Gil,” she cried below her breath, and her heart beat painfully as she gazed intently at the lights, which faded as quickly as they had appeared.

Was it fancy—a trick, or some treachery? There were no glow-worms now. It was long past the time when they shed their tiny lights, and the appearance, if it were not fancy, could only be some accidental resemblance which she had magnified in her excited state.

It was nothing, she said, as a feeling of misery came over her, and the tears rose to her eyes as she wondered where Gil could be, and whether he thought of her at that moment, when there was a slight rustle below, and she reached out of the window, as her name was uttered in a low, deep voice which she could not mistake.

“Mace!”

“Gil!”

For answer a foot was placed upon the sill below. He sprang, and caught the mullion of her window, drew himself up and clung there, with both hands, as she flung her arms round his neck, and laid her face against his cheek.

They were moments of ecstasy mingled with grief and pain, as in her delight at Gil’s return Mace began to whisper to him of her terrible position.

"I know all, sweet," he whispered back. "But hush, speak beneath your breath. You are watched at every turn, and it was only by setting two of my men to lead the spies upon a false scent that I could get to the window. Oh, my darling, I could die now after this joyful meeting. I have not doubted of thy love—not much; but I did not know how thou mightest be forced."

"Oh! Gil, Gil, I am most miserable," she moaned.

"I know it, sweet. Father Brisdone has told me all. But, there, you will listen to me now. Mace, dearest, you will not wed this man?"

"Gil, I was thinking when you came to-night I'd make the Pool my wedding-bed."

"My own!" he whispered, as he longed to press her in his arms—the arms that clung painfully to the window-sill to keep his face on a level with hers.

"I was so miserable I wished myself dead."

"But now?" he asked.

"Now," she said, forgetting all timidity in her joy, as she clung more closely to him, "Now I wish to live."

"And you will go with me?"

"What? leave my home—my father?" she said, half in amaze that he should propose such a thing, and with all a woman's inconsistency, though so few minutes before she had thought of fleeing to Father Brisdone to seek a home abroad.

"Yes, when it is no longer a home to thee, sweet. Give me the name of husband, Mace, my own old love. I have but moments to say it to thee. Come with me now from this window. I have half a dozen men waiting. Four shall help to guard you to our hiding-place while two go to the old iron-pits and fetch thence Father Brisdone. He shall wed us at once. Or we will away to my boat in the little river and go down to my ship, where

let even the King seek thee if he dare.”

“Oh, Gil—dear Gil, I cannot!” she faltered.

“Quick,” he whispered. “Hold me tightly, sweet, for my arms are failing. Look here, Janet shall come if thou wilt.”

“Nay, nay, she is false.”

“Then come without her, sweet. Come, and be my own wife, and let us laugh at this intruder, who would rob us both of a happy life.”

“No, no, no!” she faltered, as she clung to him. “I cannot come—I cannot come.”

“You do not trust me,” he said.

“Oh! hush, hush, Gil!” she moaned. “I do trust you, and love you with all my heart. I will die sooner than that man shall clasp me as his wife, but I cannot, cannot flee my home like this.”

“Yes, yes, dearest, quick, you must decide,” he whispered, as a faint chirp was heard.

“I cannot, Gil. My father—my poor father, I cannot leave him.”

“Mace, dearest, you torture me and yourself. You will come.”

“Nay, nay, I cannot.”

“What! Will you stay to be this man’s wife?”

“No! Sooner death,” she cried. “He may not return.”

“He is on his way.”

“Oh, no, no,” she whispered, shuddering. “I could not be his wife. He may not come—a thousand things may happen. Oh, Gil, Gil, do not tempt me to do wrong.”

"Nay, nay, I'll not tempt thee, sweet. 'Tis no temptation to say, 'Be my wife.' Is it so sad a fate?"

"Gil—husband—thy wife or death's!" she sobbed, as she passionately kissed his sunburned face.

"Then you will come, sweet!" he cried. "Quick, thy cloak and hood."

"Nay, Gil, dearest Gil, I cannot leave."

"Mace!"

"Do not reproach me," she said, sadly. "Gil, dear Gil, I love thee with all my heart, but I could not flee from here while hope remained."

"And does it remain here?" he said, bitterly.

"Yes, dearest," she whispered. "My father may repent; Sir Mark may never return. While there is either of those to cling to, I could not go."

"But, if they were gone, would you come? Tell me quickly."

There was a dead silence, during which the chirp, as of a bird, was once more heard.

"There is something wrong, sweet, and I must go; but tell me, were both those hopes gone, would you come?"

Again there was silence, and then once more the chirp of the bird.

"Gil," whispered Mace, with her lips to his ear, "I cannot leave my father while there is hope. If this fails me, on the eve of my wedding-day, come, and I will flee with thee to the great world's end."

"Seal it," he whispered. "Gil!"

"Seal thy promise, sweet," he whispered. "My arms fail me; I cannot draw thee to my breast. Kiss me, sweet wife, for my wife thou art."

Her lips slowly lowered themselves to his, rested there for long, and

then were raised, as a thrill of joy shot through the young man's breast.

"On the eve of the day appointed for the wedding, then, I will be here, to take thee away. Father Brisdone shall be on board my ship, the boat lie waiting, and there shall be good men and true to protect thee, love. You will not fail?"

"I will not fail," she whispered.

"There goes one hope," he said, as lights shone through the trees on the track beside the Pool. "Sir Mark has come."

Mace uttered a faint cry.

"Nay, love, that should be a cry of joy," he whispered. "I go hence happy, for the prize is mine."

Her arms relaxed, and he dropped from the window, and stole cautiously away; but on every hand he found that some one was on the watch, and that Sir Mark's people, who were more able than he had expected, were at every turn.

They had not seen him come, but partly from suspicion, partly because they half expected that the announcement of Sir Mark's return upon the following night might be merely a ruse to throw them off their guard, they were particularly watchful; and, as they had anticipated, so it happened, for there was their leader at the gate.

A few blows and a struggle, and Gil could easily have escaped, but that would have interfered with his plans; and hence he was doubly cautious, the result being that just as the horsemen bearing lights reached the house, Gil had crept back and crouched beneath his mistress's window, unable to get unseen away.

"Gil," she whispered.

"I am here, sweet. They will see me if you stay. Go in, and close thy casement."

“Nay, nay,” she whispered, agitatedly. “You will be taken—there will be blood shed. Come—quick—in here till they are gone.”

With a bound Gil reached the heavy window-sill, and drew himself up, got one arm over, then with a slight struggle he was half in, then leaped lightly down, and caught Mace to his panting breast.

“Hush! for heaven’s sake, hush!” she whispered as she clung to him, “you might be heard.”

“And if I were,” he said fondly, “I should have blurred my darling’s fame. Mace, sweet wife, that I love thee thou shalt have no doubt. Heaven bless thee, child. Good night.”

Before she could speak he had placed one foot on the sill and leaped out on to the grass, coming down so lightly that as she darted to the window she hardly heard his footfalls. There was a slight rustle though on her left, which must have been he; and then as she drew back there was the sound of low voices talking, and she became aware that they were those of her father and Sir Mark.

She shrank away from the window with a shiver, for the voice of Sir Mark sounded hateful to her; but fear lest her lover should be heard drew her back, and she stood listening, but heard no sound to cause her dread.

Once more there was the chirp as of a bird, and then came an answering chirp as from off the water, after which all was silent, and she closed her window to sit down and wonder how Gil had produced those tiny sparks of light, and then she knelt down and laid her cheek against her bed as she prayed with all her heart for forgiveness if she were wrong in feeling so joyous—so glad of soul that her lover had returned.

For there was a delicious sense of ecstasy—of freedom from all pain—pervading her. She was safe from Sir Mark and his machinations. He might take away Master Peasegood and Father Brisdone, but Gil he dared not touch; and she closed her eyes and sighed content as she thought of her stout, brave lover—so strong, so manly, and so true.

Was it the same life, she asked herself, that she was living a few hours ago? It seemed impossible; and she rose at length so refreshed and calm that she was ready enough to answer when there was a step on the stairs, and her father's voice speaking.

"Art abed, lass?" he cried.

"No, father."

"Then come down. Sir Mark would see thee and show thee the presents he has brought from London town."

Mace hesitated for a few moments, and, had it been the night before, she would have refused to go. This night she felt so at peace within herself that she was ready enough, and went down to read in the eyes of both that they were ignorant of Gil's return, though she repented afterwards, and felt that she was playing a double part, as she listened to Sir Mark's adulation, and saw the rich presents he had purchased for his bride.

It was while she was listening to his words that she suddenly recollected the necklace of pearls which she had scattered about the room where they were seated, and wondered where they had gone, for she had thought of them no more.

At last, at a very late hour for the simple country-place, she was able to retire, and when she did, and received her father's customary kiss, the words he uttered were few but they shot through her like a pang.

For they were words of thanks for her less reserved demeanour towards Sir Mark; and, as the poor girl ascended once more to her room, it was with the feeling strong upon her that the second hope to which she had clung had just been swept away.



How Tom Croftly spoke his Mind.

It was soon known in Roehurst that Captain Culverin had returned from his voyage, and Sir Mark ground his teeth with rage as he heard the news.

"The more need to get the matter over," he said to himself; and he had at once a long interview with the founder, one which set him more at ease, for it was decided then and there that the wedding should be that day week, and Mace was summoned to hear her fate.

She heard it without a word, and from that day forward went about the house like one in a dream, but with a strange feeling of excitement ever growing in her brain.

Wedding clothes lay about her room, and presents, but she hardly glanced at them. At one of her interviews with Sir Mark she had begged that she might be left much alone, and to her great relief this was accorded to her, and she waited for the eventful eve.

She longed to visit Father Brisdone at his hiding-place in the old ironstone pit, but she dared not go, for whenever she set foot beyond the scattered houses she found either Sir Mark or a couple of his men following upon her track. She had this consolation, however, that Gil was evidently in communication with the father, for he had promised to have him on board.

At first she was all excitement to know whether Sir Mark had heard her speaking to him; but she felt sure at last that this had not been so, and so she waited.

Two or three times over her heart was in a flutter, for there were well-known voices about the place, as Gil's men arrived escorting some dozens of the country-carts chartered to bear to the foundry-works load after load of dirty-looking saltpetre bags, and sacks of pure, pale yellow stone.

These were dangerous times, for all were well-armed, and there was risk enough of encounters between the sailors and Sir Mark's men, for the former gazed with jealous eyes at the position taken by the latter amongst their old friends; while the latter, who knew of the treatment of two of their companions, longed for an open quarrel and a fight.

But the orders were strict on both sides, Gil making Wat Kilby scowl as he gave the most stern commands as to the behaviour of the men when in the little village; and so, day after day, loads and loads of the special commodities were landed and carried away, and Gil made no effort to see his love or even speak.

Mace asked her trembling heart whether Gil would know which was the wedding eve, as if he would not be sure; and so great was her desire to hear of the condition of Father Brisdone that she daily made a journey to Tom Croftly's cottage, where the news she heard was always good; and the father sent her messages to be of good cheer, for he was safe.

These visits seemed to puzzle the followers of Sir Mark, who himself had his suspicions that they were made by appointment, and that she here made rendezvous with Gil; but following her one day, the most he saw was a small basket of provisions and a little flask of wine, all of which he set down to charity, and walked back with her quite content.

The unloading of Gil's ship continued rapidly, and the followers of Sir Mark heard one or two mysterious communications about the strange processions that sometimes were seen in out-of-the-way parts at night, but their orders were to keep close to the Pool-house, and no expeditions were made to see what the processions meant.

In short, there was a lull in the little hamlet—the calm that precedes a storm—and women whispered that Mother Goodhugh had been foretelling that the time of evil for the house of Cobbe was close at hand.

Sir Mark seemed to be passing his time in busily superintending the despatch of the last piece that had been finished, after careful proof, and then in idling about the woods, or rowing upon the Pool, while the preparations for the wedding still went on.

Once or twice he occupied himself with shooting the wild fowl with arquebus or cross-bow, but all the same his eyes and ears were attent to every change.

Now that the news must have reached the Moat, he studiously avoided visiting there, for he half-laughingly wondered what Anne Beckley would say.

Jeremiah Cobbe was of opinion that his intended son-in-law was trying to make friends with all the people about the place, so frequent were his visits from cot to cot; but this was not so, for he was busy trying to learn all he could about Gil's whereabouts and habits; an inquisition in which he was aided by Master Tarpling, the temporary resident parson; but the total of their knowledge when added up amounted to *nil*.

Once or twice did the founder hesitate as to the course he was pursuing, but in his business encounters with Gil he found him calm and stern, and it struck him that Mace had of late grown resigned; so he let matters drift, fully aware though he was that Sir Mark would now have forced him to keep to his word should he have shown any disposition to draw back.

"He'll make her a good husband," he said to himself. "She don't fancy it, perhaps, at first; but a father must be the best judge of what is for his child's happiness."

He was down at one of his powder-sheds, busying himself, and thinking that the Pool-house would soon be no longer the same, when he came upon Croftly, who, on the strength of his old service, said what he pleased.

"Oh, look here, Tom," said the founder, "Thursday's to be the wedding-day; you ought to set the men to work getting ready something in honour of the event. It's a busy time, but I shall not take any notice if some of you stop to rig up a sort of arch."

"Rig up!" said Tom Croftly. "Hadn't you better ask some of the Captain's men? It's more in their way."

“No, no,” said the founder, hastily. “Make an arch of green boughs and flowers, and that sort of thing. You know better than I do; go up to the village and bid the men get the case of viols, and let there be a dance—the girls will be pleased. Tell the men they shall have their shilling and plenty of ale; and you can get some powder—a keg of coarse black—and the two little old guns, and fire ‘em off. You can have what wood you like, too, for a bonfire at night. Do the thing well, my lad, and take a holiday all of you. I’ll find the ale.”

Tom Croftly took off his cap, and wiped his grimy brow with a blacker hand, as he seated himself on the bottom of an empty keg.

“We had a girt meeting ‘bout it in the ‘ood last night, master,” said Croftly; “and talked it all over.”

“Oh, you did?” said the founder, looking pleased. “Well, and what did you settle?”

“First find foremost, master, we sattled that we’d muffle the three bells up in the tower o’ the church.”

“Why, it’s two miles away, man, and the sound wouldn’t hardly be heard here.”

“And then we’d toll ‘em all day long.”

“Toll them?” cried the founder.

“Ay, master, for it be like to us as if young mistress had been put in her grave.”

“Nonsense, my lad. She’ll come back sometimes. And it’s a happy day for her.”

“Happy, eh, master?” said Croftly roughly. “Look here, you asked for this, so you may as well have it slap i’ th’ mooth. I talked to the boys, and they talked to me; and at last of all they, swore as they’d be damned, every man Jack of ‘em, if they didn’t treat the whole thing as a fun’ral, and that, if any of Sir Mark’s chaps tried to get up an ale shouting, they’d

shove 'em in the Pool."

"But you musn't take it like that, Tom," cried the founder. "It's very good of the lads to take on so about losing their young mistress, but you must rejoice. It's to be a happy day."

"She looks like it, master," cried Tom. "Why her face be terrifying. Where be her bright sperrits, and her sparkling eyes? Don't you make a mistake about it, master. We don't take on about losing her, none of us, and we'd half bust every old gun on the place and raise such a girt bonfire as would set the country alight, if she was going to wed the man of her choice. But this gay fly-golding ladybird chap fro' London! Ah, master, you be doing wrong, and that be what we all say."

"You, Tom Croftly," roared the founder, angrily, as he writhed beneath the lash of his man's words, "how dare you speak to me like that?"

"Cause it be right," said Croftly, stoutly. "Haven't she and the captain been like two lovers ever since they was little children, and sent my heart in my mouth to see 'em playing so nigh the edge of the race?"

"I will not listen to such insolence," cried the founder. "You, Tom Croftly, come for your wage on Saturday night, and give up the cottage the week after."

"And maybe you'll put William Goodley in my place, eh?" said the foreman.

"Maybe I shall," cried the founder. "You ungrateful rascal!"

"Nay," said the foreman, "you need not trouble yourself, mas' Bill Goodley would not step into my shoes, nor another man in the place. And, just to show as I beant ungrateful as you say, I'll stop on."

"Stop on!" roared the founder. "Ay, stop on. Haven't you just took another good order? Haven't you got all that 'ood ready for the colliers; and haven't you just got in a shipload of sulphur and Chinese salt? Lookye here, mas', you don't know, I s'pose, that if I left here every man and boy would go as well. No, master, we beant ungrateful, none of us;

but we don't like to see our young mistress sold, and him as should have had her thrown over."

"And pray who is that?" cried the founder.

"Captain Culverin, mas'; that be the man she meant to have."

"A wild adventurer—a man who murdered that wretch Churr."

"Nay, master, there beant a man of us here who thinks that he did," said the workman, sturdily; "and if Captain Gil was here you wouldn't say it to he."

"I am here, Tom Croftly," said Gil, stepping into the big powder-shed, "and I thank you and your fellows for your good opinion. But take no notice of this. Master Cobbe here does not believe what he said."

"But I do," cried the founder, furiously.

"Tom Croftly," said Gil, quietly, but with a flush in his cheek, "go, and leave me with Master Cobbe here. I want to talk with him."

"All right, captain!" said the workman. "Bah!" he added to himself, "if he be'd the lad I thought him, he'd make no more ado but upset the whole of this London trade, and carry young mistress off. I would."

"Now, Gil Carr," cried the founder, as soon as they were alone. "We've done our business. You've delivered all your cargo that I want, and you've been paid your money. Wouldn't it have been more decent if you had kept away?"

"Perhaps so, Master Cobbe; but there are times when a man feels that he must speak. But, first of all, why do you rake up that wretched story about Abel Churr?"

"Because I believe it," cried the founder, angrily.

"Nay, you do not. You know I am innocent, or I should not dare to come to you now, and ask you by all you hold dear to give up this

wretched business.”

“What wretched business?” cried the founder.

“I mean this proposed marriage. Listen to me, Master Cobbe. You have known me from a boy. I have been wayward and rough, perhaps, but fairly honest, for my love for Mace has kept me a better man than I should have been.”

“What does all this mean, Gil Carr?”

“It means, sir, that I make my last appeal to you before it is too late. I love Mace dearly. Give up this wedding and wait a year—two years—any time you will, till you are satisfied I am innocent of the death of Abel Churr, and then give me your consent. Don’t condemn us both to a life of wretchedness and pain.”

Gil had made his appeal at the wrong time. No matter when he had come, he would have met with a stern refusal; but now, when the founder was irritated beyond measure to find the echo of his own feelings in the breast of his very workmen, who, with true British sturdiness, refused to a man to take part in what they looked upon as the selling of his child, he was unable to contain himself, and the pent-up anger came pouring forth.

“Go!” he cried, white with rage, as he pointed to the entry. “Go, ere I’m mad enough to strike. Thou hast come now to try and breed fresh dissension—to try and raise my poor, foolish child in rebellion against me. I am not a man of blood, but, look you, your presence near my house from now till when this wedding has taken place will be the signal for my people, or those of Sir Mark, to use force.”

“But you will not let the wedding take place, Master Cobbe? For all our sakes, pause in time.”

“In time!” cried the founder; “what do you mean? There, no more.”

As he spoke he turned and hurried out of the powder-shed, and past two or three more, to enter at last one of the stone buildings, where the casting was carried on; but Gil stuck to his heels, following him closely

without noticing Sir Mark, who, on catching sight of him, raised a finger as a signal to one of his men.

“You will not sell poor Mace like this,” cried Gil, as the founder turned upon him as if at bay. “Master Cobbe, for both our sakes, pause while there is yet time.”

“Out upon thee, Gil Carr; thou maddenest me!” cried the founder. “Yet time? What do you mean by speaking to me like this? Am I not my own master?”

“Yes,” replied Gil, humbly; “and this is why I appeal.”

“Why you rebel against me, you should say,” cried the founder, passionately. “What am I to understand that you mean by ‘yet time’?”

“I mean before it is too late,” said Gil, speaking humbly and imploringly as he forced himself into making this last appeal, before venturing on an act that was repugnant to him, and which on calmer consideration he would have avoided for Mace’s sake.

“Gil Carr!” cried the founder, furiously, “go thy way, and let me go mine. I will not be dictated to by the man who has come like a blight upon my threshold. Like a treacherous adder, thou hast stung the hand that warmed thee back to life. Coward—villain—thou could’st do nothing better than set thy snares to trap my weak child. Now go, or—”

He raised his hand and dropped it again.

“For heaven’s sake, listen to me!” cried Gil, excitedly. “Master Cobbe, I would be an honourable gentleman for my father’s sake, to thee and thine, but you drive me to despair.”

In his eagerness he caught the founder by the arm, but the latter turned upon him furiously, mad as he was with rage against himself as much as with the suppliant, whom he struck heavily across the face, and then strode away.

Gil staggered back as much from surprise as from the weight of the

blow, and the blood in a hot flush of passion suffused his face.

“For thy sake, darling,” he said, calming down, “for thy sake. There, Master Cobbe, I have done my duty as a man; if blood be shed in what follows, I wash my hands of it; for ’fore God I swear, that if I fail in one way, I’d kill my darling at the altar before she should become that fellow’s wife.”

“Captain—quick—this way, Captain!” cried a voice in a hasty whisper.

“What is it, Croftly?”

“This way, skipper. Here in at this furnace-mouth; it is open behind. Follow me.”

“What for, man?” cried Gil, sternly, as he saw the grimy face of Croftly at the opening to one of the great brick smelting-furnaces now void and cold.

“Sir Mark, with a dozen men be surrounding the place.”

Gil’s hand flew to his sword, but he let it fall.

“Nay,” he said, “we must have the wisdom of the serpent here. We’ll try that first, and if it fails—the sword.”

Entering the furnace, then, Croftly helped him into a black passage beyond, which let them pass between two vast stacks of charcoal to the rough track into the forest, which Gil reached unseen, while Sir Mark, with a dozen men, searched the powder-sheds and furnaces in vain.

How Mother Goodhugh went to Work.

“Thou wicked old hag,” cried Anne Beckley, angrily, as she stood in Mother Goodhugh’s cottage. “Here have I, against my better sense, trusted to thee, and laid bare the secrets of my heart, and for what?” Mother Goodhugh smiled maliciously. “To make thee rich with gold pieces

while thou hast done naught but mock at me and laugh.”

“Nay, sweet Mistress,” said the old woman, “I smiled not at thee. I thought of what had passed.”

“And what had passed?”

“Thou hast not known thine own heart, and one day it has been set on Captain Culverin, and another day on the gay young knight of London.”

Anne gave her foot an impatient stamp.

“What is that to thee?”

“Naught, sweet Mistress, with the beautiful eyes and lips. Ah, would I were a man and young,” said the wily old flatterer. “But it be much to spells. The spirits will not be mocked at. Thou comest to me and sayest, ‘Mix me powerful philtres that shall win Sir Mark’s love’, and, when thou dost administer it according to the form I gave, thy thoughts be all the while on Culverin Carr. How canst blame me if they do not act!”

Anne stamped on the floor again.

“I don’t care,” she cried. “What did you promise me? Was it not that I could win the love of either.”

“Ay,” said Mother Goodhugh; “and I worked hard; but Mistress Mace Cobbe worked hard too, and had better luck.”

“Don’t mention her wretched name.”

“But I must, sweet child. How her beautiful eyes fire up and sparkle!” she said, as if to herself. “She be a white witch, and weaves powerful spells with her father’s wealth. For his money helps her to buy costly things my pittance will not touch.”

“I have given thee crowns and pounds,” cried Anne.

“All spent on thee and thy philtres,” returned Mother Goodhugh. “Then Abel Churr has been taken away through the tricks of that white witch Mace, who has forced Culverin Carr to slay him, that I might not battle against her. Ah, fair Mistress Anne, she be a potent witch.”

“Then she shall be burned,” cried Anne Beckley, savagely. “I have but to swear against her before my father, the justice, of her goings on, and she would be seized and pinioned and tortured.”

“And serve her duly,” cried the old woman, with malicious glee.

“Even as I could have thee seized, Mother Goodhugh,” cried Anne, “if I so willed.”

“Nay, but thou would’st not be so cruel to one who has served thee so well.”

“Served me so well?” cried Anne, fiercely. “What have you done?”

“Tried to win thee lovers,” said Mother Goodhugh, whining.

“Ay, and Gilbert Carr treats me with scorn, and Sir Mark marries that thing—that creature, Mace Cobbe.”

“Nay,” cried the old woman, “it be not so.”

“But it is so,” cried Anne, “and I am scorned by both. I heard Sir Mark talking the wedding over with Master Peasegood, and it will be at the Pool.”

“Both scorned thee!” cried Mother Goodhugh, raising her hands; “and thou so beautiful to the eye, and I’ll warrant me so sweet to the touch. She be a powerful witch indeed.”

“Then I’ll denounce her for one!” cried Anne, passionately; and the old woman’s face lit up with glee, but became serious directly after, as she grew thoughtful.

“Nay, child, it would be in vain.”

“But this marriage shall not be.”

“Why not wed Captain Culverin?”

“Hideous old fool, I tell thee he scorns me!” cried the passionate woman. “He loves that wretched creature. I’ll denounce her, that I will. I’d like to see her burn.”

“She deserves it, too, child; but it would be in vain. Sir Mark and his men and Culverin Carr and his men would defend her. She has witched them to her side.”

“But the wedding must not be.”

“Nay, it shall not, then,” cried the old woman.

Anne Beckley walked up and down the little room for a few minutes, and then with an ugly look disfiguring her handsome, weak face, she stopped short before the old woman.

“Dost know how they served the old woman over at Morbledon?” she said, with a malicious smile.

“Yes, yes,” cried Mother Goodhugh, hastily; “I heard.”

“They tied her neck and heels, and threw her into the pond to see if she would swim.”

“Yes, yes; the idiots and fools.”

“They nearly drowned her. Eh? Does that touch thee, Mother Goodhugh?” said Mistress Anne, maliciously, as she saw the old woman fall a-trembling.

“Yes, yes, yes. It was very cruel.”

“And then she was committed to prison on my father’s warrant, and perchance she will be burned at the stake.”

“Nay, nay, it be too horrible,” said the old woman, whose face was now blanched with terror.

“It is only what they’d do to thee, Mother Goodhugh, if I denounced thee for witches’ practices.”

“Then I’d denounce thee, too!” cried the old woman, turning upon her like the trampled worm.

“And, if you did, who would believe thee, thou wrinkled, ugly, spiteful crone, who goest cursing through the village, and evil-eyeing all around? Denounce me? Ha, ha, ha!” cried the girl, throwing back her head as her eyes flashed, and she looked really handsome; “Do I look like a witch?”

“No, no, no, dearie, you are lovely as woman can be,” cried the old crone.

“Then I’ll get thee burned for deceiving me!” cried Anne.

“Nay, child, nay,” cried the old woman, piteously; “thou would’st not be so cruel.”

“I can, and I will,” cried the girl, stamping her foot. “I have been a fool to listen to thee, and thou hast taken advantage of me to get my money, and laughed at my weakness because I was sick with love; but I’m not such a fool as to be unable to get revenge. Mother Goodhugh, I’d come to see thee burnt.”

“Nay, nay,” cried the old woman, grovelling on the floor before her; “don’t talk so, dearie, it be too horrible.”

“A great stake and a chain, and faggots piled round thee, and the fire blazing, and Mother Goodhugh roasting. Ha, ha, ha! it would be a gay revenge on an old witch.”

“Nay, child, nay, but I be not a witch,” cried the old woman, who seemed palsied with dread.

“Then why did’st profess to me that thou wast?” cried Anne, striking

her again and again, the old woman only cowering down as she received the blows, and piteously begging her tormentor not to denounce her. "Thou deceived'st me scores of times, and I, fool that I was, listened, and was befooled more and more. Now, hark ye, Mother Goodhugh, I have thee tight. Thou canst not win their love for me, but thou can'st get me revenge. Look here: stop that wedding."

"I will, child; I will, dearie."

"*You shall!*" cried Anne. "Mind this: I warn you. If that wedding takes place, and Mace Cobbe becomes Dame Leslie—"

"Yes, yes, yes!" cried the old woman.

"I'll denounce thee as a witch, and laugh to scorn any accusations or railings against me; and I'll come and spit at thee as thou burnest at the stake."

"Oh!" half shrieked the old woman, tearing at her bosom as she heard the other's words, and felt their power. Then, recovering herself, she began to fawn upon her visitor.

"Have no fear, dearie. The wedding shall not be. I can stay it—I can stay it. I have but to lift up my hand, and it is done."

"I believe thee not!" cried Anne, "but I warn thee. If that wedding takes place, pray to all thy familiars to save thee, or flee from here, for if not I'll have thee dragged to the stake and burned. Thou knowest that I can," she said, as she turned to go.

"Yes, child—yes, dearie."

"Then remember!"

Anne went out of the cottage as she said the last words, and, as Mother Goodhugh thought of the atrocities that had been committed against weak old women who had professed some occult art, she shivered, and in imagination saw the flames rising round her withered limbs.

“She could do it, she could do it,” she cried piteously. “But I’ll stop it: I’ll stop it. The house is cursed, and the wedding shall not be; for I can stop it, and I will.”

Left alone to her thoughts, Mother Goodhugh began to suffer from a fit of terror, which completely gained the mastery over her, as she recalled all that she knew about the terrible sentences passed upon reputed witches. There was something fascinating in being able to gain the fear of the common people, and to be looked up to as a kind of prophetess; but she avowed now that the price paid was very dear. She had won many triumphs, and been looked up to as a wise woman, but if she were denounced as a witch, those who had feared and paid her for her utterances would turn upon her, for she was ready to own how seldom her prophetic promises had come true.

One in a hundred, however, was quite sufficient to keep up her character; and when there were failures there were always some side utterances that could be brought to bear to soften defeat or turn the matter to her advantage. And so for years she had managed to keep up the character of a wise woman, and amass no inconsiderable amount of the rustic people’s savings, for there was always something upon which she could be consulted, and, in spite of her fears, she sat hugging herself upon her success as she thought of this.

“What be I to do?” she muttered; “and how be I to go to Cobbers house? If I go I shall be sent away. Why be not Abel Churr here to help me?”

In spite of her efforts to fight back her dread, the recollections of the death scenes she had heard described made her tremble, and, when a hasty step was heard outside, she rose with a cry of horror, and darted towards the inner chamber, but paused on the threshold, as she heard a woman’s voice repeat her name.

“Mother Goodhugh, Mother Goodhugh!”

“Yes; who be it?” she said, and, tottering to the door, she opened the latch with trembling hand to as it were admit a ray of light to her breast,

for the visitor brought hope.

It was Janet.

“Well, child,” she said, “and why have you come?”

“Don’t ask me yet, mother,” whispered the girl, hurrying in, and helping to close the door. “If Mas’ Cobbe knew I be come here he would half kill me.”

“Of course, of course, child! It be very wrong to come and visit poor Mother Goodhugh. Aren’t you afraid I should curse you, child?”

“Oh no, mother!” cried the girl, who, now that she was inside, recovered herself. “I want you to bless me.”

“Ah, child, and how?”

“Oh, mother,” giggled the girl, “you know. How do young women want to be blest?”

“With a husband, eh, dearie?” said the old woman with a cunning leer, as she scanned Janet’s pretty, weak face, and thought about how her good fortune had played into her hands by sending her a tool with which, if she were skilful, she could work her ends.

“But thou should’st not make me say it out loud, mother,” said Janet, with another giggle; “but, when there be so much courting and love-making up at home, how can a girl help thinking about such things?”

“Ay, truly, dear, how indeed! But why should not so bonnie a maiden win a husband, I should like to know.”

“What, as Mistress Mace?” said Janet, pouting.

“Nay, as Mistress Janet,” said the old woman, chuckling. “Well, well, and who is it to be, and what can I tell thee?”

“I want—I want to know—”

“Ay, ay, speak out, dearie.”

“I want to know,” faltered Janet, glancing at the door of the inner room and then at that of the entrance, “I want to know—Oh, I daren’t ask it,” she said, turning red and pale by turns.

“Thou would’st know the name of thy husband.”

“Ay, how could you tell that?” cried the simple girl.

“Such things be as plain to me as if they were written in a book. Sit down there,” she cried, pointing to a stool in the middle of the room.

Janet hesitated, but the old woman took up her crutch-handled stick and struck the floor imperiously, with the result that the girl took the seat, and Mother Goodhugh drew a rough circle round her as she stood behind the stool.

“I want to go back now; I must go back now,” said the girl, with trembling voice.

“Thou canst not go now until the spell is off,” whispered Mother Goodhugh, as she thrust her hand into a capacious pocket and took out a ball of glass, lined inside with some white metal, which gave it the appearance of a convex mirror.

“Shall I see anything very dreadful, and will it pook me?” faltered the girl.

“I hope not, but I cannot promise,” said Mother Goodhugh. “Sit quite still, and if anything dreadful comes I will answer for it that thou be not hurt much.”

Janet’s heart throbbed as she saw the old woman come before her and go down upon her knees, her face convulsed, and lips moving rapidly; then, holding the glass in both hands, her brow puckered as she gazed straight into it.

“What be this I see?” she cried in a hoarse voice; “a dark, tall, sun-

browed man with pointed beard, half soldier, half sailor, who looks upon thee with eyes full of scorn."

"Has he dark grey eyes, mother?" whispered Janet, in an awe-stricken voice.

"Ay, child, and a dashing, roving look."

"It be Culverin Carr," muttered the girl, pressing her hand to her throbbing heart.

"And now I see an old rough, grey man, big, and harsh, and stark, who would wed thee, but I know him not, for he keeps his head away."

"Mas' Wat Kilby!" muttered Janet, with a sigh.

"And now I see another, who is at thy feet, child; a handsome man in silk and velvet, who looks prayerfully in thy face, and asks thee to let him love thee."

"Tell me more of him!" cried Janet, eagerly.

"I can see but little more, child, only that he has white hands with rings upon them, and a sword is hanging to his belt. He looks a handsome and a courtly youth, such as we have not in these parts here."

"'Tis Sir Mark," said Janet to herself.

"He looks love to thee, but a woman of thy size and shape steps in between thee, and tears him away."

"What be she like?" cried Janet.

"I cannot see, child, for her head be turned away, but surely it be thee, from the turn of the head. How be this? Thou tightest against thyself."

"Nay, 'tis Mistress Mace Cobbe. Let me look."

“Thou art right; it be thy young mistress; and see, the gallant tries to reach thee, and her hand be raised to strike, and—How strange!”

“What be it, mother?”

“The glass has grown dim, as if a black shadow had passed over it, and I can see no more. Try thou, my child.”

“Nay, nay, I dare not; it be too terrifying!” cried Janet, thrusting back the crystal.

“’Tis better not,” said the old woman. “It be dangerous at times. There, child, I can tell thee no more to-day.”

“But tell me, mother, what can I do? Pray give me your help.”

“Help, child! How can I help thee?”

“It be all so true,” whispered Janet. “He loves me, and she has come between us, and I hate her. What shall I do?”

“Does she love him?”

“I think so. I don’t know.”

“What could I do to help her?” muttered Mother Goodhugh, as if communing with herself, but loud enough for the silly girl to hear. “I could give her a philtre that would turn her own love for this gallant to hate, and so comfort her poor suffering heart. See, child,” she said aloud, “I will give thee a potion that thou shalt take a little at a time in every meal; and, at the end of a week, thou shalt feel so strong a hatred of this lover of thine that thou shalt feel perfect rest. Will that do?”

“No, no!” cried Janet; “I don’t want to—Yes, yes!” she cried, as an idea seemed to flash across her brain, and Mother Goodhugh’s eyes sparkled as she saw how well her plans would be carried out by the foolish girl who, she felt sure, would administer the drops to Mace in place of to herself; and, going into the inner room, she remained away for some few minutes before returning to Janet, and, pressing a little bottle in

her hand—

“Take that, child, but let no soul know whence thou hadst it.”

“Trust me for that, mother,” cried Janet, joyously. “What shall I pay you?”

“Pay me, child!” cried the old woman. “Nothing, dearie; I am no old money-getting witch, but a simple, decent woman, who does these things for love. There, dearie, give me a bonny kiss of those red lips, and go thy way; Mother Goodhugh will help thee again if thou should’st come.”

“But mother,” said Janet, glancing back at the door.

“Yes, child, yes?”

“Will this act quickly and soon?”

“Yes, child; why?”

Janet reddened and hesitated, while the old woman’s eyes seemed to search her through and through.

“Speak to me at once, child. But just as thou wilt, I can read thy thoughts, I know,” and she laughed maliciously.

“Oh, mother!” cried Janet, bursting into tears.

“I think thou hast been very wicked, Janet.”

“Nay, mother, I could not help it; I tried so hard to be good.”

“My duty should be to tell Mas’ Jeremiah Cobbe.”

“Nay, nay, mother, he’d drive me hence, and Mas’ Peasegood would make me stand out before all the people in the church. Nay, good mother, give me something, pray. Sir Mark’s stout followers be rude wicked men. And Mas’ Wat Kilby, too,” she sobbed.

“I’ve given thee that which will help thee—I can do no more,” said

Mother Goodhugh, sternly.

"Now thou'rt angered with me, mother," pouted the girl. "I wish I had not come and told thee, that I do."

"Tchah! she says, *fold me*," laughed the old woman, "when I knew as well as all the world will soon know, Janet, an' thou do not use my philtre."

Janet turned pale.

"Pray forgive me, mother, I'll use the drops."

"Ay, go and use them, and through them win a husband, child. Then all will be well."

"Yes, yes, mother!" cried Janet, eagerly.

"There, I forgive thee; but get thee a husband quick. Kiss me, child. Now go."

The girl eagerly pressed her ripe red mouth to the pale and withered lips of the old woman, and then, after a glance outside to see that she was not watched, she hurried back towards the Pool, while Mother Goodhugh stood looking after her, and softly rubbed her hands.

"If aught should happen," she muttered, "the girl dare not speak, for I gave her the stuff to take herself. It would be her doing, and the wedding would not take place. But what would Mistress Anne Beckley say?"

She stood thinking for a few minutes before she spoke again.

"Nothing. She dare say nothing. But I be a witch, be I, madam? Have a care, then, for thyself. If one of two people is to die, why should it be I? But we shall see, we shall see: there be time enough yet."

End of Volume II.



How the Witch said there should be no Wedding.

“That Mother Goodhugh must have a care of herself,” said Sir Thomas a day or two later; and Anne let fall her work upon her knee to listen to her father’s words.

“And pray why?” said Dame Beckley, who was shaking up some strange infusion of herbs in a bottle.

“I hear strange things of her,” said Sir Thomas; “things that, as a justice, I shall be bound to stay.”

“And why?” said the dame, as she took out the stopper and had a long sniff at the contents of the bottle.

“Because they savour of witchcraft and the use of spells. His Majesty has opened a stem commission against such dealings, and as one whom he has delighted to honour I feel bound to show my zeal.”

“Fiddle-de-dee!” cried Dame Beckley; “show thy zeal by growing wiser, Thomas. Smell that!”

As the dame held the bottle beneath her lord’s nose, Anne glided out of the room, and made her way towards Mother Goodhugh’s cot, where she found the old woman ready to meet her with a suspicious look, and, with a feeling of gratified malice, told her of the words her father had let drop.

“But you could stay him, dearie,” said the old woman, with a look of terror which she could not conceal.

“Yes. But tell me—what have you done?”

“Wait, dearie, wait,” whispered the old woman. “The wedding will never be.”

“But it takes place in four days!” cried Anne. “Sir Mark actually dared to come over and tell my father.”

“And he told thee, dearie?”

“Nay, he told my mother, and she told me.”

“Four days,” said the old woman trembling; “four days. The time be short, but it will do. I tell thee the wedding will never be.”

“Can I believe thee this time, Mother Goodhugh?” cried the girl excitedly.

“Give me thy word as a lady, that I shall not be ill-treated by thy father and his people, and I swear to you the wedding shall never be.”

“There is my hand,” said Anne; and, as the old woman held it, there was a strange look on the girl’s face as she bent down and Mother Goodhugh whispered to her for a few minutes, after which she hurried from the cottage.

“And they call me witch, and think me ready to do any evil!” she muttered as she gazed after the girl; “while that young, fairly-formed creature has a heart full of devilry such as never entered mine. But it must be done—it must be done.”

She sat brooding over her cold hearth till evening: and then, as soon as it was dark, put on her cloak, took her stick, and walked cautiously to the Pool-house, where she succeeded in getting to the kitchen window unperceived, reaching in and touching Janet on the shoulder with her stick as she sat nodding near it in her chair.

The girl started, and as her eyes fell upon the face of the visitor her lips parted to utter a cry, but the peculiar look on the old woman’s face seemed to fascinate her, and she sat back gazing at her as Mother Goodhugh climbed in at the casement, and stood by her side.

“Wh-what do you want?” faltered the girl.

“I’ve come to see thee, dearie,” said the old woman, smiling. “I want to know how you be getting on.”

"But you must not stay here!" cried Janet, making an effort to recover herself. "If master knew he would drive me hence."

"Go and tell him, then, child," said Mother Goodhugh mockingly. "Go and tell him that Mother Goodhugh has come to ask thee about thy love affairs, and the philtre she gave thee. What? You will not? He, he, he, he! What a strange girl you are."

"But you must not stay!" cried Janet in alarm. "If you were found here master would never forgive me."

"He is sitting smoking and drinking in his parlour, dearie, and never comes this way after dark."

"Yes, yes, he does!" cried the girl; "he comes sometimes to go down to the powder-cellar with a lantern."

"What, through that door?" said Mother Goodhugh, pointing.

"Nay, nay! That be the beer cellar. That be the way to the powder-cellar," she said, pointing to a massive door, down a couple of steps. "That be the first door, and there be another farther on at the end of the passage."

"Lawk adear!" said Mother Goodhugh, "and aren't you afraid, when they bring the stuff down?"

"They never bring it through here," said the girl. "They let the little barrels down through a hole covered with a flat stone outside there amongst the trees, and master goes along with Tom Croftly to take it, in their slippers, and then comes back and locks it up."

"Ay, and I'll be bound to say always carries the keys in his pocket, eh!"

"No," said the girl, shaking her head. "They hang on a nail in the passage by the door."

"There, I don't want to know about the powder, dearie," cried Mother

Goodhugh. "Oh, the horrible stuff! I always begin to curse when I hear it mentioned, so we won't talk about it. I came to see you, and talk about love, and—"

"But you mustn't stop, indeed you mustn't stop," whispered Janet. "Suppose Mistress Mace should come?"

"But she won't come, dearie. She's in the corner of the parlour window with the handsome young spark from town."

"How do you know?" cried Janet. "How do I know, child! He-he-he! Do you think there's anything I don't know? You came to me because I was the wise woman, eh?"

"Ye-es," faltered the girl. "Well, didn't you expect me to be wise, child, eh?"

Janet shrank as far away from her as she could, and stared at her, round of eye and parted of mouth.

"Look here, dearie," whispered the old woman, "don't try to deceive me. I'm such a good friend, but such a bad enemy. You wouldn't like to make me angry, and set me cursing and ill-wishing you."

"N-no," faltered Janet, who began to be horribly frightened of the penetrating eyes that seemed to read her inmost thoughts.

"No, of course you would not. How often didn't say Mas' Cobbe went down into the powder-cellar?"

"Only once a month," said the girl, "when they've finished working."

"Then he'll be going down directly?"

"Oh, no; they finished there last week, and it will be three weeks, just," faltered Janet.

"Dear me, will it?" said the old woman. "But, as I was saying, it would be so horrible if I cursed you, though it is not me, my dear, but something

in me that does it. It be an evil spirit," she whispered, "and I've known girls as handsome as you lose their round, red cheeks, and soft, smooth skin, and their eyes have grown sunken, and their foreheads wrinkled. It be very horrible, my dear, but I couldn't help it."

Janet tried to get up and go away, but her visitor's fierce, sharp eyes seemed to hold her back in her seat, a fact which Mother Goodhugh well knew and rejoiced in.

It was the only pleasure the old woman had, and she felt at times like this how it recompensed her for the dread she felt of the stringent laws. A curious smile played round her thin lips, and Janet shuddered as the old woman leaned forward till her face was close to that of her victim.

"How is the love going on, dearie?" she whispered.

"Don't—ask—me," faltered the girl.

"You didn't take the stuff, dearie, to give yourself ease?"

"How—how did you know?"

"How did I know? He-he-he!" laughed the old woman, with a cacchination that was enough to freeze the girl's blood. "I know, child, and you can't deceive me. Why didn't you take it?"

"I—I was afraid," stammered Janet. "Mary Goodsell took some once, but it killed her and her baby too."

"Afraid? Stuff! Afraid to give yourself ease when Mistress Mace was torturing you by her love-makings with the fine spark who played with you, and pretended to love you."

"He didn't pretend," said the girl, indignantly. "He did love me till she came between."

"Ah, yes, child, I suppose so; but she be a white witch and very strong, and she would come between and master him. She could lead him wherever she liked, and win him to love her with her spells. Don't

trouble your poor, dear heart about him any more, my child, but take the drops, and be happy."

"I—I don't think I dare," faltered the girl.

"Dare? Pish! child, you be too brave and handsome a girl not to dare. It be a pity, too, that she should have come between," said Mother Goodhugh, musingly. "Ah! I have known cases where handsome, noble gentlemen have come down into country places and seen village girls, not so beautiful as thou, child, and married them, and taken them away; and a few years after they have come back looking fine ladies, with their diamonds, and jewels, and carriages, and servants."

Janet's eyes sparkled as this indirect piece of flattery went on.

"I'll take it," she said hastily; "I'll take it."

"Take it? Of course you will, dearie!" cried Mother Goodhugh; "and now look here, my child. I want something of thine to complete a little spell I have at work. Thou hadst a ribbon round thy neck when thou earnest to me."

"Yes," said Janet, "a red one; Mas' Wat Kilby gave it to me."

"Nay, then, child, that will not do. I only want an inch cut from it by thy left hand; but if it be tainted by an old man's love it would not do. Let me see. Thou hast not anything given thee by the young court gallant?"

"No," said the girl. Then, with a hasty glance around, she whispered "I have a piece of lace he gave to Mistress Mace, and which she would not wear."

"That will do, child; go, get me the tiniest scrap of that, and I will weave a spell that shall bring thee happiness and peace."

Janet rose and opened the door, and listened.

"They be all in the room," she whispered, as she closed the door again.

“That be well. Be quick, child, and let me get out of this place.”

“Thou wilt not move while I am gone.”

“Nay, nay, child, not I; but harkye, leave the door ajar while thou art gone up stairs, so that if I hear a step that be not thine I may flee.”

Janet looked doubtful for a moment, and then turned to go.

“I need not bring the whole piece?” she whispered.

“Faith, no, child; I’ll not rob you of it. The tiniest scrap be all I want. It must be something that the knight has touched.”

Janet nodded, and slipped out of the room, but ere she reached the staircase Mother Goodhugh was at the passage door listening; and, as the last stair creaked beneath the weak girl’s tread, the old woman had glided into the passage, peered about by the light of the rush-candle burning on a stand, and uttered a grunt of disappointment. The next moment, though, she saw what she wanted, in the shape of a couple of keys hanging high up, close to the ceiling; and, stepping on a chair, she just reached them, and, lightly crept back along the passage to sit down in the kitchen, panting from exertion and excitement combined.

Before she could compose herself Janet was back, too much excited herself to notice the old woman’s hurried breathings.

“I’ve got it,” she cried, producing a handsome piece of lace. “I must cut some off here. Be quick; I be in such a fright for fear some one should come.”

“That will do, dearie,” said the old woman, tearing off a scrap from one end. “There, put it away, and let me begone. Take the drops, child, and give thyself ease. You don’t care for such love as his.”

Janet did not reply, but gladly opened the door to get rid of her unwelcome visitor, who stepped out into the dark night, and hurried away across the little bridge, and into the lane, where she turned to shake her stick at the peaceful-looking house, with its lighted windows.

“Now we shall see—now we shall see!” she cried. “Two ways open, and my sayings coming to pass. There will be no wedding now.”

How Culverin Cark sealed up the Store.

The autumn sun shone brightly down into the ravine that led up to the mouth of Gil Carr’s store, and the steep sides were glorious with the bright berries that glistened amongst the changing leaves. Where the briony, with its bronze green foliage, flung down its wreaths, there was cluster after cluster of orange scarlet fruit. The brambles hung down thorny strands black with rich ripeness that there was no hand to gather; and wherever a prickly holly, all glistening glossy green, had rooted in some crevice of the sand-rock, it was covered with yellow berries awaiting more kisses from the ardent sun before blushing scarlet for the Christmas-tide.

The ferns were beginning to be dappled on their dark green fronds with gorgeous dashes of orange and chrome, mingled with crimson, red as blood, and the dyes of the finger-leaved maple were nearly as bright. Where the white tails of the rabbits could be seen disappearing as their owners heard a tramp of many feet, the dense small-leaved sloe-bushes, with their cruel thorns, showed many a row of tiny plums of the richest violet, dusted with a delicate pearly bloom. The late blossoms of the yellow rag-wort clustered amidst the purple heath, and glossy ivy hung in strands swinging in the hot sunshine with the tender tips just brushing the seeded grass self-turned into useless hay.

Hot, still, and breathless lay the ravine, with all its natural riches, ripe with the fullness of the season, and now resting, waiting the coming of the cold wintry winds, that, sweeping up from the sea, should heat and tear and bear away the brightness of the autumn and turn all to desolation and death.

Suddenly a velvety blackbird, with its orange bill and yellow-circled eyes, uttered its alarm-note and flew along like a streak of night away up and along the side of the ravine to the over-hanging woods. A chat that had been busy twittering its song over a golden clump of furze stopped

half-way and dived amongst the purple heath, while a glistening lizard, that had half taken the alarm from the scattering rabbits, ran beneath the leaves.

The steps in the distance grew plainer on the ear, and a greeny olive snake raised its head where it lay in a twirl upon a shelf of short, fine, sun-browned turf, darted its tongue out over its hard shiny jaws, and glided under the root of a tree, seeming to give warning of danger by its low hiss to an adder higher up the stony way, for the little viper condescended to raise its head where it lay like a scaly letter S upon the mossy stump of a hazel bush, round whose green, mouldering, gnarled stem were clustered, like chalices, so many thickly-veined fungi that looked as if roughly cast in orange-tinted deadened gold.

The danger seemed to be far off, for the viper lay down its spade-shaped head once more, yawned, and seemed disposing itself for another sunny sleep, but had hardly arranged its tail to its satisfaction when—*rustle—tap*—something fell from above, and struck it sharply on the back.

It was only a hazel nut that could hang no longer in its husk, but ripened into a soft warm brown, it had dried and dried till a leaf or two above it had ceased to give its shade, and then it had fallen like a warning upon the viper's back.

A moment before and the little reptile was sluggishness itself; this blow, light as it was, seemed to galvanise it into life, for a quick spasm darted through it, there was a sharp wave, and the raised head was ready to strike, while the eyes, that had a moment before resembled dim oxidised silver, now glittered like tiny jewels, as the whole creature seemed to become the picture of malicious rage, and sought where to drive deep its poison-fangs.

There was somehow a kind of resemblance between the little serpent and Anne Beckley, though there was no one by to see, as, failing an object at which to strike, the reptile seemed to consider that discretion was the better part of valour; and, slowly lowering its crest, it threw its body into a series of horizontal waves, and gradually disappeared

beneath some tawny—golden bracken on the slope.

The steps came nearer, and suddenly there was a movement on the edge of the cliff, high above the store, where a bronzed man took his place, evidently on the look-out.

Directly after another was seen scaling the side of the ravine to post himself on the slope over the entrance, while again another suddenly appeared amidst the furze on the green shoulder which overlooked the sloping downs.

Gil Carr's men did not often visit the place by day, hence the precautions against being watched by some intruder.

High up above the cavern, the gaunt figure of Wat Kilby suddenly showed against the sky. Then he shrank down into a little depression half overgrown with trees, and soon after a thin, pale blueish vapour arose, and kept rising, as, pipe in mouth, the old sailor seated himself upon a block of stone to watch.

Meanwhile, up the bottom of the ravine, close down by where the clear stream wandered in its deep fern-hung mossy shades, a little party of some twenty men wound their way.

Every man seemed well-armed, and, with the exception of their leader, all appeared to be carrying a burden, either a small keg or a little chest, or a heavy packet, which they bore through the clustering bushes, which seemed to interlace their arms and try to stay them as they forced their way amongst the rocks.

After climbing pretty close to the end, at a word from Gil the loads were set down, arms laid aside, and by means of half a dozen pike-staves the great stone was rolled away.

The men then waited while Gil went in and lit a lanthorn, returning soon after to make a sign, when one by one they all lifted and bore in their loads, following their leader for some distance to where the dim light showed an inner cavern, whose sides and roof had evidently been

roughly chiselled out by the hands of man.

Here the fresh additions to the stores of the place were neatly deposited, and the sailors sat down, while Gil busied himself in examining a bale or two that seemed to have been gnawed by rats.

"I wonder where the skipper shoved that spying fellow Churr—him as we searched for?" said one of the men in a low voice to his nearest comrade.

"Further in, somewhere," was the reply; "I thought I could smell him just now."

"That be rats," said the other; "I know them well enough. But does the place go in far?"

"I believe you, my lad. I once went in ever so far with old Wat and the skipper carrying lanterns."

"Did you?" said the other, eagerly; "and what be it like?"

"Like this here. All the same—hole after hole, with rough stone pillars to support it all, just as it must have been dug out."

"Bah! chap, this was never cut out," said the other. "It came natural like."

"Never cut out? Come natural like? Look here, my lad," said the sailor, rising and pointing to marks upon the wall that seemed to have been made with some rough tool.

"Yes, but anybody might have done that," said the younger man.

"You can think what you like," said the other. "I'm telling you what the skipper told old Wat, and you never knew him tell a lie. He said to old Wat, 'My father found the way rabbiting when a boy, and forgot all about it till he felt the want of a place to store things in unknown to other folk, and then he recollected this.' He said it was made by folks as lived underground hundreds of thousands of years ago."

“Oh?” said the other.

“Yes; and they dug first one and then another, as they wanted them, and grew bigger in numbers, and that it went right in farther than they’d ever been on account of the bad air.”

“Same as down among the bilge in the ship’s hold?”

“That’s so. The skipper’s father was most stifled by it once when he tried to go right in.”

“But do they go right in?” The elder sailor struck the top of an empty barrel a sharp rap with the hilt of his sword, and the other’s question was answered, for the sound went echoing into the distance till it died away.

“It be a queer sort of place,” said the other, with a half shudder. “Hang me if I’d like to be boxed up here along with Abel Churr, if the skipper’s stowed him there.”

“Plenty of room and good water,” said the other, pointing down to where the source of the stream outside ran trickling through the interstices of the stone, and formed tiny pools of limpid clearness.

“Ugh! the place smells damp and cold, and I should expect to come out, if I was shut up here, all over blue mould.”

“Like a bit of ship’s cheese, eh? Come along: here’s the skipper.”

“Now, my lads!” cried Gill, just then, “work with a will, plenty to do.”

He led the way, and the men followed him with a sense of relief out into the bright sunshine, where the ferns fringed the rough arch over the entrance to the hole.

They glanced at the heaps of stores and the various shipping chandlery, spare sails and cordage, but all was so familiar that nothing excited their interest.

Just as they reached the outside there was a whistle from below, and

Gil uttered an impatient ejaculation. But hurrying a little distance down, he peered over a mass of rock, to see one of his men, who had been on sentry, leading a dark figure with bandaged eyes.

“Father Brisdone!” said Gil. “Bring him along, my lad.”

Going forward, he quickly undid the handkerchief and threw it aside.

“I forgot to tell them, father,” he said, holding out his hand; “there was no need with you.”

“I do not wish to pry into any of your secrets, my son, that you do not care to trust me with,” said Father Brisdone, smiling as he took the young man’s hand.

“Trust you, father? Why, I’d trust you with anything. But you look weary and hot with your journey. Sit down on yon stone: this is nature’s parlour. Here is something to eat. Lockyer, a bottle of that wine from the case inside on the left. The cup too.”

Leading the father to a nook by the side of the entry, he placed refreshments before him, and then said—

“Now you shall see us lock up the house, for it may be a year before we return.”

“Why should you show me?” said Father Brisdone, smiling.

“Why should I not show the man whom I have always looked upon as a trusty friend?” retorted Gil. “Now, my lads,” he said, and, leaving the father’s side, he soon had his men busy with spade and shovel. First of all the old stone was reared into its place. Then smaller blocks were thrust in here and there, so as to completely wedge it in. Then shovels of stones were thrown into fissures, and sods of earth, mingled with grass and heather, were carefully arranged; after which broad-fronded ferns, roots of rag-wort, grasses, and bramble roots were planted, dead leaves sprinkled here and there, and touch after touch given till nothing seemed left to be done but to pour water over the new earth to bind it together, and make the plants take root.

“There,” said Gil to the father, as he stopped by him, hot and panting; “unless some spy has watched our work, that is safe enough, for in a week’s time those things will be growing again.”

“Yes, that will be secure enough,” said the father, rising. “Thanks, my son, I was indeed faint for want of food. And now, what next?”

“Next, father, you will accompany my man there on board. The little ship lies ready in the river; he will take you down in the skiff. If all’s well we shall be with you soon after midnight, and then heaven send us favouring gales, for we shall drop down the river on the tide, and put to sea at once.”

“But no bloodshed, my son. For heaven’s sake do not let the hand that leads your promised wife on board be red with the blood of a fellow-man.”

“Father,” said Gil, sternly, “I am no cut-throat; I am no lover of the sword. I go to-night to fetch my wife, and I go with peace and love towards all; but if that man or his followers stand in my path to prevent us, they must take what follows, for I cannot trifle now.”

Father Brisdone sighed.

“You know the consequences; if I do not get her away to-night, they are to be wed at eight o’ the clock, and to stay that, there must be a deadly fray. Trust me, father; and, if I can help it, no blood shall be shed.”

“I trust you, my son. Go, and my blessing be with you. I shall make the little cabin a chapel, where I shall pass the time in prayer for your success.”

“And then, father, a chapel where you make her mine by ties that none can break.”

“Amen, my son, amen!” said Father Brisdone; and they parted, the father to follow his guide down the valley, and Gil to lead his men through one of the forest tracks in the direction of Roehurst Pool, Wat and the

other watchers closing in behind.

The advance was made with caution to within a mile of the foundry, where, beneath a spreading oak, Gil called a halt, and cast his eyes over his party of twenty sturdy, well-armed men, every one of whom could handle his weapon well.

“That will do, my lads,” he said in his quick, imperious way. “Now lie down, and eat and rest. Silence, every man; not a word above a whisper. Goodsell, Kingley, two hundred paces each of you along the track. A good look—out, and a quick whistle, if so much as a berry-hunting child approach.”

His orders were carried out, and then with the soft autumn evening rapidly drawing nigh, Gil also went out through the forest to watch and listen for the approach of footsteps that might end in the discovery of his men.

How Gil and his Men drew Sword.

The hours glided slowly by, and the soft damp of night scented the forest with its peculiar odours,—of decaying leaves, swift-growing fungi, and mouldering wood. Ever and again a leaf that had hung lightly by its dying stalk became so laden with dew that it fell pattering down with a noise that seemed startlingly loud in the silence of the time.

Borne on the sighing breeze that whispered through the branches above came, rising and falling, the rushing sound of falling water, as the swift stream dashed past the front of the founder's house, and hurried towards the huge wheel, but only to be turned aside to sweep with a sudden plunge into the lower hole.

There was something very strange and hollow that night in the sound of the rushing stream; and, as Gil stood leaning against a tree, the falling water seemed now distant, dying away in sighs; now close at hand, rolling down with a thunderous bass. If he had been asked why it affected him, he could not have said; but its deep notes sounded then like a portent of mishap. He remembered it afterwards so well, for every incident of that memorable evening seemed to be burned into his brain, and he had but to lean over the side of his ship and gaze away into the depths of air and sea to have all come vividly back as if the events were then taking place.

Hour after hour glided by and there was no interruption, nothing to disturb the solitude. From time to time Gil walked back to the oak, but only to find his men well on the alert, and that the sentries had nothing to report. There was scarcely any talking, no drinking, and no smoking, for his people were in earnest to do everything possible to carry out their leader's plans. Even Wat Kilby contented himself with sucking quietly at his empty pipe and glancing round at every man in turn to see that the rules were kept.

Hardly a word had passed between Wat and his leader, for the old man was in dudgeon. He had had his shrewd suspicions that Gil intended

to carry off Mace that night, and he had come to the conclusion that his duty was to take Janet at the same time. To his anger and disgust, though, he found that this was strictly forbidden, and earlier in the day a sharp verbal contest had ensued.

“Why can’t I take her abroad?” he growled. “You’re going to have a priest, and I want a wife same as other men.”

“Once for all, Wat,” said Gil, sternly; “I will have no paltering with the work I have on hand. Will you obey me and work to the end for my scheme?”

“Why, of course I will,” grumbled the old fellow, “but I don’t see why as—”

“Not another word!” cried Gil. “But what I says is this, skipper: Thou’st got a priest—”

“Silence, sir; how dare you!” roared Gil; and the old man shrank away to pull out his little pipe, and begin sucking at it viciously, jerking his long body about, and acting generally as if he had a volcanic eruption going on within him, the safety-valve to which was an explosion of muttered words now and then, which escaped after a kind of quake that shook him like a spasm from top to toe.

All the same, though, Wat made no further resistance to his leader’s will, but with the energy of a long tried, well-disciplined follower, he worked away at the various preparations, and was as obedient as a dog.

As Gil stood thinking in the wood, he once more went over his plans, wondering whether there would be an encounter with Sir Mark’s followers, and then smiling grimly to himself, as he half wished there might be, and thought of how he would like once more to stand face to face with the man who was so nearly robbing him of her whom he had always looked upon as his very own.

At last the time seemed to him to be a fitting one for the venture, and, giving the signal, his men started up from amongst the dewy

herbage; there was the clink of arms and a rustling noise as all fell into their places; and, taking the head of his little force, Gil gave his final orders, especially commanding silence, and made for the Pool-house.

Gil's plans were well matured, and his followers fell into their respective places without confusion. Arriving pretty close to the foundry, he posted them behind the smallest of the furnace-sheds, where the black shadow of night was blacker than in the open; and then, with Wat at his elbow, he made for another shed, where he knew that a short stout ladder was kept.

This was in its place, and Wat was about to shoulder it, when in a low hoarse whisper the old fellow said:—

“You’ll let me take her, too, skipper?”

For answer Gil turned angrily.

“Put that ladder down,” he whispered; “and go back. Send Morris.”

“No, no, skipper,” whispered the old fellow hastily. “Let me go.”

“Put down the ladder. Go back, and send me a trustworthy man.”

“I’m the trust worthiest man you’ve got, skipper,” growled Wat, “only I was obliged to say a word for I feel as I ought to marry the girl now. You don’t know what it is to be in love, skipper, or you would not treat me thus.”

“Do you go, or stay?” said Gil.

“Stay,” said Wat. “I shan’t leave you, skipper, come what may. I’ve done. Not another word about it will you hear from me.”

Wat shouldered the ladder, and together the two men walked towards the water-run, and along it by the stones to the little bridge, which they softly crossed, and entered the garden.

They paused to listen, but all was very still and dark. A more suitable

night could not have been chosen for the adventure, and together they made for Mace's window, where a dim light was burning.

The end of the ladder rustled slightly as it was borne amongst the trees, and they again stopped to listen; but all was still, and so intense was the darkness now before moonrise—the moon that was to light the boat down the river to where the ship lay waiting—that they could see neither to the right nor the left, even the thick bushes under the window were in the gloom.

Would she fail him at this important time? Gil's heart asked; but he crushed down the thought. No: she would come, he was sure of it, for she had promised him, and he felt no fear of her wanting in spirit for the enterprise.

"No," he muttered; "she would go through fire and water to escape his touch alone, and she would dare more to be beside me."

There was a thrill of joy at these thoughts, and he gazed anxiously at the window, waiting to see it opened, that he might raise the ladder and help her away.

It must be the hour, he thought, but the next minute he set it down to impatience.

"She will be to her time," he said.

As if warned by an instinct of coming danger, Gil Carr drew his sword, and, resting the point upon the toe of his boot, stood leaning his hands upon the hilt, while Wat placed the foot of the ladder on a flowerbed, and held the two sides, with his rusty-beard upon one of the spokes, thinking of how he wished they were going to carry off Janet, and whether she would have been willing to come.

"She did call me an old fool last time, and slapped my face," he muttered; "but that was only by way of showing how fond she was. Ha! it be terrifying work having to deal with such an arbitrary skipper as ourn."

Gil still gazed at the window, thinking that if he had changed places

with Sir Mark, and a dangerous foe had been in the field, a cordon of sentries would have been placed round the house for his love's protection; whilst Sir Mark was evidently sleeping luxuriously, and dreaming, perhaps, of possessing his fair young bride. "Poor, befooled idiot!" said Gil to himself; "I do not envy him his morrow's waking. Why, if I —. Pst! Wat, your sword."

His left hand involuntarily flew to the silver whistle that hung at his neck, while his sword was raised readily, and turned aside a pass that grazed his ribs. For in an instant the bushes around them seemed alive with armed men, who rose in obedience to a call, and made for Gil and his old follower.

Wat was as much upon the alert as his leader, but he had not time to draw his sword. Not that it mattered, for the short ladder became a very effective weapon in the emergency. Raising it with both hands above his head, he poised it there for a moment, keeping it well ready, and then, darting it rapidly forward again and again, he drove it into the chests of three or four assailants, sending them crashing down amongst the bushes, as he kept them sufficiently distant to prevent them from reaching him with the points of their swords.

As the first blade gritted against that of Gil's, he placed the whistle to his lips, and its note rang out shrilly on the midnight air, to be answered by the rush of feet over the little wooden bridge as his men came running up; and now there was nothing left but for the defenders of the house to be beaten back, the place itself to be forced, and Mace carried away.

"Swing the bridge!" cried a voice, which Gil recognised as that of Sir Mark. "They're trapped now. Hollo, there! Lights, quick! Surrender, you dogs, in the King's name."

There was a creaking noise as the little bridge was swung round, and Gil felt that, far from being in sleepy indolence and safety, Sir Mark had not only been well on the alert, but had cleverly made his plans according to his own lights to entrap his rival and his followers when they came, attracted, as he felt that they would be, by the bait within the founder's house.

“Poor fool!” muttered Gil, “if he thinks he can take us here.”

For his men came running to his side to group round where he and Wat were standing well at bay.

How the Powder had its Say.

Sir Mark had not been alone in his suspicions, for the founder had had a half fancy come into his head that Gil might make some effort to prevent the marriage; and after all he could not help feeling that he would not be sorry if this were done. Now it had come so near he thought more than ever that he was doing wrong in giving his consent, for Mace’s distress seemed to be ever on the increase, and he dreaded losing his child.

“But it’s too late now,” he muttered—“too late. Matters must go on as they are, and it will be a grand and good thing for my little girl to become my lady—Dame Leslie, who will take her place at Court with the finest of them there.”

“Do you think our friend Culverin will show himself at the wedding to-morrow?” Sir Mark said.

“I cannot help thinking that he will,” said the founder.

“Well, for my part,” said Sir Mark, “I have a suspicion that we shall see him sooner—that he will make an effort to carry her off to-night.”

“Nay!” cried the founder, flushing, “he would not dare.”

“I think he would,” said Sir Mark, with a cunning smile. “Why look, man, what easier? He has followers and a vessel. Depend upon it, he will try to get our darling away to his ship.”

“If he dared to attempt such an outrage,” cried the founder, half rising from his seat; and then, as if changing his mind, he sat back thoughtfully in his chair.

"You would spit him, eh, Master Cobbe? A most worthy proceeding. But, look here, I have made my plans."

"Plans?"

"Yes. I have, as you know, six men here, all well-armed, and to do honour to my wedding a gentleman of His Majesty's household, a friend of mine, will be here this evening, as soon as it is dusk, with eighteen fighting-men beside. These will come unseen, when I give the signal, and be placed in ambush in the garden. I shall plant two by the open bridge, and, if our friend comes, he and his men will walk into a trap, for the moment they are over, the bridge will be closed, and thus, you see, my dear father-in-law elect, I shall rid myself of an awkward rival, and his Majesty of a band of buccaneers.

"But there will be bloodshed, and on the eve of my child's wedding."

"Pish!" cried Sir Mark. "Have no fear of that. Once the rats are in the trap, and they will shriek for mercy, as such ruffians and bullies always do. My dear father-in-law, you shall have the pleasure of seeing the whole band tied two and two, and marched off, when the district will be cleared."

"And my business ruined," said the founder.

"Trust me for that, old man," said Sir Mark, smiling. "You shall make culverins and howitzers for his Majesty's troops to your heart's content, so have no fear. Powder shall you manufacture, too, but we will not talk of that. Did his Majesty know that powder was stored upon your place, ay, ever so little, he would never be your friend. But how do you like my plans?"

"Not well," said the founder, gloomily. "I liked Gil. You rob him of the woman he meant to be his wife. Why take his liberty as well?"

"Master Cobbe, this is wretched drivel," cried Sir Mark, laying his hand upon his shoulder. "What am I to think of it?"

"What you will," said the founder, sullenly; "I like not my part at all."

“And you will betray my plans?” said Sir Mark, angrily.

“Nay!” exclaimed the founder, sharply, as something of his old mien showed itself in his countenance. “Sir Mark Leslie, I am a rough yeoman of the country, but I have something of the gentleman at my heart. You insult me by your suspicions. I gave you my word, and my hand upon it, that my child should be your wife, and I repent me of it now; but Jeremiah Cobbe is not the man to go back from his word, and, sooner than Gil Carr should forcibly carry her away, I’d take him myself, and deliver him into your hand.”

“I did but jest, father,” said Sir Mark, grasping the founder’s hand. “Now, let us see something of pretty little Mace for an hour, before I perfect my plans.”

Janet was summoned, but she announced that her mistress was busy preparing things for her departure, and the girl hurried back to Mace’s room, to gloat over the silk dresses and presents that lay about.

Other messages were sent to Mace in the course of the evening, but she refused to come, and at last, out of patience, as the soft autumn night began to fall, Sir Mark went out to finish his arrangements.

“You are master, to-day, my lady,” he muttered; “to-morrow I shall rule, and you’ll know it too.”

Had Gil dared to post a man nearer to the house, he would have known of the preparations made to entrap him, though possibly they would not have kept him back. As it was he knew nothing of the well-armed soldiers who, punctual to the moment, marched across the bridge, and were rapidly disposed in suitable places by Sir Mark, who exhibited no mean generalship in his plans.

Then came the waiting, and Sir Mark stood listening with the founder by his side.

“They’ll not come,” said the latter, impatiently, after a weary while.

“Hist! there is one,” whispered Sir Mark, as a footstep cautiously crossed the bridge.

“Why it is a woman,” said the founder.

“A disguise,” replied Sir Mark. “Gil himself.”

“Nay, it is Mother Goodhugh. I know her walk and her tap with her stick. The old hag! I’ll go and turn her back. What does she want?”

“Bah! be silent, man; she comes to see the maids—fortune-telling, or to beg for something in the way of cakes or wine. I’ll not have my plans spoiled now. Hist! what’s that?”

It was a heavier foot this time, and unmistakeably Gil and a companion had arrived. Then followed the rustling of the ladder, the waiting, the signal whistle, and, when the bridge had been closed, Sir Mark’s summons to surrender.

Lights flashed upon the dark scene as Sir Mark’s command rang out, and Gil saw that he and his men were far outnumbered.

He stamped his foot impatiently, for, though he felt no fear of being beaten, the presence of these men might hinder the carrying out of his plans.

“Surrender, you dog!” roared Sir Mark again. “In the King’s name, I say. Shoot down every man who resists.”

A scornful roar of laughter was the response; and, as the heavy guns of the period were levelled, Gil’s men, lithe and active as wild cats, leaped at their bearers with their swords, dashing the guns up, so that the scattered volley that followed sent the bullets skyward, while man after man was knocked down by a blow or the recoil of the piece.

Then commenced a furious fight; sword clashed with sword; there were groans, oaths, and cries; and, as Mace’s casement was opened, its occupant gazed down, shuddering at the hideous, torch-lit scene in the trampled garden.

“Be ready with that ladder, Wat,” cried Gil, hoarsely. “She must be got away now at any cost. Hah! there is Sir Mark.”

As he uttered the words he sprang at his rival, who had recognised him at the same moment by the flickering light of one of the torches borne by a soldier, who held it on high as he tried to take aim at Wat Kilby with a wheel-lock pistol, from beneath Mace’s window.

“Surrender!” shouted Sir Mark. “Quick, here, men, here!”

“Surrender yourself,” roared Gil, as with a rush he beat aside the other’s guard, closed with him, and forced him down, where he lay with Gil’s knee at his throat.

Their leader’s cry, though, brought half-a-dozen men to his side, and blade in hand they would have cut down Gil had it not been for Wat, whose orders had been to stay there with the ladder. Raising this, he drove it with a crash against one man, who had raised his point, and was in the act of striking another, when Sir Mark recovered himself sufficiently to get at a dagger, which he would have plunged into his opponent, had he not felt himself scorched by a blinding glare, as he, Gil, and Wat and those by him were hurled headlong amongst the trampled bushes, and, before they could realise what had happened, there was a mighty roar, as if thunder had come from earth instead of sky, and then gone rolling across the Pool, to die away in echoes amongst the hills.

How the Love Philtre worked.

If Mother Goodhugh had stood by while it was done, Janet the weak would have taken the decoction placed in her hands; but, foolish as the girl was, she had her share of cunning.

“If I give it to her and it does make her love turn to hatred, he must turn to me; and, if after all she cares more for Captain Carr, why even then it may turn right for me. Does the old thing think I’d take the stuff? Clever as she be, others be clever too. But how shall I give it to her?”

Janet took the little flask out of her bosom, which was her hiding-place for particular things—ribbons, scraps of lace, a scent-bottle wonderfully like one of Mace's—and looked at it attentively.

"A little every day," she said; and the next morning she poured a portion into a jug that stood for drinking purposes in her mistress's room.

That afternoon Mace went up to her bedroom with a bunch of flowers from the garden, which she placed in a shallow basin, and the contents of the jug were used to keep them alive!

The same evening, finding the jug empty, Janet refilled it, and again poured in a little of the contents of the flask.

She had just completed her task when she heard Mace's step upon the stairs, and in her haste to replace the stopper of the flask she let it fall upon the floor, where it broke; and she had only time to throw the broken glass out of the window, and drag a piece of carpet over the stain on the floor, before her mistress entered the room.

Janet escaped as soon as possible and sought refuge in the kitchen, from whence she stole round to the garden and picked up the broken bottle, then ran back, throwing the pieces into the water-race as she hurried along.

"I dare say she will have taken enough," she said to herself, "and, if she has not, I'll try no more. I hate myself for doing it. Poor girl, she looks more as if she was going to be buried than married."

In fact, Janet's heart was not very deeply touched, and she would have been ready to hand over her young affections to anybody a little more eligible than Master Wat Kilby, who was rather too old for her taste. During these busy days, too, there was so much to take her attention, for she had all a girl's love and excitement in an approaching wedding.

First and foremost there came a present to her from Sir Mark in the shape of what was to her a most handsome dress.

"That's for thee, pretty Janet," he said; "and when we come back

from our wedding jaunt I'll bring thee a handsome husband as sure as I live. One kiss for it," he said; and he took it, and another and another. How many dozens he would have taken it is impossible to say, only the founder's step was heard, and Janet fled with her dress by another way.

"The spell be working somehow," she said to herself joyously. "May be he will turn her over yet, and marry me himself."

She hurried up to her room to inspect her gown-piece, and smooth her ruffled hair.

"Oh, these men, how wicked they be!" she cried half-petulantly, as she gazed at her flushed cheeks in a damp-stained mirror.

"I be handsomer than mistress pale-face down stairs," she cried, giving her head a toss. "Fie on her! why does she not go and wed with Captain Culverin, and leave me Sir Mark."

The gown-piece again took her attention, and she folded it in pleats and tucks, and draped herself in it, ending by doubling it over and over, and laying it flat beneath her bed.

"I'll go see her presents now," she said; and she descended to Mace's room to find the jug untouched.

"Perhaps shell never wear these gauds after all," muttered Janet, as she went to the dressing-table and examined the presents Sir Mark had brought, rich jewels some of them, with laces and ribbons enough for a dozen weddings; but the white satin dress hanging across a chair was the great attraction for Janet, with its puckers and folds, and great stomacher dotted with pearls.

"It be brave!" she cried, as she went down upon her knees to gaze at it, and lay portions of the skirt across her arm, or feel its softness against her cheek.

And so the time glided on till the eve of the wedding, when, pale and dark of eye with want of sleep, Mace felt that the excitement was more than she could bear.

It was very terrible, she told herself, and again and again she asked her conscience whether she was doing wisely in listening to Gil's prayers. It was an act of disobedience to her father, whom she dearly loved, and yet she felt that she clung to her lover more. But even now she would, in obedience to her father's wishes, have refused Gil and remained unwed. To be forced, though, to become the wife of one whom she utterly detested she felt was impossible, and she knew that she must go.

She had no one to counsel, none to take her part; and she knelt down and sobbed bitterly as she thought of the mother who had been taken away so long ago.

Then rising from her knees, quite calm and peaceful at heart, she sat down in her sweet-scented old chamber waiting, for she told herself it was inevitable, and that time would soften her father's anger, and all be happiness once more.

"He feels it is for my welfare," she said, "but he does not know poor Gil."

The whispered mention of Gil's name sent a thrill through her, and, with a smile of hope and love upon her worn, pale face, she sat dreaming of him, and mentally praying that no mishap might accompany their flight.

At last, feeling flushed and hot, she drank from the jug of water which Janet had left unchanged.

There was a peculiar taste in it, but her thoughts were too much occupied to pay much attention, and, taking her seat by the window, she sat, watching the darkness coming on of this the last day in her old home.

How the old happy hours of the past came back to torture her with their recollections; and now she told herself it would have been better that she should have died young, in peace and innocency, ere she knew the bitter heart-grievings of the present. For in these last hours her breast was racked by contending emotions; the love of parent fought hard with the stronger, more engrossing love of the maiden for the man of her

choice, but the latter won.

Agitated as she was, it seemed to her that she grew feverish and thirsty—a thirst she turned to the water-vessel more than once to assuage, but without effect; and at last, with a curious, excited sensation upon her, mingled with weariness, she went to the glass to find that her cheeks were flushed, and that there was a strange dilated look about her eyes, whose unusual lustre startled her.

“I have had too little sleep lately,” she said, with a sad smile, as she thought of the long, restless nights she had passed; and at last she threw herself upon the bed, and closed her eyes, just as a tap was heard upon the panel of the door.

“Come in, Janet,” she said, as she unclosed her eyes to gaze round at the confusion that reigned with half-packed garments, and upon a couch her wedding-dress, facing her like the flaccid shade of herself lying upon a bier.

There was something very weird in that dress, and it seemed to influence her with thoughts of death which made her shudder.

“I be come to try on the wedding robe again, mistress,” said Janet. “I did alter those strings and that fastening, and now it will fit you well.”

“That’s kind of you, Janet,” said Mace, drowsily. “Thank you for all you have done. You will think kindly of me when I am gone?”

“Why, of course, mistress. But, there, dear heart alive, don’t talk like that. Why it be as if you was going to be buried. La! You ought to be as blithe as blithe.”

“Should you be, Janet?” said Mace. “Oh, my head—my head, it burns—it burns!”

“La, mistress, yes; as joyous as a bird to wed with so handsome and courtly a man. Art ill, mistress?”

“Sleepy, Janet, sleepy.”

“There, then, let’s get on the dress, and see how you look, and then you shall have a long sleep, and I’ll see that no one disturbs you.”

“No, no,” said Mace, hoarsely. “I must not sleep, child—I will not sleep. Try on the dress and go away. I shall sit by the open window.”

“La, mistress, thou’lt get the ager-shakes that come off the Pool. I wouldn’t sit by the open window to-night. Come, get up, dear, and let me take off your gown. I’ll unlace it, and now we’ll have on the beautiful white robe. Lovely, lovely!”

And again, “Lovely, lovely!”

And then, “How beautiful you look!”

And amidst it all strange reelings of the brain, her head throbbing and wild imaginings rushing through her mind. She was married and clasped in her lover’s arms, and his kisses were showered on her lips, her veins tingled, a strange thrill ran through her nerves, but his kisses burned her face, her eyes, her head. And now it was not Gil who clasped her in the ecstasy of love, but Sir Mark, and, in place of burning passion, she froze, her heart seemed to stand still, and she was numbed with horror as he approached his lips to hers. Why did he laugh so with such a strange, silent, ghastly laugh? Why did he press her so tightly to his breast? His arms hurt her, his breast was bony, and his laugh was lifeless. It was a frightful grin, and she could not tear herself away. It was not Sir Mark; it was a hideous skeleton, and she made a supreme effort to rid herself of the terrible vision that clasped her to its breast.

At last it was gone, and she was dressed in her bridal robe. She was feverish and excited, and that was a kind of nightmare dream. There she was, then, before the big swing mirror, gay in satin and lace, and once more the exclamations of pleasure fell upon her ears.

“How lovely! how lovely!” And again, “How beautiful you look!” The reflection in the mirror died away, for her eyes closed. She could not bear to look upon it longer, and, now that her eyes were shut, once more came the phantoms of her troubled, reeling brain. Gil, Sir Mark, the hideous

shape of death, all had her clasped in their arms in turn. She struggled in spirit, but her body was motionless; the brain was in full action, but muscle and nerve were inert. She could only lie there and suffer tortures so horrible that she felt that if they lasted she must go mad.

Then again she was gazing at herself in the great mirror, gay with satin and lace, and once more there was the round of horrors.

How long was it to last?

There was a lucid moment when she knew that she was seriously ill. Some terrible ailment had seized her, and then came the recollection of the water like a flash through her reeling brain.

Was it poison?

"How beautiful! It is lovely, lovely, lovely!" and there was the vision again of the satin gown.

"I must be going mad," she thought; "but Janet must not see. I will be firm and wait. I must send her away soon. Let me see," she thought. "Gil will be here at midnight. I am not too ill to go with him, and, when once away in peace, I shall soon be well. How absurd to think of poison. How beautiful I look. This fever seems to have given me my colour once again. Poor fool! Why should I masquerade like this, when I am never to wear these things? It is time I put them off and sent her away. My poor head, my poor head! how it burns and throbs and reels with pain."

Then again, the wedding with Gil, and his hot kisses burning her face. No, it was Sir Mark; and then again the chilly horror of being seized by those arms and pressed nearer, nearer, to that hideous framework of ghastly bones, while the cold grinning teeth rested against her lips, and in place of kisses began to tear and rend her. Now it was her fair young cheek, now her soft bosom; and at every contact it was the burning pain of ice that froze with a touch like heated iron. She strove to struggle, to call for help, but it was in vain. The hideous teeth were now meeting in her forehead, and a pang of agony ran through her brain.

“Gil, Gil, help me, help!” she tried to say; and then there was the clash of arms, the firing of guns, the shouts of contending men—cries, oaths, shrieks, wails. What was it? Was she really mad? Had her sufferings robbed her of reason, or was she striving to rush from the room down the broad old staircase when that hideous rush of fire, and that crash of thunder, came to tear her away? Was it madness, a dream, or was it—. Her reeling senses seemed to leave her as she asked herself the final question, when she was stricken down, even as her lips uttered the question.

Was it death?

How Gil brought the Bride from the Burning House.

For a few moments Gil’s men and the followers of Sir Mark stood appalled by the effects of the explosion. Fully one-half had been prostrated by the terrible blast that had swept the beautiful old garden, cutting down tree and shrub as level as if with a knife. Some of the men lay groaning where they had been cast, burned, wounded, and disfigured; while those who were uninjured, of whichever side, seemed as if by mutual consent to consider their petty strife at an end in the face of so awful a catastrophe, and, sheathing their swords, stood looking at the ruined house before them, confused and unmanned by the shock.

For to a man the explosion had so shaken them that a curious feeling of helplessness had succeeded to the energy they had displayed, and no one moved even to render assistance to the wounded.

Suddenly a loud voice shouted—

“Run, my lads, run! There will be another explosion directly. It is a plot to blow up the place.”

This seemed to break the spell, and there was a rush of feet towards the closed bridge, when the founder’s voice arose.

“No, no,” he cried; “there can be no other explosion. It was my store;

I thought it safe; the powder has all—”

He stopped speaking, and reeled and nearly fell to the earth, for he had received a blow from a falling beam; but he recovered himself sufficiently to point towards the house in an appealing way that no one understood.

“Halt there!” cried Sir Mark, who now rose to his feet, from where he had been thrown, “follow me some of you, quick, before it is too late.”

He might well add these last words, for, as the smoke rose like a heavy pall above the ruined house, it could be seen that, with the exception of a couple of the gables near where they stood, the place was shattered and nearly razed to the ground. There was a huge hole here, another cavernous rent there, and, piled above them, beams and rafters, blackened, smoking, and dotted with glowing embers, which began to sparkle as the portion of the house now standing burned furiously.

There was no need for light, for wood had entered largely into the construction of the building, and the powder seemed to have prepared everything to burn. With a rush great tongues of fire leaped from the embayment of the fine old parlour, whose diamond panes flew crackling out, while the lead in which they were set trickled down in a silvery stream. The whole of the parlour glowed in a few seconds like a furnace, and directly after the fire sprang forth from the two rooms above, and then again from the little window in the pointed gable, which was soon being licked from gutter to the copper vane on its summit by the orange and golden flames.

The rooms on either side rapidly followed, and soon the two gables that had remained after the explosion seemed wrapped in fire, which lit up the unscathed trees, and turned the lake as if into a pool of blood.

As Sir Mark sprang forward, a dozen men ran to his side—Gil’s men, every one of them, for his own stood aloof; but as they went close up a rush of flame and smoke drove them back, scathing and scorching them so that it was impossible to face it.

“A ladder—a ladder—fetch a ladder!” cried Sir Mark.

The words were hardly uttered, before a couple of men picked up that which Wat Kilby had used as a weapon, and to which he still tightly clung, as he lay at some little distance, where he had been cast.

This was dragged from him, and a couple of men reared it, by Sir Mark’s directions, against the burning casement of Mace’s room.

Seizing the rounds Sir Mark climbed up, and reached the room, now all aglow, but as he felt the scorching flames, which were already burning the top of the short ladder, he rapidly descended and stood wringing his hands, while Gil’s men seized poles, fetched buckets from a shed, and began to obtain water from the race.

“It is impossible! My poor girl! What shall I do?” moaned Sir Mark.

Then to the men nearest he shouted, his voice sounding shrill and strange amidst the roar and flutter of the flames, “There is a lady in yonder—a hundred golden pounds to the man who fetches her out.”

There was a murmur amongst the little crowd, but no one stirred, and he repeated his offer.

“Are you men to stand there and see her burned to death?” he cried. “Two hundred pounds to the man who saves Mistress Mace Cobbe.”

“Damn your two hundred pound,” cried a hoarse voice, as a great gaunt blackened figure crawled into the glow. “Up the ladder, my lads, there be two women there.”

“Old Wat,” cried the men, in a loud chorus of excitement, as the weird looking figure stretched out its hands, and seemed to grope blindly towards the ladder, but rolled down with a groan, utterly unable to make the attempt, having received some injury to the hip.

“Is there no man here who will try to save the helpless women?” cried Sir Mark. “That’s right, my brave lad,” he said, as one of Gil’s men took a hatchet from his belt and ran up the burning ladder.

He seemed to beat back the flames with his hands, and bravely climbed in at the window, a roar of cheers following him, as he regularly leaped into the burning room. Then there was a shower of sparks, a rush of flame, and, to the horror of all present, the brave fellow was seen to literally roll out of the parlour casement, blackened and burned, having fallen at once through the floor to the room below.

“No one can be there and live,” he gasped. “Water, boys, water! I am burning: throw me in,” he shrieked; and one of his companions deluged him with the contents of a bucket.

“It is all over. How horrible—how horrible!” groaned Sir Mark. “Quick lads, water, dash it in. Who is that?”

He started back almost in fear, as he saw Gil stride forward, pick up the fallen axe, and seize the ladder to drag it from the burning casement.

As he did so he staggered, for he was quite giddy yet from the blow he had received when the explosion cast him some twenty feet away; but he recovered directly, and, planting the ladder against the next window, he seemed to regain his strength, and dashed up axe in hand.

There was a lusty cheer at this, and Sir Mark gnashed his teeth, as he wondered why he had not thought of going up to the next window, where the flames seemed to burn less furiously, though the next instant they were pouring out from the shattered window beneath, and making the long trailing strands of roses and woodbine writhe and twine as if in agony, as the flames licked them up, and then seemed to wreath themselves around the figure of Gilbert Carr.

With two vigorous blows, he dashed in the oaken divisions of the window, and as he struck the flames leaped into his face, wrapping round him; but he seemed to heed them not, for blow after blow fell, till he cleared the way, and then, leaving the burning ladder, he climbed right in, and a dead silence fell upon all present as he disappeared amidst the flames and smoke, which came rolling out more furiously than ever.

No man spoke for a while, as the fire crackled, and the tiles on the

old house slipped, and fell rattling down. The copper vane suddenly began to burn in the intense heat with a vivid blue light like some firework. The ladder, which had stood out dark against the flaming windows, gradually burned till rounds and sides were so much glowing charcoal, and a dull sense of horror chilled to inaction the spectators of the gallant deed.

Suddenly Wat Kilby raised himself up on his knees, supporting his injured body with one hand, and lifting the other to wave above his head.

“His father’s son!” he yelled, as the fire glistened in his wild eyes and blackened hairless face, for his grisly beard was scorched away—“his father’s son—a Carr!—a Carr!—Culverin for ever! Fetch him out brave boys—a rescue—a rescue! Forward boys—Board!”

As he yelled out these words, they seemed to electrify his followers, and with a shout the crew dashed to the burning house as if about to plunge in.

There was no hesitation now, not a man flinched, but, leaping in through the lower burning window, the ladder fell in so many glowing fragments amidst the feet of the foremost, who disappeared for a few brief moments, and then re-appeared with Gil Carr, bearing out through the flames a figure that seemed to be clad in gold, so glistening and yellow seemed the satin dress, with its stomacher of pearls.

The men drew back from him as Gil bore his burden on towards what had once been the shady lawn of the garden, and laid it reverently down, tearing a handkerchief from his breast to cover the ghastly mutilation of the face, and then crushing out as he knelt the smouldering flames and sparks that had attacked the wedding-dress.

“Mace, my darling!” cried Sir Mark, passionately.

“Back!” cried Gil, fiercely; “touch her not, upon your life.”

Sir Mark shrank away, appalled by the fierce gaze of the man who knelt there upon one knee, reverently arranging the garments round the

dead, whom he had found comparatively untouched by the flames, but pinioned and crushed by a fallen beam. He heeded not his own sufferings, though those who stood by could see that the doublet he wore was falling from his breast in pieces; that the leather of his belt and boots had crumpled up in the intense heat; and that his hands and face were horribly scorched.

“Let me see her, let me see her,” cried a harsh voice, and the little crowd parted to let Wat Kilby crawl forward. “Is it Janet? Tell me, brave boys, is it my lass? The cursed powder has taken away my sight. Tell me, brave boys, is it my little, bright, tricky Janet?”

“No, no, no,” moaned a piteous voice; “it is my child—my darling child. Oh, Mace, Mace, joy of my poor old heart, has it come to this?”

There was so piteous an appeal in these words—so intense, so terrible was the suffering they betokened—that the men drew back as the founder staggered to the side of the dead, let himself fall upon his knees, and there crouched with his hands clasped together in his lap, gazing helplessly down.

The remains of the Pool-house burned brightly still; the flames licked up rafter and beam; the red-hot tiles cracked and splintered and fell with a crash from time to time, sending up a whirlwind of sparks; and the blaze that lit up the Pool and forest far and near made plain, as if seen by day, the piteous group on the old lawn. But no one heeded the fire now, or dreamed of there being danger of the flying embers setting light to one or other of the powder sheds. Every thought was turned to the bereaved father; and as Sir Mark stood there, among his followers and the workpeople, one of the few unscathed by the fire, he found himself, bridegroom-elect although he had been, a person apparently of very secondary import, for next to Jeremiah Cobbe men and women gazed upon Gil Carr.

Just then the founder raised one of his trembling hands and stretched it out to reach the kerchief Gil had so lovingly placed over the mutilated face, but the latter stayed him.

“No, no,” he said in a low voice, “for your own sake no. Let us remember our darling as she was.”

The old man's hand closed upon the scorched palm, and then he laid the other upon it and held it, gazing piteously in the other's face.

“Right, Gil,” he said in a cracked voice. “Right! Let us remember *our* darling as she was.”

There was a pause here, and a beam fell in the burning house, causing a whirlwind of sparks to rise.

“Forgive me, Gil,” continued the founder. “Even if this hand did slay Abel Churr, the fire has purged it. Brave boy—brave boy! I was very hard on both!”

“Over her who lies here I swear I am innocent of that man's blood,” said Gil softly; and then in a lower tone, “My darling—my darling—you believed my words.”

“And so do I, Gil,” cried the old man piteously. “Oh, my child, my child! God in heaven, how have I sinned that I should suffer this?”

A shudder ran through the crowd, so wild and piercing suddenly rose the old man's upbraiding cry, while like an echo to his words came a shrill, harsh voice from the direction of the ruins, where, on a heap of smouldering wood and stones, stood Mother Goodhugh, like a black silhouette against the flames.

“Woe to the wicked house! Woe to the maker of deadly grains! Woe to the caster of cannon and culverin and gun!”

There was a dead silence, and then, amidst the crackling of the blazing wood and the fluttering of the flames, rose once more the voice of Mother Goodhugh, as she gesticulated and waved her stick.

“What did I say? What did I foretell against this evil man and his house? Did I not cry, it was cursed, and that the curse would fall? Look at the wicked place! And now once more I raise up my voice, and tell thee

that a curse will fall on him or her who touches stick or stone to try and raise it up again. Let it burn—let it be level with the earth, and become a refuge for snakes and toads and unclean things. Let no man try to build it up, or be he cursed as well.”

“Silence, hag!” cried Sir Mark passionately.

“Nay,” she cried, “I will not hold my peace. Go thou, young man, and rejoice that thou art saved from to-morrow—saved from wedding to the daughter of one whom I had cursed. Who doubts the power of Mother Goodhugh now? Speak, Jeremiah Cobbe, did I not foretell the ruin of thy house?”

“My poor child. My little love—where are thy pretty sayings now, where thy prattling ways? Little Mace—pretty little Mace! How old is she to-day, mother?” said the founder, gazing at vacancy, with a smile, for the old woman’s words had not reached his ears. “Six, eh? six. Why what a great age for my darling to have grown. Gil, my boy, God bless thee, lad! You have grown stout and well again, and I look to thee to protect my little one from harm. There, you must love her; take thy little sister; keep her from the pool, and mind her pretty little feet don’t stray near the water side. Hey, boy, did’st ever see such bonny little feet, so white and pink, and pretty, it seems a sin to put them into leather shoes. Be good to her, my brave stout lad, and some day—who knows?—thou may’st perhaps like to make her thy own little wife. If thou dost, ha, ha, ha! she shall not disgrace thee, boy, for she shall be a very lady in her way.”

He looked round with a vacant smile, and nodded pleasantly at Gil.

“Cursed! I tell thee—cursed!” cried Mother Goodhugh. “It has been a long time coming, but it has come at length. Look how it smokes and burns. Didst hear the noise the devilish powder made? Ha! ha! ha! That which he made to destroy others has destroyed himself. Burn, flames, burn!” she cried, waving her stick; “burn wood and stones, and burn until all is level with the dust!”

The crowd stood round her at a respectful distance listening to her ravings, and had she been the wise woman she professed to be, she

would have known where to stop and beat a hasty retreat, with a great increase, among the simple people, to her reputation. But it was not to be.

Just then, borne in a lumbering carriage that this time had brayed all the ruts, up came Sir Thomas Beckley, with Mistress Anne and Master Peasegood.

The old woman caught sight of Anne Beckley as she descended hastily from the carriage, and approached her with a malicious, triumphant look.

Just then the jealous girl caught sight of the prostrate body in its wedding-dress, and seemed petrified.

“What did I say—what did I say?” cried a voice behind her, and turning she encountered Mother Goodhugh’s malignant eyes.

This was too much for Anne, who crept shuddering away, when the burning house, the kneeling figure by the dead, the whole scene seemed to swim round her, and she would have fallen but for Sir Mark, who caught her in his arms.

“Oh, it is too dreadful—too dreadful!” she murmured, and closed her eyes.

“Master Peasegood, will you take him to your house?” said Gil. “Poor soul! the shock has been too heavy for his brain.”

“Eh! Go with Master Peasegood? Yes,” said the founder smiling. “Gil, brave lad, you’ll see that my darling does not come to harm.”

Gil bowed his head, and as the founder rose from his knees smiling and ready to accompany the parson, down whose cheeks the great tears coursed, Mother Goodhugh climbed on a heap of stones, waving her hands wildly as she saw her enemy pass.

“Woe to him; woe to his house!” she shrieked excitedly.

“Silence that vile witch’s mouth,” cried Sir Thomas.

“A witch, a witch!” cried a voice; and Wat Kilby, who had dragged himself up once more upon his hands and knees, waved one hand again towards the burning ruins, which had just burst forth into fiercer flames.

“A witch—a witch!” he yelled, “away with her, and let her burn.”

A shout rose from Sir Mark’s followers, and, with a rush, they surrounded the old woman, who struck at them with her stick as she was seized. Then, in spite of her shrieks and appeals, she was borne towards the burning ruins.

The burning of a witch was so congenial an occupation, that, failing a great triumph over Gil Carr’s crew, the followers of Sir Mark took to their task with such gusto that in another minute Mother Goodhugh would have been hurled into the flames.

It was in Anne Beckley’s power to save her by a quick appeal to Sir Mark; but she hesitated, for the thought flashed across her mind that, Mother Goodhugh dead, she would carry with her many secrets, and, above all, the greatest one, of how this terrible affair had been brought about. It might have been accident; but she had her doubts.

Sir Thomas looked on in puzzled guise. He knew he ought to do or say something, but without his clerk he was generally at sea, while Master Peasegood, who might have given him good advice, had gone off, leading the stricken father to his home.

It was Gil who interfered, and none too soon.

Springing up from where he had knelt on one knee, he threw himself before the would-be executioners.

“Shame on you!” he cried; and the men stopped, short, while Mother Goodhugh struggled from them to throw herself on the earth and cling to Gil’s knees.

“Save, oh, save me!” she shrieked; “I cannot die.”

“What are you, that you interfere?” cried one of the men.

“A witch—a witch—to the flames,” cried Wat Kilby, in his harsh voice.

“Silence, old dog!” roared Gil.

“In with her, lads!” cried the first of the men, seizing Mother Goodhugh by the shoulder; but, as she shrieked with horror, the man went down from a blow given by Gil’s clenched hand, which the next moment sought his sword, to find it gone.

With a shout, the others closed round Gil, but this roused his own followers, who ran up and dragged Mother Goodhugh away. They faced Sir Mark’s men, and, weapons being drawn, there was an imminent risk of a renewal of the fight, when Sir Thomas’s fat voice was heard, sounding weak and tremulous, for the baronet was terribly alarmed.

“Stop! my good men,” he cried; “you must not burn her until she has been tried. A woman suspected of witchcraft must—er—er—must—er—er—be taken before—er—er—the nearest justice of the peace—er—er—er—that is me, you see, and—”

“Escape without a word,” whispered Gil to the old woman. “I’ll cover your flight.”

“Bless thee for—”

“Keep thy blessings and thy curses,” said Gil, sternly. “Go.”

Mother Goodhugh shrank trembling away, the village people and the workers opening to let her pass, while, when Sir Mark’s men advanced to try and retake her, they were met by the swords of Gil’s crew.

“Don’t; pray don’t let them fight,” whispered Anne in agony.

“Is this a seemly time for a fresh encounter, Sir Mark?” said Gil.

“Not if you give yourself up,” was the reply. “I give up—to you?” said Gil. “Let who interferes with me and my men do so at his peril. This way,

my lads," he cried. "There is a cloak behind yon shed. It was meant for thee, sweet," he whispered, as he bent down over the dead, "to keep thee from the cold;" and upon its being brought, the lifeless figure, in its wedding-dress, was reverently lifted and borne into Tom Croftly's house.

Sir Mark concluded to engage in no further encounter that night, telling himself that he could easily take Gil another time. So, calling off his men, he allowed him to superintend the removing of the lifeless girl, Anne Beckley now following trembling into the cottage, awe-stricken as she was at being in the presence of death, while, when at last day broke and the bright sun rose, it was upon a heap of ashes smouldering and smoking still. Where the pleasant old garden had been alive with verdure, teeming fruit-trees, and autumn flowers, was a space of trampled blackened soil, while for fifty yards round the trees had been scorched and stripped not only of their leaves, but of every minor twig and spray.

Sir Mark scowled angrily again and again at Gil, and his men gave the sailors many a menacing look, as they took upon themselves the duty of keeping watch by the house where the poor girl lay.

It was Gil's men, too, who tried to search the ashes of the Gabled House for the remains of poor Janet, the only other occupant of the building; but the task was given up, on its being found that the intense heat had fused metal, and reduced the stones so that they crumbled at the touch.

How Master Peasegood preached Wisdom.

Gil's ship, with Father Brisdone on board, after waiting in vain for its freight, grounded as the tide went down. The old priest, who had been on deck, leaning over the bulwarks gazing up the river for the boat that did not come, had been startled by a great flash of light which suddenly shot up above the hills, and then by a heavy clap as of thunder, followed shortly by a fierce glow in the sky, all of which told him only too plainly of some terrible catastrophe at the powder-works.

He was not surprised, then, that the boat did not arrive till the long, weary night had passed away, and the bright sun shone once more upon the dancing waters, but even then noon was fast approaching before there was the measured dip of oars, and the boat came round a wooded point.

He looked earnestly for Mace, but, not seeing her, he sighed.

"My eyes fail me a good deal now," he said; and, shading them with his hand, he stood watching till, as the boat neared the ship, he could see that she had four men lying in the stern sheets, and he concluded that there had been an encounter.

"A bad augur," he said, sadly; "bloodshed on the eve of a wedding. Poor boy though, there seems no chance of a wedding, for he has not won his love."

His hands trembled as he stood at the gangway, while the boat was run up to the side and Gil painfully climbed on board.

"Failed, my son?" cried Father Brisdone and here he stopped short as he saw the terrible look of anguish in the young man's eyes.

"Help my poor lads, father," he said sadly. "They have been lying hurt these many hours."

One by one four injured men were hoisted on board, and laid

beneath the shelter of a sail, while Gil and the father attended to their injuries with rough but sensible surgery. There was a severe sword-wound and plenty of terrible burns, but the worst sufferer was poor Wat Kilby, whose face was blackened by the explosion, hair and beard burned off, and his thigh-bone broken.

He was in a high fever and wandering when slung on board, turning angrily upon those who had helped him.

“Don’t I tell you the poor lass is burning?” he cried. “This is your doing, skipper,” he moaned. “You were always against it, and now you leave the poor lass to burn, and keep me here. Father, this is the boy I watched over and brought up, and taught. This be the way he treats me now I am in trouble.”

It was with great difficulty that they could keep the poor old fellow sufficiently quiet to enable them to perform the necessary bandaging, but at last he sank into the heavy sleep of exhaustion; and Gil, having satisfied himself that his injured men were cared for, saw to his own burns, gave orders for the ship to be floated up to her old berth on the next tide, and then returned to the Pool.

For the next seven days he was almost constantly at Roehurst, in company with the stricken father, whom affliction seemed to have turned back to him as his only friend; and together they hung about the ruins, which still smouldered slightly, and crumbled more and more into a shapeless heap, overhung by a few masses of tottering wall.

Gil would have tried to persuade the old man to leave the spot, but that it had so terrible a fascination for him as well, and together they would sit hour after hour gazing at the ruins, and rebuilding the place mentally and occupying it as of old.

The people of the sparsely inhabited district came to gaze at the wreck, and from far and near they gathered together two days after the fire, to see Gil’s men carry the flower-sprinkled bier from Croftly’s house to the little rustic churchyard two miles away, the men taking it in turns to bear her, four and four about. The place was densely crowded, thinly

populated as was the country there, to see Gil Carr and the weak, broken founder, who seemed to have aged in one night to a venerable old man, walk hand in hand behind, and stand bareheaded while Master Peasegood read, and sobbed, and read, and finally letting fall his book, went down upon his knees in the soft earth, and prayed beside the grave.

Sir Mark chafed more and more, but it was in vain. He was to have been chief actor in another scene; here he was completely set aside again, and Gil Carr had resumed his place.

Fortunately for Sir Mark, his old acquaintance Sir Thomas Beckley came forward to offer his hospitality, and he took up his abode with him, feeling that he could not leave the place with his task undone, and in a bitter mood he received the attempts at consolation offered to him by Anne, who, however, always kept very much aloof, playing the part of the injured woman, but promising herself a sharp revenge, if ever the King's messenger should again lay siege unto her heart.

Up to the day of the funeral the founder had been almost childish from the effects of the shock; but after that he seemed to have recovered himself, though he looked aged and bent, and changed to a remarkable degree.

"I was very hard upon you, Gil," he said to him one evening, as they stood leaning against one of the posts that had helped to support the swing bridge now completely swept away, and whose place was occupied by a couple of stout planks laid across the race. "I was very hard upon you, my lad, but, though I made that affair of Abel Churr's an excuse, I don't think I believed at heart that you did away with the poor wandering wretch."

Gil looked at him sadly, and bowed his head without speaking.

"What are you going to do now, my lad?" continued the founder, gazing at him with a yearning look as one his lost child had loved.

"To do?" said Gil, in a low hopeless tone, "to do? What is there left to do, sir, but die?"

“Hush, my lad,” said the founder, laying a trembling hand upon the young man’s arm; “that is for me to say. I am old and stricken: the storm has torn one great branch from the trunk, and the old tree will slowly wither and die. You are young yet, and hope will come to you again as time goes on.”

“Hush, for God’s sake, hush!” cried Gil, turning upon him almost fiercely; then, gazing round him in the gathering gloom of the evening, he let himself sink, upon his knees lower and lower, with his hands covering his face, as for the first time in the solitude of that blasted home he gave full vent to the pent-up agony that for days and days he had striven to hide.

“Hope,” he groaned, “hope?” as his broad shoulders heaved and the despairing sobs tore their way from his weary breast. “He does not know what she was to me—he cannot tell how I loved her. Mace, Mace, my darling, would to God I were lying by thy side!”

It had grown quite dark now, and the founder sank upon his knees in the black ashes to lay his hands upon the young man’s head.

“Gil, my son,” he whispered hoarsely, “forgive me, for I never knew your heart till now. In her name I ask you to forgive me for the wrong I would have done you both in tearing you apart. I thought I was doing right, but I am punished for my fault.”

“Forgive you!” groaned Gil, who, for the first time in his life, was quite unmanned. “Yes, I forgive you, if there is aught to forgive.”

He pressed the old man’s hand, as he rose after a time, weak and desolate, to sit down upon one of the stones cast from the main building by the blast. Some distance away a couple of windows shed their feeble light, as if they were signals to Mace to open her casement once again, and a groan rose to Gil’s lips as he thought of the past. Then, like a wandering spirit, a white, filmy-looking owl swept by them, turned and came back once more, as if attracted by the blackened ruins, glided to and fro for a few minutes, and it seemed to the two men that it shrieked faintly just over the very centre of the ruined house before it glided away.

Gil sat watching the bird in a dreamy, hopeless way, and, as he gazed through the darkness, he felt that the place would become the home of such creatures.

He was aroused from his reverie by the founder.

“How did it happen, Gil?” he said.

He spoke in a low, hoarse voice, but his Words sounded very plain in the silence of the autumn even.

“How did it happen?” said Gil, repeating his words.

“Yes, my boy, tell me all. I cannot believe that God would make that old woman with her curses his instrument to punish me.”

“I have little to tell,” said Gil. “I saw our darling again and again, begging that she would go with me; but she refused till she found it hopeless to move you, and that the wedding was to be.”

“Yes, yes—go on,” groaned the founder.

“Then she consented, and I made my plans.”

“Yes, I see,” replied the founder, “you were there with your men, and Sir Mark felt sure that you were coming. But yours was a mad revenge on him, and meant ruin and destruction to all.”

“I do not understand you,” said Gil, quietly.

“Did you think by blowing down part of the place to get her away in the confusion?”

“Blow down? The place?” said Gil. “We had not a charge of powder with us. I left it all on board.”

“Then it was the store below caught first,” said the founder, musingly; “but how—how?”

"I cannot tell," said Gil.

"Wat Kilby," exclaimed the founder, jumping at a cause for the terrible disaster; "he was smoking his tobacco by the entry, and must have thrown down the burning pipe."

"Nay, he did not smoke; he was by my side bearing a ladder."

"Are you speaking frankly to me, Gil?" said the founder. "I prithee keep nothing back."

"Can you speak to me like that?" replied Gil, in a grave, reproachful tone. "Master Cobbe, I have kept nothing back; I have added nothing to my story; I have only left out that there was the priest awaiting on board of my ship, to be our darling's companion until we were made man and wife."

"Forgive me, Gil," said the founder. "I know now that you are keeping nothing back. But how could it have happened?"

"A shot from one of Sir Mark's men's pieces must have gone through to your store of powder," said Gil. "They did fire, but my men struck their pieces aside."

The founder accepted this theory, and they sat in silence for a few moments, till they were interrupted by the approach of a great, dark figure, who seemed at last to make them out.

"Ah! friend Cobbe," it said, in the thick rich tones of Master Peasegood, "I was seeking thee. Come; the night-dew is falling, and it is time you were safely housed. Ah! Gil, my good lad, you here?"

"Yes," was the curt response. "Master Peasegood, hadst thou but done thy duty by her who was thy charge, these troubles might not have been."

"Reproach me not, good lad, I was taken away through Sir Mark's scurvy tricks and carried up to London. And there I was, day after day, half prisoner, half free. Sometimes they'd let me fly a little bit, like a bird

with a string at its leg. Other times they'd keep me in, and never a word could I get to know of my offence."

"Not a legal prisoner, then?"

"Nay, lad, not at all. Though, had I tried to flee I had been tied fast enough, I'll warrant. I took advantage of my freedom to see Saint Paul's, and should be sorry to preach there. I bought me though, as I had my money with me and the chance was good, six yards of cloth in Paul's churchyard to make me a goodly cloak—four pounds sixteen it cost me—and seven yards of calamanko for a cassock; one pound four and sixpence that, besides a pound for a new hat, and six shillings for a lutestring hood for Mistress Hilberry. I lightened my pocket, Gil, but I was heavy enough at heart."

Gil nodded.

"I grew so hot of blood and angry at last with the way they kept me in, and the too free use I made of the most villainous ale, Master Cobbe, I ever put to my lips, that had I not been blooded freely by a surgeon, I should have been ill. It was not the proper time—the haemeroyal time, though close upon the full, but I let him take a good ten ounces from my veins, and felt a better man."

"It would have been better, Master Peasegood, had you been here."

"True, lad, but I was not my own ruler. That Sir Mark never trusted me. I had hard work to get free again, and hurried down to get to our darling's side. You saw me when I came—that night? Sir Thomas Beckley overtook me, and he brought me on."

Gil bent his head, and held out his hand, which the other pressed.

"When do you sail again?" said the parson.

"I sail again? Maybe never," said Gil. "Why should I sail?"

"To give thyself occupation—work—toil-weary evening and restful night. Up, man, and work. Bear thy load bravely till Heaven send the soft

touch of time to make it lighter. Thou art young; thy ship waits. Go across the sea and do thy work. This is no place for thee."

"Why do you interfere with me, Master Peasegood?" cried Gil, testily. "I am none of thy followers."

"Nay, my lad, thou art not; but I give thee good advice that my lips seemed urged to speak. Go and toil, and sit not down sobbing like a fretful child."

"Man, you would madden me if I listened," cried Gil.

"Nay, but thou shalt listen," said Master Peasegood, "and I will quell thy madness. Thou hast received one terrible loss like a man; I would not have thee do it like a woman. Then, too, Master Cobbe, when are these fires to be relit, and the wreathing curls of smoke to rise from each furnace chimney?"

"Never," said the founder sadly, "my energy has gone, and I am spent."

"Tut, tut, man; fie!"

"What have I to live for?" cried the founder, as angry now as Gil.

"Not for thyself," cried Master Peasegood. "Not both of ye to indulge a moping selfish regret, but for others—for the memory of one dead. Tut! man, those do not pay most respect to their dead who sit and sigh, and groan, and work themselves into fevers. Gil Carr, thy men call for thee to lead them in some seafaring adventure. Jeremiah Cobbe, thou hast got together here some fifty souls—workmen, their wives, and the children they have begotten. Thou didst bring them to do thy work, and now the furnaces are cold, the busy wheel has ceased to turn, and thy workmen lean against the doorposts, and idle, and get out of trim. Come, come! up, and be doing."

"For whom?" cried the founder angrily, "for whom should I toil?"

"Not for thyself, but for thy people. Nay, nay! don't take it ill, and think

me unfeeling. To both of you I say it is your duty, and, in the name of yon sweet girl whom we all so dearly loved, I say keep her memory green in your heart of hearts, but cease unmanly repinings against fate."

"Ah! Master Peasegood," said the founder more gently, "thou hast never been a father."

"Had I been sweet Mace's father could I have loved her better, Jeremiah Cobbe? Have not mine eyes oft filled with tears at the memory of her sweet face; has not my voice choked, and have not my words failed when I have tried to speak, Gil Carr? Tut, man, give me credit for loving her as well. Thou hast felt sore against me because I tried to keep you two apart; but why was it, Gil, why was it? Had I not seen that which made me think thou would'st prove a faithless lover to her, poor child. Give me your hand, man, my love for her was different to thine, but it was quite as deep."

Gil's hand was laid in the heavy palm of the parson of Roehurst, and they joined in a close firm grip without another word.

"When shall these fires be going again, Master Cobbe," continued the parson; "when shall the busy wheel turn plashing round? Come, come, promise me that thy mourning shall not be quite out of bounds."

The founder had turned his back, and remained gazing away from them at the blackened heap.

"You will be up and doing, will you not, Master Cobbe?" continued the parson, urging him on. "Come: for thy child's sake. Would'st have this place left a ruin? Come, promise me thou wilt."

A deep sigh seemed to tear itself from the founder's breast, and he turned to gaze in the direction of his works.

"Thou art right, parson," he said; "it is not fair that the workmen I brought here to feed and furnish with hard labour should suffer for my sake. The fires shall be lit again."

"Ay, that's well," said Master Peasegood earnestly. "It will be glad

news for many a heart. Then I shall see the axe busy again as the leaves fall, and the glow of the charcoal fire in the woods; and meantime thy men will delve for iron, and the furnaces go roaring on. Is it not so?"

"Yes."

"Bravely spoken, brave heart," said Master Peasegood; "and thou, Gil Carr, off to thy ship once more, and bear away her freight. Come back to us laden with the pale yellow brimstone and the grey-white salt. Tut, tut, tut, of what am I speaking?" he muttered, as Gil shuddered. "You will go, my brave lad, eh?"

"I suppose so: yes," said Gil slowly; and the parson laid his hand upon the founder's shoulder once more.

"And the dear old house, Master Cobbe? There is sandstone waiting in the quarry to be borne here, and thou hast oaken timber enough cut to build it up. When wilt begin to repair thy loss?"

"Never," cried the founder fiercely. "Parson Peasegood, I'll work and toil and invent and strive day and night to keep things going here, but it is for others' sake, not mine."

"Nay, nay, but the house must be restored."

"Never," cried the founder; "never, Master Peasegood; never, Gil Carr. I care nothing for the words of that reviling old woman and her curses. Punishments come from Heaven, not from Hell, and, if she be a witch, 'tis devil's work she does; but no hand shall touch yon heap, neither stone nor ash shall be disturbed. The flowers may spring up again, and the grass will grow, but to touch it would be to me like disturbing my poor child's grave. Our dear old home died with my darling. Let them rest."

He turned away and walked firmly across the planks towards the lane where Tom Croftly's cottage stood, followed by the parson and Gil, who stepped back as the founder rapped upon the cottage door.

"Tom," he said, as the door was opened, and the light of a rush-

candle shone upon his deeply-lined face, "go round to the men and bid them light the big furnace in the morning, and you see about the mixing up of another batch of powder."

"Hurray, master," cried the man. "Give me my hat, wife. Dal me! but that's good news again."

"Thou'lt go on making powder again—so soon?" said Master Peasegood, as the founder joined them, and they went down the lane.

"Yes," said the founder firmly. "Gil, when thou com'st back, my lad, there will be some score barrels of the best and strongest make. I want to show people that an old hag's curses are as light as wind."

"Ay, and that a bad mishap is not to be taken as a judgment, because a would-be soothsayer says 'tis so," cried Master Peasegood. "Thou'rt right, Master Cobbe. I thank Heaven I spoke to you both as bravely as I did, for my heart misgave me all the while."

The next morning the smoke rolled up once more from the furnace chimney. The great wheel turned and plashed as it shed showers of silver from its broad paddles and spokes; blackened men bore baskets of soft dogwood charcoal to be ground, and others shovelled up the pale yellow sulphur and the crystals of potash for mixing into powder once again. Two heavy tumbrils jolted and blundered down the cinder-made lane to fetch great loads of ironstone from the pits in the woods whence it was dug, and then fierce furnaces were charged with layers of ore and charcoal ready for smelting, while the horses tugged at their loads in answer to the uncouth cries of the men. It was as if the people of Roehurst had awakened from sleep, and all were rejoicing in the gladsome feeling of being once more at work after their enforced idleness, the change acting like a spur. There was shouting over the various works, and now and then some one burst forth into a song, some doleful love-ditty about a sweet young maiden, sung in a minor key.

Tom Croftly was in his element once more, and after seeing the furnaces started and the men preparing the next batch of powder, he anxiously set his colliers to work to get him more coal.

It was no sending down a set of blackened miners with their Davy lamps crowding a cage that dropped slowly into the gas and choke-damp charged bowels of the earth, but the superintending of couples of men who attacked some cords of wood—long, low stackings of the loppings of the trees cut down the previous winter—and, clearing out a circular space, throwing out the earth all round, they set up a pole in the centre. Then picking the branches that were some four feet long, they carefully began to build them round the centre pole, standing all on end, and going on round and round till a low circular stack was built, when the stout central pole was taken away, the space it occupied being filled with light brushwood, which was then set alight ready to communicate with the wood around, while the air running in through spaces left at the sides soon made a swift fire. This, however, was not allowed to burn fiercely, for old charcoal powder mixed with dry earth lay ready, and, after the stack had been covered with a litter of weeds, dry grass, and thin twigs from the fallen trees sufficient to keep it from falling through, the earth was shovelled on all over the stack wherever there was a sign of flame or thin smoke breaking forth, till at last the flames were stifled and the thick smoke rose only from the centre.

“More loam on,” cried Tom Croftly, who, spade in hand, danced excitedly round the charcoal pile like a grim black demon busy over some fiery task, and the men worked and watched, smothering the flames with more earth and water till not a gleam was seen, though all the while the fire was glowing fiercely and burning out the watery gases of the wood.

And this went on night and day, the colliers having a shelter rigged up to keep off the night-air when they needed rest, this being called turn and turn, for, should there be no one ready to throw on shovels-full of loam when the fire began to work a way through, the burning would be spoiled.

But there were no burnings spoiled with Tom Croftly, who, had the men been disposed to fail, would have been there to catch them lapsing and take the shovel in hand himself. So the charcoal burned its time, glowing slowly in the well-closed heat till by gentle testing here and there it was declared to be quite fit, when the earth was cleared away, water used liberally for quenching, and the erst flaming heap allowed to cool,

the effect being that the branches of rough wood were turned into black clinking metallic-sounding charcoal, hard and brittle to the touch, and ready to fuse the ironstone or turn into potent powder in the mill.

Then by slow degrees the traces of the explosion were softened down, and a new bridge took the place of that which had been swept away. A fresh fence, too, was made of riven oak, and surrounded the ruined garden, so that Master Peasegood had hopes that the founder had re-considered his words.

But he had not. The fence was there to protect the ruins from the feet of straying cattle. It was not needed to keep off the people of the little place, for they gazed upon it with awe, and whispered that it was haunted by the dead. And, when Master Peasegood asked thereof, the founder said his words stood firm. But this was when weeks had glided by, and Gil Carr's ship was tossing far away upon the sea.

How the Beckley Pullet ruled the Roost.

Dame Beckley was one of the happiest women under the sun, for she had scarcely a care. Her sole idea of home management was obedience, and she obeyed her lord implicitly. Next to him she yielded no little show of duty to her daughter, who ruled her with a rod of iron, which she changed for one of steel when dealing with her father.

"Well, my dear," said the dame, "speaking as a woman of the world, I must say I think it hardly becoming of us to keep Sir Mark here after his behaviour to us before. See how he slighted us. Fancy a man who calls himself a courtier telling a lady of title that her camomile tea that she has made with her own hands—it was the number one, my dear, flavoured with balm—was no better than poison."

"Never mind the camomile tea, mother. I tell you I wish Sir Mark to be persuaded to stay."

"Ah, well, my dear, if you wish it, of course he shall be pressed. I'll tell him that you insisted—"

“Mother!”

“La! my dear, what have I done now?” cried Dame Beckley. “You quite startle me when you stamp your feet and look like that.”

“How can you be so foolish, mother? Go—go, and tell Sir Mark—insist upon his staying here.”

“Well, my dear, and very proud he ought to be, I’m sure. Why, when I was young, if a gentleman had—”

“Mother!”

“There, there, my dear, I’ve done. I’ll try and persuade Sir Mark to stay. I’m sure it would do him good, though I don’t want him. It always seems to me that that terrible explosion sent a regular jar through what Master Furton, the Queen’s chirurgeon, called the absorbens. If he were my son, I should certainly make him take a spoonful of my conserve of elder night and morning, and drink agrimony tea three times a day. In cases where there is the slightest touch of fever there is nothing—bless the girl, why she has gone, when did she go out of the room?”

Mistress Anne had gone away directly after her last imperious utterance of the word “mother,” and walked straight to her father’s room.

She had left Dame Beckley busy over her herbal, and she now found her father also on study bent, his book being a kind of magistrates’ *vade mecum* of those days on the subject of witchcraft, and the author his Majesty the King.

“What are you reading, father?” she said, making him start as she came suddenly behind him and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

“His Majesty’s book, my dear.”

“Why?”

“Well, you see, my dear, it behoves me as a justice of the peace to be well informed of his Majesty’s views respecting the heinous sin of

witchcraft, and to know how I should comport myself and deal with so foul a creature in case, at any future time—”

“Mother Goodhugh should be brought before you?”

“Yes, exactly,” said the baronet. “My dear Anne, I’d give almost everything I possess for your clear discerning head.”

“Never mind my head, father,” she said, with a half-laugh; “I want to speak to you about more important things.”

“Yes, my dear, certainly. But won’t you sit down? You worry me when you tower over me so, and threaten, and preach at me. Do sit down, child, pray.”

“Nay, father, you can hear what I have to say without my seating myself.”

“Yes, my dear,” said Sir Thomas, humbly.

“Let Mother Goodhugh be, father.”

“But, my child, she is a most pestiferous witch.”

“For the present, father. For the present, let her be.”

“Well, my dear, if you wish it, of course—”

“I do wish it, father.”

“How odd, my dear, that you should come to say that, when I was studying up the matter.”

“I did not come to say that, father,” said Anne; “but to speak to you about our guest.”

“Yes, my dear, he has been here now six weeks since that disaster.”

“Seven weeks, father.”

“Well, my child, seven weeks if you like; and he has sent back those soldier fellows and his own attendants, and seems to have settled himself down. I mean to tell him that he had better—”

“Stay here till his health is quite recovered, father.”

“Nay, indeed, my child, after his grossly neglectful behaviour to us, I feel ready at any time to send him away.”

“But you will do no such thing, father. Sir Mark is your guest, and an important officer of his Majesty.”

“An’ if he had not been I should very soon—”

“Your good treatment of so important a gentleman may mean something in the future. It is always well, father, to have friends at Court.”

“Yes, yes, my child, but to leave us in so scurvy a way, and take up his abode with old Cobbe.”

“That has nothing to do with the matter, father. Ask him to stay.”

“But, Anne, my child.”

“Father, I insist upon your forcing him to stay.”

“Force,” said Sir Thomas; “ah, there’ll be no need of that. The job will be to force him to go. But surely, child, thou’lt never think of setting thy cap at him after his engagement with the founder’s child?”

“I? Set my cap! Oh, father,” she cried, with a weak giggle, “that is too good. I absolutely hate him.”

“Then I’ll tell him we wish him—”

“To stay as long as he can, father. Go at once.”

“But, my dear, he is going to-morrow. He told me so when he was on his way to the moat to fish, and I told him I was glad to hear it.”

“You told him that, father?” cried Anne, with flashing eyes.

“Indeed I did,” said Sir Thomas.

“Then go at once,” cried Anne, imperiously, “and bid him stay.”

“But it will be like eating my words, my child.”

“Go eat them, then,” cried the girl; “and quickly. Say that you were but jesting.”

“And that you specially wished—”

“No, father. Are you mad? Say what thou wilt, and canst; but mind this—Sir Mark must stay.”

Sir Thomas grumbled, but he had to go, and he went, and very easily persuaded Sir Mark to give up his project of leaving the Moat next day, and so it came about that about an hour later, when Mistress Anne was wandering, book in hand, in the pleasaunce, beneath the sun-pleached trees, where the soft turf was dappled with sunshine and shade, she accidentally came upon Sir Mark, moody and thoughtful, busy over his favourite occupation of trying to persuade one of the ancient carp in the moat to swallow a hook concealed in a lump of paste, a lure of which the said carp fought exceedingly shy.

If Sir Mark had been told a month before that he would become an angler—one of those patient beings who go and seat themselves on the banks of a piece of water and wait till a fish chooses to touch their bait—he would have laughed them to scorn.

All the same, though, he had gone to Sir Thomas Beckley’s, very much shocked at the sudden termination of his matrimonial project, and had taken to his bed, where he stayed some days.

He told himself that he was heart-broken; that he would never look upon woman’s face again; that he would pay a pilgrimage yearly to Mace’s grave, and live and die a heart-broken anchorite.

On the sixth day he arose and wrote a despatch concerning the state of Jeremiah Cobbe's manufactures, retiring certain proposals that he had made concerning the supply of guns and powder to his Majesty's forces. Later on he found that it would not be necessary to seize on Captain Carr, and later still followed the news that Gil had left those parts.

On the hearing of this he told himself that he could give full vent to his sorrow, which he did, taking at the same time a good deal of nutriment to counterbalance his sighs and tears.

Then, being a satisfactory moping pursuit for one so cut to the heart, he took to fishing week after week for the carp in the great moat; and after, on this particular day, trying in vain for one particularly heavy monster, he sighed very loudly—so loudly that it seemed to be echoed, and, looking sadly up, his eyes fell upon Mistress Anne, reading as she walked beneath the trees.

It was but a momentary glance, for she turned away directly after, and he sighed again, for he foresaw an interview with another lady as Dame Beckley came bustling to his side.

It was one way of showing his grief: A curious way of showing it; but every one has his peculiarities, and Sir Mark elected to dress himself more gorgeously than of old.

Sable had a prominent place in his costume, but it was largely relieved with gold lace and white linen, so that the angler who rose from his seat on the green bank of the old moat seemed, from the elegantly plumed hat to the shining rosetted shoes, more like one dressed for a ball or Court gathering than a man prepared to land the slippery carp or wriggling eel.

Dame Beckley was very nervous over her task, but she managed to acquit herself pretty well, and Sir Mark received her request that he should stay with a saddened smile that seemed to say all things were alike to him now.

"If my presence will give you pleasure, madam," he said with a sigh,

“I will stay, though you will find me sorry company, I fear.”

Sir Mark applied a delicate lace handkerchief to his eyes, and spread around a faint odour of musk, before applying a fresh lump of paste to his great hook, and casting it once more between the water-lilies.

“Plague on the man,” said Dame Beckley to herself; “it is not a pleasure to me. I wish, though,” she added musingly, “he would let me administer some of my simples. I could make him hearty and well.”

Sir Mark sighed again when he was left alone, and began to pity himself for his sufferings. Somehow he did not feel much sorrow for the young life that had been so suddenly cut off. His sorrow was for him who was to have been a bridegroom, and who would have succeeded to a goodly property with his handsome wife. This was the more important to him, as his little patrimony had been pretty well squandered, and his tailor was an extensive creditor who was eager to be paid.

“Yes,” he said, “I’ll stay. Poor woman, she wishes it, and, until my brain recovers from this dreadful shock, I am as well here as anywhere. Besides, I cannot well go back till I see my way to obtain some money.”

Just then a great carp came slowly sailing along through the deep clear water, and rose amongst the stems of the water-lilies, as if to get a better glance with its big round eyes at the gorgeous object in black velvet, puffed with white satin and laced with gold, seated so patiently upon the bank.

“I begin to think now,” said Sir Mark, as he gazed back at the carp, whose great round golden scales suggested coins, “that I have made a mistake. I might have had fair Mistress Anne.”

The carp glanced down for a moment at the lump of paste, and shook its tail at it, its head being too rigid. The bait was not to its taste, so it rose higher and stared with its great round expressionless eyes, while it gasped with its big thick lips.

“Two hundred pounds for wedding garments of my own,” he said,

gazing back at the carp. "Twenty-five pounds for that new sword with the silver ornaments to the hilt, and five pounds for those white crane's plumes for my hat; and now they are useless. I cannot have them altered to wear now without spoiling them, and unless I marry soon that money is all thrown away."

He sighed again very softly, for he was exceedingly sorry for himself, as he thought of the founder's thousands.

"You are a lucky fellow," he continued, addressing the carp; "you always swim about clad in golden armour, and pay nothing for the show. True, I have not paid for mine, but I suppose that some day I shall be obliged."

Just then the carp smacked its lips as it thrust its nose above the water, gave its tail a lazy flap, and turned itself endwise so as to face Sir Mark, who gazed full at its fat gasping mouth, puffy eyes, and generally inane expression.

"What becomes of the old Beckleys?" said Sir Mark. "One might fancy that they all went to animate the bodies of the carp in this moat, for yon fish bears a wondrous resemblance to the baronet. I wonder whether he is as well clothed in golden scales. By all that's holy, here he is."

For, unnoticed on the soft velvety grass, Sir Thomas Beckley had come slowly up, looking in effect much more like the great carp than might have been considered possible, for his head was so charged with his daughter's mission that it seemed to force his mouth open, and his eyes from his head, while, as he came close up, he gasped two or three times, opening and shutting his lips without making a sound.

"Fishing, Sir Mark?" he said at last, for want of something better to say. "You have captured one, I suppose?"

"No, Sir Thomas," said his guest with a sigh. "Faith, an' I do not care to catch the poor things. I find in angling a change from dwelling on my sad thoughts. You never catch them, I suppose?"

“No,” was the reply, “I never do. My father once caught one.”

“Indeed!” said Sir Mark, yawning, for it was a peculiarity of Sir Thomas Beckley that he made everyone with whom he came into contact yawn.

“Yes,” continued Sir Thomas. “It was during a very hot summer, and the moat was nearly dry. I remember it well.”

“You seem to have an excellent recollection, Sir Thomas.”

“I have, Sir Mark, I have,” said the baronet pompously. “The great carp had somehow been left in a tiny pool whence he could not escape, so my father caught him.”

“But not with a hook, Sir Thomas—he did not angle.”

“Marry, sir, but he did. He’d have gone in after it but for the mud, which would have sullied his trunk hose and velvet breeches of murrey colour, so he had a kitchen meat hook tied to a long pole, and caught the big fish fairly.”

“Indeed, Sir Thomas? It must have been an exciting scene.”

“My father was a great man, Sir Mark.”

“Great and rich, Sir Thomas?”

“Very, Sir Mark.”

“Then I have been doing wrong,” thought Sir Mark. “This old idiot here must have inherited all the old man’s money, unless—. Did your brothers much resemble him, Sir Thomas?” he said aloud.

“Brothers, sir? I never had a brother. I was an only child.”

“Indeed! But I might have known. Sir Thomas, this is a fitting time to thank you for your hospitality. I may not have another chance before I go.”

“But you will not go yet, Sir Mark. I was about to press you to stay with us yet a while—till your health is more restored. You look pale and ill as yet, Sir Mark.”

“Really, Sir Thomas? Thanks for your kindly concern, but I must go and try to recover elsewhere. Your good lady, Dame Beckley, has been trying to persuade me to stay, but I think my visit here has been too long already.”

“Nay, nay,” cried Sir Thomas, “we cannot spare you yet. You must think us very unfeeling if, after your terrible loss, you are not almost forced to stay here and recover. Not a word more, Sir Mark, not a word.”

Sir Mark, however, endeavoured to put in several words, but was checked by his host, who left him afterwards, strutting away with a fat smile upon his countenance, and a belief in his heart that he had been doing some very hospitable act, Mistress Anne’s commands being for the time entirely forgotten.

“That is settled then,” said Sir Mark, as he kneaded a fresh piece of paste for the carp. “Perhaps in a few weeks I may find out some way of raising money, that is, when my heart has grown less sore.”

He threw out his bait, and then settled himself with his back against a tree, to take a quiet nap, when, in a sheltered nook, where four huge hawthorns formed a kind of bower, he once more saw Mistress Anne busily reading, and, thinking that he ought to tell her of his intention to stay, he rose to saunter to her side.

How Master Peasegood said his Prayers and paid a Visit.

There was a deep, singular humming sound coming from the open window of Master Peasegood’s cottage, and, as this noise passed through the big cherry-tree, it seemed to be broken up like a wind through a hedge, and to be somewhat softened. A stranger would not have known what it was, unless he had listened very attentively; and then he would have found that it was Master Peasegood saying his prayers.

“Sum—sum—sum—sum—sum—sum—sum—sum.” It sounded like a gigantic bumble-bee. Then a few distinct words. Then “sum—sum—sum—sum—sum,” again; and you would hear, “Lead us not into temptation’—sum—sum—sum—especially with strong ales—sum—sum—sum—sum—sum—oh! Lord, I am so fleshly and so fat—sum—sum—sum—sum—I cannot do as I preach—sum—sum—sum—sum—I am a sadly hardened and weak man, oh! Lord—sum—sum—sum—sum; but I try to live at peace, and do to others as I would they should do unto me—sum—sum—sum—sum—Amen. Mistress Hilberry, I’m going out. Bring me my ale.”

Master Peasegood was refreshed in mind, and proceeded to refresh himself in body, feeling at peace with the whole world, including Mother Goodhugh and all her works.

Mistress Hilberry came in, looking sour, but, as her eyes lit on the jovial face before her, some of its amiability was reflected back upon her own; and, finally, as the stout parson drank up his great jug of ale with the heartiest of enjoyment, she almost smiled.

“How thou dost take to thy ale!” she said.

“Ay, how naturally we do take to all bad habits, Mistress Hilberry; but a man cannot be perfect, and the possession of one wicked little devil may keep out seven devils, all much worse. I don’t think it would be right to be quite good, Mistress Hilberry, so I take my ale.”

“If thou never take nothing worse, master,” said Mistress Hilberry—who was in a good temper—“thou wilt do;” and she seized the empty vessel and went out.

“Hah!” sighed Master Peasegood, taking his pipe off the mantel-piece, and looking at it ruefully, “I talked to her about one little devil, and, lo! here is another. That makes two who possess me, if King Jamie’s right. I’ll just have a little of the devilish weed before I go out. Nay, resist the devil, and he will flee from thee. Go, little devil, back to thy place, and let’s see what our good Protestant King does say.”

He put back the pipe, and took from his scantily-furnished shelves a copy of his Majesty's Counterblast against Tobacco, seated himself comfortably, and began to read.

Master Peasegood's countenance was a study: for what he read did not seem to agree with him. He frowned, he pursed up his lips, he nodded, he shook his head; and at last, after half-an-hour's study, he dashed the book down upon the floor, doubled his fist, and brought it heavily upon the table.

"If this book had not been written by our sovereign lord, James the First, by the Grace of God King of Great Britain, France, and Ireland, as it says in the dedication to my Bible—and what a thumping lie it is—I should say that it was the work of one of the silliest, most dunder-headed, and bumble-brained fools who ever walked God's earth. Tchah, tchah, tchah, tchah. I don't believe the pipe's a little devil after all.

"Here! I must be off," he said, with a sigh. "There's work to be done. I'll go see my poor old friend Cobbe, and try and comfort him in his trouble.

"Nay, I will not; it will be like running right into temptation. He'll bring out pipes and ale.

"But he is in trouble sore, and I have not been of late. I must go—

"'Into temptation.'

"Nay, it cannot be into temptation, for it is to do good works. The ale is not a devil of possession, after all.

"Mistress Hilberry, I'm going down to Jeremiah Cobbe, if any one should call."

"All right, master," she said; and the stout parson rolled out, and sauntered down to the cottage the founder occupied now.

"Ah! Master Cobbe," he cried, "I've been remiss in visiting you these last few weeks, but I'm glad to see thee look so well."

“Well? Master Peasegood,” said the founder, sadly. “Nay, I am not well. Perhaps I am, though—perhaps I am. I have been busy lately, very busy. A goodly store of cannon and ammunition has been sent off to his Majesty this past week.”

“Ay, so I hear,” said the parson.

“But sit down, man. Hey, Mrs Croftly, bring a flagon of ale and the pipes and tobacco. Master Peasegood will sit down here in the garden with me this evening.”

“That I will,” was the hearty response.

A table was placed on one side, and the two friends sat down, drank heartily to one another, and then filled, lit their pipes, and smoked in silence for awhile.

“There’s a nice view from here, Master Cobbe,” said the parson at last.

“Ay, there is,” said the founder; and a longing painful look came upon his deeply-lined face, as he thrust back his rough, white hair and sighed.

“A very pretty view. You like this spot?”

“Yes,” said the founder, slowly, as he pointed with the stem of his little pipe to an opening in the forest beyond the ruins of the Pool-house. “Do you see yon patch of rock where the martins have made their nests?”

“Surely, surely,” said Master Peasegood.

“There is a good-sized hole there, friend Peasegood.”

“Yes, I see,” said Master Peasegood, nodding, “though my eyes are not what they were.”

“That place was made by the shell fired from my big howitzer when my poor girl applied the match.”

“Poor child!” said Master Peasegood, sadly, and for some time the two men sat and smoked in silence.

“Shall you ever build up the house again, Master Cobbe?” said the parson at last.

The founder turned upon him almost fiercely, and seemed about to utter some angry word; but he calmed down, took the parson’s fat hand in his, shook it, and released it.

“Nay,” he said, “let it rest; let it rest.”

“I did not want to hurt your feelings, Master Cobbe,” said the parson; “but I thought it would be better for it and for thee. You must be growing richer than before.”

“Yes; and what good is it?” said the founder, bitterly. “Of what use is money to me? I only work and toil to keep my mind at rest. Nay, nay, I cannot build the old place up; let it be. Besides,” he added dryly, “Mother Goodhugh says it is cursed.”

“Hang Mother Goodhugh—or burn her,” cried the parson impetuously. “A wicked, cursing, old hag. She had better mend her ways, or Sir Thomas will be laying her by the heels. He swore he would months ago, but I persuaded him not. She had been following and abusing Mistress Anne.”

“Ay, poor soul—poor soul, she is mad from her grief, and it makes her curse. Ah! parson, many’s the time I could have gone about cursing too. Poor soul—poor soul! let her rest.”

“I see you have been very busy with the garden again.”

“Ay; it is getting to be what it was. The trees have shot forth once more, and the flowers bloom. She loved that garden, parson—dearly.”

“Ay; and the old house too, Master Cobbe. Build it up, man; build it up.”

“Nay, not a stone. It is cursed—cursed.”

“Bah! Stuff, man. Away with such folly. It is no more cursed than it is haunted, as the people say.”

The founder started, and gazed strangely at his friend.

“Do they say it is haunted?”

“Yes; such folly. Two or three people have sworn to me that they have heard shrieks.”

“Parson,” said the founder hoarsely, as he laid his hand on the other’s sleeve; “they are right; I once heard them too.”

“What?” said Master Peasegood, laughing, “the owls?”

“Nay, I should know the cry of an owl, man. It is not that. Time after time I’ve stood there in the forest, and heard the wild cry just at dark when everything is still.”

“Nay, nay,” said Master Peasegood, “the dead don’t cry for help, neither do the angels in heaven; and if there’s truth in all we believe, man, our little Mace’s looking down upon us, an angel among God’s best and dearest ones.”

The old man’s head went down upon his hand at this, and he sat in silence for some time, while, with his eyes misty and dim, Master Peasegood leaned back in his chair, and smoked with all his might.

The silence was broken by the founder holding out his hand to his visitor, and shaking it warmly.

“Thankye, parson, thankye,” he said. “What you say ought to be true; and I hope she forgives me for my vanity and pride.”

“Poor child! It was a mistake, Master Cobbe, but let it rest. They say our gay spark, Sir Mark, is going to comfort himself by wedding Mistress Anne.”

“Ay? Indeed?” said the founder. “I did hear something of the kind, but I paid little heed.”

“I hear it as a fact, Master Cobbe.”

“Well, let him,” said the founder. “He should be a rich man, too, by this time, for he has made money from me as well as I have from the King. Don’t talk of it, though; it makes me dwell upon the past.”

They smoked on for a time without speaking, and then, with a patient, piteous aspect in his face, the founder turned to his visitor.

“I’ve been a wicked man, parson,” he said.

“So we all are,” said Master Peasegood, bluffly. “I always sinned from a desire for the good things of this life. I love goodly food, and good ale, and good tobacco now; and I shall go on sinning to the end,” he added, taking a hearty draught.

“I have been harsh and hard, and I’ve not done my duty here, Master Peasegood; and these punishments have come upon me for my sins.”

“Stuff, stuff!” cried Master Peasegood. “I won’t sit and hear it. Don’t talk of your Maker as if he were some petty, revengeful man like us, ready to visit every little weakness upon our heads with a misfortune, or to pay us for being good boys with a slice of bread and honey. Out on such religious ideas as that, Master Cobbe, and think of your God as one who is great and good. Bah! It aggravates me to hear and see people fall down and worship the ugly image they have set up in their hearts, one that every work of the Creator gives the lie to for its falsity and cruel wrong. Bear your burden, Jeremiah Cobbe, like a man. It is not in us to know the ins and outs of God’s ways; and it is a wicked and impious sin for people to say this is a judgment, or that is a judgment, and to pretend to know what the All-Seeing thinks and does. You say you’ve been a wicked man, Master Cobbe.”

“Yes, yes,” said the founder sadly; “and I have but one hope now, and that is that I may see my darling once again.”

“Amen to that,” said Master Peasegood; “but, as to your wickedness, I wish every man was as wicked, and hot-tempered, and true-hearted, and generous, and frank, and industrious, and forgiving as thou art, Jeremiah Cobbe; and—Will you have that ale flagon filled again? Much talking makes me dry.”

The founder smiled, and called for Croftly’s wife, who replenished the flagon, bobbed a curtesy to the parson, and re-entered the cottage.

“I like you, Jeremiah Cobbe,” continued Master Peasegood, after setting down the flagon with a satisfied sigh; “but don’t be superstitious, man, like our sovereign master the King, who has written a book to hand down his wisdom to posterity.”

“Indeed!” said the founder, whose thoughts were evidently far away.

“Yes, indeed,” said Master Peasegood; “and it’s all about witches and warlocks and the like. That piece of idiot spawn has gotten itself down here into Sir Thomas’s hands; and, as I told thee, he was very near laying that foolish old woman Mother Goodhugh by the heels. Now she hates me like poison, because I laugh at her and tell the people she is a half-crazed old crone. Last time I saw her we quarrelled, for I told her she was a wretched old impostor, for cheating the poor people as she did. Ha! ha! ha! and then she defied and cursed me, and said she’d go to Father Brisdone and turn Roman Catholic. I told her to go, and he’d curse her for cursing, for it is his trade, and she has no right to handle such tools at all.”

“Poor weak woman,” said the founder. “She is more to be pitied than blamed. I suppose she thinks in her heart that I am the cause of all her woes.”

“Ay, poor soul, but it’s partly vanity, friend Cobbe. She likes to set up for a prophetess, a sort of diluted Deborah, and to make the people believe in her. There, you must go and see her. If I go to her, being the good man of the parish, she will have naught to say to me. Now, you being a wicked man, may have more influence than I.”

"I influence? Nay, man; she'll fall a cursing if I go nigh her cot."

"Let her curse. Her words won't hurt thee, man. Go to her, and give her money—thou hast enough—bid her get away far enough from this place to somewhere safe; and when there, tell her to live a decent life and forget her silly trickstering and stuff. It's a fine opportunity for thee, Jeremiah Cobbe. It's just the sort of revenge thou lik'st to take on an enemy. Go and pour coals of fire on her head, for I'm sure this place isn't safe for such as she."

"Would Sir Thomas imprison her?" said the founder.

"Sir Thomas is so good and honest a justice of the peace, and so great a lover of the words of his Majesty the King, who made him the baronet he is, that he would set up a stake, scatter Dame Beckley's dried simples and herbs around it, heap it with goodly faggots, and burn Mother Goodhugh for a witch while the Roehurst people would look on."

"Thinkest thou this, Master Peasegood?"

"I'm sure of it," said the parson, dashing down his pipe in his anger. "Jeremiah Cobbe, it makes me as mad as Moses to see what fools the people are. We have just got rid of the superstitions of Rome, sir, and we go at once and set up the golden calf of witchcraft, and worship it, from our ruler to the humblest peasant in his realm. By my word, Master Cobbe, an' I had had the two tables in my hands like the old prophet, I'd not have broken them on the rocks, but upon the thick-boned skulls of my erring folk."

"Not worship the idol—condemn it, Master Peasegood," said the founder, smiling.

"Well, but we believe it," cried the other. "Out upon us all, but we are sorry-fools."

"I'll go and do this thing, Master Peasegood," said the founder, after musing for a few minutes.

"That's right; I knew thou would'st."

“But maybe she will not go.”

“Then take her, like the angels did Lot of old, and thrust her out of the place. Tell her Roehurst will prove a Sodom to her if she does not go, for i’ faith she’ll go to the flames, in spite of all I can do or say.”

“I’ll go to her this very evening, Master Peasegood.”

“Then I will go my way,” cried the parson; and, paying one more attention to the flagon, he rose, shook hands, and left.

How Mother Goodhugh fared ill at Justice's Hands.

By chance it happened that Anne Beckley had extended her walk towards the woods and had strolled farther than she had intended. Fate led her into the narrow lane where she had rested in Gil Carr's arms when Mace and Sir Mark had been witnesses of the scene.

She smiled now as she seated herself upon the bank, and thought of the changes that had taken place, for she was shortly to become Mark Leslie's wife.

How the time had passed, she thought, and how cleverly she had won Sir Mark from his gloom and despondency to become at first grateful, then loving, and at last—so she believed—so infatuated with her, that she could do with him as she pleased.

If some unkind friend had told her that her father's money and estates had anything to do with the match, she would have rejected the suggestion with scorn, and then gone to her mirror, to examine the sit of her ruffle, to give a slight touch to her painted cheeks, and perhaps add another ornamental patch to her chin.

Sir Mark was in town now, preparing for the bridal, and Anne's heart was joyful within her, as she thought of the coming ceremony. For years she had been dreaming of and hoping for wedlock, and at last she was to be a wife—a lady of title—Dame Anne Leslie, and her eyes sparkled with the pleasure of the thought.

The spot she had chosen for her reverie, though, brought up thoughts that made her sigh. There, close by where she was seated, Gil Carr had held her in his arms; and she sighed as she recalled how fondly she believed that she had loved him. And where was he now?

A year had rolled by since he set sail, and no news of either him or his followers had reached Roehurst since; and as she thought of this the events of that terrible time came crowding back.

“Poor Mace!” she said, softly; “I am sorry I hated you so much; and poor Gil Carr, he was a proper youth. Alack! What change one lives to see!”

She felt half disposed to continue her walk, and go on as far as the Pool-house; but a slight shudder ran through her nerves at the thought. Somehow the ruins had a repelling influence upon her, and she shrank from going near, feeling that she had been to blame for what had taken place on that terrible night.

“I don’t think I’ll go,” she said softly; and she was about to rise and return, when she became aware that some one was standing close behind her, and, starting up, she found herself face to face with Mother Goodhugh, who had advanced as quietly as a cat.

“Mother Goodhugh!” she cried in a startled voice.

“Yes, my dearie, it be Mother Goodhugh. What can I do for thee, my beauty bird?”

“Nothing, mother,” replied Anne sharply. “Nothing, my dearie?” said the old woman laughing. “Nay, surely you want some help of the poor old woman who works to help you. Is it a new lover, my dear?”

“I have told thee I do not want anything, mother,” cried Anne peevishly.

“Nay, then, come on to my cottage, where we can talk. Thou has not been to see me for months and months.”

“Nay, mother, I’ll come no more. Good day, I must get me home.”

“Stay, child,” cried Mother Goodhugh, clutching at her dress; “I want to talk to thee of him. Come to my place.”

“Loose me this instant, mother,” cried Mistress Anne, indignantly. “How darest thou lay thy hands on me?”

“Only because we are sisters, dearie.”

“Sisters?”

“Ay, dearie; don’t we practise the art together. But hist, hist, come to my cottage and let us talk.”

“Not a step will I go,” cried Anne, angrily.

“Nay, is it so? Ah, she has gotten what she wanted by my help—a brave, fine husband, and now she throws me by.”

“Cease thy talk about those childish follies. I am sick of them.”

“Ay, child, yes; thou art sick of them now, but when thou wast hungry for thy love nothing was too good for Mother Goodhugh then.”

“Out upon thee! Did I not pay thee well for thy silly mummeries?”

“Pay me well?” cried Mother Goodhugh. “Nay; what were a few paltry gold pieces for such a husband as I gained for thee?”

“You gained for me?” cried Anne, contemptuously.

“Ay, to be sure, I gained for thee, mistress; and now thou hast him safe I be thrown aside. Not once hast thou been to me these many months.”

“I tell thee I have done with such follies,” cried Anne contemptuously. “I have paid thee, and there the matter ends.”

“Oh, nay, mistress, it does not. Thou hast thy lover, and so had poor Mace Cobbe, and the wedding was to be next day; but I prophesied that she should not have the man of thy choice, and what came to pass?”

“Mother Goodhugh,” said Anne, turning pale, “if I thought thou had’st anything to do with that misfortune at the Pool thou should’st be handed over to my father for punishment according to thy deserts.”

“And would she who helped me be punished too?”

"If thou had'st accomplices, yes."

"Sweet mistress, then we will go to prison, thou and I, together, for we made our plans to stay the wedding of Mace Cobbe."

"It is false; I had nothing to do with thy plans," cried Anne excitedly.

"Had'st thou not better come to my cottage, mistress?" said Mother Goodhugh.

"Nay, I have done with thee and thy ways. I'll come there no more."

"But thou wilt pay me for winning thee a husband."

"Pay thee?" cried Anne contemptuously. "What should I pay thee?"

"A hundred golden pounds, mistress," cried the old woman, whose eyes sparkled at the very mention of so much money.

"A hundred pence," cried Anne. "Go, get you gone, old crone. I'll never part with a piece again for thy follies."

"Have a care, mistress," cried the old woman excitedly, for her anger was getting the better of her reason. "Thou art not Mark Leslie's wife as yet, and some accident might happen to thee, too."

"Mother Goodhugh," cried Anne, "have a care. Thou art a marked woman."

"I will have a care, my dearie, that if I am to suffer, thou shalt suffer too. I can place thee in prison if I am touched, so beware—beware."

"Vile old hag," cried Anne angrily; "Speak a word against me, and you shall bitterly repent it."

"Rue it, eh! We'll see; we'll see," cried the old woman, shaking her stick after the girl, as she hurried back, uneasy enough in her mind to suffer acutely, for Mother Goodhugh might throw obstacles in the way. She shuddered at the bare thought of what had happened on the eve of

Mace's wedding, but determined to risk all.

"If she speaks, no one will believe her," cried Anne laughing. "She shall be seized for a witch, and she dare not charge me with helping her, for if she did it would only be accusing herself, and that she dare not do. Neither dare I let her be at liberty till I am dear Mark's wife. After this she may do her worst."

Full of this intent—for now that the old woman had obtruded herself once more upon her path, she really feared her—Anne hurried back towards the Moat, feeling anything but secure while Mother Goodhugh was at liberty. Her mind had been too much occupied of late during Sir Mark's long visits to trouble herself about the old woman, and whatever thought she had had of the terrible night at the Pool-house had been gradually allowed to grow dull. The great thing had been that the wedding had been stayed, but, now that she thought the matter over, she felt sure that Mother Goodhugh had been guilty of some desperate deed; and to bring it home to herself—if the old woman would do such a thing for gain, might she not do it for revenge?

Anne shuddered and her brow grew cloudy as she felt that she could not set Mother Goodhugh aside as one that she need not fear. Sir Mark was not yet her husband, and what if some terrible catastrophe were to happen to prevent the wedding.

"I should go mad," she muttered; and she paused to think whether it would be better to try a bribe.

"She wants too much money, and if I did silence her now she would be pestering me with claims for more, and threaten and harass me. No, mother; you have opened the battle again, so now let us see which of us is the stronger."

Hurrying to her father's room lest her mind should change, Anne had a long colloquy with him, introducing the subject of witchcraft incidentally.

"Sir Mark tells me, father, that his Majesty strongly approves of efforts being made to keep down witches in this country."

“Yes, my dear, so I heard Sir Mark say,” replied Sir Thomas, putting on his carplike visage, and gaping and panting at his daughter, as his eyes stood out wide and round.

“Why should you not do something to commend yourself to the King?”

“But what could I do, child?” said Sir Thomas.

“True, there is nothing you could, unless you arrested Mother Goodhugh.”

“You forbad it once, but the very thing!” cried Sir Thomas, eagerly.

“But she is not a witch,” said Anne, dubiously.

“Nay, my child, but, according to his Majesty’s book, she has all the signs of a witch in her.”

“Indeed, father?”

“Yes, child, I have studied it all well, and can show you a dozen points wherein she answers to a witch. Anne, my child, she shall be seized and examined.”

“I don’t think I would, father. Such women are sure to say more than is quite true, and spit their venom at random. Better let her rest in peace.”

“Nay, child, she shall be examined, and, if she says too much, she shall be gagged. I am not a man to be trifled with by a known and practised witch.”

Next day Mother Goodhugh returned to her cottage from one of her many absences in the forest, full of bitterness against Mistress Anne.

“Does she think she be going to play with me?” muttered the old woman. “Not she. I be not frightened of her threats now. Let her speak if she dares. I could tell strange tales against her if I liked, and I’ll be paid. One hundred golden pounds she shall give me, or she shall not marry

him; nay, that she shall not. Mother Goodhugh is stronger than they think." She chuckled, as she walked sharply up and down the little room, shaking her stick and then thumping the end upon the floor. "Nice tales could I tell. Mistress Anne Beckley would look well as my companion, and ha-ha-ha! ho-ho-ho! What would the fine, gay, gallant Sir Mark say to his sweet if he knew of the tricks and plans she had carried out. There would be an end to the wedding, and she dare not speak. What do you want here?"

"I came to see thee, Mother Goodhugh," said the founder, who had just raised the latch, and stood in the doorway.

"To see me," cried the old woman, fiercely. "What! hast come to be cursed again? But no, no, no; go away, man, go away, away," she said hurriedly, as she fell a trembling. "I don't want thee here."

"Mother Goodhugh," said the founder, sadly, "thou hast always looked upon me as an enemy."

"Yes, a bitter, cruel enemy," she cried, flinching from him. Then, with a malignant grin, she added, "But thou hast had to suffer too, Master Cobbe, and to know what it is to gnaw thy heart with pain."

"Yes, yes, woman, I know all that," said the founder, hastily; "but let us not talk of the by-gone, but of the future."

"What is my future to thee, Mas' Jeremiah Cobbe?" cried the old woman, suspiciously. "Go thy ways, and let me go mine."

"I came to tell thee that there is danger for thee, Mother Goodhugh. They say that thou'rt a witch, and I came to bid thee go hence to some place where thou art not known."

"Who will harm me?" cried the old woman.

"Maybe Sir Thomas will have thee put in prison."

"She daren't do it—she daren't do it," cried the old woman, fiercely. "I defy her—I defy her."

"The law dare do a good deal, Mother Goodhugh," said the founder, sadly. "But take my advice: go from hence. I have ready for thee twenty gold pounds; they will keep thee for some time, and when they are gone I will give thee more. But go, and go at once, before it is too late."

The old woman's fingers were held out crooked and trembling to grasp the money, her eyes twinkling with eagerness; but ere the founder could place the coins therein she seemed to make a tremendous effort over herself, and snatched back her hands.

"Nay," she cried, "I will not go. Thou for one would'st get rid of me, and Mistress Anne hath sent thee, but I'll not be baulked of my revenge."

"I came not from Mistress Anne, good mother. It was from a talk with Master Peasegood that I came to-day."

"Yes, yes, I know," cried the old woman exultingly, "from Mas' Peasegood, her friend. So I am to be sent away on a beggar's pittance, and forego my revenge. She be a clever girl, but she can't outwit me."

"I understand not thy sayings, mother," said the founder, wearily; "I only bid thee get hence, for the sake of thy poor dead husband and thy boy."

The founder said the words in all kindness, but they transformed Mother Goodhugh into a perfect fury; her eyes flashed, the foam stood upon her lips, and, mouthing and gibbering in impotent rage, she pointed to the door.

"Go," she shrieked at last, "and tell them who sent thee that Mother Goodhugh will stay in her place and defy them. Bid Mistress Anne have a care, and tell her that if Mother Goodhugh stands at the stake it will be back to back with the mincing, painting, and patching madam who came and bade her curse and destroy her rival at the Pool-house; who planned its destruction; who is a worse witch than I. Tell her all this, for I'll stay and defy her. Bid her do her worst."

"Silence, woman!" cried the founder, who gazed at her, horrified and

startled at this outburst; “thou art mad.”

“Mad? Ay, mad, if thou wilt; but wait and see. Tell her I’ll stay—tell her I’ll stay and defy her. She don’t know Mother Goodhugh yet, Jeremiah Cobbe; so wait and see.”

“I shall not have long to wait, then,” said the founder, gloomily. “It is thy own fault, woman, and God forgive thee for thy cursing and thy lies.”

Mother Goodhugh had literally driven him from her room, to stand at the doorway fiercely gesticulating and threateningly waving her stick; but, as the founder spoke and drew back from her, a complete change came over the old woman: her eyes grew fixed, her jaw dropped, the stick fell from her hand, and she clung to the door-post, turning of a deadly white, for at that moment Sir Thomas Beckley, looking red, important, and accompanied by the village constable, a couple of assistants with a cart, and some dozen or two of the people, came slowly to the door.

The rustic constable held a document in his hand, which he tried to read to the woman, and dismally failed from want of erudition, even though prompted by Sir Thomas. He mumbled out, though, something about the heinous sin of witchcraft; and sovereign lord and King.

Then thrusting the document into his rough doublet, he caught the old woman by the wrist.

“No, no,” she shrieked in agony, all her defiance gone, as she found herself face to face with the horrible reality. “No, no, I will not go.”

“Come, thou must, Mother Goodhugh,” said the constable; “and I warn thee that if thou begin’st any cursing against me and my men it will be the worse for thee.”

“I will not go; I am innocent, Sir Thomas. Pray, Sir Thomas, don’t let him. A poor weak widow woman. Pray, pray don’t.”

“An anointed witch thou art,” said the justice, pompously. “Away with her.”

“Nay, nay, Sir Thomas,” cried the founder. “She is no witch; only a silly, half-mad creature.”

“Yes, that he right,” cried Mother Goodhugh, clinging frantically to one of the doorposts, “mad—mad with trouble, good Sir Thomas.”

“Nay, woman, thy witchcrafts have stunk in my nostrils this many a day, and there is a long list of crimes for thee to expiate at the stake.”

“Shame, Sir Thomas!” cried the founder, indignantly; “if any one has cause against her it is I.”

“Yes, yes, good Sir Thomas, hear him. I have cursed him more than any. Oh, pray, pray.”

“Pray,” cried the justice; “pray to thy familiars, woman! Take her along.”

“This is monstrous,” cried the founder, indignantly.

“Hold thy peace, Master Cobbe,” said Sir Thomas, impatiently; “and if thou dost interfere it will be at thy peril. Take her away, men, take her away.”

“No, no! no, no!” shrieked the horrified woman, before whose affrighted face the faggot and stake already loomed. “Mas’ Cobbe, save me—for pity’s sake, save me. I be not a witch. I only cursed in the naughtiness of my heart. Help me, Mas’ Cobbe; for thy dear child’s sake, help me, and I’ll tell thee all. I will not go. I will not go.”

The founder sprang forward to her help, but he was unarmed, and Sir Thomas drew his sword and placed himself before the prisoner.

“I warn thee, Master Cobbe,” he cried, “that this is a legal seizure. Stand back, sir, stand back. Quick, men, do your duty.”

It was a horrible scene, for the old woman clung to her door, and had to be literally torn away by the men, who, adding coarseness to the superstition of their superiors, felt no mercy for one whom they looked

upon as being leagued with the powers of ill.

And now that the wise woman's reign was over, and she was held to be harmless, those who had feared and sought counsel of her rose up to spit on the shivering form that was being dragged along the ground towards the tail of the cart. For we were a fine and manly race in the good old times, and those who represented us at Roehurst made no scruple about reviling and kicking the quivering, helpless creature, who struggled hard as she was dragged by the wrists, her clothes torn, her hair dishevelled, and her old white face looking from one to the other for the help that none would give.

"Out upon the witch!" they shrieked and yelled, drowning the poor wretch's hoarse cries for mercy. "Burn her! Burn her!" rose in chorus; and the founder strove hard to reach her, but he was kept back by the increasing crowd, for the news that Mother Goodhugh was to be taken for a witch soon spread, and men, women, and children came panting up to join in execrating the helpless wretch.

Faint and exhausted, they bound her hands behind her back and her ankles tightly together, before, amidst tremendous shouting and yelling, she was lifted by four strong men, and literally thrown into, the cart, which was then set in motion, with Sir Thomas following behind with his sword drawn, and the people going before and crowding after, as the wheels sank down first on one side in the ruts, then on the other, revealing the wretched woman, who was now goaded to desperation, and had struggled up into a kneeling position, which she could hardly maintain for the rolling of the cart.

Every time she was nearly thrown down the crowd yelled with delight: and on some rustic genius throwing a clod of earth at her, his example was followed, and the poor wretch knelt there cowering from the shower of missiles sent into the cart.

At last she contrived to get her wrists loosed from the ill-tied cords; and, holding the cart-side with one hand, she raised the other, and shrieked out anathema after anathema against her persecutors, uttering such horrible curses against them that the less bold shrank away and the

stoutest began to quail. But Mother Goodhugh's reign of cursing was nearly at an end; for, as the founder indignantly watched the proceedings, a great lad close by him picked up and hurled a lump of sand-rock at the wretched creature, striking her full in the temple, and, amidst a shout of triumph, the miserable woman fell stunned and bleeding to the bottom of the cart.

"That were a good hurl, master," cried the lout, with a broad grin.

"Yes," said the founder, fiercely, "and so was that!"

As he spoke, he struck the great, broad-faced fellow straight in the cheek, and he rolled over into one of the cart-ruts, whilst the procession with Mother Goodhugh, fortunately insensible now to pain, turned a corner of the winding lane, and passed out of the founder's sight.

How Roehurst kept Fête for a Wedding and a Death.

Truly Satan must have been reigning upon earth in full fig when it was found necessary to execute thirty of his disciples at one time in Edinburgh. As for poor Mrs Hicks and her little daughter, aged nine, who were hanged at Huntingdon in 1716, they might have rejoiced at the opportunity of getting out of such a world of fools and ignorance. They must have been great sinners, though, for they had sold their souls to the devil, and—crowning atrocity!—they had raised a storm, and the recipe is handed down to posterity, for the *modus operandi* was "pulling off their stockings and making a lather of soap!"

If for such a crime as this a tender child of nine could be punished with death in Christian England in those salutary days, there can be no wonder that Mother Goodhugh's condemnation was pretty sure. She was the known witch of the neighbourhood, and those who had feared her, sought her help, and paid her, were among the first to give evidence against the repository of their secrets.

Jeremiah Cobbe strove hard to save her, and so did Master Peasegood; but two men in an out-of-the-way part of England could not

stem the tide of popular opinion, as it set strong against the wretched woman. In her rage and hate she strove to drag down Mistress Anne as well, but in so doing made a bitter enemy of one who was strong in court favour. For on hearing of the accusation Sir Mark lost no opportunity of fighting against "this notorious witch."

But Mother Goodhugh was not condemned without ample test and trial, fallen as she had under the care of a famous witch-finder and judge of the day, who came down to the nearest town by royal command to investigate the case.

The wretched woman was put through a course of torture. She suffered the pin test for the witch's mark. This failing, she next had her thumbs and toes tied together, she was wrapped in a sheet, and in the presence of plenty of spectators thrown into a pool.

As a certain amount of air remained in the sheet, and the water was some time in penetrating it, the poor woman naturally enough floated, amidst the execrations of the crowd, among whom were some twenty or thirty of Sir Mark's men.

None but a witch could float, so it was said; so after a final test, in which Mother Goodhugh failed to repeat the Lord's prayer without hesitation, her trial proceeded, and she was condemned to be burnt at the stake in her own village a week after sentence.

There was not much mercy shown in those days, and, though the fair rounded cheeks of Anne Beckley turned a little pale when Sir Mark brought her the news, they flushed directly after, for she felt that she would be freed from a persecutor who would give her no rest, and who might cause her trouble with her husband after the first few months of matrimonial life.

Besides, Anne Beckley argued with a shudder, the old woman had done strange things, and, with the superstition in her nature ready to accept it, she argued that if living she might curse her to her injury. True she might curse her now, but, as her accusations had been set aside as malicious, it was quite possible that her evil genius had deserted her as

he did those who became unfortunate, and, as she had risked so much and gained only defiance, Anne Beckley determined to go on to the end.

It was a strange mixture, but the preparations for the wedding of Mistress Anne Beckley and for the execution of Mother Goodhugh went on side by side, in spite of the further efforts of Master Peasegood and the founder, who even went so far as to make a journey to London to seek the King's clemency. Of course without avail.

From his position as maker of his Majesty's Ordnance, Master Cobbe succeeded in getting an audience, to be received well, told that he was a good man, that his guns were strong, but that he knew naught of witchcraft.

"Read my book, Master Cobbe, read my book," said his Majesty; and Jeremiah Cobbe had to bow himself out with the stout parson, who was perspiring with anger.

"I'm a loyal and I hope religious man, Master Cobbe," said the latter excitedly; "I fear God and I honour the King; but all the same, Master Cobbe, I vow and declare that his Majesty is the damndest fool I ever saw, and may the Lord forgive me for swearing."

"Yes," said the founder, sadly. "Well, old friend, we have done all we can, so let us stay away till they have wreaked their silly vengeance on that poor, mad soul."

"No, no, thank God!" said Master Peasegood, "they can only wreak it on her body, my friend, and as to staying here—nay, that must not be. I have no love for the weak old creature, who spent her time in mummery and silly cursing, but my place is by her side to ask forgiveness with her and a painless passage to the mercy-seat."

"Ay, parson, thou art right, and I'll join thee in thy prayer, for there should be mercy for one who men declare shall have her hellish flames before she dies."

"I don't quite like that speech, Master Cobbe, but you mean quite

right. Now, good friend, take me to some hostel and give me ale, or I shall faint here by the way. Nay, I'll not. It is choler. I'll be blooded instead, a good nine ounces, or I shall have a fit."

They were stout, strong posts that were set up outside the Moat gates to bear the arch of evergreens and flowers, but it was a stronger one in front of the cottage where Mother Goodhugh had spent her days, and, while men piled last year's faggots and heaped up charcoal taken from the founder's dogwood stacks, others cut down branches of yew and holly and gathered bundles of heather and golden gorse, and the preparations for the wedding feast went on.

"Ah, parson," cried Sir Mark, from the back of one of Sir Thomas's stout cobs, as he rode along beside fair Mistress Anne, who was mounted on a handsome jennet, "I have not seen thee for days. Art ready to tie our nuptial knot?"

"No, Sir Mark," said Master Peasegood, sternly. "I am going to pray beside the dying and the dead."

"What does he mean—the insolent fool?" cried Sir Mark, angrily.

"Truth, love, I cannot tell," said Mistress Anne; but in her heart of hearts she felt a sickening sensation, and would have given anything that the execution or the coming wedding were to take place elsewhere.

"As he will, sweetest," said Sir Mark, tenderly, and they rode on, receiving salutations from all they passed; "there are plenty of priests who will be glad to make us one; and only think, love—only two days now."

Anne Beckley rode on in silence for some time, thinking. Her betrothed laughed and chatted gaily, and truly they were a handsome pair; but the girl's heart was ill at ease, and at last, being bantered by Sir Mark upon her silence, she leaned towards him in a quiet glade of the forest, and, laying her hand upon his shoulder, offered her lips to his long clinging kiss.

“I have a favour to ask, love,” she said.

“Ask favours from now till night, and thou shalt have them all,” he cried.

“It is but one,” faltered Anne; “our wedding.”

“I would it were over,” cried Sir Mark, eagerly; “but what of it, bright eyes?”

“I like not the day,” said Anne, checking her horse’s pace so that she could cling to her companion.

“And why not?” he asked.

“I like it not for my sake and thine,” she said in a low tone.

“Let’s hear the reason on thy part,” said Sir Mark, laughing.

“It is the day they burn that wicked woman; and it troubles me that we should go to church at such a time.”

“The day of a good deed, love,” he said. “Now the other, for my sake.”

“Have you not thought,” she said, pressing closer to him, heedless of the fact that they were watched.

“I thought? Yes, that it is the most blessed day in the calendar.”

“Nay; but have you not thought what day it is?”

“Not I. Saint Somebody-or-another’s—some Christian martyr’s, perhaps; and we’ll give him a burnt sacrifice of bad witch to satisfy his manes.”

“Mark, it is the anniversary of the day that was to have seen you a husband; me a broken-hearted girl.”

Sir Mark started and changed colour. He was troubled, for it seemed

a bad augury that such a day should have been chosen, but he lightly put it aside.

“Never mind, love; it was an accident, and can make no difference now. Besides, the matter is settled, and if we picked the days over we should find each the anniversary of some troubled time.”

Anne Beckley was disappointed, but she made no more objection, and they rode soon after through the avenue and over the bridge, beneath which the great carp gaped and stared with their big round eyes in unconscious imitation of their master, the wise dispenser of King James’s justice, and keeper of the peace.

How Mistress Anne watched and feared.

Early morning, as bright and glowing autumn time as ever shone over the weald of Sussex. The harvest was gathered in; the trees were heavy beneath the red and golden crop of apples, and in hedgerow and plantation the brown and cream-husked nuts peered out in clusters from the leafy stubs.

There was a suspicion here and there of the coming fall, but only in bright touches of beauty—golds, and russets, and reds—bloody crimson, and orange scarlet, where the sun-kissed leaves yet burned beneath the caresses of the ardent god. The sky above was of the richest, purest blue, and the eye rested on naught but beauty, so long as it kept to nature, and not to art, for winding along the narrow lane towards Roehurst was a procession of armed men, preceding and following a rough country tumbril, drawn by a clumsy horse. The load was apparently a heap of shabby garments, dropped in one corner of the cart.

But the crowd that pressed upon the armed men, striving to get a glimpse of the interior of the vehicle, could see that the bundle of clothes in the cart moved slightly from time to time, lifting a thin white hand and letting it fall heavily once more; and as they buzzed, and talked, and shouted to one another, they made out further that there was a grey head raised from the heap, and a white, scared face looked round partly in

wonder, partly seeking for pity, as its owner seemed to realise her position, and then crouched lower and lower as she heard shouts and voices crying out the words, "Mother Goodhugh! Witch! The stake, the stake!"

The escort took the pressure of the eager little crowd very good-humouredly, but had to keep waving the sight-seers back, or some would have been trampled beneath the horse's feet, and as it was the procession was greatly delayed.

"I don't believe they'll burn her after all," said one rough specimen of a peasant to another.

"Nay, they will. Stake be all ready, and faggots enough to burn a dozen such witches as old Mother there."

"I'll believe it when I see it, lad. See if she don't go off in a flash, or else make the rain come so as the faggots won't burn. Nay, lad, she won't be done for yet. Look there. Did'st see her wicked old eyes glowering round when she raised her head? Don't let her look at thee, or she'll put a curse in thy face."

"Ay, but she be a wicked looking one, and it will be a glad riddance for Roehurst when she be gone, for she did naught but curse."

"Mas' Cobbe ought to be glad to see her burnt, for she's cursed him oft enough, poor soul."

"But why don't they make haste? I want to see the burning, and then get back to the wedding games."

"Oh, they won't wed till Mother Goodhugh's all in ash, lad. See, there be the bridegroom. He be going to see it done."

"But what be they stopping for?"

"Don't know," said the other, climbing up the bank and holding on by the branch of a tree. "Why, it be parson come, and he be getting into the cart with Mother Goodhugh. Say, look there! He be gone down on his

knees aside her, and takes her hand. Look out, parson, as she don't fly at thee like a cat."

But there was no cat-like spring in Mother Goodhugh, for torture and starvation had reduced her so that the little life left in her was likely to flutter away before the torch was placed to the faggots. As Master Peasegood laboriously clambered into the cart and knelt beside her, he took one of the poor wretch's wasted hands in his, and she raised her head to look up at him half-wonderingly, before letting it fall once more, and remaining apparently nerveless and flaccid, waiting for the end.

The procession passed within fifty yards of the Moat gate, where Anne Beckley was waiting—not to cry out in reviling tones against the wretched woman, but to see her pass, hidden awhile amidst the dense evergreens, and trembling lest she should be seen.

Anne Beckley's heart beat fast as the procession came nearer and nearer, and she crouched down trembling as she fancied that Mother Goodhugh must see her; while the cold dew stood upon her brow as she waited for the curses the old woman would fling upon her head.

But there was no curse hurled at her; there was the trampling of feet, and the buzz of many voices, beating hoofs, and grinding wheels coming nearer and nearer, till all appeared to stay close by, and Anne's heart seemed to stop its pulse as well.

She had come to see her enemy, and would gladly have witnessed the execution, only that she dared not express a wish so to do; and even now, so great was her trepidation, that in place of gazing at the broken, half-dead object in the cart, she shrank down lower and lower till the leaves completely sheltered her head.

What were they stopping for? Were they going to bring Mother Goodhugh there?

No: there had been no stoppage at all; it was only her fancy. They were going slowly on, and that was Master Peasegood's voice praying beside the wretched creature so near her end.

The buzzing and trampling seemed to grow louder and the grating of the wheels more defined, till it seemed to Anne as if they would never pass away; but they grew fainter at last, and after some ten minutes of agony she hurried out of the clump of shrubs, and hastened to her room, too faint and heartsick to think of dressing for the ceremony to come.

Sir Mark and his men would be at the execution she knew, and when he returned it would be a signal to her that her enemy was no more, and she told herself that she would be able to go to the little church with a lighter heart.

In imagination she followed the procession to the narrow lane, and up to the front of Mother Goodhugh's cottage, where the great stake had been placed. She saw the wretched woman bound there, the faggots fired, and seemed to hear her shrieks as she waved her hands and wildly cursed those around. Now she strained at the chain, and strove to tear it away as it grew red hot and burned into her thin white flesh, while the flames rose higher and higher, the faggots crackled, and she even fancied that she could hear the shouting of the people.

How the smoke curled up, half suffocating her at times, and making her hang her head as if dead! Then it was swept away, and the flames rose higher, half hiding the hideously contorted face with a ruddy lurid veil. The flames fluttered and danced, and seemed to Anne as if rejoicing at their task of purifying the earth from the presence of a witch. Then the smoke rose higher, till it formed a heavy canopy above the stake, while the flames played wildly on its lower surface.

Again the flames opened to reveal the figure of Mother Goodhugh. She had ceased to curse now, and with blackened, outstretched hands was appealing to her executioners to set her free.

As she did so Anne started forward with a wild cry.

"It is too horrible—too horrible!" she shrieked. "Father, father, save her before it is too late!" and then, overpowered by the imaginary scene she had conjured up, she tottered a step or two, and sank fainting upon the floor.

How the Witch-Faggots were fired.

The scene at the execution was different from that which Anne Beckley painted in her mind. The cart, with its helpless burden, went slowly on, bumping up and down through the ruts of the narrow lane, and the armed escort patiently bore the pressure of the increasing crowd. For every hamlet for ten or fifteen miles round had sent its occupants to see the double show, and every bank and hillock had its gazing faces; while, as the procession drew near to the stake, with its terrible adjuncts, the cart had some difficulty in getting through.

The crowd gave way, however, to the escort, who pushed them back till a circle was made about the stake, in the midst of which stood Sir Thomas, Sir Mark, and the armed men.

As the cart stopped, Master Peasegood descended, wiping his bare wet forehead, and stood gazing with pallid face as four of the men pressed forward and roughly lifted the condemned woman to the earth.

“Be gentle, men, be gentle,” he cried, in tones of remonstrance. “It is a woman with whom ye have to deal.”

“A witch—a foul witch—thou mean’st,” said one of the men; and there was a yell of execration from the crowd.

“Silence!” roared Master Peasegood, furiously. “Are ye brute beasts, or men, women, and children? Ah, Master Cobbe, are you there?” he cried. “Can nothing be done to save this poor creature here?”

“Yes,” said the founder, sternly. “I protest against this terrible outrage in our midst, and I call upon you, good people, to help me to stop it.”

There was a murmur in the crowd that gathered round; but it was the murmur of a hungry beast fearful of being robbed of its prey, and not a hand was raised to help the speaker.

“Master Cobbe,” cried Sir Mark, sternly, “if thou art not mad, hold thy

peace, and let the King's commands be done."

"Water, water," gasped the wretched woman, looking appealingly round.

"Nay, Jezebel, thou shalt have fire," said Sir Thomas. "It is more purifying than water for such as thou."

There was a burst of laughter at the coarse jest, but Master Peasegood strode into the cottage, took a rough earthenware vessel, and, parting the crowd, filled the mug from the clear cold spring, and held it to the wretched woman's lips.

She drank with avidity, and then pressed her thin white lips to the hand that held the vessel, while her eyes gave a grateful look at the face.

"Bless you," she said, in a hoarse whisper, and her lips kept moving quickly.

"Quick," cried Sir Mark; "we are wasting time," and four of the men seized and carried the trembling creature to the stake, where a chain was hanging ready to bind her fast.

But as it happened there was the chain but no means of fastening it, and impatiently throwing it aside they bound her with a cart-rope so that she was upright, for her limbs refused their task, and she had to be held as the rope was twisted round.

"Mas' Cobbe, Mas' Cobbe!" cried Mother Goodhugh, in a hoarse wail.

"Nay, go not nigh to her, Master Cobbe," cried Sir Thomas. "She will only curse thee again."

For answer the founder, who could not tear himself from the spot, strode towards the stake.

"I cannot save thee, Mother Goodhugh," he said, hoarsely.

“Nay, but thou did'st try,” said the poor creature, piteously. “Try and forgive me, Mas' Cobbe, for I be a wicked wretch. I have cursed thee, and the curse has fallen back on me. Mace, thy child, be—”

“Stand aside, Master Cobbe,” cried Sir Mark, imperiously. “Now, knaves, do your work quickly. Round with the faggots. Pile them higher, man, the brushwood first and the charcoal last. Quick, we are wasting time.”

The founder and Master Peasegood were thrust aside, and a part of the crowd pushed forward to help to build up from a stack at hand the brushwood and faggots round the wretched woman, who hung forward with drooping head, apparently insensible now from weakness and dread; and at last all was ready.

A deep silence fell upon all. The morning sun shone more brightly than ever on the gay autumn woodlands, and the eager crowd that, open-mouthed and staring, awaited the fiery trial.

“Will she screech?” whispered one matron, who had brought a child in arms to see the show, and who kept handing her little one clusters of the great blackberries that grew so plentifully upon the banks, “because if she do I shouldn't like to stay and hear her cry aloud.”

“Nay,” said another, “she'll not squeal much; she'll take something to keep away the pains.”

“Think she will?”

“Ay, that she will. She be an anointed witch. See how she lives. You never go to her place but there be meal in plenty, and sugar and bacon too. Where do it come from, eh?”

“Nay, I d'now.”

“She makes it all with spells, and calls up plenty for what she wants. Eh, but she be a clever one. I've met her o' nights in the forest, going crouching along; and one night John Piper see her with a white sperrit, going along together hand in hand.”

“Eh, did he? What did he say?”

“He never said a word; he dare not; but went down flat upon his face, and laid there till she’d gone.”

“I’d ha’ spoke to her if it had been me.”

“Nay, thou wouldn’t. It be too dreadful. Maybe she’d ha’ put a spell upon thee, and cursed thee like, and then thou’d ha’ pined away like Susan Harron. You marn’t speak to a witch when she be out o’ nights.”

“But dost think she do conjure up meal, and sugar, and bacon?”

“Why, could she get ’em if she didn’t?”

“I don’t believe about the white ghost.”

“Eh, but it be true enough,” said another. “Why, I used to see the old witch go o’ nights to dig about the Pool-house, and Mas’ Tom Croftly said, when I telled him, that it was to get burned bones to make spells with. I see her night after night, when the stones was smoking still.”

“Eh, she be witch enough,” said another. “See how she said that the Pool-house would be blown up some day, and never be builded again. I think she goes with one o’ they owls, as flits about o’ nights.”

“Shouldn’t wonder,” said the woman with i the child; “and, if she do screech, see if it bean’t just like they call.”

“She’ll fly out o’ the fire like one o’ they, see if she don’t, and her wings won’t even be singed. I wonder whether she’ll come back again, and live about here like an owl. If she do I shan’t stay i’ this neighb’rood to please nobody, so there.”

“Nay, she won’t fly away,” said one who had not yet spoken. “She’ll go down into the earth like, and underneath or into the rocks. Frank Goodsell told me he saw her go right into a solid piece o’ rockstone one night as he crossed the forest—she was there one moment, and the next

moment she was gone—and became so frightened that he ran away.”

“But he ought to ha’ searched the place.”

“So he did next day, for he was ’shamed o’ being scared by an old woman.”

“Yes; and what did he see?”

“Solid stones, and not a hole big enough for a mouse to get into and hide. She just touched the rock with her stick, and it opened and she went in, and it shut up after her. That be a real witch, that be.”

“It be a terrifying thing to think of,” said another. “Only think of going into the earth and stopping for days, like a corpse.”

“Nay, but she didn’t do that?”

“Eh, but she did, for Frank Goodsell went every day to her cottage to see if she was there, pretending he wanted a charm for a pain in his wife’s leg; and he had to go ten days before he found her back, and then she was as quiet and smiling as could be, only she looked white and very terrifying to see.”

“Ah, lots of us wondered how she used to live. She’ll be back there soon; you see, they’ll never get her to burn; and, if they do, she’ll harnt the place, and make it bad for everybody. I’m not going to throw a stone at her, poor soul.”

“Poor soul, indeed, why she beant got one. She sold it to old what’s-his-name long ago.”

“Eh, but it be very horrid, said the woman with the child; and I half wish I had not come to see her burned to death.”

“She won’t burn.”

“Nay,” said another, “it be very terrifying; but she’ll be dead ’fore they burn her, if they don’t be smart. Think of it, though: Mother Goodhugh

going to be burned for a witch.”

“I don’t quite like the old woman to be burnt. How wist she looks!” said the young mother, as she stared at the preparations.

“Hold thy tongue, do,” said another; “the country be better without her.”

“Ay, it was time something was done now the holy father’s gone, and Parson Peasegood won’t do naught to exorcise the witch.”

“You went to him, didn’t a?”

“Ay, I went to him and told him o’ Mother Goodhugh’s doings, and how she put a spell on our cow, and evil-wished neighbour Lewin’s boy.”

“What did he say?”

“Laughed at me and puffed smoke in my face. ‘Go to,’ says he, ‘for a fool. Thou must get some one to sew some more buttons on thee. Mother Goodhugh be no witch.’”

“Did he say that?”

“Ay, that he did, and when Betsy Goodsell saw the white sperrit o’ Sweet Mace, in the wood near the high rocks and went and asked parson to lay it, he got in such a rage that Betsy had to go.”

“She should ha’ took him an offering and then he would.”

“She did. She took him a two-pound lump o’ the fresh butter from her cow after putting a lump o’ salt i’ the churn to keep out the witch, and told him what she wanted done, and he ups with the butter and throws it at her, and it stuck on the door-post till Mistress Hilberry come and took it off; and when she heard what was wanted she said Parson ought to do it, and then he called her a silly fool.”

“What did she want Parson to do?”

“To do, why, to lay the spirit that kept walking uneasily night after night. Ay, and it keeps walking now, as a dozen Roehurst folk could tell, only they won’t speak about it for fear of doing themselves ill.”

“What did Betsy want him to do?”

“Why, just go and cut a piece o’ turf off her grave about a hand-breadth long and a hand-breadth wide, and lay it on the holy table in the church, and after that be done the spirit rests and doesn’t trouble people any more.”

“He might ha’ done that,” said the young mother. “I should say it would be wise to get a bit off Mother Goodhugh’s grave by-and-by to keep her from walking.”

“Eh, but you’ll never find grass grow upon her grave, lass. It will always be black and scathed like.”

“Nay, they’ll never bury her in no grave. She’ll be scattered in dust and ashes to the four winds o’ heaven.”

“Or the other place,” said one of the women, sententiously, and then they all watched the preparations.

“Hush! Look!” cried the young mother in an excited whisper; and a strange murmur ran through the crowd as, at a sign from Sir Thomas, whose florid face was blanched, and blotched with livid patches, a man ran into the cottage with a rough torch.

Master Peasegood saw that the end had come, and, pressing against the pile of faggots which reached up round the victim’s neck, he reached over one hand and touched her cheek.

“Courage, poor soul!” he cried earnestly. “Pray with me for mercy in that other land.”

The wretched woman seemed to be brought back by the parson’s voice, and she stared at him in a curiously dazed manner, her lips moving at last in a whisper that could not be heard.

“Pray with me, my poor soul—let us pray,” cried Master Peasegood eagerly.

“No,” she said sharply. “It be too late. I want to do some good before I die.”

“And it is too late for that,” said Master Peasegood to himself, as the excited murmur of the crowd went on.

“No, not to do—to say something, Master—and—and it seems all gone. Yes; I know,” she cried, striving hard to hold up her head, which fell back again heavily upon her chest. “No, I can’t remember. Yes, Mace, come here, child. I’ll give thee to thy father now.”

“Poor soul, she wanders,” muttered Master Peasegood. Then aloud: —“Try to pray with me, mother. Try—one word.”

“Yes, I was not a witch, master. It was only—Where be Jeremiah Cobbe? Here, let me tell him—quick.”

“He cannot reach thee now, poor soul. Pray with me quickly. Oh, Father have—”

“Mace. Here—quick, child, come. Poor sweet—I had to fight hard to hate thee. My head—my head.”

Master Peasegood stretched out a hand to try and sustain the palsied head.

“Stand back, sir,” cried Sir Mark fiercely; and he laid his hand upon Master Peasegood’s arm, but the stout cleric shook him off.

“Back yourself, sir,” he cried, “an’ you would not singe your gaudy plumes. My place is here.”

Sir Mark stood back, for at that moment the smoking, flaming torch was thrust into the brushwood, which began to crackle and burn furiously, while a pillar of smoke rose high in the still autumn air, in company with a shriek from the women, some of whom turned away, while others

covered their faces with their hands.

The torch was thrust into the faggots again and again, four times in all, and at each thrust there was a burst of flame and a cloud of smoke; but Master Peasegood stirred not, though the flames licked his long black garb.

The torch-bearer then rose up, and was in the act of thrusting his light right in the centre of the pile, when a strong hand seized it, wrenched it from his hand, and hurled it, as the man staggered back, full in the face of Sir Mark.

A loud chirping whistle rang out at the same moment, and a score of the rough country fellows in long gaberdines, who had been so busy in helping, now took advantage of their forward position to seize the burning faggots and hurl them furiously at the armed men.

Almost before the crowd could realise what was taking place, the flaming brushwood was scattered far and wide, and amidst the smoke a tall, bronzed fellow was seen cutting Mother Goodhugh free.

“Take her, Wat; she’s as light as any child,” he cried, in a clear voice. “Lead on, we’ll cover you.”

“Down with them!” shouted Sir Mark, as he recovered from his astonishment; and, drawing his sword, he made a rush at the disturbers of the judicial tragedy.

His first attempt, though, was unfortunate, for he fell over the prostrate body of Master Peasegood, who had been overset in the struggle; and his men hung back as they saw the rough-looking countrymen whip out the weapons they had concealed beneath their gaberdines, and form a bold front.

There was ample room, for the crowd fled shrieking as the bright steel flashed before their eyes. They had gazed in a stupefied, puzzled manner at the disturbance of the faggot pile, and wondered whether it was part of the show or the result of witchcraft; but the bold rescue of the

wretched woman they could understand, and they hastened to find safety in flight.

Sir Mark was not long in recovering himself, and, calling to the armed men to follow, he pursued the retiring party, which retreated steadily along the narrow track, which, after it had passed Mother Goodhugh's, gradually assumed the nature of a forest footpath, and grew more rugged at every step.

Attempts were made to outflank the party, but the density of the forest rendered that impossible, and those who left the path lost ground, while Sir Mark found himself kept at bay by the rear-guard of the retreating men.

"These are no countrymen," he muttered to himself, as he saw how steadily they kept up the retreat; and he was in the act of cheering on his little force to make a rush where the pathway opened a little, when cries from behind warned him that he was attacked in the rear.

He bit his lip angrily as he found how cleverly his men were trapped, for it was evident enough that a portion of those he pursued had turned off to right or left, allowing him and his men to pass, and then closing up to attack, this rear movement being the signal for those in front to turn and make a desperate charge upon him and his London men.

It was so sharp a surprise that, at the end of five minutes' cutting and thrusting, Sir Mark was down, faint and sick from a slash across the cheek, and his men had thrown up their weapons and fled helter-skelter through the forest, leaving the rescuers of Mother Goodhugh to proceed in peace.

"Single file, my lads, and away!" cried a well-known voice. "One of you relieve Wat Kilby, and change and change as you grow fagged. Wat, go round by the lower stream. I'll come last and hide the trail."

It required little hiding, for the men passed on and disturbed the herbage but slightly, while, after turning off to right and left in various narrow half-hidden tracks, their course could not have been discovered

by the keenest eye, especially as one cut was made right across the forest.

Not a word was spoken, and the roughly-clad, brown-faced men went steadily on. Their load was changed from time to time, and after a while a stoppage was made by a stream, where Mother Goodhugh's face was bathed, and the leader, whom it would have puzzled his best friends to have taken for Gilbert Carr, knelt beside her, and poured a few drops of spirits between her lips.

"Think she's burned, captain?" said a rough voice that could be none other than that of Wat Kilby.

"No," was the reply, "but I fear we were too late. She will hardly live to our journey's end. Forward, my lads, forward! Did anyone see aught of Master Cobbe?"

"I saw him turn away and go behind the cart," said one of the men. "He was not in the fight."

"And Master Peasegood?"

"I helped him up, captain, and he staggered to the bank, and sat down on a half-burned faggot."

"Then they are all right," said the captain, musingly. "Wat, we shall have to be off to sea again at once. This affair will make the country too hot to hold us."

"Why did you do it then?" growled the old man, gruffly, as he limped along, his scarred face shining in the sun. "She was no good, and will only curse us for our pains."

"Well, Wat," said the captain, sadly, "and if she does, we can bear another curse or too."

"Ay, or a hundred," was the reply.

It was a hot walk, through the still woods and over streams and

ravine-scored hills. The men, as they grew heated, stripped off their rough country Saxon gaberdines, and appeared as light, active seamen of the time, one and all taking turns in carrying Mother Goodhugh, for whom a rough kind of hurdle had been hastily twisted together, and upon it she was laid.

At last the little party was ascending one rugged side of the valley where Anne Beckley had been left to wait the coming of her lover; and after a weary climb the men all had a rest, seating themselves by the spring that gushed from the rocks where the ferns and mosses hung, and after tempering the clear fluid with spirit they began to smoke.

“Let her rest for a time,” said Gil; “there is no danger here. Poor soul! A narrow escape from death.” As he spoke he covered the wretched creature with a cloak, and placed a doubled gaberdine beneath her head.

He again trickled a few drops of spirits between the cracked white lips; and, after watching its effects, he rose from his knees, leaving Wat Kilby to fill his little pipe.

“Not much of a job after a twelvemonths’ cruise,” muttered Wat, as he limped uneasily up and down, “but better than leaving the poor old lass to burn. She’s too old and ugly, or she might have done; for I want a wife. Bah! No. She wouldn’t do. She’s not the witch I want. Eh! captain, did you call?”

“Yes,” was the reply; and, on rising, the old lieutenant scrambled up to where Gil, who looked bronzed and ten years older, stood pointing to the stones at the mouth of the store.

“Not been touched, eh, skipper?” said the old fellow.

“No; not by anything more than a rabbit,” said Gil, in a grave, quiet voice. “Get up the bars when the lads are rested. We shall have to stay here for the night.”



How Wat Kilby fired a train and Mother Goodhugh spoke.

Gil sat down beside the old woman and remained thinking of what had taken place during the past year. He had sailed away, reckless and heart-broken, caring little where he went, and, after discharging cargo in one of the Spanish ports, he had taken in provisions, and, his men rather welcoming the change, he had made sail for the far East, touching at Ceylon; then on to the Eastern Islands, the lands of spices and strange growths. It was an aimless voyage, but they took in small articles of cargo—silk here, rice there, and dye-woods; and then sailing further went north and east to China and Japan, before the vessel's stem was turned once more for home.

For a strange sense of longing had come over Gil Carr. Months back he had felt that he could never see Roehurst more. Then came the change, with its longing void in his heart. Night and day it was ever the same. There was the old place before his eyes, and a something tugging at his heartstrings to draw him back. The face of Sweet Mace seemed gazing appealingly in his as it asked him to come and save her.

"Save her—from what?" he cried passionately, as he paced up and down the little deck, looking wild-eyed and strange, while his men whispered the one to the other, and he set his teeth firmly and his eyes flashed with anger, for he knew they thought him mad.

It was the work of a minute almost. They were sailing into a fresh port in Japan, where they could see the strangely-dressed people staring at the new comers from the decks of their junks, when Gil suddenly gave orders—he recalled it all—orders to 'bout ship, and they were obeyed without a word.

It was not until they had been sailing on for days that Wat Kilby had come to him with the gruff question, "Where to now, skipper?"

"*Home!*" was the single word spoken in reply; and then, as he stood gazing straight before him at the wide expanse of ocean, there arose from the crew a tremendous cheer.

He recalled it all—how he had stood gazing there while order after order was given by Wat Kilby; how sail after sail had been set and the little vessel careened to the breeze; while ever before him, with a smile upon her face, the figure of Mace seemed to stand waving him on.

And so it had been during the homeward voyage. Every sail the vessel would bear had been kept set, and she seemed to skim over the sea in fair weather, and to battle bravely in foul, to get back to the little river and her ancient moorings beneath the trees.

He recalled telling himself that he was mad, for this was but another phase of his humour. But a short time back he was restless to get farther and farther away; now he had conjured up this phantasy to call him back—back to what?

A bitter sob would struggle from his heart as he told himself it was to gaze again upon poor Mace's grave.

Always there, sleeping or waking, never shut from his mental vision, that sweet, pale face smiling at him as the ship sped on; and only when forced by want of provisions did they enter port, till once more upon the tide the weather-beaten ship rode safely into the mouth of the little river. Then the big boat was lowered and manned, a tow-rope run out, and the men pulled cheerily to keep the little vessel's head straight as she glided on up the fast narrowing stream, till the spars nearly touched the branches on either side, and her old moorings were made.

Wat Kilby played the part of spy, and went ashore, for now that they were back the fancy that had floated before Gil's eyes had been seen no more; and moody and despondent he had shrunk from leaving his ship.

It was Wat Kilby then who made his way over the hills and through the forest to the village, and had borne back the news which stirred Gil to action; and for Mace's sake, as he said, he had determined to save poor old Mother Goodhugh from so horrible a fate.

"She would have urged me to do it," he said to himself; and, making his plans, he had been successful; while there, half dead, the poor

creature lay, with the adventurer sitting meditating by her side.

“What shall I do now?” said Gil to himself in a bitter tone. “Set sail again, I suppose, for this Sir Mark, unless too busy with his wedding, will try to hunt us down.

“Well, let him come if he will,” he added, wearily, and then rising. “Now, my lads!” he cried, “to work.”

His men jumped up; and as he stood by, watching and thinking how in one year the ferns and wild plants set in the crevices had concealed the mouth of the store, iron bars and shovels were plied, the stones loosened and thrown aside, till at last only one large piece remained, and that had so tightly wedged itself in that it resisted all their efforts to dislodge it.

“Come boys,” Wat Kilby cried, “have you left all your strength in the Indies? Lay to at it with a will. Now, all together—heave ho!”

As he spoke he brought his whole strength to bear upon it, but dropped the bar directly after, and stood shaking his head; for he had never recovered from the terrible burns and injuries he had received at the explosion—injuries that had left him for months a helpless invalid during the early part of the voyage, and a cripple for life.

“Skipper,” he said, “I’m not quite so strong as I was, and my bones don’t seem to be knit together as they were. It’ll take some pounds o’ Mas’ Cobbe’s best to lift that out.”

Gil frowned, for the old man’s speech brought up a host of painful recollections.

“Shall we get up some powder, skipper?” said Wat.

“And fire the barrels that are in the store?” said Gil sternly.

“Nay,” growled the old fellow; “we could hoist out that stone without reaching any that is in yonder: it is too far away.”

“Get it then,” said Gil indifferently; and a couple of men were despatched to the ship, returning after some two or three hours with the keg, which they carried in turn.

Mother Goodhugh had not moved, but lay in a kind of stupor with half-closed eyes, Gil sitting near and dreaming over the past.

A slight rustle near him made him gaze upwards once to see a rabbit scurry away from a hole beneath the great stone, and this he marked as suitable for laying the charge to lift away the mass.

At last, the men came toiling up the steep ascent, and Wat Kilby busied himself in preparing a mine that should do what was required without further damage to the store.

It was soon done—a train laid, and a fuse prepared. Then Mother Goodhugh was carefully lifted and laid behind a corner of the rock, where harm could not befall her, and Wat Kilby stood ready to fire the fuse after seeing all the men were safe.

“Now, captain,” he said, “as soon as you like.”

“Stop a moment,” said Gil, thoughtfully, though all the time he was experiencing a fierce longing to enter the cave once more.

“What for, captain?” said Wat gruffly, as he puffed at his pipe.

“The sound may be heard, and bring Sir Mark’s fellows down.”

“Nay,” cried Wat, “the noise will run down the valley and out to sea, my lad. They’ll not hear it inland, I lay my life. Bah! and if they did, what then? No one could find his way here without a guide.”

“Go on, then,” said Gil quietly; and, drawing back to the shelter of a little recess, he stood watching the acts of Wat Kilby, a famous old gunner in his way, as, after puffing at his pipe to make it glow, he just touched the end of the fuse, laid the other end by the train, and limped coolly to the captain’s side.

From the rocky recess they could see the fuse sparkle and burn rapidly away, and listen to the buzz of the voices of the crew as they talked of the explosion; then a zigzag line of fire seemed to run along amongst the heather and ferns; there was a blinding flash, a thick white smoke, and, lastly, a heavy dull roar that rolled down the ravine, and the fall of masses of the splintered rock.

The smoke rose slowly over the face of the cliff, showing the grey and blackened traces where the fire had blasted bush and tree; while, where the large block of sandstone had lain was now a dark opening, the rock having been lifted right away, reft in twain, and thrown some yards down the slope.

"There, skipper," growled Wat, as he limped along, and the men came up; "there be not a cask split inside I'll wager, and a few showers of rain will hide all the marks."

Gil nodded.

"Four of you bring the old woman along," he said. "We'll make her a bed inside. Good God!"

He was startled at what he saw, for the explosion seemed to have roused Mother Goodhugh, who came crawling painfully towards them to raise herself upon her knees and point, and struggle to speak.

"Yes, yes," she cried. "Powder, powder—the cursed stuff. Cobbe's work; Cobbe's work. He slew my dear with it, and now—ha, ha, ha! I have brought it home to him. Listen, boy, come here."

Gil stepped to her side, and she clutched at his wrist, and clung to it, as she turned her ashy, distorted face to him, but only for it to droop back upon her chest so that she gazed at him in a way that was horribly grotesque.

"Listen; do you hear. She wanted it stopped—that wedding—Mistress Anne—the jealous fool, and paid me for it all. I did—I stopped it. Do you hear? I got the key—the powder-cellar, and laid a train—a long,

long, train all the way to the cellar, and hid myself in the garden—there safe away. Do you see? just down yonder,” she panted, pointing to the part of the ravine from which she had crawled.

“I did it—I did it. I waited hours and hours till you came by me—all of you, and began to fight with Sir Mark’s men—and then I struck with my flint and steel—and the fire—ran along the ground—and the powder blew up as it did when I lost my dear, and—and—why is it daylight? Why does the sun shine?” she continued, gazing wildly from one to the other.

“She’s daft,” growled Wat. “Poor soul! they have frightened away her wits.”

“Silence,” cried Gil. “Let her speak.”

“Who says I’m daft?” cried Mother Goodhugh, gathering strength. “I am not; but I know, I know. Ha, ha, ha! I wanted to stop the wedding and make my words come true. It was a judgment, too, on Mas’ Jeremiah Cobbe, and I fired his powder-store.”

“She thinks it is a year ago,” muttered Gil, gazing at her with horror.

“Yes, yes. I’ve had my revenge,” muttered the old woman, gazing round wildly, as she struggled to keep her head erect, “and burnt his place. He has paid me now for my dearies, whom he killed. Poor souls! poor souls! One so white and cold when they drew him from the water; the other so blackened and so burned. But she was not so burned. Poor child! poor child! poor child!”

“Mother Goodhugh,” cried Gil hoarsely, “did you fire the Pool-house?”

“Yes, yes, yes; the powder,” gibbered the old woman, as she dragged her head up, and it once more fell back upon her chest. “I did it well; and now I’ll forgive him. I’ll curse Mas’ Cobbe no more. I did it just now. You heard it roar. See, it has burned my hands—my hair, but never mind; I’ve had revenge.”

“Then it was you who fired the powder there—that dreadful night,”

cried Gil furiously, as he clutched the weak old creature by the throat.

“Yes, I did it,” chuckled the old woman; then, throwing up her hands as if in pain—“but Sweet Mace—poor Sweet Mace—they thought it killed her, too. I hated her; and yet, no; she was very good and sweet. I saw him bring her out—yes, it was you—and laid her—dead upon the ground. Yes, I saw; and she turned to a white spirit—yes, white spirit—and she comes to see me—no: does she?—I can’t think—it was just now I got her out, and she has come to me ever since, so white and sad, and she looks at me always with her great soft eyes. Poor child! poor girl! I’ve wept about her sore, for she was as good and gentle as Mistress Anne was bad.”

The spirit was in Gil Carr to strangle the old woman as she made her hideous confession, but her words of pity for sweet Mace disarmed him, and he let her sink to the earth, where she crouched, gazing feebly from one to the other, and fighting hard to sustain her tottering head.

“Yes, yes, yes,” she moaned piteously; “she comes looking so white and sad to ask me why I killed her, and it makes my heart so sore. But I shall bring her to her senses again some day, perhaps—some day. Hush, hush! not a word. If you speak she goes again. There—there—look, look!” cried the old woman in a hoarse whisper, as, throwing one arm round Gil’s leg, she leaned her head against it, steadied herself, and pointed with her skinny fingers. “Yes, there she be. Poor child! poor child! Mace, child, I did not mean to harm thee. Wilt forgive me, dear? See! see!”

As she pointed they glanced in the direction indicated by the old woman’s finger, and Gil uttered a cry, for in the dark, powder-riven entry to the store, and not a dozen yards away, stood a weird figure with long, flowing hair. The arms and shoulders were bare, and the white hands covered the face, giving it as it stood in the obscurity of the cave a spiritual look that made even the least superstitious of the party—Gil himself—shudder, feeling that he was in the presence of a being of another world.

How Culverin Carr solved a Problem.

Sweet Mace stood motionless in the opening, a soft blue reek floating gently out from the store, as the damp air of the place was driven forth by a downward current through a fissure far in its depths; and this, as it surrounded the rescued prisoner, added to the unreality of the scene. For the figure was seen through a medium that rendered it unsubstantial in aspect, added to which the deadly whiteness of the brow and hands made it look unnatural to a degree.

For some time no one spoke. The men grouped together, stared at the strange apparition in the cavern mouth, and Wat Kilby gazed from it to his leader and back, while the soft wind wafted the blue haze from the opening away from the motionless figure, and then enveloped it again, as if it were part and parcel of the subterranean abode, and it sought to draw its occupant back to its shades.

Mother Goodhugh was the first to break the silence, as, crawling towards the place on hands and knees, she crouched at last at Mace's feet, and lay there, panting.

"She has come from the dead to fetch me," moaned the old woman, whose reason seemed to wander. "I know her. See how white, and cold, and strange she is. My child, my child, I killed thee, I killed thee; and now—now—have pity on me! have pity! I be not a witch."

She grovelled lower and lower, clasping Mace's bare, white feet, and laid her cheek against them, while, still keeping one hand across her eyes, the poor girl bent down slowly, and touched the crouching wretch.

Gil had remained motionless till now; but as he saw the figure move, his faith in its being supernatural was shaken, and with a loud cry he ran forward with outstretched hands.

"Mace," he cried, hoarsely, "speak to me, oh, speak!"

He had not touched her, for in his surprise it seemed possible, after Mother Goodhugh's words, that the woman he loved had come back from

the dead, but still his common sense revolted, while his eyes asserted that it was true.

As he spoke Mace rose upright again, but without removing her hand from her eyes, and Gil saw that her long hair was grey as that of some venerable dame; that the slight garment she wore was ragged, and that her fingers were torn and bleeding fast.

He could not tell what it meant; how she came to be there; but the idea of the supernatural was cleared away, and, making an effort over his slavish dread, he caught the disengaged hand in his.

It was like ice, but his touch broke the spell, for, with a piteous cry, Mace tottered and would have fallen had not Gil caught her in his arms.

She was deathly cold, and as he bore her to a spot where the soft turf was dotted with purple heather he saw that her eyelids were tightly closed, and her brow knit as if with pain; and, judging that the glow of sunshine caused her to suffer, he laid a kerchief across her eyes before clasping her icy hands and trickling a few drops of water between her lips.

A host of confusing thoughts rushed through his brain, the only substantial one he could grasp being that Mace must have gone to the cavern to seek him, and then have been shut in.

But this idea was driven away on the instant by an older recollection, one which made him groan in the anguish of his heart.

"My love is dead," he panted. "Did not those hands lay her in her grave? God in heaven have mercy on me! Am I going mad?"

"Skipper," whispered a voice at his side, and looking up he saw old Wat standing with dilated eyes, pointing down at the insensible figure. "Skipper," the old fellow whispered hoarsely, "we bean't cowards, but the old woman be a witch after all. Come away, come away!"

In his strange confusion of mind, Gil was for the moment ready to accept this theory, and he gazed down at the weird figure beside him,

and then at Mother Goodhugh, where she lay. Was there really truth then in witchcraft, and had this old woman the power to recall the dead?

He looked at the deathly white face, the white hair, then at the cave mouth, and the surroundings of the bright sunlit ravine, and his group of wonder-stricken men, and then his every-day common sense prevailed. It was no myth, no trick of witchcraft, but a living, breathing form. It was Mace, the dead restored, his lost love, she whom he had mourned. How it was he did not know, neither could he stop to consider while she lay helpless by his side. Mace lived again, and the mystery must rest.

“Wat,” he cried, as like a flash of lightning the thought entered his brain. “The dead—the grave—it was Janet who was killed.”

The old man shook his head, but Gil paid no heed, for a low sigh had just escaped from Mace’s lips, and, bending down, he raised her head upon his arm, swept aside her long grey hair, and kissed her stony brow.

It was enough for him that she lived—that she whom he had mourned was restored to him, and raising the kerchief slightly he gazed in silent wonderment at the fast-closed eyes.

Then he awoke to the fact that it was time for action, and not for wonder, and rousing himself he began to give orders.

“Quick, my lads,” he cried; “make up a couch of the sailcloth in yonder, and carry in yon poor old creature. Wat, have a fire lit, then cut some of the ling, and make another couch.”

Their leader’s words broke the spell that seemed to have charmed the men, who hurriedly obeyed, while Gil strove hard to restore the icy frame he held to consciousness, trembling lest the shock had been too severe, and fighting hard to keep his brain from dwelling upon the mystery.

“Dead!” whispered a voice at his ear, and a pang shot through his breast as he gazed in horror at the face resting against his heart.

“No!” he cried hoarsely. “Dog! you lie.”

“No, no, skipper: the old witch—Mother Goodhugh. She be gone.”

“Art sure?” cried Gil, with a sigh of relief.

“Sartain, skipper. She was almost gone before.”

“Heaven forgive her!” said Gil, softly. “Wat, lay her decently in the furthest part of the store till we can put her to rest. See that a couch is ready. Poor sweet! she cannot bear the light.”

As he spoke, handling her as tenderly as if she had been an infant, Gil rose up and bore the insensible girl into the store, where the state of the objects around told him plainly that she must have been a prisoner for months.

In a few minutes' time he had her lying upon a bed of soft heather, softened with a sail and a couple of heavy cloaks for coverlids, as he sought to infuse warmth, and with it life.

As evening came on, Gil knelt beside the motionless figure upon the rough couch, in an agony of spirit, for, in spite of all his efforts, Mace seemed to be slipping away from him once again.

He had fancied that the marble coldness that had struck a chill to his heart was not so marked, but he could not be sure; and at last, after trickling spirits between the white lips, and trying all he could to promote warmth, he knelt there waiting despairingly for the result.

The sun had descended beyond the hills, turning the far west into one blaze of mellow golden glory; there was a faint twittering from the linnets and finches that hung about the bushes on the steep slopes and crags; and on one rugged old hawthorn, whose roots were thrust amongst the rifts and crags of the sandstone, a solitary thrush was singing his evening hymn.

As Gil watched the face of her who lay there as rigid almost as if in death, it seemed to him that the soft sweet face that looked so smooth and young, and yet so old, was not so ashy white as a short time before;

but directly after he realised the fact that the warm sunset flush was reflected into the store, and with a groan of despair he bent down and kissed the cold lips, and tried to breathe into the icy frame the vigour that throbbed and bounded in every nerve and vein of his own.

But no: there was no movement, and at last, when Wat Kilby came softly up to say that one of the look-out men had encountered a Roehurst founder, and learned from him that Sir Mark and Mistress Anne were married and gone away, and that there was no pursuit, Gil bade him sternly begone, for he muttered:

“The old wound is torn asunder, and I must seek for consolation with the dead.”

That she might live was Gil’s prayer; that, if a victim were needed to offer up to death, his own poor worthless life might be taken. For it was agony indeed. He had begun to carry his load of misery with patient resignation, and had been content to revisit the spots where so many happy hours had been spent; but to come back to this was more than he could bear.

The warm glow of the setting sun died out, to leave all ashy grey, and in mute despair Gil gazed down upon the white, rigid face before him. How cold she was, and how changed! Her silver hair, as it lay dishevelled around, formed a soft halo about the placid face, for the contraction of the brow had passed away, and, with the fading of the light, the drawn and pained expression of the eyelids had given place to a peaceful look that inspired him with awe. While though at times he fancied that she breathed, it was so faintly that he could not be sure, the icy coldness seemed to increase.

As the night drew on Gil knew it was impossible to get help, and in his despair he felt that he could only wait and hope. His men, saving those who watched, contrived themselves a rough tent under the shelter of the over-hanging rock, and at last, as the fire they had made died out, Gil knelt there alone with her who had been his boyhood’s love, his manhood’s deepest passion, and, feeling that she was gliding from him once again, he flung himself by her side, clasped the icy form to his

breast, and sought by his despairing kisses to win from it some token of life.

It was in vain, and the warmth he sought to impart fled from his own breast to receive back the icy chill from hers.

The night stole on, and the soft whispers from the forest around were heard from time to time, or a withered leaf fell with a noise that was striking in the stillness around. Sometimes an owl swept past the cavern's mouth on ghostly wing, making its presence known by its strange cry. The stars glittered and blinked and shed their soft light, while from time to time a faint breeze from the sea swept through the forest and up the glade, where it sighed and seemed to sob as it appeared to enter the cavern, and then fled shivering away.

Now and again some muttered word or uneasy motion on the part of one of the men could be heard, and at stated times the gaunt form of Wat Kilby was seen to go limping past, as he changed his sentries. Then the hours slipped by, and Gil still lay there clasping the senseless form to his breast—the form of the dead he told himself again and again, till utterly worn out with grief and despair a stupor more than a sleep fell upon him, and the present passed away.

It was broad daylight, and a faint flush of the coming sunshine was reflected from the side of the ravine visible from where Gil lay, while for a few moments he could not collect his thoughts. There was a strange buoyant feeling in his breast to which it had long been a stranger, and he lay wondering what it meant, till, like a flood, the recollection of the past night came upon him, and with a groan he turned his eyes to gaze upon the sweet, dead face of her he loved; but only to start up on his elbow, trembling with dread lest he should have been deceived.

For it was no icy marble frame that he had clasped to his breast. The warm life-blood of his heart had seemed to communicate its vitality to her who lay insensible there, and sent the current of life, that month by month had grown more sluggish in its course, bounding through artery and vein once more; and, as he bent lower and lower, it was to feel Mace's soft, warm breath upon his cheeks.

He caught her hand in his and placed it on his breast. It was icy cold, but it was not deathly; and, when in a passion of thankfulness and joy he rained his kisses on brow and lips, the clammy, rigid feeling had quite passed away.

He knew that she lived; but there was no reply to his caresses. Asleep or in a strange stupor, he could not tell which; but as he released her she lay back motionless, save that her breast heaved softly, and her breathing was regular and slow.

He spoke to her with his lips to her ear, but there was no reply; he raised her in his arms and gazed in her pale face, but still there was no response; and, trembling lest she should again slip from him, he softly laid her head upon the rough pillow and tried to think of some plan to fan the tiny spark of life into a warmer glow.

Rousing his followers, and regardless now of discovery, so that he could gain help, Gil despatched Wat Kilby to Roehurst, and others to the ship and the nearest town, the result being, that the same evening the insensible girl was carefully borne to Croftly's cottage, near her ruined home.

How Sweet Mace awakened on her Wedding-Day.

A sensation of intense heat. Then a feeling as if her head were on fire, followed by a terrible pain.

How long this lasted Mace never knew, but she lay there confused and troubled. One feeling, however, was dominant. It was very nearly the time when Gil would be beneath the window, and she must take off that wedding-dress, and send her maid away.

What a mockery it was, that dress, and how hot and clammy it seemed. She shuddered in one of her more lucid moments, as it struck her that it was like a winding-sheet, and she recalled that she had often wished herself dead.

How dark it was, and how steaming and hot. Drip, drip, drip, drip. The noise of dripping water, every drip seemed as if it struck upon her brain, and caused her suffering. Why, it rained!

Well, what matter? What was rain to Gil, who, in his frail ship, dared the greatest storms that blew?

He would come, let the weather be what it might.

Then she seemed to be overcome with sleep, to awake once more with the pain less and her head clearer.

Drip, drip, drip. The rain still falling, and she felt, in a helpless way, that she must have been to sleep again, and began to wonder how long Gil would be.

It was still intensely dark, and very close and stifling, the heat seemed to be more than she could bear.

How long would Gil be? Poor fellow, how cruelly he must have felt it to hear that she was to wed another, and—yes. Why, had not Janet taken off the wedding-dress before she lay down to sleep.

How bad her head had been. She never remembered to have suffered such pains before; and then that terrible thirst! How horribly she had dreamed, too. She recollected now; a horrible dream. First, Gil had clasped her in his arms; then it was not Gil, but Sir Mark; and even now she shuddered at the thoughts of the grim shade which had come next.

But it was a dream consequent upon the excitement she had gone through; and now she had awakened, and it must be time for Gil to be beneath her window.

She did not attempt to rise, for the strange feeling of stupor still held her, and she lay quite still, till the thought that she might have slept too long came and sent a thrill through her brain, and she started up to listen, becoming conscious of a strange, suffocating odour as of dank, hot mist.

How black it was! She could not see the window, and, with the

confused sensation of one waking in the darkness, she sat gazing about and listening.

Still that ceaseless drip, drip, drip, of water, but the gurgle of the water-pipe that went down by the side of the gable was not there, and it suddenly struck her that she could not hear the familiar rushing noise of the race, where the water hurried towards the wheel.

She stretched out her hand to rise from the bed, and it touched something rough and hard, making her withdraw it, but only to stretch it forth again and find that she was touching wood and roughened stone.

"Where am I?" she said, softly; and as she spoke she made out tiny sparks of light.

"Gil's signals!" she cried. "But why does he show them now?"

She tried to get off the bed, but no bed was there; and, after feeling about for a few minutes, she clasped her hands to her head.

"What does this terrible silence mean?" she faltered. "Where am I? Where is Gil?"

There was the slow drip of the water for answer—nothing more; and she tried to recall the past.

"I have been to sleep," she said, "heavily asleep: and yet I don't know."

She tried to collect her thoughts, but seemed to grow more confused.

"I must have been very ill," she said, at last. "And it began directly I had drunk of that water. But how long is it ago? And why is it so dark? Where am I?"

Weak and prostrated by the terrible shock she had suffered, a curious sensation of stupor overcame her once more, and she crouched down to save herself from falling, as she dropped into a feverish sleep.

When she awoke again her head was clearer, but she was terribly weak. It was dark as ever, but the suffocating feeling had gone, and she could no longer see the signal lights, but the peculiar drip, drip, of water was there.

"I must have slept again long past the time when Gil would come," she said, with a wild feeling of yearning for him; and now again she tried to make out where she was.

"I must be mad!" she exclaimed in a despairing tone, and she started, for her voice seemed followed by a hollow whispering murmur, that sent a shudder through her frame.

Crouching down once more, she waited with eyes and ears on the strain, but still there was nothing to be seen, no sound to be heard but that ceaseless drip, drip of water that fell with a faint musical plash somewhere hard by.

But her senses were gradually growing clearer, her perceptions more vivid, and she tried to make out what was the meaning of a peculiar heavy odour.

"It is powder!" she exclaimed, with a shudder. "Can there have been a mishap while I slept?"

She paused, trying to think, and her senses grew clearer still.

"Yes, it is powder; there must have been an explosion;" and she recalled the strange, dank, pungent odour that she had often breathed when some accident had occurred.

"But when? How could the powder have fired?"

She tried hard to think it out: but her mind was still too confused, and in a helpless manner she groped her way in the direction of the dropping water, till she felt a splash upon her head, and, stooping down, plunged her hands into what seemed to be a deep, cold pool.

With the avidity of one perishing from thirst, she scooped up the

water and drank again and again, each draft she took seeming to infuse new life within her veins; and, at last satisfied, she tried to master the horrible feeling of dread that was overpowering her, and to make out her position.

“Let me go back,” she said, forcing herself to the point. “I will not be alarmed at what is perhaps some trifling accident. Now, then—I went to my bedroom to be ready when Gil should come. I was feverish and thirsty, and I drank from the jug upon my table. Then I grew worse, and Janet came to try on my dress. I must have lain down and had some frightful dream.

“Yes, I remember it now: and I tried on the dress in a half-stupefied way. Nay, it must have been Janet as I lay half asleep, half mad—

“Oh, God!” she moaned, “am I half mad now?”

There was a hollow, echoing whisper, and she cowered there trembling for a time, but, recovering, she forced herself to go on.

“I was lying there ill and quite asleep, and—yes—no—yes—I have some recollection of cries—a terrible shock—and—it must be—it must be.”

She pressed her hands to her head, and rocked herself to and fro, for her reason was on the verge of being shattered, so horrible were her thoughts.

By degrees, though, she grew calmer, and she once more tried to unravel the mystery of the thick darkness around, and to carry this out she again drank from the pool. Then her hands touched stones and timber; and at last, after a long struggle, she fully realised the facts. There could be no doubt of it, for she recognised again the peculiar odour of the powder.

This had come while she slept, then, overwhelming her so suddenly that she had not awakened from the stupor in which she was plunged. The powder had exploded, and she must have fallen with the ruins down

into the vault where her father had a store.

She made a brave struggle against the feelings that seemed to bear down with overwhelming violence, ready to snatch her reason away, but she was only weak, and at last, with a burst of hysterical sobbing, she sank back completely overcome. It seemed as if the drugged sleep into which she had been plunged by Mother Goodhugh's distillments had returned, for her reason became overclouded, and then all was blank.

It was like awakening once more in the utter darkness that she became conscious of the drip, drip, of the water from the roof, as it fell into the pool that lay somewhere near her feet.

Again she had to fight her way to a knowledge of her position; and now, with her head far clearer, she became fully conscious that this was no dream. The idea of death or madness grew weaker, while that which pointed to some terrible explosion and the destruction of the place gained better hold. The odour of the exploded gunpowder grew so faint as to be scarcely perceptible, but it was still there, and had she wanted further evidence she found it upon touching some of the stones, for her hands were damp and clammy with the reek that would have been black, for she was too well versed in her father's trade not to be certain upon such a point.

There was relief even in this, for in spite of the horrors of her position, this common-sense knowledge relieved her mind of the morbid terrors that had been ready to sweep away her reason, and set her thinking of escape.

The knowledge that she was literally buried alive was almost more than she could bear at times; but, as her brain grew clearer, hope began to dawn like a soft, pale ray amidst the real and mental blackness all around.

There was no doubt now: the Pool-house had been destroyed by a terrible explosion, either of the powder in the cellar stores or by some calamity outside; and, shivering with horror, she gave way for the moment to the superstitious belief that it was a judgment upon her for not

having faith that the wedding would be put off. She smiled, though, directly after, at the absurdity of the idea, and began to wonder how those she loved had fared.

Gil? Had he been near the place? And her father, what of him—was he safe? Janet, too, poor girl! She hoped that no ill had overtaken her.

Then she shuddered, for the idea had come upon her that Sir Mark might have suffered, too, and be even now alive or dead within a few yards of where she lay.

In spite of a great effort she could not keep from shrieking aloud at this idea. She crouched listening, almost expecting to hear step or word, and, in place of being ready to welcome them, she was prepared to turn and flee from what, instead of seeming like a companionship, bore the aspect to her of another frightful calamity.

Then, with her mind upon Gil, and the feeling strong that those above must be making a search for her, she felt that she ought to make some efforts to let them know her whereabouts.

She raised her voice, and cried loudly—“Gil—father—help—I am here!” But there was no reply to her wild cry, no sound of iron bar or pick removing some heap of stones, and in spite of her efforts she could do no more than sob as if her heart would break.

And now, as if to give her mental relief from the horrors that she had passed through, came long periods of sleep and dreams of happy times—bright, sunny skies, the waving trees, and flowery meads. Gil was with her, and they were fishing once more upon the lake.

It seemed to be spring-time, the time of love and hope and joy; and in fancy she saw again the waving woods, the silvery bosom of the lake dotted with broad green leaves, waving sedges, and the silver and golden chalices of the lilies starting up from the water as if held out by some pixie’s hand. There, too, were the distant hills, and the empurpled heathery waste, where the golden gorse grew so densely. The meadow with its waving grass ready for the scythe. The old garden lush with

flowers and advancing fruit. Its round-topped beehives, the pleasant sheltered seats and grassy walks; and then the bright scene seemed, dream-like, to fade away in the rich soft glow of evening, and she was once more at her window gazing, but blushing and happy with expectancy, for there, out on the far green bank, shone the signal lights of four glowworms, and directly after there was a noise, and a voice so deep and clear came up, making her heart beat as it uttered her name.

Yes, there it was; he called her; and with her hands pressed to her heaving bosom she answered him back—

“Yes, yes, Gil—love—I am here.”

She started up with straining eyes, so real did it seem, and then sank back sobbing bitterly, for it was but a dream. And so was this noise of falling stones and crackling wood, with the rush as of a mass of broken fragments that had crumbled down beside her—all a dream, from which after three weary days of pain she did not care to make the effort to rouse herself. For the Pool-house had been destroyed, and she must be dead, even though Mother Goodhugh’s voice had come to her, perhaps to curse. For that was Mother Goodhugh calling to her in this dream, bidding her rise and come forth, and live again, and then all was blank.

Blank to Sweet Mace, but no dream, for her cries had been heard by the old woman, as she haunted the ruins by night, picking out little objects of value, and toiling from the first to reach poor forgotten Janet, an object that kept her busy, for she could not rest till that was done. The sixth night had come before she had been able to drag away a sufficiency of the *débris* to reach the imprisoned girl. She had not dared to summon help from the dread she suffered lest Sir Mark’s men should seize her once again; and when at last she succeeded in dragging the sufferer from her living tomb, and had laid her upon the ground hard by, there was none to see her in the grey of the early morning staggering with her burden to her lonely cottage in the lane.

How Mother Goodhugh missed her Revenge.

“Dead, and they’ve buried her!” cried the old woman, as she stood beside the bed, whereon she had lain Mace. “Dead, and they’ve buried her; and Jeremiah Cobbe can feel now what it be to lose one that he loves!”

“Let him feel it,” she snarled, “let him feel it, and gnaw his heart for a time. I’ll tell him naught.”

Then she glanced uneasily at the door, and drew the curtain that screened her bed.

“No one can see her now,” she muttered. “I’ll keep her as long as I can. She be weak and half-childish with what she has gone through. Let her rest; but I’m glad she be not killed.”

A feeling of satisfaction glowed for a time in the old woman’s heart, but it was mingled with annoyance that, after all, Jeremiah Cobbe would know rest, while she could never recall her dead.

As the days glided by, to her surprise Mother Goodhugh found that Mace did not recover. She partook of food mechanically when it was offered to her, but she did not speak, only looked vacantly about her, and seemed to be without even the power to think.

“Why should I lose my revenge?” thought the old woman. “Why should I even let him think that she lives? It will be another to keep until he finds her out, and that may be months first, if she stops as she be now. But I can keep her easily,” she said with a chuckle, “since corn grows on the moonbeams, and meal can be had for all my wants from out the earth.”

A month had gone by, and Mace showed no sign of being roused from her dull, apathetic state. She made no attempt to move, but sat where she was placed, gazing straight before her, and never a word passed her lips. Whether the old woman was by her or she was away on some errand, it was all the same, Mace stayed where she was left, unseen by a soul, for since the explosion at the Pool-house no one had cared to go near Mother Goodhugh, and but for her foresight she might

have starved.

But the old woman had a means of keeping body and soul together that people little dreamed of, for one day, while herb-gathering in the woodlands, far away behind the founder's house, she had kicked against a fragment of iron, which proved to be a portion of a shell; and, passing further in search of more, she came upon a hole in the sandstone rock beside the scarped mass that rose behind the Pool-house.

Such a place had its interest for her; for, by the fragments of iron about and the blackened appearance of the rock, she could tell that it was the work of one of Jeremiah Cobbe's pieces of ordnance.

Parting the ferns and tangled growth with her stick, and muttering a curse or two upon him and his belongings, the old woman found that there was an opening large enough to pass through; and, investigating further, she could see that the great shell had broken through what was but a thin crust of rock, and that within there was a narrow passage-like opening, worn apparently by the waters of some ancient stream.

Another day she examined further, for the place interested her, and she penetrated some distance and returned.

Another time she came, and brought a lanthorn to search further, for anything bordering on mystery was valuable to her, ending, after winding in and out for some distance, by coming to the conclusion that this was the place of which Abel Churr had spoken—that she had long sought in vain, and that she knew Gil Carr's secret, having hit upon another entrance to his store.

It was a long and tedious way in, but that mattered little to her; while, ignorant of the fact that he had been the means of breaking a way into his own treasure-house, Gil Carr duly, as he believed, sealed it up and set sail.

Here one night, when the fear was upon her that Mace might be discovered at her cottage, and the malignant fit was stronger than usual, Mother Goodhugh brought the helpless girl. A touch of the hand was

sufficient to lead her where her gaoler willed, and, docile as a child, Mace accompanied her to what was hereafter to be her prison, whose dark shadows seemed to accord with her helpless state; and here she would sit and seem to doze away her life.

It was a safe place, only visited by the old woman at night, and she found it easy to feed her prisoner from the ship-stores; but now and then a fit of remorse would seize upon her, and she would, on leaving the place, resolve to restore the poor girl to her home.

A dozen times over she threw herself in Jeremiah Cobbe's way to tell him all, but the sight of the founder seemed to raise up gall and bitterness in her heart, and she went away chuckling and laughing.

"Let him suffer a little longer—a little longer," was her cry. "Some day the girl will recover her senses, then I'll speak."

But the time flew by, and sense was as it were dead in Sweet Mace's brain; while, having gone so far, Mother Goodhugh dreaded at last to bring her back. There were strange rumours afloat about her, and her position was not so safe as it had been of yore. So in utter fear she would fasten up her cottage and take refuge in Gil's store for days together, dreading lest ill should befall her; but at the end of a week passed in this gloomy abode she would be ready to revile herself for her cowardice, and go back. At these times she was more than ever prepared to own that she could not restore Mace to her father.

"Let him suffer, as I have done," she would cry again. "She can stay till Gil Carr comes back. Let him take the poor stricken idiot if he will. I've had revenge, and a sweet one after all."

In this spirit Mother Goodhugh would return to her cottage, and the tale of her evil doings grew longer, for there were those who said that she disappeared for days together—none knew where; and that she had always meal in plenty, while the miller swore none ever came from him, and that she was a witch indeed.



How Croftly cut the Hay in the Two-Year Stack.

There was a great deal of talk about punishing those who had rescued Mother Goodhugh from the flames; but Sir Mark was away with his wife, and soon after his marriage, being somewhat of a favourite of the British Solomon, he was appointed to a diplomatic post at one of the continental courts, and when Sir Thomas Beckley took his first steps to vindicate the insult offered to the law he received so broad a hint that he might suffer bodily for his interference, that he quietly shut himself up in his old house, surrounded by the carp-haunted moat, and took walks upon its bank to give the gaping, staring fish a model that they might study for their benefit at will.

In fact, the rescue of Mother Goodhugh was half forgotten in the news that was spread by the superstitious that by her subsequent death a spell had been broken, and Sweet Mace had been set free and had returned to life.

For by degrees she was restored, but it was only by long and patient nursing. In the latter part of her imprisonment her faculties had become dulled, and the shock had produced a semi-torpid state that had its effect upon her mental powers, which were slow to recover their tone. Gil was ever by her side, though she did not know him or her father; but, after a month's prostration, during which she had hardly left her couch, she began to fight her way very slowly back to strength.

Tender nursing prevailed, and, could her health, drunk in flagons of ale, have given it back sooner, Master Peasegood would have insured her the most robust of constitutions months before she was seated in the old garden, an object of curiosity to all who saw her, with the face of twenty and the silvery hair of three-score and ten.

But the ashy pallor gave way to the returning hue of health, and the rigid, fixed features became softened and rounded. It was Sweet Mace's old face again by the next summer, all but a couple of deeply-marked lines in her forehead—lines of care and thought which still remained.

The founder sighed even in his joy at her return, for still there was

something wanting.

“Nay, Gil,” he said, sadly, “thou hast brought me back the body of my darling, but thou hast not brought the spirit. She smiles sadly and gazes at me when I speak, and that is all.”

“Yes, that is all,” groaned Gil; “she knows me no longer.”

“Poor lad, poor lad!” muttered Master Peasegood, who was present; and he drowned his sigh in a flagon of ale.

“Art going to rebuild the old house, now?” said the parson.

“Ay,” said the founder, “and at once. I have my hopes that the sight of the old place, made as near like as can be, even to the trees, may do the poor child good, for she seems at her best when I take her round the garden.”

Gil looked up curiously, for a thought had struck him; but he said nothing; and, on the founder proposing that they should go and see the men digging the foundations out, he walked with them to the old place.

As they walked down to the garden, Gil's mind ran a good deal upon the thought that had occurred to him, but he said nothing, and waited patiently for his opportunity.

The visit was prolonged till towards evening, when, before returning, the founder walked down the narrow lane by the side of the Pool towards the meadow where Sir Mark had made his first proposal to Mace.

The place was full of memories for Gil, and he sighed as he thought of the bright sweet face he had encountered, and recalled his jealous feelings towards the man who had forced himself into the position of his rival.

But his attention was taken up directly after by the founder, who, with a return of his old business briskness, thrust open the meadow gate, and pointed to the new, sweetly-scented stack of hay just formed.

“What think you of that, Master Peasegood?” he said.

“Truly I am no judge of grass or hay, friend Cobbe, unless it be metaphorically, and for simile’s sake—grown up at noon, cut down at night,”—was the reply. “Ask our gossip, Tom Croftly here.”

“Ay, Tom Croftly is a good judge of grass and stock too, though he is only a founder.”

“I see not why a man may not be a judge of hay as well as iron,” said Master Peasegood, as Croftly drove a horse and rough tumbril through the gate, and along the track to where the old stack of hay stood, with a good quarter of it cut away, waiting the knife.

“Neither do I,” said the founder, smiling as he thought of his own business.

“You hear this, friend Gil Carr,” said Master Peasegood; “why not give up thy roving ways, and settle down to help friend Cobbe. There, lad, the good time is coming: the past forgotten; sweet little Mace will be herself again; and Master Cobbe will be ready to take thee by the hand as son. Faith, and how deftly Tom Croftly handles that great blade, and cuts the hay in squares. Were I a fighting man, methinks that would be a good weapon to have in battle. Heyday! what ails the man? Does he want to break his neck?”

For Tom Croftly suddenly threw up his hands, leaped some eight feet down into the meadow, and came up panting and with his forehead bedewed with sweat. His eyes were staring, and his countenance ghastly, while for a few moments he could not speak.

“Hast seen a ghost, Tom Croftly?” cried Master Peasegood with a hearty laugh.

“Close upon it, master,” gasped Croftly. “Hey, master, but it be terrifying.”

“What is terrifying?” cried the founder.

“That, that,” panted the man. “Lord forgive me; I didn’t know what I did.”

“Speak out, man, speak out,” cried the founder, as the poor fellow began to tremble; and he clutched him by the arm, fearing that some new trouble had befallen his house.

“I can’t, yet, master, it be too terrifying,” gasped Croftly. “The Lord forgive me for doing such a deed!”

“Less of that last, Tom Croftly, and more explanation,” said Master Peasegood, sternly.

“Yes, Mas’ Peasegood, I’ll tell thee,” gasped the poor fellow. “I sharpened up as usual—the big knife, you know—and went to cut the ’lowance for the horse and pony, when I couldn’t have been looking; and he must have got up there to sleep.”

“He? Who? What?” cried the founder.

“It’s not I as can say, master,” stammered the poor fellow; “the knife went down hard, but I thrust the more, and then, taking up the truss of hay, his head rolled down.”

“What?” roared the founder.

“Heaven forgive me, master,” cried Croftly, sinking on his knees, “I’ve cut a man’s head clean from his body.”

The founder and Master Peasegood stared at him aghast, as if believing he was mad, but the poor fellow was sane enough; and, on following him to the little stack, there was the horrible truth; but Croftly was relieved on finding his knife had decapitated the dead, and not some sleeping man.

“Was he dead, then?” he faltered, in answer to a few words spoken by Master Peasegood.

“Dead, man! ay, months ago. Heaven have mercy on us, it’s a

horrible thing.”

“You’re right,” said the founder, turning away with a shudder; “the poor wretch must have lain down when we were making the stack, and more hay have been thrown upon him. He must have been smothered.”

“Some gipsy, perhaps,” said Master Peasegood, whose broad face looked white.

“Here be a bottle by him,” said Tom Croftly, lifting one from beside the body, “and here be a strap. Why, master, master!” he cried, rising up with a scrap of clothing in his hand.

“What is it, Tom?” said the founder, shuddering. “Come away, man, come away.”

“Ay, I’ll come away, Mas’ Cobbe, but I’ve found out who it be.”

“You have?” cried Master Peasegood, excitedly, as the man opened and smelt the bottle.

“Ay, I have,” said Croftly. “That be strong waters in this bottle; and him as lay down,” he continued, sagaciously, “I say, him as lay down upon that half-built stack was drunk, and the steam of the moist hay stifled him.”

“But who think you it was?” cried the founder.

“Him as was missed,” cried Croftly, triumphantly.

“Thank God!” cried Master Peasegood; “then Gil was as innocent as the day.”

“Innocent—as the day?” cried the founder, in a puzzled voice, as he looked from one to the other. “Poor creature, how do you know? But I don’t understand. Some one who was missed? Good God!” he cried, as a light flashed upon him, and he took a step or two up the short ladder by the stack, and then leaped down. “’Tis Abel Churr!”

How Gil Carr lit the Lamps of Love.

Another year slipped by and Gil's ship had made a couple more voyages with Wat Kilby at the helm, for Culverin Carr had stayed at home, the helper and adviser of Jeremiah Cobbe. The Pool-house had risen again from its ashes, stone for stone, beam for beam, in spite of the bitter curse fulminated against those who should restore it. The aspect of age could not be given to the place, but it was a labour of love on the founder's part to consult with Gil how they should get that clump of roses, that high cluster of clematis, and those bright flowers to grow beneath the window as of old.

Wealthy as he was, the founder could replace many things destroyed by the calamity that befel his house, and with so zealous a treatment it was wonderful how nearly they brought the new house in furniture and surroundings to resemble the old.

At last they paused, feeling that there was nothing more to do, and the two strong men sat at the table in the big parlour, gazing the one into the other's face, as if to ask for hope and friendly assurance of success. For on the next day Mace was to be brought to the new house, and they both felt that, if her mind were to be restored, they must see some symptoms in the change.

The founder begged Gil to help him bring his child home once more, but he bluntly refused.

"Nay," he said; "I will not come. Take her thyself. Thou art her father, and God speed thee in the task."

It was a glorious summer day at the end of July, when the flowers were blooming, and the whole air was redolent with Nature's sweetest scents. The Pool was pure as crystal, and amidst the broad green leaves the silver chalices of the water-lilies swam upon the surface, where the herons waded, and the gorgeous kingfisher darted across the glassy mirror.

In the old garden the flowers drooped their heads in the heat which quivered over the grassy meads, while the forest-trees were silent in the glowing sunshine. No leaf moved, no zephyr played in the dark shades, but lizard and glistening beetle darted here and there, where the sandstone peered out amidst the heaths and ferns.

Mace suffered herself to be led by her father from the cottage they had made their home; but she heeded not the faces at the window and door, nor heard the pitying words spoken concerning her by the workpeople who had eaten her father's bread for years.

They watched her as the grey-headed founder led her across the bridge, and opened the garden gate; but she did not look. He spoke to her and pointed out her favourite trees, and then groaned in the anguish of his heart, for she made no reply. Her soft, sweet eyes might have been blind; her tongue have never spoken; and her soft, pinky, shell-like ears have never heard a sound, for all the sign she gave; and the founder's heart sank low as he felt that his task of love had been labour in vain.

And yet he would not despair; but, leading her in, he gently placed her in the recess by the open window with her work spread around as of old, and her roses nodding and flinging their odours into the pleasant room.

No word, no look, no sign; and at last, in despair, the founder left her with her maid, and, bent of head and weary, trudged up to Master Peasegood's cot to tell of his disappointment over a friendly pipe.

"Yes," he said, at last; "it is all over, and I am going to try to be resigned."

"Nay," said the parson, "why say that? Be resigned, man, come to you what may; but, after all this preparation, why give it up?"

"Because it is useless, Master Peasegood. Her mind is dead."

Master Peasegood refilled a pipe, and lit it to smoke for awhile in silence, while the founder gazed before him through the open window at

the setting sun.

"I could preach thee a long, long sermon on the subject of hope, Master Cobbe," said the parson at last; "but I will refrain. Look here, man, and recollect what thou hast done. Only to-day thou did'st take our sweet smitten flower back to the bed where it blossomed and grew so fair. It had been away in desert soil that had blighted it, and where it had grown wild and strange; and, lo! thou saidst 'I will plant it back in the old sweet soil, and there shall be a miracle; it shall blossom in an instant as of old—in the twinkling of an eye.'"

"Yes, yes, I did—I did," cried the founder, sadly.

"And it did not blossom a bit," said Master Peasegood bluntly. "Jeremiah Cobbe, that is all."

"All!" cried the founder, blankly.

"Yes, all at present. Wait, man; wait, and be reasonable. Such a thing as thou askest of Heaven must be the result of time, or some stronger power than thine. We have miracles enough now-a-days, for every work of God is miraculous; but we have no sacred conjuring tricks in common life. Heaven forgive me if I am irreverent. I mean we have no such sudden changes as you expected here. Tut, man, wait awhile and have some faith. I'd have more faith in a tender kiss and a loving word from Gil, than in all that thou canst do. Wait, mail, wait. Maybe he is already working at that which proved a sorry failure in thy fatherly hands."

"He refused to come," said the founder, sadly.

"Ay, with thee; but maybe he has stolen to her side now thou art here."

"Dost think so?"

"Nay, I know not; but fill thy pipe, man, and wait. I have faith that our darling was not restored to us for such a life in death as this. I' faith, friend Cobbe, I pray nightly that I may see some merry little prattlers with the faces of Gil and Mace, softened and sweet, playing round our chairs

as we grow more wrinkled and more old. Heaven bless us! There's time enough yet. See here, man," he cried, rising and taking a curious flask and glasses from a corner cupboard, "here is some strange liquor sent me by Father Brisdone, a great man, now, in sunny France. He bids me wish him well when I drink thereof, and I do, and pray for his health and life. There," he continued as he filled the glasses, "here's Father Brisdone, and now here's Culverin Carr and his dear wife and children, bless them all."

"All," said the founder, fervently, as he drained his glass of the potent liquor; and then, as the evening crept on apace and the stars came blinking out, the two friends sat and smoked, with the founder's heart growing cheery from the words and liquor of his firm old friend.

It was as dark as a summer night knows how to be, when, after a final pipe, the founder rose to go.

"Nay, but I'll see thee home," said Master Peasegood; "and what is more, as it is early yet, I'll drink a flagon of ale and ask a blessing in the dear old—new—old—well, the to-be happy home;" and rising he strolled down the lane with his friend and across the bridge.

The founder opened the gate and let his companion through with a strange sensation at his breast, and he was about to lead the way round to the door when Master Peasegood's hand was laid upon his shoulder, and with a hoarse sob he sank upon his knees, and buried his face in his hands, weeping like a child.

It was almost dark when Gil Carr, who had seen the founder go, strolled slowly down towards the Pool-house. He was heartsick and weary, and the soft, balmy, night-air seemed filled with depressing influences. Another disappointment and another, and hope more distant still.

The night mists were rising, and he smiled sadly as he glanced at the dark and dewy banks, and thought of the long-ago, when, with a love of the hidden and secret, he and Mace had held stolen meetings, till she chided him and bade him come no more.

“Hah, but they were happy days,” he sighed, as he walked on and on till he stood beside the wide-spreading Pool, and thought of his narrow escape from death therein. Then a few steps further, and he was by the rushing outlet where the water dashed under the little bridge and onward to the dripping wheel.

“Where are Sir Mark and his fair wife now?” he muttered, as with a faint smile he thought of the knight’s plunge in the rushing stream, and his own to fish him out.

Again a few steps and he was across the bridge, leaning on the garden gate, and gazing sadly at the new casement that had replaced the old.

Yes, it was well done, and he thought of his many meetings, of his waiting that night to carry his love away; then of the fight, the explosion, and his scorching ordeal as he clambered in and bore out her whom he believed to be poor Mace.

Sad thoughts—sweet thoughts—thoughts that almost unmanned him, so that when the moon rose, and he gazed still at the casement, he believed he was deceived, and that it was not Mace there, but some trick of the imagination.

There was the figure at the open window, and he was about to speak, but he checked himself, and stole away.

Hastily recrossing the bridge, he hurried along the lane, stooping gently here and there, and returning in a few minutes to bend over the tall bank facing the broad casement of the Pool-house.

In a moment after, diamond-wise, there shone forth from the dark grass four glowworms’ lamps, the old love-signal of the past, and with beating heart—he knew not why—Gil retraced his steps, crossed the bridge, entered the garden, and, with his hands trembling, made his way towards where he could dimly make out the pale, sweet face in the halo of silver hair.

There was a rough, short ladder hard by, where Tom Croftly had helped to nail up the blossoming roses, close round Sweet Mace's panes; and Gil seized these rough garden steps as he stopped beneath, gazing with all his soul at the face of her he loved.

Was it a dream, or was it honest truth? Did he breathe and live and hear? Was he blind, or was she leaning out towards him, with outstretched hands, as her dear voice whispered with all the passion of her old, old love, the one word—"Gil?"

"Mace!" he cried, and with a bound he sprang to her side, to clasp her to his breast, as her own soft, round arms drew his face closer—closer to hers, and their lips met in one long, loving kiss.

Miracle? Merely such a one as love might perform; and when—how much later no one knew—the founder and Master Peasegood came slowly up, they saw and heard enough to make the latter's heart swell with joy as the father sank upon his knees in thankfulness for the blessing that had come at last.

The End.

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